

# ICOMOS DENMARK



## **Roskilde Cathedral** **World Heritage Site** **Denmark**

**Periodic Reporting on application of the 1972 World Heritage Convention.**

**Copenhagen June 2004**

# Roskilde Cathedral

World Heritage Site Denmark

**Periodic Reporting on application of the 1972 World Heritage Convention.**

SECTION II: STATE OF CONSERVATION OF SPECIFIC WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTIES

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## SECTION II: STATE OF CONSERVATION OF SPECIFIC WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTIES

### II.1 Introduction

**State Party:** Denmark

**World Heritage property:** Roskilde Cathedral

**Geographical Location:** Island of Sjaelland  
N55 38 32 E12 447

**Date of WH List inscription:** 1995

**Organization responsible for the preparation of this report:**

ICOMOS Denmark has carried out the periodic reporting for ‘Kulturarvsstyrelsen’, The National Cultural Heritage Agency, Ministry of Culture.

The report is prepared by Flemming Aalund, architect MAA, PhD., after consultations with all bodies responsible for management and up-keep of the monument.

**Date of report:** Copenhagen,

**Signature on behalf of State Party**

**Signature:** -----

**Name:** -----

**Function:** -----

## II.2. Statement of significance

The World Heritage Committee decided to inscribe Roskilde Cathedral to the World Heritage List in 1995 under criteria (ii) and (iv) on basis of the following justification provided by the State Party:

‘Roskilde Cathedral is in many ways the most important ecclesiastical building in Denmark. It is the first Gothic building in the country, although it contains older Romanesque parts. It is built of red brick, which was beginning to be made in Denmark at the time. Unlike most other Danish churches, the architecture of the cathedral is influenced mainly from northern France. Since the 15th Century the cathedral has been the favoured place of burial of the Danish royal family. Across the centuries a number of architecturally very important chapels were added to the original church building, in each of which the best artists of the period displayed their talents.

The cathedral is a unique artistic achievement and is associated with the history of Scandinavia and the Baltic region, on the architecture of which it exerted great influence. The annexed chapels are outstanding examples of architecture and sculpture from the Middle Ages to the present day. There is no comparable building in the region’.

In connection with the admission procedure the ICOMOS advisory body to the World Heritage Convention added that... ‘Roskilde Cathedral is of significance for three principal reasons. First, it is the mausoleum of the Danish Royal Family over many generations, for which there is no parallel in Europe. Secondly, it represents the earliest use of brick in the construction of large religious buildings in northern Europe. Thirdly, because of the successive addition of chapels and porches to commemorate Danish kings since the 16th Century, in each case in the current architectural style, it is an epitome of the history of European architecture in a single structure’.

Further to this, comparative analysis indicates that Roskilde Cathedral... ‘is the first major Gothic place of worship in brick to be nominated for inscription on the world Heritage List. Gothic cathedrals and abbeys in stone have been the subject of numerous comparative studies, but ICOMOS has been unable to find one devoted to brick Gothic, which is characteristic of the North European plain and south-western France, for example’.

At the inscribed to the WH List in 1995 the WH Committee Report ‘drew the attention of the Danish authorities to the interest of the canonical and episcopal quarter, which surrounds the Roskilde Cathedral, and encouraged them to take all necessary steps for the safeguarding of this exceptional site’.

The original justification for inscription has not changed, but in accordance with the recommendations of the WH Committee meeting of 1998, it is recommended that a Statement of Significance is being formulated. In this connection it should be considered to put special emphasis on the intangible heritage values, which may be associated with the cathedral in view of the 2003 International Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage.

### **II.3. Statement of authenticity/integrity**

At the time of inscription the monument had been through a number of major restorations, including a complete renewal of the roof above the transept and the Margrethe Spire after a fire in 1968, and a complete renovation of the cathedral close according to the plan of 1978. At this time the burial-ground of King Frederik IX was added as the latest of the royal chapels, which are attached to the original cathedral.

In preparation for the inscription in the World Heritage List, Roskilde Cathedral was visited in 1994 by an ICOMOS expert mission, which approved highly of the quality of the conservation and restoration work and of the management of the cathedral and its precinct.

This situation has not changed during the intermediate years.

The disastrous effect of the preservatives used for the new timber construction at the restoration after the big fire in 1968 has prompted a complete replacement of the central part of the roof. So far the Margrethe spire was replaced in 1999 and the roof about the choir was renewed in 2003 at a total cost of 17 mill D. Kr.

The maintenance programme and the regular up-keep of the church secure a high level of preservation of the heritage resource with a very high degree of perfection.

It can be argued that the aim of perfection is accomplished at the expense of maintaining authenticity in material. The process of ageing has not always been valued as an inherent quality, and in some cases, the church interior is not allowed to maintain the patina of age that evolves as the result of wear and tear.

### **II.4. Management**

The main responsibility for the management of the church property rests with its congregational council (Menighedsrådet).

The Local Preservation Plan no. 136 of 1982 is providing a protected buffer zone around the Cathedral merging with the delimitation of the World Heritage site. Furthermore, the majority of buildings facing on to the Cathedral close are protected pursuant to the Preservation of Buildings Act.

The importance of the church twin spires of the cathedral as the symbol and landmark of the city of Roskilde is widely acknowledged. A recent visual impact study of the possible consequence of the construction of high rise structures in connection to the new urban development scheme east of Roskilde has convinced the town council that the cathedral shall remain as the dominant feature of the skyline retaining future constructions to a maximum of four stories.

Contrary to all other Evangelical Lutheran churches in Denmark entrance fee is requested at the rate of 25 D.Kr for adults and 15 D.Kr. for children. The policy of collecting admission seems to be inconsistent with the view expressed by the congregational council, that the cathedral is primarily a parish church serving the local congregation. Alternatively, if admission fee is collected on the grounds that the cathedral is presented as a historic monument, the complete lack of public amenities is open to criticism.

### Interpretation and presentation.

In respect for the congregational life, the cathedral is closed to the visitors at time of religious ceremonies. The scheduled hours of service are announced at the cathedral website, providing tour operators an opportunity to plan for the visit accordingly, whereas individual tourists run a risk of returning empty. A closed door frustrates tourists and reduces visitor satisfaction. As compensation a pamphlet in English and Danish is available at the entrance proposing an itinerary around the church including information about the church exterior and the surrounding buildings.

However, the opportunity to guide visitors to other related sites in Roskilde is not fully exploited. The intriguing canonical and Episcopal quarter, including the bishop's palace, the canonry residence and the cathedral school as well as other related medieval church institutions, remain generally obscure to the unprepared visitor.

The most recent publication about the cathedral provides a comprehensive description of the history of the building: Anette Kruse, *Roskilde Domkirke*, Roskilde Domkirkes Salgsfond, 2003. Pamphlets about the history of the cathedral are available in Danish, English, German and Spanish. The home page of the cathedral [www.roskildedomkirke.dk](http://www.roskildedomkirke.dk) provides only basic introduction and practical information about the church. The Internet as a means of communicating information about the history of the place in several languages is not yet developed.

A cathedral museum was established in the Great Hall above Christian I's Chapel in 1995. The exhibition illustrates the history of the building from the time of construction of the first church in 985 to the present. Located within the church the museum is only accessible from the southern gallery, when the cathedral is open to the tourists and access is impeded by the isolated location. At the moment visitors are admitted into the museum at fixed hours three times a day. Furthermore, information about the museum is scarce and only a limited number of visitors get a chance to find their way to the museum, not to speak about the disabled or handicapped people, who are excluded from visiting the museum. It is a pity, as the exhibition provides an informative and very apt introduction to the history of the cathedral in Danish. A separate brochure with an explanatory text is available in English and German. There is no specific information addressing the youth or the children.

Seen from a church perspective the limited number of visitors facilitates the management of the museum and reduces the potential conflicts between the double function as a church and a tourist destination. However, the international status as a world heritage site attracts a growing number of tourists, who are visiting the cathedral in its own right as a historic monument. At the moment the cathedral has about 150.000 visitors per year.

An alternative location outside the cathedral would give another status to the museum in favour of a visitors amenity centre, which could also serve the tourists, also when the cathedral is closed. This alternative arrangement would take pressure away from the church, separate religious and secular functions and provide an opportunity to present the heritage values associated with the cathedral in a wider perspective. For example, the history of the cathedral is closely related to the World Heritage Site at Jelling, as well as to cultural transition period of Roskilde from the pagan Viking age to Christianity. It is remarkable that the first wooden church, which stood at the same location as the cathedral, was commissioned by Harald Bluetooth, at a time when he buried his father King Gorm in Jelling and Viking ships was still at sail in Roskilde bay.

The special concern of World Heritage Committee for the canonical and episcopal quarter, which surrounds the Roskilde Cathedral, should be reviewed. The interrelationship between 'Palæet', the bishop's palace, and the cathedral seems disregarded in spite of the physical connection by way of the Absalon Arch dating from the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Listed according to the Preservation of Buildings Act this building complex is well preserved, but the relevance of the present use of the main building as a contemporary art museum could possibly be reconsidered.

Designed by the architect Lauritz de Thurah and constructed in 1733-36 the palace was planned as the residence of the King during his stay in Roskilde. The present building is erected on the foundations of a previous bishop's palace and closely related to the traces of the Mediaeval Arnold Wall, which still determines the extension of the Cathedral Close. A possible extension of the World Heritage nomination to include the palace could be considered.

The Baroque building complex constitutes an irreplaceable cultural property, which is not fully acknowledged in terms of its architectural values and the importance for the surrounding historic environment of the cathedral. The description in the Roskilde Municipal Atlas (1990) emphasises in particular on the importance of the symmetrical layout of the Palace and the main axis towards the city square (Stændertorvet).

The parking of tourist busses near the cathedral in Fondens Bro creates undesirable traffic in the centre of town that calls for an appropriate, alternative solution. Furthermore, the macadam surface and unspecified width of the main access route to the cathedral via Fondens Bro has a mediocre visual appearance.

The City Council has for many years considered a reorganisation of the city square, which eventually would have an immense impact on the overall experience of the cathedral and the historic urban environment.

### Security

Safety against theft and vandalism is managed through a discreet and unobtrusive electronic alarm system, which alert staff to possible dangers, if a person go beyond the permitted visitor zones. The double function as guides and security personal seems to function irreproachably.

Fire precautions seems to be attended satisfactorily. The churchwarden is attentive to potential risks. The fire brigade is on the alert and regular on site training sessions to check out fire-fighting procedures in the cathedral are securing a high level of preparedness.

Special fire security is required whenever a service or special arrangement is attended by more than 750 people at a time.

## **II.5. Factors affecting the property**

The main threat to the monument is resulting from the fatal application of a special non-inflammable fungicide and insecticide as a preservative to the new roof construction after the fire in 1968. Corroded by the chemical combinations of ammonia the copper roofing is starting to fail and the subsequent infiltration of rain results in leaching of chromium and arsenic, eventually threatening also the vaulted ceilings below. The disaster has already prompted the complete renewal of the Margrethe spire and the roof of the choir.

During replacement of the Margrethe spire the structural condition of the timber proved very brittle with reduced structural capacity as a result of the chemical reactions of the wood preservative. Subsequently, the remaining roof construction above the transept has been under constant survey and the condition is now considered critical. The replacement cost is estimated at the range of 50 mill D.Kr.

Furthermore, the copper roofing at the twin spires is in an advanced state of deterioration due to ageing and a renewal is considered indispensable within a short span of time at an estimated cost of another 50 mill D.Kr.

The extraordinary appropriation of about 100 mill D.Kr. is requested as a special emergency funding from the Parliament.

## **II.6. Monitoring**

The elected congregational council (Menighedsrådet) maintains the responsibility for up-keep and maintenance. The churchwarden is managing the day-to-day co-ordination of all practical matters and restoration works in consultation with the assigned site architect, who consults the Conservation Department of the National Museum in all matters concerning restoration of mural paintings and fine arts. The actual condition of the property is monitored continuously and regular church inspections are carried out every year according to law. The deanery committee, the supervising authority in economic and technical affairs, is reporting to the diocesan authority every 3 years.



During the last half century four succeeding architects have maintained responsibility for restoration of the cathedral, securing continuity of work. The Special Church Surveying Commission, which was previously appointed at some forty of the most important churches in Denmark, has been dissolved, creating the imminent risk of reducing the multidisciplinary technical and aesthetic appraisal and monitoring of the property.

The church authorities account for the cost of maintenance and restoration of the cathedral, whereas all costs related to the royal chapels are defrayed directly by the state.

The regular annual budget for the up-keep and maintenance amount to 937.500,- D.Kr. Additionally, a specified long-term work plan has been established for a period of 15 years up to 2013. The extraordinary budget includes conservation of the royal chapels, estimated at a cost of about 30 mill D.Kr., and work at the cathedral in the range of 60 mill D.Kr. The stipulated work is summarised for incorporation in the annual work plan according to priority.

## **II.7. Conclusions and recommended action**

All documents provided and the observations made during the visit to the site, as well as discussions with the responsible institution corroborate the overall impression, that regular up-keep and professional management of the property contributes to the good state of preservation.

The cathedral functions as a parish church to the local community as well as a royal burial place. The religious purpose of the cathedral is a priority. Visitors to the church are welcome during opening hours except during time of religious service. Considering that the cathedral has about 150.000 visitors every year, adequate visitor amenities are missing.

The restoration of the roof after the fire in 1968 and the complete reorganisation of the area surrounding the cathedral in 1978 did bring the cathedral up to an acceptable standard of preservation. Subsequently, regular maintenance and up-keep of the property secure the preservation to a high level of perfection. The authenticity and integrity of the cathedral and its surroundings is valued to be in keeping with its international status as a World Heritage Site. However, the actual need of about 100 mill D.Kr to cover the stipulated cost of roof repairs leaves the authorities to face a huge renovation task for the second time in less than thirty years.

Everything considered, the different issues outlined under the previous headings lead to the following specific recommendations:

- **Statement of Significance**

A statement of significance should be drawn up as part of the requested baseline information, in accordance with the statements by the World Heritage Committee Meeting in 1998 and the current format of the WH Nomination Form.

Knowledge of the values of the site is important and the statement of significance should form part of the general information material. The Internet should also be used more actively for the presentation in several languages of the cathedral as a historic monument.

- **Visitors Centre and/or special site museum.**

Education, information and awareness building is a major obligation of the State Parties to the World Heritage Convention in order to strengthen appreciation and respect of the heritage values.

As a church in daily use priority is given to the religious purpose of the building. However, the international status as a World Heritage monument attracts an increasing number of visitors and foreign tourists to Roskilde Cathedral.

Visitor management will be a major challenge in the future and it should be considered, whether an independent visitors amenity centre can serve the purpose, possibly by including parts of the Palace for presentation and communication of the cultural heritage values related to the history of the cathedral.

- **The historic environment of the Cathedral**

In view of the special concern by the World Heritage Committee for the canonical and episcopal quarters, the possibility of integrating these buildings more actively in the presentation of the cathedral and its historic environment, need to be considered.

The Cathedral Close, the Palace and Stændertorvet (the city market square) compose an urban whole of great importance to the understanding and appreciation of the cultural heritage values in relation to the cathedral proper. The main axis of the Palace, in particular, need reinforcement in connection with a reorganisation of the central square and a possible inclusion of the Palace courtyard in the public domain, would greatly enhance the appreciation of the exceptional rich historic environment around Roskilde Cathedral.

ICOMOS Denmark

Copenhagen 25.06.2004