
Ribeira Sacra (Spain) No 1639

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Ribeira Sacra

Location

Provinces of Ourense and Lugo
Autonomous Community of Galicia
Spain

Brief description

The Ribeira Sacra cultural landscape, which is located in northwestern Spain in the provinces of Lugo and Ourense, Autonomous Community of Galicia, covers large portions of the steep valleys of the Miño and Sil rivers. With its diverse and rich cultural and natural heritage and concentration of churches, monasteries, and hermitages, the nominated property is an important example of the sacralization of a territory.

The property is a serial nomination of four components, all of which encompass monastic estates: the Ribeiras, the largest component comprising the agricultural and sacred landscape along the river valleys; the Heredad de San Pedro de Rocas; the Heredad de Montederramo; and the Heredad de Ferreira de Pantón. The nominated property includes 78 parishes and 170 population centres.

Ribeira Sacra preserves evidence of an intense occupation from the Paleolithic to the present day, including petroglyphs, *castros* (fortified villages), nomadic sanctuaries, *pazos* (stately homes), and great Renaissance and Baroque houses, as well as 20th century hydroelectric power stations and their infrastructure. Its foremost historic importance, however, is linked to the evolution of Western monasticism and that movement's particular social organization systems, land use, and economic production.

Along with its built legacy and natural landscape features, the nominated property highlights intangible ethnographic heritage, emphasizing traditional land management such as parcellation into micro-small holdings (*cavaduras*) and steep-slope agriculture on dry-stone terraces (*socalcos*).

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a serial property of four *sites*.

In terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (July 2019) paragraph 47, it has also been nominated as a *cultural landscape*.

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

16 July 1996

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations and Technical Evaluation Mission

Desk reviews have been provided by ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, members, and independent experts.

Comments on the natural features of this property and their conservation and management were received from IUCN in November 2020 and have been incorporated into relevant sections of this report.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 4 to 11 October 2020.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter requesting additional information on the monastic landscape, the early hermitages and monasteries, the impact of dams, legal protection, and management was sent to the State Party on 13 October 2020. A response was sent by the State Party on 13 November 2020 containing clarifications on the requested subjects.

An Interim Report was provided to the State Party on 17 December 2020 summarizing the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel.

Following the Interim Report, supplementary information was sent by the State Party on 19 February 2021, with additional clarifications on the sacred character of the property and a reformulation of the justification of the proposed criteria for inscription.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

18 March 2021

2 Description of the property

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report only provides a short summary of the most relevant aspects.

Description and history

The diverse and rich cultural and natural heritage of the Ribeira Sacra cultural landscape includes a concentration of churches, monasteries, and hermitages that collectively represent an important example of the sacralization of a territory. This continuing agricultural and sacred landscape, which has been occupied from the Paleolithic to the present day, includes features covering a wide temporal and typological span from Roman archaeological remains to contemporary dams and

reservoirs within its 78 parishes and 170 population centres.

The nominated serial property is comprised of four components covering 16,973.16 hectares in total along the valleys of the Miño and Sil rivers in northwestern Spain's provinces of Lugo and Ourense, Autonomous Community of Galicia. The components focus on the following monastic estates: Ribeiras, Heredad de San Pedro de Rocas, Heredad de Montederramo, and Heredad de Ferreira de Pantón. Apart from monasteries and churches, the region is rich with features that speak to the property's religious heritage, such as hermitages, rectories, and crosses (*cruceiros*).

The Ribeiras, the largest of the four components at 16,470.87 hectares, is characterized by deep river valleys, although these valleys have been transformed to a certain degree as a result of the construction of large dams in the mid-20th century. The topography and climate have historically conditioned the development of steep-slope, terraced agricultural practices, which continue to the present day.

The Heredad de San Pedro de Rocas component (452.09 hectares) symbolizes the ascetic landscape. Built on the site of a hermitage, it marks the transition in Western Europe from solitary eremitism to community worship in a monastic order.

The Heredad de Ferreira de Pantón component (39.86 hectares), which traces its roots back to the 12th century, houses the only monastic community still active in the area.

The Heredad de Montederramo, the smallest component (10.34 hectares), is one of the main Cistercian monasteries in Galicia and bears witness to the historical origin of the Ribeira Sacra name.

The cultural landscape of Ribeira Sacra exhibits the history of human habitation and sustainable exploitation of land in rough mountainous terrain, with steep-slope agricultural terraces (*socalcos*) and characteristic land parcellation (*cavaduras*). The *socalcos* are mostly located on hillsides with slopes of more than 30 % and represent a specific character of the landscape. The *cavadura*, which is the surface area that a person is able to cultivate in one day for sustenance, is the historical basis of land division and has been preserved to the present day.

The land use associated with the nominated property is an expression of the sacred character of the territory and the history of evangelization. The monasteries, churches, hermitages, sanctuaries, and other sacred features documented and preserved within the boundaries of the nominated serial property illustrate various stages in the development of Christianity in Western Europe through interchange with Eastern Christian traditions.

Historically, the monasteries of Ribeira Sacra originated in eremitism, specifically in an early Christian movement called Priscillianism, which was inspired by Eastern Christian traditions. Historical evidence, including the remains of a world map preserved on the walls of the Heredad de San Pedro de Rocas, indicates a cultural transfer between the East and the West. Monasticism in this region was endorsed in the 6th century by Martín de Dumio, bishop of Braga. The founding inscription of the Heredad de San Pedro de Rocas (573 CE) is presented by the State Party as material evidence supporting a claim that this is the birthplace of Western monasticism.

Important historical events and processes began here with the Christian evangelization influenced by Priscillianism and the development of eremitism, followed by the transition from eremitism to monasticism in the wake of the formation of the Swabian kingdom and the political-administrative strengthening of the Catholic Church during the 5th and 6th centuries CE. The Arab invasion of 711 triggered the flight of Christians from the south of the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa to this region, and the subsequent intensive colonization and cultivation of the territory. Benedictine and Cistercian monasticism expanded here in the 11th and 12th centuries. Reformation and reorganization of the monastic orders and strengthening political integrity with the Catholic Church and the Kingdom occurred in the 16th century.

Monastic rule of the territory was first challenged by local civic powers amidst the political, economic, and social crisis of the Late Middle Ages, leading to the decline of the monasteries. In modern times, with the Spanish War of Independence (1808-1814) and the Catholic Church's laws of disentailment and expropriation, the State confiscated all monastic goods, which led to the expulsion of religious communities and largely put an end to more than 1,000 years of monastic orders in this region. The modern era brought significant physical as well as socio-economic transformations, placing energy production and its infrastructure at the heart of this sacred landscape.

In the additional information sent by the State Party in February 2021, the State Party remarks that, even though the nominated property includes an exceptional group of monasteries, it is a living and evolving cultural landscape that arose from the sacralization of nature by the communities, and therefore conveys spiritual values beyond its religious features. Letters from the bishoprics of Lugo and Ourense are included in the additional information as a confirmation of the continuation of the sacred character of Ribeira Sacra up to the present.

Boundaries

The rationale for the delineation of the nominated property's largest component, the Ribeiras, is based on geomorphological and cultural features so as to incorporate the highest concentration of heritage elements preserved in the landscape. The *bocarribeira* – the characteristic change of the slope gradient from values higher than 30 % (*ribeiras*) to values lower than 10 % (*chairas*) – defines the limits of this component.

Regarding the three smaller components, the rationale for the delineation of their boundaries is not obvious. The boundaries of the Heredad de San Pedro de Rocas, Heredad de Ferreira de Pantón, and Heredad de Montederramo each form separate polygons of different sizes, all embedded in the single buffer zone. There is insufficient explanation of the principles adopted for delineating each boundary or the spatial interrelationship between the monasteries and the wider landscape.

The proposed buffer zone covers 53,177.29 hectares and is comprised of 106 parishes and 668 population centres. It surrounds all four components of the nominated property and borders the Courel Mountains UNESCO Geopark (designated in 2019). The buffer zone is based on the boundaries of historical parishes and is intended to encompass the key components presented in the nomination as well as their wider landscape setting.

In addition to the buffer zone, a still wider study area has been defined, made up of 25 municipalities that have historically considered themselves to be part of the Ribeira Sacra cultural landscape. Even though most of this study area does not have special heritage protection, it is proposed to be important in terms of the nominated property's management.

State of conservation

The nomination dossier provides information on the state of conservation of the nominated property at two different scales – the single-object level, and the landscape level. The information is based on evaluations carried out in 2017-2019. The state of conservation of the great majority of features is satisfactory or very good, particularly the religious sites and agricultural terraces, which are reported to be in a very good or optimum state of conservation.

Conservation institutions, human resources, and funding mechanisms are in place to ensure the continued conservation of different features of the cultural landscape over the long term. There is regular monitoring of their state of conservation.

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is satisfactory.

Factors affecting the property

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the property are development, environmental, demographic, and tourism pressures. Other factors mentioned by the State Party are the open quarries, intensification of agriculture, and forestry. ICOMOS and IUCN consider that active quarrying should not be permitted within the boundaries of the nominated property, nor should indirect impacts from quarrying or mining be allowed.

Development pressures having the highest impact include large-scale energy production infrastructure such as dams, reservoirs, and transmission lines. In the additional information sent in November 2020, the State Party contends that the dams and reservoirs built for energy production in the mid-20th century have not had a significantly negative impact on the features that support the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property, including the qualities of the physical landscape and, particularly, its sacred character. Moreover, the historic and cultural values of these modern engineering structures are highlighted by the State Party as valuable parts of the continuing cultural landscape.

Amongst the environmental pressures, the State Party highlights invasive species and changes to the local ecosystems. In addition, ICOMOS and IUCN note the negative impact of wildfires, which are observed to be related to the abandonment of forests and groves whose cultivation began in the Middle Ages. ICOMOS also notes the obstruction of visual links between monasteries and other sacred features and the rivers as a result of afforestation.

One of the major factors affecting the nominated property is the demographic trend towards an older population, which is related to the harsh working conditions and the precarious historic agrarian infrastructure that have resulted in the abandonment of plots that are difficult to cultivate. This trend threatens the traditional community-led agricultural production in micro-small holdings, which is one of the key features of the nominated property. Depopulation and ageing also affect the landscape's sacred character: many religious buildings have lost their historic use or have been adapted to new non-religious functions. The only monastic community still extant is composed of eight nuns in the Heredad de Ferreira de Pantón.

The State Party highlights the major role planned for tourism in revitalizing the economy of Ribeira Sacra. A number of strategic plans and documents at various administrative levels have been put forward to ensure sustainable and socially sensitive tourism. Considering the demonstrated rapid growth of the tourism sector in the last decade, however, tourism could potentially threaten the sustainability of the local traditional agricultural economy, outcompeting the latter's historically formative role in the character of the territory.

ICOMOS notes with some concern the visual impact of wind turbines on the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property. One large wind farm is located in the buffer zone between two of the nominated property's components, and three others, while more distant, are also visible.

ICOMOS considers that historical events and the physical transformation of the territory over the last 200 years, depopulation and ageing, abandonment and afforestation, and loss of visual links between the sacred components of the property have irreversibly altered the

character and meaning associated with the medieval monastic sacred cultural landscape. Despite significant efforts by the State Party to preserve the historical features and revitalize the local economy, ICOMOS considers that the territory is particularly vulnerable to demographic change and its negative influence on the formative sacred and agricultural features that support the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated serial property.

3 Proposed justification for inscription

Proposed justification

As presented in the nomination dossier, the nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- Ribeira Sacra is a unique testimony of monasticism characterized by the influence that the Priscilianist heresy had on Gallaecia (4th-6th centuries) and the subsequent reform and correction undertaken by the Church headed by San Martín de Dumio, which allows us to document the birth of the Western monasticism in 573 with the consecration of the cenobitic community of San Pedro de Rocas made up of six monks of various origins, following the models of the Eastern monasteries, symbol of the new order and meeting point between East and West.
- Ribeira Sacra represents a unique example of the sacralization of an entire territory, as reflected in its historical name, which demonstrates the existence of an exceptionally high concentration of monasteries since the early Middle Ages in a small area around the deep valleys of the Miño and Sil, which has maintained a unique set of abbeys that in the 8th and 9th centuries served as a refuge for migrations from North Africa, bearers of classical culture, a meeting point of East and West, and that for a thousand five hundred years managed this territory.
- Ribeira Sacra is an exceptional cultural landscape in which the combined action of the local communities and a singular nature is represented, and which maintains the characteristics with which it was built, forming a unique testimony of the structure of the territory: some local communities organized in parishes, identity units that emerged in the 6th century and that by means of the *presura* and the *forum* (ecclesiastical and stately concessions), which were created between the 8th and 9th centuries, promoted the creation of anthropic and fertile lands in the *ribeiras* (deep valleys) by means of the construction of *socalcos* (monumental terraces) intended for the polyculture of subsistence in very small plots, the *cavaduras* (436 m²). A unique territory that also continues to work with traditional techniques and in which the built, humanized landscape coexists with the wild, untamed natural landscape.

The nomination dossier presents features of a wide temporal and typological span, from Prehistoric and Roman remains to contemporary dams, all of which are proposed as contributing to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. However, the justification for the potential Outstanding Universal Value is predominantly based on the sacred character of the territory, the history of its evangelization, and the associated land-use. Although the nomination dossier describes the landscape as continuing, it is difficult for ICOMOS to see the large-scale infrastructural elements of the modern period as contributing or relating to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property.

In response to ICOMOS' concerns about the continuity of the sacred character of the nominated property, the State Party in February 2021 presented a reformulated justification, withdrawing from the original version of the nomination dossier on emphasis on monasticism and the history of evangelization, and referring instead to the transcendent dimension of this landscape and the continuity of perception of its sacredness from the Paleolithic to the present day. ICOMOS considers that this reformulation does not justify the nominated property as being outstanding or exceptional: the evidence of sacralization of a natural landscape in the context of the evolution of human belief systems is preserved elsewhere in Europe as well as in many parts of the world.

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis is presented in three parts: comparisons with other properties linked to the evangelization process of a territory; comparisons with other properties representing unique monastic ensembles; and comparisons with other cultivated landscapes on hillsides or terraces. The geo-cultural region is identified as primarily the Mediterranean area, though many examples from beyond this region are also included.

The analysis includes a selection of 57 sites, including properties on the World Heritage List, on national Tentative Lists (in Spain and in Italy), and a property not on either list (Tebaida Berciana in Castilla y León, Spain). Comparisons related to the evangelization process number 16 sites, to unique monastic ensembles number 19 sites, and to cultivated terraced agricultural landscapes number 21 sites. Such a large number of comparable properties highlights the fact that hillside terraced agricultural landscapes, sacred places, and monuments related to evangelization are not uncommon in Europe, or in other parts of the world – or on the World Heritage List.

The State Party states that the nominated serial property is outstanding within this group of comparators because it is associated with the establishment and expansion of monasticism in the West, specifically in relation to Priscillianism, and contributes to an understanding of the cultural interchange of Christianity between the East and the West. In addition, it states that the nominated property has an exceptional concentration of noteworthy architectural ensembles that illustrate more than

1,000 years of uninterrupted presence of religious communities. And finally, the topography and setting of the nominated property have greatly defined the shape and form of the agricultural landscape, illustrating the sustainable use of the harsh natural environment. The comparative analysis concludes that the Ribeira Sacra cultural landscape stands out from its comparators since none of the other sites have a comparable set of characteristics.

A similar approach is adopted by the State Party in the additional information it submitted in February 2021. In reassessing comparators originally selected, the State Party asserts that none have been defined by the sacredness of elements that generated an agricultural landscape and a symbolic relationship with nature and the territory.

ICOMOS considers that the analysis reveals close similarities with some properties, such as the World Heritage property of the Holy Valley and the Forests of Cedars of God in Lebanon (Lebanon, 1998, criteria (iii) and (iv)), where agricultural terraces historically cultivated by the monks, hermits, and peasants form part of a sacred landscape. Furthermore, similar patterns of human occupation, historical development, monasticism, subsistence steep-slope farming, micro-small holdings, and polyculture can be found in several areas of the European part of the Mediterranean region.

ICOMOS further considers that monasticism and its associated land use and water management practices can be seen to have shaped a large part of European landscapes. There are significant numbers of well-preserved ensembles of monastic structures in this geo-cultural region, and beyond. The comparison with Western European medieval church buildings also reveals similarities in architectural features and qualities in terms, *inter alia*, of preserved hagioscopes and anchorite cells.

The comparative analysis presented in the nomination, although in many ways confirming the qualities of Ribeira Sacra, leaves open the fundamental question of whether the nominated serial property can be considered outstanding for its combination of landscape features or its relation to particular events in the history of Western monasticism. As it has been observed, monasticism and its associated land use can be seen to have shaped a large part of European landscapes. In terms of ensembles of monastic structures, there are also many more intact ones elsewhere.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis does not justify consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iii), (iv) and (v):

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property is a unique testimony to the development of Western monasticism characterized by the influence of Priscillianism (4th-6th centuries) and the subsequent reform undertaken by the Church. Consecration of the coenobitic community of San Pedro de Rocas in 573 represents the earliest documented evidence of a monastic community in Western Europe, following the models of the Eastern monasteries, illustrating the cultural interchange between the East and the West.

ICOMOS considers that the claim of this being the birthplace of Western monasticism based on the foundation stone of the Heredad de San Pedro de Rocas adds only a limited and singular argument to the proposed justification. There are several other areas in Western Europe that are known as refuges for early Christian hermits and their communities, as well as for early forms of monastic orders influenced by Eastern Christian traditions. Therefore, ICOMOS considers that the preserved evidence of the date of consecration of one of the monasteries – presented as a separate component of the nominated property – is not sufficient to demonstrate that the nominated serial property bears a unique or exceptional testimony to the identified cultural tradition.

The reformulated justification for criterion (iii) provided by the State Party in February 2021 places the emphasis on the transcendent dimension of the landscape, which is considered as the basis for eremitism and the birth of Western monasticism. The new formulation does not, however, assist in clarifying the arguments provided in the nomination dossier. Instead, it has made it more difficult to explain to which cultural tradition or civilization the nominated property is a unique or at least exceptional testimony.

Criterion (iv): *be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates a significant stage in human history;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property represents an outstanding example of the sacralization of a landscape, manifested in the high concentration of monasteries since the early Middle Ages around the deep valleys of the Miño and Sil rivers, which served as a refuge for migrations from North Africa and southern Spain, bearers of classical culture.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property is described as a “continuous cultural landscape,” but it is difficult to see the large-scale energy production infrastructure of the modern period as contributing or

relating to the historic sacred character of the landscape. ICOMOS also considers that the preserved material evidence of the high concentration of monasteries and religious features has been significantly reduced: of the 85 religious properties documented throughout history, only a few have been fully preserved today. And of these, only one has an active monastic community – that of eight Cistercian nuns. The disintegration of the majority of the monastic communities, abandonment, demographic change, afforestation, and loss of visual links between the sacred components makes difficult to perceive today the sacred character of the territory, or its continuity.

The reformulated justification presented by the State Party in February 2021 refers to outstanding Benedictine and Cistercian monastic ensembles that reflect the evolution of Western architecture up to the present day. ICOMOS acknowledges the high architectural quality and historical importance of these structures, but does not consider them to be outstanding examples of the development of Western architecture in the context of criterion (iv), as many more monastic ensembles of great architectural quality and historic value are found intact throughout Europe.

Criterion (v): be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures) or human interaction with the environment, especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property is based on the exceptionality of the cultural landscape of Ribeira Sacra, which has maintained to the greatest extent the continuity of its spatial and socio-cultural organization (parishes, *cavaduras*, *socalcos*) since the early Middle Ages.

The reformulated justification provided by the State Party in February 2021 further stipulates that the structuring of society into parishes, the myths, and the animist vision of the landscape by local communities, together with sacred trees, stones, and other natural and human-made objects, convey the continuing sacredness of the territory. The State Party clarified that the churches and monasteries of Ribeira Sacra have not been desacralized, as has been the case in many other places in Spain, thus maintaining their sacred character and function. Furthermore, clarification was provided on the continuity of generations of families who have been cultivating the land from the time of the monastic orders to the present day.

ICOMOS considers that a rich diversity of cultural heritage features exists in the nominated serial property, but notes that the sacred landscape of Ribeira Sacra has undergone significant transformations in the last 200 years that have interrupted the continuity of the landscape in terms of the connections to its religious character and sacred origins. On the one hand, there has been the development of large-scale infrastructure that has changed the physical environment, while on the other

hand, there has been a drastic decline of monasticism as a result of the reforms of 19th century that led to the confiscation of land and abandonment of many monasteries in the area.

ICOMOS does not consider that any of the cultural criteria have been demonstrated.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

Since integrity is a measure of the completeness or intactness of the attributes needed to demonstrate the Outstanding Universal Value proposed by the State Party (and to the absence of threats to those attributes), it is not possible to fully assess the integrity of the nominated property at this stage because its potential Outstanding Universal Value has not yet been established.

The integrity of the nominated serial property is based on it being a testimony to the development of Western monasticism since the year 573, the sacralization of this landscape as manifested in a high concentration of monasteries and other sacred features, and the continuity of its spatial and socio-cultural organization since the early Middle Ages.

According to the State Party, the historical events and developments of the 19th and 20th centuries – most notably the construction of large dams, reservoirs, and railways and the confiscation of land from the monasteries – have not had significant negative impacts on the integrity of the nominated serial property.

While acknowledging the detailed information provided by the State Party on the perceived impact of the dams and other modern-era infrastructure on the cultural landscape, ICOMOS considers that fundamental questions remain in terms of how these large-scale elements that have modified the riverain landscape can be seen as contributing or relating to the history of monasticism or its associated traditional land uses or sacred character of the landscape; and the way these aspects are understood, perceived, and valued today.

With regards to the landscape, and the way it has been shaped by monastic activities during the Middle Ages, ICOMOS observes that it is currently difficult to comprehend the current landscape as it could have been at this period. The lands have been abandoned in large part and forests cover more than half the territory.

In the additional information provided in February 2021, the State Party notes that most of the forests are part of the traditional agricultural system: chestnut forests (*soutos*), areas of scrublands for pasture (*devesas*), fruit orchards, and cork tree groves are all grown in humid areas near rivers and are not prone to forest fires. Nevertheless, information provided by the State Party confirms that significant damage to the landscape results annually from forest fires. Furthermore, afforestation is

observed to have led to the loss of visual connections between the monasteries, and between them and the rivers. The present state of the monastic sacred landscape does not allow the historic landscape shaped by the monasteries' activities to be readily visualized, which represents, in ICOMOS' view, an important issue of integrity.

In conclusion, there remain doubts about the degree to which the present landscape can be considered as having maintained the integrity of its formative socio-economic systems following the confiscation of monastic land possessions, the disintegration and abandonment of the once-powerful monasteries, and the consequent auctioning and subdivision of their land over several generations.

These questions and doubts apply both to the integrity of the whole series as well as the integrity of the component sites.

Authenticity

Without the potential Outstanding Universal Value having been established and the attributes relevant to conveying that value having been confirmed, the following comments on authenticity cannot be considered definitive at this time.

The authenticity of the nominated serial property is based on the features that support its proposed Outstanding Universal Value, including ensembles, buildings, structures, archaeological sites, and landscape features. Documentary sources dating back to the 10th century confirm historical events, phases of construction and reconstruction of churches and monastic buildings, processes of division of agricultural lands and administrative units, and construction of *socalcos*, roads, and railways that have shaped the Ribeira Sacra landscape for more than 1,000 years.

The historical transformations over the last 200 years have led to the disruption of the continuity of the socio-economic system that played a decisive role in the formation of the cultural landscape of Ribeira Sacra. The lands possessed by the monasteries, which historically owned and controlled the territory and fostered the agricultural development of the river landscape, were confiscated in the 19th century, leading to a drastic decline of monasticism in the area. The once-functional socio-economic relationship between the monasteries and the agricultural landscape of the river valleys has vanished, along with almost all the monastic communities.

The only remaining historical monastic community in the nominated serial property is composed of eight Cistercian nuns at the Heredad de Ferreira de Pantón. The reduction and abandonment of the region's religious function has given rise to the adaptation of former religious buildings to new uses. These adaptations are commonly carried out to the highest conservation standards, though mostly in support of tourism functions. For example, Santo Estevo

de Ribas de Sil, once an important Benedictine abbey, has been converted into a *parador de turismo*; the former Pantón priory is being converted into a winery and restaurant; and the former San Paio de Abeleda monastery will be converted into a hotel. A number of *pazos* (stately homes) dating to the Renaissance and Baroque periods have also been converted for cultural and tourism uses.

In terms of authenticity of the physical features, the 20th century transformations are of critical importance. The large-scale infrastructure for energy production, with four large dams, water reservoirs, and other infrastructural elements on the Miño and Sil river systems, has significantly altered the natural setting and ecosystem of the landscape. Some agricultural terraces, settlements, and traditional river crossings have been flooded. The relocation of the churches of San Xoán da Cova and Santo Estevo de Chouzán to prevent their flooding represents an exceptional undertaking of their time. These projects predate the well-known translocation of Nubian temples in Egypt, and are highlighted by the State Party as pioneering engineering and conservation achievements.

The information provided by the State Party in November 2020 makes clear that the appearance, geomorphology, ecosystems, and possibly even climate of the historic cultural landscape has been irreversibly altered. Despite the fact that majority of the individual features of the property – monastic buildings, sacred objects, traditional rural buildings, agricultural terraces, archaeological sites, etc. – retain the authenticity of their material substance, the above-mentioned transformations have compromised the authenticity of the monastic sacred landscape as a whole.

The changing demography – depopulation, ageing, and gentrification – adds a further challenge to maintaining the sacred spirit of place vis-à-vis the challenge of the socio-economic revitalization of the region.

These concerns apply both to the authenticity of the whole series as well as the authenticity of the component sites.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the whole series have not been met, and the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the individual component sites have been only partially met.

Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription

Based on the information provided in the nomination dossier and in the additional information submitted in November 2020 and February 2021, ICOMOS does not consider that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this serial property for the World Heritage List. It has not been demonstrated that the nominated serial property can be considered outstanding for its combination of landscape features or its relation to particular events in the history of Western monasticism.

Similar patterns of human occupation, historical development, monasticism, subsistence steep-slope farming, micro-small holdings, and polyculture can be found elsewhere. In addition, monasticism and its associated land use can be seen to have shaped a large part of European landscapes.

ICOMOS does not consider that any of the cultural criteria have been demonstrated. The proposed criteria, both as originally presented in the nomination dossier and as reformulated in February 2021, do not seem coherent with the 20th-century transformations of the landscape, nor with the drastic reduction of monastic communities and the alienation of the present socio-economic system from the system that fostered the creation of a distinctive agricultural and sacred landscape.

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the whole series, and of the individual component sites, have not been fully met. There are fundamental questions as to the degree to which the present landscape maintains a connection to its formative socio-economic system following the confiscation of monastic land possessions, and in light of the abandonment of the monasteries. Furthermore, there are questions about how the large-scale infrastructural elements that have modified the river landscape contribute or relate to the history of monasticism or the traditional land use; or the way these aspects are understood, perceived, and valued today.

For the reasons listed above, ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis, proposed justifications, integrity, and authenticity of the nominated serial property do not point towards a conclusion that the exceptionality of the nominated property has been demonstrated.

Features

The nomination dossier includes features of a wide temporal and typological span, from Prehistoric and Roman archaeological remains to contemporary dams, all of which are seen by the State Party as contributing to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. The justification for the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, however, is focused primarily on the sacred character of the territory, the history of its evangelization, and the associated land use. The features most directly associated with the proposed criteria are the natural landscape of the deep valleys of the Miño and Sil rivers; the Ribeiras, Heredad de San Pedro de Rocas, Heredad de Montederramo, and Heredad de Ferreira de Pantón, as well as other preserved monasteries, churches, and various places of religious significance; the dry-stone agricultural terraces that utilize traditional techniques for cultivation in a sustainable and self-sufficient way; and the historic administrative divisions of parishes and land parcellation in micro-small holdings (*cavaduras*).

The steep-slope (more than 30 percent) agricultural terraces form distinctive agricultural and landscape features. Their emergence about the 9th century was related to the monasteries, which owned the land. Over

time, a subsistence polyculture of small holdings suited to the local climate and topography was developed. The transformation of the steep river valleys into fertile terraces is a remarkable work of engineering and resilience.

The parishes are referred to as one of the historically important features of the nominated property. More than simply administrative units, they are presented as the lowest level of social organization and have contributed to a specific and strong community identity and solidarity over the centuries. The historical parishes determine a sense of social belonging for local people.

Other features include vernacular architecture, stately homes, castles, and modern infrastructural elements such as dams, bridges, roads, and railways. The modern infrastructure demonstrates engineering achievements and the evolution of natural resource utilization, but are not easily associated with the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property. Some of these modern structures have individually been declared as a Property of Cultural Interest.

ICOMOS considers that the specific features that convey the value of the property have been well identified, but that the nominated serial property cannot be said to demonstrate exceptionality at this stage.

4 Conservation measures and monitoring

Conservation measures

Actions related to research, conservation, rehabilitation, and adaptation have been developed in accordance with the Strategic Plan of Galicia 2015-2020 and its sub-plan for the protection and conservation of cultural heritage. Restoration and improvement of the state of conservation of unique heritage elements in Ribeira Sacra have been included in the relevant actions and programmes of that Plan. Some of these actions are dedicated to improving visitor experience, while others are directed at conserving unique elements such as mural paintings, sculptural elements, and altarpieces.

At the landscape level, the Galician Landscape Catalogue has delimited several "Areas of Special Landscape Interest" around Ribeira Sacra, as well as viewpoints and "Itineraries of Landscape Interest." The Galician Landscape Guidelines, currently under preparation, will define landscape quality objectives, describe their indicators, and establish measures, specific actions, standards, and recommendations to integrate these objectives into the planning system. The conservation of important landscape features such as traditional land use is supported by the Land Conservation Act, which controls changes to land use.

Monitoring

In addition to various thematic programs for managing heritage and the landscape, the Management Plan for Ribeira Sacra includes a monitoring plan, all overseen by the Interdepartmental Commission of the Ribeira Sacra.

The nomination dossier describes two sets of key indicators for monitoring the nominated serial property's state of conservation. One refers to the conservation of the landscape, and the other refers to the effectiveness of management measures and the physical conservation of its most significant features. ICOMOS considers that adding indicators regarding traditional land management and cultural practices would help ensure their continuity.

The key management organization for Ribeira Sacra, the *Dirección Xeral de Patrimonio Cultural* of the Xunta de Galicia, has sufficient technical and human resources to ensure regular monitoring, which is scheduled to take place annually or every 5 years, depending on the nature of the different elements. As the Management Plan has only recently entered the implementation phase, there are no detailed results of previous monitoring reports for the nominated property.

The *Dirección Xeral de Patrimonio Cultural* has collected information on the significant elements of the cultural landscape in a geographic information system, which it will continue to develop in order to be able to incorporate, as far as possible, most of the key indicators with their geographic information.

With regard to specific indicators related to tourism, an agreement is envisaged with the Ribeira Sacra Tourism Consortium for the control of those parameters specifically related to its functions.

ICOMOS considers that the conservation measures and monitoring system are adequate. The monitoring system could be further augmented to better ensure the continuity of traditional land management and cultural practices.

5 Protection and management

Documentation

The tangible and intangible cultural elements as well as the natural features of Ribeira Sacra have been studied for decades. These studies serve as a foundation for the protective measures and management mechanisms for the nominated property, its buffer zone, and the wider study area. The *Dirección Xeral de Patrimonio Cultural* is responsible for managing, archiving, and updating the documentation and information.

The information about the protected assets of Ribeira Sacra, as well as the geographic information system that connects the various types of information, can be accessed online. These serve as tools for systematizing information and integrating the various strands for planning and management. The geographic information

system is managed by the *Instituto de Estudos del Territorio* of the Xunta de Galicia.

Legal protection

The Ribeira Sacra has comprehensive legal protection at the local and regional levels, supported by more general overarching national legislation. Formal legal protection has been applied to the territory since the early 20th century, with the first listings of sites in the nominated property in 1923 (San Pedro de Rocas and Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil). There are more than 1,200 classified sites in the municipalities that make up this territory and study area. The Ribeira Sacra cultural landscape has recently been declared a Property of Cultural Interest (Decree 166/2018, of 27 December), the highest level of classification for a cultural property.

This declaration also includes the cultural landscape's buffer zone. Following a request for clarification from ICOMOS, the State Party advised that the rationale for the nominated property's buffer zone being larger than the buffer zone of the Property of Cultural Interest is to better ensure the integrity of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the four different components of the property.

For the part of the nominated property's buffer zone that falls outside the Property of Cultural Interest's buffer zone, control over interventions is exercised by the *Dirección Xeral de Patrimonio Cultural* and a special interdepartmental commission. Within the area of the buffer zone of the nominated property beyond the one included in the Property of Cultural Interest declaration, any intervention that may have territorial effects, including through planning and land use documents, must receive advice from the *Dirección Xeral de Patrimonio Cultural*.

The Land Conservation Act, which strictly controls changes in land use, also provides an important instrument for protection and control of traditional land use patterns and practices.

Comprehensive protection and an institutional framework are in place for the natural heritage located within the nominated property. Some parts have been identified as sites of special importance within the Natura 2000 network of protected areas in Europe.

Several other international protective instruments overlap the nominated property, most notably the Routes of Santiago de Compostela: *Camino Francés* and Routes of Northern Spain, which was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1993 and extended in 2015. The Courel Mountains Geopark, designated in 2019, touches and overlaps slightly the nominated property. In addition, the central part of the nominated property is planned to be nominated as a Biosphere Reserve. These measures affirm the great diversity of values of this territory and provide cross-sectoral legal and institutional frameworks for its long-term protection.

Management system

The key management organization for Ribeira Sacra is the *Dirección Xeral de Patrimonio Cultural*, which has the legal capacity and extensive technical and human resources to control all interventions to ensure compatibility with protected cultural values. It also coordinates the design of specific measures relating to the protection, coordination, and dissemination of the cultural values of the nominated property. Staffing levels of the *Dirección* are sufficient and stable.

Various institutions at the local, supra-municipal, regional, and national levels make up a complex network of agents having a role in the management of the territory. Some of the most important stakeholders include the *Axencia de Turismo de Galicia*, for disseminating and interpreting the site; the *Instituto de Estudos del Territorio*, for developing and applying geographical and statistical information for the Ribeira Sacra geo-destination; the Ribeira Sacra Tourism Consortium, a public-private body for coordinating the tourism sector and promoting cohesion and identity in this region; and the Regulatory Board of the Ribeira Sacra Denomination of Origin, for controlling agricultural production activities.

The local parish and town councils have technical offices with which the *Dirección* collaborates in processing each file and with which coordination is maintained through training and exchange of information.

Established in 2020, the Interdepartmental Commission of the Ribeira Sacra ensures coordination of all these various actors. The Commission brings together different departments of the national, regional, provincial, and local authorities, the representatives of the non-governmental organizations in the matters of culture and local development, local associations, religious authorities, and “the people representing the parish communities that make up the cultural landscape of Ribeira Sacra.” The *Dirección* carries out the functional tasks for the Commission. The Commission is a key mechanism for measuring the implementation of the Management Plan.

Concerning management tools, there is a multiplicity of sectoral plans and strategies at the local, regional, and national levels. At the national level there are several thematic plans that set out a methodology, selection and categorization criteria, priorities, and objectives, and provide political visibility and a coordination framework for different regions and municipalities.

The Management Plan for Ribeira Sacra was adopted in 2019 for the period 2020-2023. The plan incorporates the various programs for heritage, landscape, and land use planning, conservation of natural values, sustainable economic development, tourism, education, training and research, communication, and participation. Each of these programs contains actions and monitoring indicators. The plan is overseen by the Interdepartmental Commission of the Ribeira Sacra.

The action plan for viticulture is of specific interest for the nominated property. Its main objectives include improving infrastructure to mechanize the production of wine, and encouraging the consolidation of existing farms. These processes are declared to be fully consistent with the values and long-term conservation needs of the territory. However, specific solutions that ensure these actions respect the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property are yet to be devised. While there are protective instruments in place to control and protect the use of *socalcos* and *cavaduras*, owners are nevertheless allowed to consolidate lots of up to 2,000 square metres (or 4.5 times the size of a traditional *cavadura*) without administrative procedures.

Visitor management

The nominated serial property has a wealth of resources for tourists. There has been a regular increase in the number of visitor numbers over the last 10 years. The nomination dossier presents a detailed description of available tourism services and cultural products. Visitor management and coordination is implemented by the Ribeira Sacra Tourism Consortium and overseen by the *Axencia de Turismo de Galicia*, as well as the Interdepartmental Commission of the Ribeira Sacra.

The Ribeira Sacra Tourism Consortium was established in 2005 and encompasses all the communes in the nominated property. It is supported and funded by *Turismo de Galicia*. The basis for tourism management and stakeholder cooperation is the Tourism Revitalization Plan, which corresponds to the Local Development Strategy and other relevant strategies for developing the territory.

The nominated property's Management Plan articulates a tourism promotion strategy focused on the protection of the values and features of the site to ensure that the effects of tourism are measured and managed with respect to the carrying capacity of the site. An appropriate carrying capacity has not yet been defined.

Community involvement

Significant efforts have been made by local authorities to ensure wide support of the nomination, to facilitate an exchange of information, and to promote the education and integration of the younger generation. Mechanisms for responsible participation have been strengthened through the dissemination of tools such as guides, manuals, and geographical information made available on digital platforms, and by criteria for interventions on historic buildings and the environment.

The State Party in November 2020 provided a clarification with regard to community involvement in the work of the Interdepartmental Commission: due to the large number of parishes involved (78 parishes in the nominated property and 106 parishes in the buffer zone), participation in the work of the Commission is exercised through elected representatives rather than local citizens.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the protection and management of nominated property

The nominated property has been well documented and well-studied. It has comprehensive legal protection at the local and regional levels, and has been declared a Property of Cultural Interest, the highest level of classification for a cultural property. Comprehensive protection is also in place for the natural heritage located within the nominated property.

Institutions at various levels make up a complex network of agents having a role in the management of the nominated property. The key management organization is the *Dirección Xeral de Patrimonio Cultural* of the Xunta de Galicia, which collaborates with local parish and town councils. The Interdepartmental Commission of the Ribeira Sacra ensures coordination of the various actors.

A significant management challenge is the ongoing depopulation of the area. Other management challenges include protecting against wildfires; precluding visually intrusive wind farms and antennas; and re-establishing lost visual links by means of forestry management.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection and the management system for the nominated serial property are adequate.

6 Conclusion

Ribeira Sacra is nominated as a testimony to a continuing sacred cultural landscape and a traditional way of life. The nomination dossier presents information on a large number of monasteries, churches, and other religious and sacred features, and on the specific land divisions that evolved from those monasteries. ICOMOS acknowledges that local identity and social bonding remain strong and that the community, albeit ageing, is dedicated to continuing traditional agricultural practices on the steep slopes of the river valleys.

Nevertheless, this sacred and productive landscape has changed significantly over the past 200 years. On the one hand, there has been the development of large-scale infrastructure that has changed the physical environment, while on the other hand, there has been a drastic decline of monasticism as a result of reforms in the 19th century.

The nomination dossier presents features that cover a wide temporal and typological span, all of which are seen by the State Party as contributing to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, though the justification is predominantly based on the sacred character and history of evangelization of the territory and the associated land use. Although the nomination dossier describes the landscape as continuing, it is difficult for ICOMOS to see the large-scale infrastructural elements of the modern period as contributing or relating to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property. ICOMOS acknowledges the detailed supplementary

information provided by the State Party on the impact of numerous dams on the landscape. However, there remain fundamental questions regarding how these elements that have modified the riverain landscape contribute or relate to the history of monasticism, the sacred character of landscape or the traditional land use; or the way these aspects are understood, perceived, and valued today.

It is also difficult for ICOMOS to understand the continuity of the sacred landscape when its key drivers – the monastic communities – are no longer involved in shaping that landscape. The nomination dossier provides information on the decline of monastic communities throughout Ribeira Sacra following the confiscation of land from the monasteries in the 19th century. Only part of the concentration of monasteries extant in the Middle Ages has been preserved, and only one small Cistercian monastic community is still active. Due to such transformations of the formative elements of the valleys, it is difficult to understand the present relationship of the monasteries with the agricultural landscape once managed by them. Depopulation, modernization, and the consequent challenges to the traditional way of life add further difficulty to demonstrating this relationship.

With regard to the landscape and the way it was shaped and cultivated by monastic activities during the Middle Ages, ICOMOS observes that it is difficult to comprehend the current landscape as it could have been during that period, as agricultural lands and cultivated forests have been abandoned and become overgrown. This leads to a situation where visual connections between the monasteries, and between the monasteries and the rivers, are no longer possible. The nominated property is left with a compromised representation of the monastic sacred landscape. ICOMOS considers that this constitutes an important issue of integrity.

The comparative analysis is a wide-ranging compilation of more than fifty sites worldwide. Such a large number of comparable properties highlights the fact that hillside terraced agricultural landscapes, sacred places, and monuments related to evangelization are not uncommon in Europe, or in other parts of the world. ICOMOS notes that the comparative analysis, although in many ways confirming the qualities of Ribeira Sacra, leaves open the fundamental question of whether the nominated serial property can be considered outstanding for its combination of landscape features or its relation to particular events in the history of Western monasticism. Monasticism and its associated land use can be seen as having shaped large parts of European landscapes. In terms of ensembles of monastic structures, there are significant numbers in this geo-cultural region, and beyond.

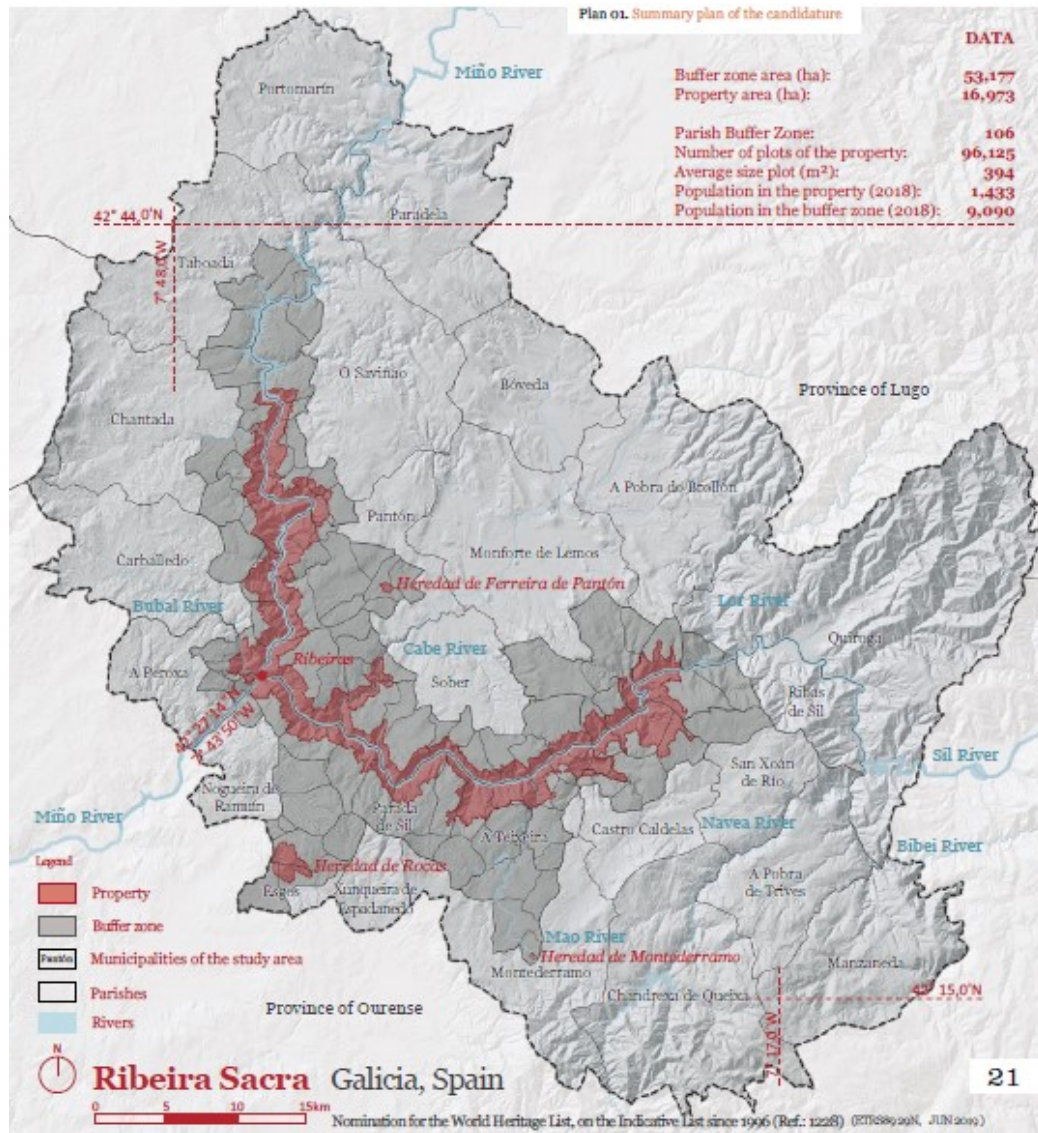
There appears to be an inherent tension between preservation of the sacred character of the territory and accommodating the contemporary needs of communities and modern infrastructure. ICOMOS is not convinced that the two can be reconciled in the way suggested, whereby

the dams and other such interventions are considered as a logical development of a traditional landscape. Nor can these interventions be seen as complementary to what remains of the legacies of the once-powerful monastic communities formerly resident in these valleys.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that Ribeira Sacra, Spain, should **not be inscribed** on the World Heritage List.



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property and its buffer zone