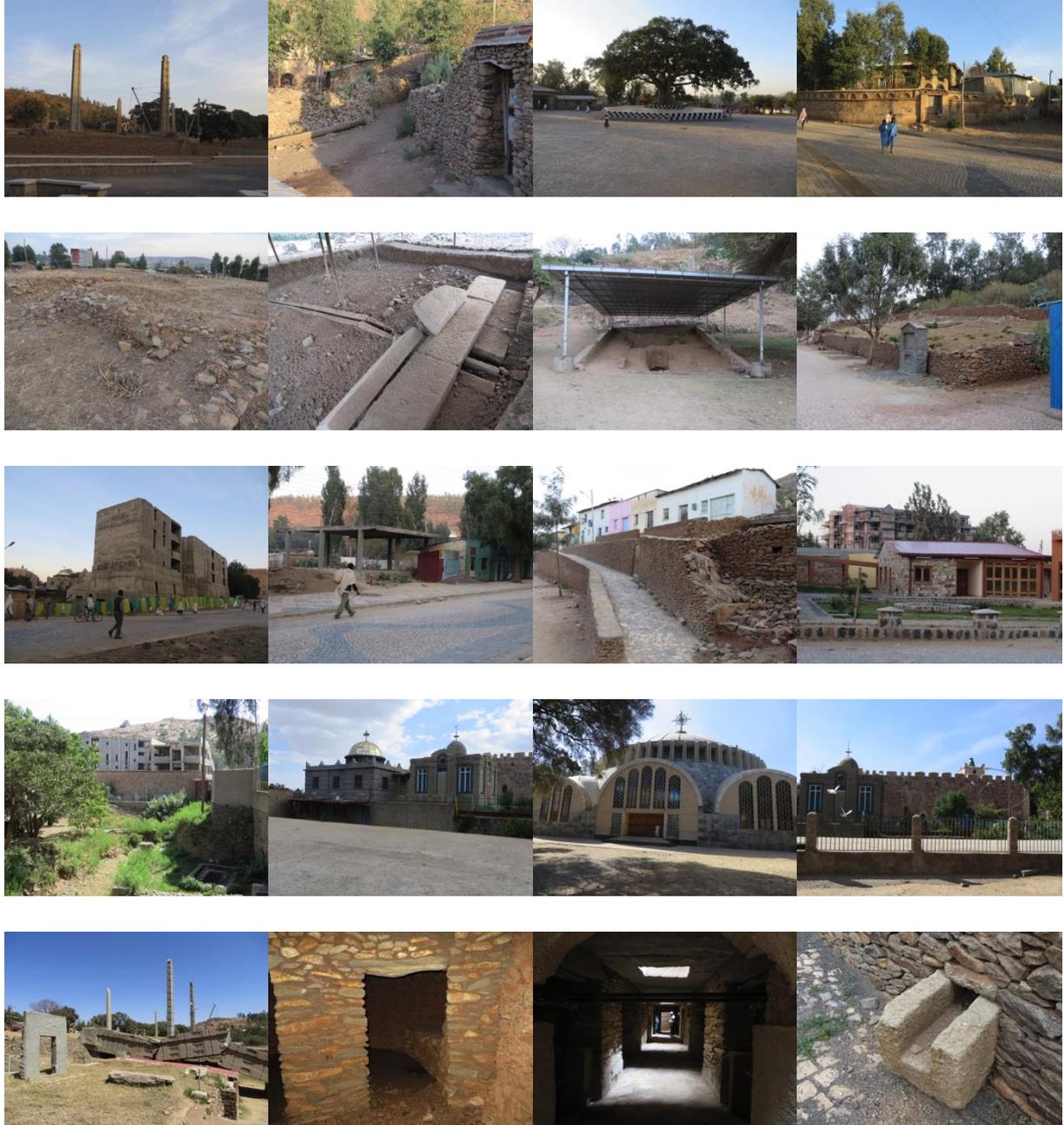




REPORT ON THE
ICOMOS REACTIVE MONITORING MISSION TO THE
AKSUM WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY (C15)
FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA



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International Council on
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission (hereafter Mission) visited both Addis Ababa and the Aksum World Heritage property on invitation of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia during 1–7 February 2016. The Mission had been tasked to review the progress of the construction of the Church Museum and the modifying of its façade and consider whether the visual integrity of the World Heritage property and its surroundings have been sustained. The Mission had to further review the management mechanisms in line with national and local authorities responsible for the management of the property and evaluate whether the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project is in line with the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme and addresses infrastructure development, visitor management, and community benefits. It further had to assess the progress made by the responsible authorities to define the boundaries of property and its buffer zone and discuss their methodological approach. Finally the Mission had to assess the progress made on the consolidation of the Stela III and the investigation of the causes of the rising water level in the tomb of the Brick Arches and consider progress with the implementation of other remaining recommendations of the 2013 Reactive Monitoring mission.

In fulfilling the Terms of Reference the Mission has found:

- **Church Museum:** No progress has been made on the construction of the Church Museum since the previous mission in 2013 and no indication yet exists on how the façade will be modified at present. The unfinished state of the Church Museum has a high negative (temporary) impact on the setting of the property and in its current state negatively impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, in part because it is extending the current perilous state of conservation of the Church Collections. It is therefore highly desirable that this minor façade modification be submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review and the Church museum project completed. It is further recommended that the State Party investigate claims that the Church Museum site still harbours archaeological remains, report their investigations to the World Heritage Centre, and if archaeological remains are found, stabilise these in an appropriate manner in and in line with international best practice.
- **Management mechanisms and plans:** The gazetting of the Aksum World Heritage Reserve Area Designation Council of Ministers Regulation No 346/2015 makes a positive contribution to the conservation and management of the property but requires fast implementation. The Mission was unable to access the current draft Management Plan and therefore cannot comment on it. Development guidelines urgently need to be developed and enacted for the property and buffer zone as new construction is impacting on the setting and Outstanding Universal Value of the property. The relocation of inhabitants, who lived over archaeological sites in two areas, has improved the safeguarding of these sites, reduced the risk that housing posed and reinforced the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.
- **The Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project:** The ESTDP came to an end in 2015 and the comment of the Mission is retrospective, but provides forward acting insights. The ESTDP addressed

Destination Development, Marketing and Institutional capacity and included community benefits. It was broadly in line with the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme. Some of the activities impact the setting of the property and should therefore have been communicated to the World Heritage Centre under Paragraphs 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*. It is imperative that the designs of the ESTDP interventions not be applied to other areas of the property such as the Church Compound as they are unsuited to these contexts.

- **The boundaries of property and its buffer zone:** The delineation of the property and buffer zone has been formalised through the gazetting of Regulation 346/2015. However the maps that accompany the Regulation relate only to latitude and longitude coordinates and provide no topographic or urban detail. Detailed maps need to be developed with the physical boundaries of the property and its buffer zone clearly defined and these submitted to the World Heritage Centre. The mission has come to the conclusion that these boundaries were informed by current knowledge of the archaeological sites of Aksum, but do not respond to critical view lines and the continued built fabric and intangible presence of the Church in the Aksum World Heritage property. The State Party should communicate this in the required format to the World Heritage Centre.
- **Progress with regards the consolidation of Stela III and the investigations of the reasons for the rising water level in the Tomb of the Brick Arches:** Apart from the generous allocation of funding to address these problems no progress has been made in either planning the consolidation of Stela III or the investigation of the water problems in the Tomb of the Brick Arches. The Mission identified further problems with rainwater ingress and structural weakness at the Mausoleum, which further compounds the problems faced at the main Stela Field. The Mission recommends that for the Tomb of the Brick Arches any proposal that requires excavation in or around the Tomb not be undertaken, opting for a cautious approach through improving and automating the pumping mechanism already present into the tomb. The consolidation of Stela III and the Mausoleum are highly sensitive and pose much risk and the Mission recommends that any plans to do so be developed in consultation with the existing experts with experience of the site, Studio Croci & Associati, and all plans submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review.
- **Progress made in applying the Recommendations of the 2013 High Level Reactive Monitoring mission:** The Mission finds that the gazetting of Regulation 346/2015 has addressed in principle the recommendations of the 2013 Reactive Monitoring mission with regards to the protection of critical viewpoints. The 2013 mission recommended the various parties draw up a list of prospective projects for submission to the World Heritage Centre. On enquiry by this Mission, the site management stated that they were not aware of any projects. Yet during the visits to the property, the Mission became aware of a number of mooted proposals, such as landscaping the Church Compound, demolishing the building at the entrance of the Stelae Field and constructing a new entrance building. These two proposals represent such proposed future developments and they, and any similar developments should be communicated so that: *“...the World Heritage Centre is notified in timely manner of the scope and extent of these developments, to develop appropriate, place specific tool kits for management of*

the historic urban landscape – as envisaged in the UNESCO Recommendation for Historical Urban Landscape and to ensure that the future management of the site remain integrated and with the OUV as guiding beacon. (2013 mission report: 48). Further to this, the Mission found no evidence to indicate progress has been made with regards to the safeguarding of the collection of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church at Aksum or developing a conservation plan therefor. Similarly no evidence of closer cooperation between Church Authorities in charge of this collection and the future Church Museum and the Archaeological Museum has been established yet. Neither the Aksum Master Plan (Hydea, 2007a) nor the Archaeological Survey (Hydea, 2007b) have been reviewed to allow the inclusion of the Church Compound, and the Thematic Master Plan (Rich 2010) has not been reviewed through an Heritage Impact Assessment process, as proposed by the 2013 Reactive Monitoring mission.

Further recommendations:

- The implementation of all the provisions of the new Regulation 346/2015 is of a high priority and will require the establishment of numerous development guidelines and regulations, including restoration and adaptive reuse guidelines. The mission concludes that a number of inappropriate developments are under way in both the property and the buffer zone due to this deficiency.
- The completion of the Management Plan for the property remains of high urgency.
- The need exists for training for all parties involved in the management of the property with regards to the *Operational Guidelines*. At the same time the principles of the UNESCO Declaration for the Historic Urban Landscape should be investigated for application in the Management and Planning for the property.
- Communication in terms of Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines* and in response to Reactive Monitoring mission recommendations needs to be improved.

Despite the challenges facing the property, the Mission finds that these do not at present pose a threat that would merit the inclusion of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger. However if the extant threats and factors were to remain unchecked and reach fruition, a situation would arise which would warrant consideration of inscribing the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

For an extended list of recommendations see Section 5 of this report.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 2016 ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission (hereafter Mission) to the Aksum World Heritage property wishes to extend its heartfelt thanks to the host of the mission, the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH). These thanks are extended in particular to the Director General of the ARCCH, DG Yonas Desta and Ms Tsehay Eshetie the Head of World and National Heritage Sites Management Coordinating Office who saw to all travel, logistical and other practical matters.

The Mission was warmly received by Getu Assefa, UNESCO Addis Ababa office Culture Programme Officer. He also accompanied the Mission to Aksum and the many stakeholder meetings, providing support and also translation services.

Mr Ale Wolde-Selassie, site manager, and Mr Tewidros Abraham, the former site manager availed themselves for discussions and site visits in Aksum.

Additional insights into the nature of the challenges faced by the Aksum World Heritage property were provided by Mr Tekle Hagos, acknowledged expert on the archaeology of Aksum during an informal meeting. His insights have been of great use to the mission.

Courtesy visits and discussions

1. The Office of the Patriarch of the Church of Ethiopia on 02 February 2016.

The mission was greatly honoured by the large and welcoming reception offered it by the office of the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. In attendance were:

- His Grace, Abune Geerima. Head of External Relations. Office of the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- Nibure-Id Eliyas Abreham, Secretary to His Holiness the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- Melake Selam, Aba Kalistelik Mulugeta, Head of Foreign Relations for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- Dr. Mulumebet Shegana, Foreign Relations Department of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- Reverend Solomon Tolcha, Head of the Heritage Department of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- Engineer Solomon, former engineer to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- Mr Getu Assefa, UNESCO
- DG Yonas Desai, ARCCH
- Ms Tsehay Eshetie, ARCCH
- Nicholas Clarke for ICOMOS

2. Meeting with the Department of Archaeology, History and Heritage Management, Aksum University, 04 February 2016.

The meeting at the offices of the Head of the Department aimed to discuss the methodology of the buffer zone definition as well as the methodology, timeline and progress made in composing the management plan.

- Mr Andalem Tariku, HOD.
- Ms Birhan Teka, archaeologist and former HOD
- Mr Getu Assefa, UNESCO
- Mr Ale Wolde-Selassie, Site Manager
- Ms Tsehay Eshetie, ARCCH
- Nicholas Clarke for ICOMOS

3. Meeting with the Nibure-Id of Aksum and inspection of the Church compound, Aksum, 04 February 2016.

His Grace of the Nibure-Id of Aksum, not only met with the Mission but also took time to inspect the Church compound with the mission, indicating areas of concern.

- Aba Mahri Abde'es
- Mr Getu Assefa, UNESCO
- Mr Ale Wolde-Selassie, Site Manager
- Ms Tsehay Eshetie, ARCCH
- Nicholas Clarke for ICOMOS

4. Courtesy visit and debriefing, State Minister of Culture and Tourism, Addis Ababa, 06 February, 2016.

The Mission, accompanied by a representative do the ARCCH was received by the State Minister of Culture and Tourism on a Saturday afternoon. The mission would like to extend its thanks to the State Minister in person for her availability.

- State Minister Meaza Gebre Medhin
- Ms Tsehay Eshetie, ARCCH
- Nicholas Clarke for ICOMOS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

SOUV	–	Statement of O utstanding U niversal V alue
ICOMOS	–	International C ouncil for M onuments and S ites
UNESCO	–	U nited N ations E nvironmental, S cientific and C ultural O rganisation
WHC	–	W orld H eritage C ommittee
ARCCH	–	A uthority for R esearch and C onservation of C ultural H eritage
EOTC	–	E thiopian O rthodox T ewahedo C hurch
HUL	–	2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the H istoric U rban L andscape.

In this document the term:

- ‘*Operational Guidelines*’ refers to the ‘**Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention**’ (UNESCO, July 2015);
- ‘1972 Convention’ refers to the 1972 ‘**Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage**’.

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1. BACKGROUND TO THE MISSION

1.1 Inscription history

Aksum World Heritage property was inscribed on the World Heritage List during the fourth session of the World Heritage Committee in 1980 (CC-80/CONF.016/10). The inscription was motivated as follows:

“The site of Aksum enjoys great renown. This is due to the fact that the name of the city and the kingdom of which it was the capital are part of world history. The ruins of the city are highly distinctive and cover a very wide area. The giant stelae, which may be approximately dated to the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D., and which include the largest monolith ever carved by human hands, give a remarkable appearance to this archaeological site. The study and preservation of these ancient relics (stelae, buildings, sculptures, tombs, pottery of different kinds, coins and inscriptions), is indispensable to our understanding of Ethiopian antiquity. The site does not merely contain relics from 1st millennium A.D. Mention should also be made of an 18th century basilica which, besides being of historical interest, is a unique example of Ethiopian architecture. These monuments are consequently of exceptional universal value from the historical, artistic and scientific points of view.”¹

The property was inscribed under the, then applicable, Cultural Criteria (i) and (vi).

Previous missions to the Aksum World Heritage property include:

- In 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 Advisory missions of the World Heritage Centre and experts for the implementation of the Obelisk reinstallation project;
- In 2010, a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission requested by the World Heritage Committee in its decision 32 COM 7B.46.
- In 2013 a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission requested by the World Heritage Committee in its decision 36 COM 7B.41 (See Annex A.6 for the recommendations from this mission report).

1.2 Criteria and Outstanding Universal Value

In 2007, the World Heritage Committee called for the submission of Retrospective Statements of Outstanding Universal Value for properties which had been inscribed between 1987 and 2006 (Decision 31 COM 11D.1). The Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value was submitted by the State Party in 2012 and adopted in 2013 the 37th Session of the World Heritage Committee (37.COM/8E). The Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value extended the Outstanding Universal Value of the property to include its Christian history:

¹ 1980 Nomination file, under ‘Justification for inclusion on the World Heritage List.’

Situated in the highlands of northern Ethiopia, Aksum symbolizes the wealth and importance of the civilization of the ancient Aksumite kingdom, which lasted from the 1st to the 8th centuries AD. The kingdom was at the crossroads of the three continents: Africa, Arabia and the Greco-Roman World, and was the most powerful state between the Eastern Roman Empire and Persia. In command of the ivory trade with Sudan, its fleets controlled the Red Sea trade through the port of Adulis and the inland routes of north eastern Africa.

The ruins of the ancient Aksumite Civilization covered a wide area in the Tigray Plateau. The most impressive monuments are the monolithic obelisks, royal tombs and the palace ruins dating to the 6th and 7th centuries AD.

Several stelae survive in the town of Aksum dating between the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. The largest standing obelisk rises to a height of over 23 meters and is exquisitely carved to represent a nine-storey building of the Aksumites. It stands at the entrance of the main stelae area. The largest obelisk of some 33 meters long lies where it fell, perhaps during the process of erection. It is possibly the largest monolithic Stela that ancient human beings ever attempted to erect.

A series of inscription on stone tablets have proved to be of immense importance to historians of the ancient world. Some of them include trilingual text in Greek, Sabaeen and Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopian), inscribed by King Ezana in the 4th century AD.

The introduction of Christianity in the 4th century AD resulted in the building of churches, such as Saint Mary of Zion, rebuilt in the Gondarian period, in the 17th century AD, which is believed to hold the Ark of the Covenant.

The property is inscribed under:

Criterion (i): *The exquisitely carved monolithic stelae dating from the 3rd and 4th centuries AD are unique masterpieces of human creative genius.*

Criterion (iv): *The urban ensemble of obelisks, royal tombs and churches constitute a major development in the cultural domain reflecting the wealth and power of the Aksumite Civilization of the first millennium AD.*

Integrity

The boundaries of the property, which encompass the entire area of ancient Aksum town, need to be adequately delineated and approved by the Committee.

One obelisk, removed from the site and taken to Rome as a war trophy during the Italian occupation, was returned to Aksum in 2005 and re-erected in 2008.

Furthermore, at the time of inscription, it was noted that small, modern houses were built over most of the site, obscuring the majority of the underground Aksumite structures. Some of them still remain covered by modern houses. In 2011, the construction of a new museum began in the main Stelae Field and, unless amended, the height of the museum will have a highly negative visual impact on the property. Flooding has also become a major problem in the 4th century AD Tomb of the Brick Arches and other monuments.

For the reasons mentioned above, the integrity of the property remains vulnerable.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the obelisks, tombs and other monuments remain intact, although they are vulnerable due to lack of conservation. However, the authenticity of the whole property in terms of its ability to convey the scope and extent of ancient Aksum and its value is still vulnerable to lack of documentation, delineation and lack of planning controls. The monuments need to be related to the overall city plan, in spatial terms.

Protection and Management Requirements

The city of Aksum was put under the jurisdiction and protection of the National Antiquities Authority in 1958. No special legal framework is provided to protect the Obelisks of Aksum, except the general law, Proclamation No. 209/2000, which also established the institution in charge, the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH).

The property is managed at three levels – the site; the region; and the Federal administration. ARCCH prepared a proclamation that mapped and identified the precise area to be protected with local site authorities. It is reviewing the components and may wish to suggest changes to the number and/or size of the property.

The boundary and the property's management plan are not yet established. There is a need to submit an updated map of the property to clearly indicate the boundary, to produce and submit a management plan and to delineate and submit a buffer zone. There is also a need for adequate legal protection to be put in place.

1.3 Examination of the property's state of conservation by the World Heritage Committee and its Bureau

The property has been evaluated by the World Heritage Committee through **nine** Reports on the state of conservation (SOC) from 1996 to 2015. Below are highlights from these reports and decisions. For more information on the Committee working documents and decisions relative to this property, see Annex A.2, or the World Heritage Centre's dedicated web page for the property: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/15/documents/>.

1996

Following the successful large-scale excavation activities undertaken at Aksum under the leadership of Prof David Phillipson (University of Cambridge), the persons responsible for curating the property were congratulated. However it was felt that the position and capabilities of the site manager should be strengthened:

- by providing him with documentation on the site and its restoration;
- by giving him the means to publish brochures presenting the site and its different monuments; and
- by upgrading the equipment available (cameras and measuring equipment, transportation) and providing him with the means to intervene rapidly in the event of new discoveries in the city and to make a more systematic survey of the numerous sites in Axum and its surroundings.

1998

By 1998 factors affecting the property were listed as *Housing* and the *management Systems/management plan*.

Conservation issues presented to the World Heritage Committee included concerns relating to urban planning and that it was *necessary “to foresee an urban plan to protect the site threatened by construction projects envisaged by the religious authorities”*. This concern was based on the ICCROM communication that a wooded site, opposite the main Stelae Field had been cleared for construction of a new residence for the Patriarch of the Church. These plans had not been communicated to the CRCCH, forerunner to the ARCHH. The World Heritage Committee decided that *(1.) the Centre to send a letter to the Centre for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (CRCCH) and the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church drawing attention to the significance of the World Heritage values of the site and underlining the need to preserve it, which would require the postponement of any further work in the proximity of the Stele,*
(2.) that the mission on the state of conservation planned by the World Heritage Centre in June 1998, which was postponed for security reasons, be carried out as soon as possible with the purpose of drawing a clear definition of the boundaries of the World Heritage site,
(3.) due support and consideration be given by the Ethiopian institutions and UNESCO to the preparation of a comprehensive town plan of Aksum with a clear conservation component which balances the conservation constraints with the need for the continued growth and development of the city and the communities of Aksum.
(22COMVII.32/33)

2005

Some time had passed since the 1998 World Heritage Committee review of the state of conservation of the property, by which time a number of factors had been identified affecting the property, being:

- Housing
- Interpretative and visitation facilities
- Management systems/ management plan
- Other Threats: Lack of documentation and equipment

Along with previously identified factors:

- Lack of conservation and Management Plans;
- Uncontrolled constructions;
- Lack of documentation and equipment;
- Lack of interpretation and presentation;
- Lack of the demarcation of the site.

During 2005 the return of Stela II had become a reality based on a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Italian and Ethiopian Governments and a mission had been coordinated with the Ethiopian authorities in Addis Ababa, the Permanent Delegation of Ethiopia to UNESCO, UNESCO Addis Ababa Office, the Italian Delegation to UNESCO and the Italian Embassy in Addis Ababa, to pave the way for UNESCO's involvement in the erection of the Obelisk at Aksum World Heritage property. This mission had undertaken extensive surveys of the area for the erection of Stela II. At this time the Committee also requested an updated detailed map of the World Heritage property, including geographic coordinates and scale, indicating clearly the boundaries of the core and buffer zones and requested a joint ICOMOS/ICCROM mission to the Aksum World Heritage property.

2006

Following various mission reports dated 2006, in the examination of the State of Conservation the Committee noted remaining threats as in 2005, as being a lack of a legal framework, management system and management plans and lack of cartography, documentation and equipment. Added to this were previously identified threats:

- a) Inexistence of the delimitation of this serial site;
- b) Lack of conservation and management plans;
- c) Lack of appropriate urban and architectural legislation;
- d) Lack of cartography, documentation and equipment.

Much of the Committee's examination concerned the return of Stela II to Aksum, including the pre-emptive studies that would be required to preserve the site's integrity and archaeological remains. The Committee noted the World Bank Funded Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project – Pilot Project, commenting that this project did not comprise a comprehensive management plan. In its Decision (30Com 7.B 39) it (4) reiterated the *request to the State Party, in cooperation with the World Heritage Centre, to submit an up-dated map and the management plan of the property indicating clearly the boundaries of the World Heritage core and buffer zones.*

2008

The relocation of Stela II had been subject to delays, but work was nearing completion. The Committee also noted that the Tigray authorities were in process of delineating the property and buffer zone, but was still awaiting the submission of maps. The Committee also noted positive measures in the field of site management, yet retained the insufficient legal framework, lacking management systems/ management plan and a lack of cartography, documentation and equipment as threats. Continuing on this, the Committee requested the submission by 1 December 2008 of *“the map of the property indicating clearly the boundaries of the World Heritage property and buffer zones, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 33rd session in 2009”*; and noted for the first time the problem of rising water table level affecting the Stelae Field and requested implementation of a road map to the compilation of a management plan with interim protective measures implemented (32COM7B.46).

2010

The lack of a management system/management plan remained the dominant threat to the property noted by the Committee in 2010, along with the insufficient delimitation of this serial property; and lack of appropriate urban planning and building regulations, noted in previous reports. This was in part based on the recommendations of a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission that had visited Aksum on 4-8 February 2010. The main recommendations of the mission related to the need for the definition of boundaries, for a retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, for a Memorandum of Understanding on governance arrangements, for qualified staff, for planning controls, for a Management Plan, and to address the structural instability of Stela 3 and related rising water table issues.

The Committee noted that a structured management and urban planning is needed in order to:

- Halt the urban encroachment at the Gudit Stelae field;
- Maintain protection of the integrity of the archaeological remains in the living Town;
- Conduct test excavations prior to any building works;
- Restrict new construction within the buffer zone;
- Control planned construction within the World Heritage property and for major changes within the buffer zone;
- Ensure that the physical interventions of the World Bank Tourism Development project within the property do not hinder its integrity;
- Improve when possible, the site presentation through minimalist interventions.

In its decision, the Committee:

4. *Considers* that the vulnerability of the property to urban encroachment and unregulated development needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency through the adoption of appropriate urban planning regulations and *requests* that the State Party put in place such regulations as soon as possible;

5. *Reiterates its request* to the State Party to finalize a draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value including the conditions of integrity and authenticity as previously requested and submit it for review by the Advisory Bodies and for approval by the World Heritage Committee;

6. *Also considers* that there is a need for more structured management arrangements at the property which need to be encapsulated in a management plan based on an agreed Statement of Outstanding Universal Value;

The Committee requested the State Party to investigate the cause of the rising water level at the main Stela Field and invited the State Party to submit a request for International Assistance for this study. The issue of delineation of the property and boundary had still not been resolved and therefore the Committee... *Further reiterates its request to the State Party to provide a map of the property of sufficient scale and detail to indicate clearly the boundaries of the World Heritage property and to submit a map of the proposed buffer zone, with details of protective arrangements to the World Heritage Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies and for approval by the World Heritage Committee;*

It also requested the State Party *keep the World Heritage Centre informed about changes and new construction within the property and its proposed buffer zone including the planned Church Museum, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, before any commitment is made (34COM7B.45).*

2012

The Decision of the World Heritage Committee in 2012 as dominated by the construction of the Church Museum without correct notification procedures having taken place under Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*. The World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies had now reviewed the details submitted by the State Party on 23 March 2012, and considered that the size, scale and design of the building were incompatible with the sensitive surrounding where previous excavations showed foundations of ancient structures, and would have a

negative impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. The Committee therefore requested that construction be halted on the Church Museum pending a comprehensive assessment undertaken by means of a High Level Reactive Monitoring mission before any further construction activity takes place. At the same time the Committee in detail assessed the communication from the State Party that Urban Regulations and a Tourism Masterplan had been developed in 2010. The Committee stated that it was essential that a land use and development plan also becomes a legal reference for planning permissions.

With regards the site management the State Party had informed the Committee that a site office was to be established shortly. The Committee also found that the newly gazetted Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Proclamation No 209/2000 was a sufficiently strong legal document to ensure the long-term protection of the property. Challenges with regards the conservation of the main Stelae Field: the instability of Stela III and the rising water table remained, and proposed that the State Party submit a request for International Assistance to fund the required consolidation, reiterating its similar 2010 decision. The Committee further requested that construction of the Church Museum be halted and expressed the concern that the museum would have a negative impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. It also requested that the *...the State Party ...establish more structured management arrangements at the property, including a Management Plan, and to provide the World Heritage Centre, for review by the Advisory Bodies, with maps showing the precise boundaries of the property and the buffer zone;*

2013

After consideration of the State Party report on the state of conservation in 2013, the following factors remained as affecting the property: Housing, Interpretative and visitation facilities, Management systems/ management plan, Water (rain/water table) and Other Threats: Structural instability of Stele 3. The joint UNESCO World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS High Level Reactive Monitoring mission had recommended that the Church Museum should go ahead, with minor façade modifications and on condition that the critical screening of the structure by extant vegetation be maintained. The Committee accepted this recommendation. A conservation issue highlighted by the 2013 mission report was the need to address by urban control mechanisms the protection of the current visual quality of the Stelae Field, through restrictions on height and bulk being included in the Master Plan for the property. The lack of a Management Plan was discussed, and it was noted that work on composing a Management Plan had commenced. Delineation of the boundaries of the property and buffer zone had in principle been completed but detailed maps had still to be compiled and submitted. The stability of Stela III was not resolved yet and that the State Party believes that the cause for the rising water table in the Tomb of the Brick Arches has a direct relation with the destabilization of Stela III. Therefore, if the problem in the foundation of Stela III is solved, the rising water table could be stabilized.

This led the Committee to decide that final plans for the Church Museum be submitted of the World Heritage Centre as soon as possible; the Management Plan be implemented as soon as possible; the boundaries for the property be finalized and submitted to the World Heritage Centre with urgency; noted that the State Party has not identified funding to deal with either an investigation of the rising water table or with strengthening the

foundations of Stela III, as recommended by a technical report; and appealed to the international community, to consider supporting work to address the implications of the consolidation project of Stela III (37COM7B.38).

2015

The 2015 State Party state of conservation report informed the 2015 examination by the World Heritage Committee of the state of conservation of the Aksum World Heritage property. In this it was reported that the construction of the Church Museum was making 'significant progress', but was not complete yet. The report included a detailed plan of the Church Museum Design (1 A4 format artist rendering, part of a complete set of detailed plans originally submitted to the World Heritage Centre in 2012). The State Party reported that it had decided to self-fund the stabilization of Stela III, and in the process investigate the cause of, and address the problem of rising water in the Tomb of the Brick Arches, having assigned a team of experts to investigate the causes of this problem. This report also included maps of the property and buffer zone.

The Committee welcomed the commitment of the State Party to ensure the consolidation of Stela III and the investigation of the causes of the rising water level in the Tomb of the Brick Arches at the same time urging... *the State Party to keep the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies updated on:*

any changes in the agreed-upon project document for Stele III, the results of the investigation of the rising water level; (39COM7B.39)

The Committee also noted ... *that it remains unclear how the façade will be amended to take account of the 2013 Reactive Monitoring mission's views and therefore, requests the State Party to submit relevant plans and drawings* (39COM7B.39). The Committee noted the progress reported with regards to the compilation of the Management Plan, noting that the State Party should ensure this plan also safeguards critical viewscapes. Finalizing the property and buffer zone boundaries remained a priority. The Committee further requested copies of the Thematic Masterplan be submitted to the World Heritage Centre, liaise with the World Heritage Centre with regards developing the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project.

Factors affecting the property remained Housing, Interpretative and visitation facilities, Management systems/ management plan, Water (rain/water table) and Other Threats: Structural instability of Stele 3.

Conclusion

A number of factors have affected the property continuously over the years: The first of these are **Management Plan/management system** which has been a constant factor affecting the property since **1996**. **Housing** has affected the property continuously since **1998**. **Inexistence of the delimitation of this serial site/** demarcation of the property has been listed as factor since **2005** as has the **Lack of appropriate urban and architectural legislation/ Lack of appropriate urban planning and building regulations** (2008) leading to uncontrolled constructions (2005).

1.4 Justification of the mission

Refer to the Terms of Reference in Annex A1, Programme in Annex A3, and composition of mission team provided in Annex A4.

The mission was requested by the World Heritage Committee at its 39th Session held at Bonn, Germany, 2015, that the State Party *...invite an ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission to the property, before the end of 2015, to review the progress made on the above issues and to examine the state of conservation of the property* (39 COM 7B.39.9, Annex A.2).

In its Decision above, the World Heritage Committee congratulated the State Party for committing to finance the project for the reinforcement of Stela III, which had been destabilised during the reinstallation of Stela 2 in 2008, and the investigations into the rising water level in the Tomb of the Brick Arches, but also requested communications should further details emerge on these projects. At the same time the Committee requested the State Party submit the minor modification of the Church Museum façade, as recommended by the 2013 Reactive Monitoring mission. Other aspects commented on were the development of the Aksum Master Plan, the urgency to finalize the property and buffer zone delineations and the request that Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project be developed in conjunction with the World Heritage Centre.

The 2013 Joint UNESCO World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS High Level Reactive Monitoring mission (20–27 January 2013) had also recommended a number of additional actions including, that a conservation plan and interpretation plan for the display be developed for the current collections of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, to be housed in the new Church Museum; an education programme be implemented among the youth of Aksum and certain identified viewsapes be protected and developed (2013 mission report).

NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE PRESERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY

2.1 Protected area legislation

The *UNESCO World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS Monitoring Report, Aksum World Heritage site, Ethiopia* (2010) provides a good overview of the legislation applicable to the property and is here reproduced with due acknowledgement:

The Aksum Stelae and the principal sites and relics connected with them were protected in terms of the National Law of 1958 on the Administration of Antiquities. Reference was made in the Inscription File prepared in 1978 to a Draft Law on the Identification, Preservation, Inventory and Inspection of Sites and Monuments belonging to Cultural Heritage under preparation financed by the Ethiopian government with occasional foreign aid. Both legislations, apparently, have been superseded by the Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Proclamation No 209/2000 of year 2000. Currently, therefore, this is the principal law for the management of the Stelae, associated sites and the historical town.

This law provides for the establishment of the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH) to “carry out a scientific registration and supervision of Cultural Heritage so that ... [it] may be handed down from generation to generation” [...] From a statutory stand point, therefore, the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural [Heritage] has custodial responsibility for the Aksum sites.

The Aksum World Heritage Reserve Area Designation Council of Ministers Regulation 346/2015

(Terms of Reference in Annex A.1, Programme in Annex A.3 and composition of mission team provided in Annex A.2)

In its 2016 state of conservation report, the State Party reports the gazetting of new regulations pertaining to the Aksum World Heritage property. This regulation, the *Aksum World Heritage Reserve Area Designation Council of Ministers Regulation* published on 28 August 2015 in the Federal Negarit Gazette of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, lists the coordinates of the property and buffer zone boundaries, makes provision for the establishment of an ARCCH site management office to be located in the city of Aksum.

Additionally the regulation bans the use of chemicals and high radiation tools in that might damage the heritage fabric of the property. It also prohibits any construction of buildings, high tension electric or telephone transmission towers, water reservoirs, mining and quarrying activities and planting of trees that may negatively affect the visual integrity of the Outstanding Universal Value, not authorised by the Advisory Committee. These provisions also control developments in the buffer zone.

2.2 Institutional framework

The Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH), established under the *Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Proclamation No 209/2000* carries the responsibility for curating the Aksum World Heritage property. It is also the reporting organisation to the World Heritage Centre. The Head of the 'World and National Heritage Sites Management Coordinating Office' coordinates these responsibilities within the ARCCH.

Currently the property is managed by the Agency for Culture and Tourism (Axum Cluster) of the Tigray Region Department of Culture and Tourism, who employs a site manager in Aksum. The ARCCH, the party ultimately responsible for the curating of the property, had, at the time of the mission no permanent presence on the site.

The Agency for Culture and Tourism site office, with one secretary, has a large staff contingent and consists of nine professionals:

- The site manager (Trained Historian and currently undertaken post graduate studies in Archaeology at Aksum university)
- A Historian
- An Archaeologist
- Two information specialties
- One Cultural expert
- One Museologist
- One Cultural expert
- One Hotel and Supervision contact person.

Of these one historian and one archaeologist are stationed in the Archaeological Museum behind the Stela Field, operated by the Agency for Culture and Tourism (Axum Cluster).

The Agency for Culture and Tourism (Axum Cluster) employs 20 site guards.

The Aksum Municipality controls the development environment of the property. It maintains a GIS database of the city, which presents a land use plan and includes all known archaeologically sensitive sites. A new Structure Plan for the City of Aksum is currently in planning stages.

The State Party gazetted the *2015 Aksum World Heritage Reserve Area Designation Council of Ministers Regulation (Regulation 346/2015)*. This regulation establishes the provision of a site office for the ARCCH at Aksum and facilitates the creation of a formal management structure for the property. This in principle rectifies the disjunction between the current management structure, put in place by the Agency for Culture and Tourism (Axum Cluster) and the responsibilities of the ARCCH. The new management structure is to consist of a wide range of stakeholders from civic administration, academia, civil society groupings, religious institutions, tourism industries and the ARCCH site manager. This Advisory Committee, which is to meet once every three months, is to be headed by the Mayor of the City of Aksum. It will, amongst others, assess development proposals in the

property and in the buffer zone, as gazetted. This structure was not yet functioning at the time of the Mission. The Advisory Committee will be the local organ, which will report directly to the ARCCH head office—which has the reporting duty to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre—through the ARCCH representative in Aksum.

2.3 Response to the recognition of values under international treaties and programmes

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has ratified:

- The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Paris, 16 November 1972.
- The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Paris, 17 October 2003.
- The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Paris, 20 October 2005.

The State Party has become party, through accession, of:

- The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention. The Hague, 14 May 1954.
- The Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. The Hague, 14 May 1954.

The State Party has designated two Biosphere Reserves, the Kafa Biosphere Reserve and the Yayu Coffee Forest Biosphere Reserve.

Two elements have been inscribed on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, being:

- 2015: Fichee-Chambalaalla, New Year festival of the Sidama people,
- 2013: Commemoration feast of the finding of the True Holy Cross of Christ.

One nomination is currently on-going:

- 2016: Gada system, an indigenous democratic socio-political system of the Oromo.

IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF ISSUES

The 2015 state of conservation report (SOC) lists factors affecting the property. These are expanded on below:

- Housing
- Interpretative and visitation facilities
- Management systems/ management plan
- Water (rain/water table)
- Other Threats: Structural instability of Stele 3

Factors identified by previous missions:

- Insufficient delimitation of this serial property
- Lack of conservation and management plans
- Lack of appropriate urban planning and building regulations
- Urban encroachment and inappropriate new developments
- Rising water level / seepage

This Report will not address each of the above factors individually, as they are interlinked, but report to them under overarching headings.

It must be noted that the submission by the State Party of a Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for the property, and the subsequent adoption thereof by the World Heritage Committee at its 37th Session (37.COM/8E) effectively extended the range of values for which the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List to include the continued association of the Orthodox Church with the property. This has added a new dynamic, the inclusion of a living heritage, with its associated traditions and practices, as forming part of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, a property which previously had been inscribed on the List only due to its archaeological attributes. This extension requires an increased sophistication in the management of this archaeological and living heritage site.

3.1 Management

The management of the property has to date fallen under the Agency for Culture and Tourism (Axum Cluster), Tigray Region, while the State Party office for World Heritage resides in the ARCCH, a division of the Federal Ministry of Culture and tourism. As discussed above (Section 2.2), this has led to a mismatch in roles and sometimes lack of communication in the chain starting from the site management that operates in the regional sphere, to the Federal authorities onwards to the World Heritage Centre, and vice versa.

2.1.1. The new 2015 Aksum World Heritage Reserve Area Designation Council of Ministers Regulation (Regulation 346/2015)

The Aksum World Heritage Reserve Area Designation provides not only for the delimitation of the property (referred to as the Core Zone in the regulation) and buffer zone but also includes provisions on its management. This regulation reaffirms the role of the ARCCCH in managing the site and includes the establishment of a site office at Aksum. Further to this, the already mentioned (See Regulation 346/2015 Section 2.1) Advisory Committee will support the site manager and their office.

The gazetting of the Regulation is a major advancement in the management of the attributes of the property that lead to its inscription on the List of World Heritage. It also regulates the authority of the ARCCCH over the buffer zone (Section 11).

While the Regulation prohibits the *...construction of buildings affecting the visual integrity and Outstanding Universal value [sic] of the heritage site* (Section 10.2.a) and *...planting of trees that can cause damage to the heritage* (Section 10.2.e), it does not provide for any mechanism to define rules and guidelines for development, be that new construction or renovation of extant built fabric. This is an aspect that requires urgent attention seen in the light of the current annual 10% increase in visitor numbers, both pilgrims and tourists, reported by the State Party. Both the buffer zone and property will experience an increase in development pressure. It is imperative that the Advisory Committee in collaboration with the ARCCCH and the Aksum Municipality urgently develop spatialised development guidelines, including land use, height, form, semantic and materiality provisions, to be submitted for review to the World Heritage Centre. Simultaneously standard restoration specifications need to be developed for the entire property, including the vernacular structures present in the property and buffer zone.

Regulation 346/2015 requires implementation. Despite already having been gazetted on 15 August 2015, the new regulation was only transmitted to the Aksum Municipality and the site manager during the 1-7 February 2016 Mission with the consequence that, at the time of the Mission, the Advisory Committee had not been established, the ARCCCH did not have a permanent representation on-site and other provisions of the Regulation had not yet been applied.

2.1.2. The 2013 inclusion of the heritage and history of the EOTC in Aksum into the Outstanding Universal Value of the property

The State Party has assumed responsibility for the curation and management of structures located on the St Mary of Zion EOTC property included in the Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value. This includes the 16th Century church of Saint Mary of Zion, mentioned directly in the Brief Synthesis, but also other churches such as the 1957 New Church of St Mary of Zion, the Edna Yesus Church and the Church of the Four Animals (the Evangelists). The EOTC properties also house many archaeological attributes that contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

The inclusion of the Church as stakeholder in the Advisory Committee, established under the Regulation 346/2015 is supported. It is evident that the ARCCH and the EOTC maintain close relations, yet more need to be done with regards the management of the EOTC properties from perspective of tourism management, preservation of buildings, collections of artefacts and archaeological residue. These responsibilities fall to the ARCCH in collaboration with the EOTC. The Mission recommends the EOTC identify a candidate with expertise in heritage management as site manager for its properties within the Aksum World Heritage property and second this person to represent it on the Advisory Authority established under Regulation 346/2015.

2.1.3. Management Plan

Previous Reactive Monitoring missions (2010 and 2013) remarked that the property suffers from the absence of a Management Plan. This remains the case.

The State Party reports that a Management Plan is in the process of being composed, is in advanced stages, and would be presented to Aksum local stakeholders in March 2016, after which it will be forwarded to the World Heritage Centre under Paragraph 172 of the World Heritage *Operational Guidelines*.

The Management Plan however been informed by input from Aksum University where a core team, consisting of two archaeologist, one historian, one architect from the Engineering Department and two GIS specialists, investigated the property and forwarded their findings to the Municipality. This Aksum University research project was undertaken through the formal relationship that exists between the University and the ARCCH.

Concurrently a new Structure Plan for the whole of Aksum City is under preparation by consultants for the Aksum Municipality. As neither of the two documents was available to the Mission, it cannot comment on the contents of either, nor can it report on the level of integration of the two documents.

Completing a suitable and effective Management Plan and its subsequent submission to the World Heritage Centre for review remains a matter of urgency. Thereafter its urgent implementation must receive the highest consideration.

2.1.4. Tourism management: Site access, information provision and interpretation

The State Party has, with support of the World Bank, executed the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project (Refer to Section 3.2 (3) below). Through this Programme's Destination Development component both visitor access as well as on-site interpretation has been (and was in process of being) upgraded. This includes provision of pathways at the Stela Field and paving of major squares.

As part of the same project, permanent information walls have been constructed to receive information panels at 22 places in the property. These have been constructed utilising a dark blue shale/slate stone, with concrete capping in the shape of a pediment. The State Party has also recently constructed ablution facilities at outlying sites such as the Tombs of Kaleb and Gebre Meskel and Dungur, in both cases clad in local brown stone to avoid visual contrasts within close location to these archaeological sites.

Throughout the property, tombs with visitor access have been provided with electrical lighting. In some instance (Tomb of the False Door) this was not functioning at the time of the Mission visit, in other instances these installations have been haphazardly been repaired leading to situations which potentially might pose the danger of electric shock. All electrical installations in the tombs need to be checked and dangerous connections repaired.

As part of the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project a new Visitors Centre has been constructed. This includes an auditorium for the presentation of informative films, booking office and interpretative sections. The location of the centre is well chosen: it is easily accessed and all visitors to the property will pass by it. It was not yet operational at the time of the Mission.

The Archaeological Museum at present still forms the main information source for visitors to the site. The museum has under the ESTPD programme received a outdoor display of craft for sale, increasing its offering to visitors. The display of the museum is intriguing and insightful, but will in the near future require upgrading.

It is the opinion of the Mission that new Visitor Centre and the Archaeological Museum have not adversely affected the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. As a side note, the architectural quality all new interventions, such as the ablution structures could have been improved on, but their current form does not detract from the sites at which they are located. It is a pity that the planning for these interventions was not submitted for review to the World Heritage Centre as they have impacted the character of the site.

The Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project also contributed to the training of local guides. The Mission observed during visits to various archaeological sites that guides on those sites were well trained.

The EOTC properties however require interpretational signage in the short term. In the long term the EOTC properties will require carefully planned visitor routes to avoid conflicting use of spaces by pilgrims and tourist.

A very positive development is that the Ethiopian Tourism Organisation has developed a website <http://www.ethiopia.travel> which includes the history and practical information on this, and other Ethiopian World Heritage properties. Folders for each of the properties have been developed and submitted to the ARCCH for review. The Mission was provided with the new Aksum z-folder and it provides basic information for Aksum, and other heritage sites such as Yeha and Aba Garima.

2.1.5. Access control and security at the various sites of the serial property

The site office staff contingent includes a large component of security personnel resulting in most sites having a security detail allocated to them. In the case of the security at the Gudit Stelae Field is facing some challenges. Here the main entrance gate has been stolen. The site manager informed the Mission that this problem was being addressed. At the same time the southern fence of the Field has been cut in a number of cases (possibly to allow for unapproved grazing or ease of access to fields located in the Field). The Mission did not think that this poses immediate danger, unless tomb-robbing and unpermitted digging takes place and therefore the situation requires careful ongoing monitoring.

2.1.6. Knowledge of the Convention and *Operational Guidelines* at the Local Managerial Level

The current site manager is in the employ of the Agency for Culture and Tourism (Axum Cluster), Tigray Region. He expressed the need for training with regards the Convention and especially the *Operational Guidelines*. The Mission supports this request and recommends the new site management team – to be installed under the new 2015 Aksum World Heritage Reserve Area Designation (Regulation 346/2015) – receives suitable instruction in both the new Regulations as well as the *Operation Guidelines* as a matter of urgency.

2.1.7. Communication as required per Paragraph 172 of the World Heritage *Operational Guidelines*

Previous Reactive Monitoring missions requested documentation to be forwarded to the World Heritage Centre. For example, the 2015 Committee Decision 39COM7B.39 requested the submission of the 2010 Thematic Master Plan for the property. This was finally undertaken in the 2016 State Party state of conservation report. Similarly the aforementioned 2013 High Level Reactive Monitoring mission requested the submission of the designs for the Church Museum to the World Heritage Centre. These have still not been transmitted. The planning for the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project was also not transmitted to the World Heritage Centre. The State Party should improve this situation. At the same time all stakeholders. Including the EOTC, should be made aware of the provisions of Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines* and a clear communication framework should be instituted, through the Advisory Committee established through Regulation 346/2015, to ensure that the head office of the ARCCH is informed of any potential developments and can fulfil its mandate under the *Operational Guidelines*.

3.2 Factors affecting the property

3.2.1 Construction of the Church Museum and preservation of the EOTC Aksum collection

The construction of the Church Museum was halted in soon after the visit of the 2013 High Level Reactive Monitoring mission and no work has been undertaken since, despite the decision of the World Heritage Committee, which noted:

... the results of the mission that the Church Museum when completed will not have an adverse visual impact on specific views within the property if a screen of tall trees is maintained and the building façade is slightly modified as recommended by the mission; and requests the State Party to submit the final plans to the World Heritage Centre as soon as possible; (WHC Decision 37 COM 7B.38.3).

The minor façade modification requested by the World Heritage Committee formed a major point of discussion during the meeting with the Office of the Patriarch of the EOTC held in Addis Ababa on 2 February 2016. At the

meeting the Mission urged the EOTC to comply with the request of the World Heritage Committee and recommence the construction of the Church Museum.

The urgency of this was confirmed during the visit to Aksum. The incomplete skeleton of the Church Museum, fenced by a temporary corrugate iron sheet fence, has a current temporary high negative visual impact on the property and therefore has a temporary negative impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. This needs to be rectified through completion of the project, while taking in cognizance the recommendations following submission of the minor façade modifications.



Figure 1. The Church Museum, 2016. (Author)



Figure 2. The Church Museum at time of the 2013 Mission (KA Bakker)

The Mission did not have the privilege of visiting the treasury of the EOTC at Aksum granted to the 2013 High Level Reactive Monitoring mission but can report that the collection is still housed in the same structure as in 2013. It is not clear whether the conditions of the repository of the collection have been improved since the 2013 mission, but the EOTC, though the Nibure'ld assured the Mission that the collection was well catalogued. The Mission did inspect the outside of the treasury building and could see no indication of alterations to the building which would address the concerns regarding the climatic conditions of the storage of the collection expressed by the 2013 mission. In the absence of more information this Mission reiterates the concerns of the 2013 mission and recommends the State Party, in collaboration with the EOTC, to urgently implement the recommendations of the 2013 mission where these have not been addressed yet.

A paper by the eminent Aksum archaeologist Tekle Hagos (2015), contradicts the reporting to date that the site of the Church Museum contained no archaeological remains. In this paper entitled 'Challenges of Conservation towards the Landscape of the World Heritage Site of Aksum', the author presents photographic evidence of ancient structures exposed by the excavations for the construction of the Church Museum. He reports to having identified stone walls and arched brick gates on the site at the time of the 2010 excavations, located to the west of the new Church Museum building. These claims urgently need to be investigated, and if confirmed, emergency archaeological documentation and stabilization of the remaining archaeological fabric should be undertaken.

The Church Museum as a new large volume in Aksum old town presents a precedent, which could influence future developments. It is the only large scale building in the property located on the street edge; the Churches of St Mary, both old and new are located in the parkland of the Church compound. Development controls should clearly indicate that this building is an exception, not to be repeated anywhere in the property.

3.2.2 Factors affecting the Property at the Stela Field

The conservation of the Stela Field is faced with a number of challenges, two of which, the consolidation of Stela III and the rising water in the Tomb of the Brick Arches, have been reported to in previous mission reports. An additional factor, structural instability and rainwater ingress at the Mausoleum is in the opinion of this Mission a matter requiring urgent intervention.

1. Structural instability of Stela III

The structural instability of Stela III is arguably the most visible of the factors affecting the property at this stage. The Stela historically had already been leaning at an incline of approximately 6° (Hagos, 2015, Littman, et al., 1913). As part of the 'Zero Risk Operation' (Bandarin, 2008: 13) to reinstall Stela II in 2008, Stela III received a temporary safety structure. After the reinstallation project it was found that Stela III had in fact been further destabilized by the 'Zero Risk Operation' (2013 mission report; Hagos, 2015), leading to the retention of the temporary safety restraints and commissioning of a study by Studio Croci & Associati, who undertook site analyses of the problem and presented a proposal for the stabilisation of Stela III. This proposal, dating to 2010, includes shoring up the Stela (to a vertical position) with a temporary steel structure, propping up of the sacrificial stones (base plates), excavation of the foundation (thereby destroying the historical foundation), casting of a large new reinforced concrete foundation (7m x 7m x 2m), after which the base plates would be returned and the temporary scaffolding removed. UNESCO has accepted this proposal but no further action has been undertaken to date, due to financial restraints.

The State Party has now allocated a budget to this project. This was already acknowledged by the World Heritage Committee in their 2015 decision (39 COM 7B.39) and again reported on in the State Party's February 2016 state of conservation report.

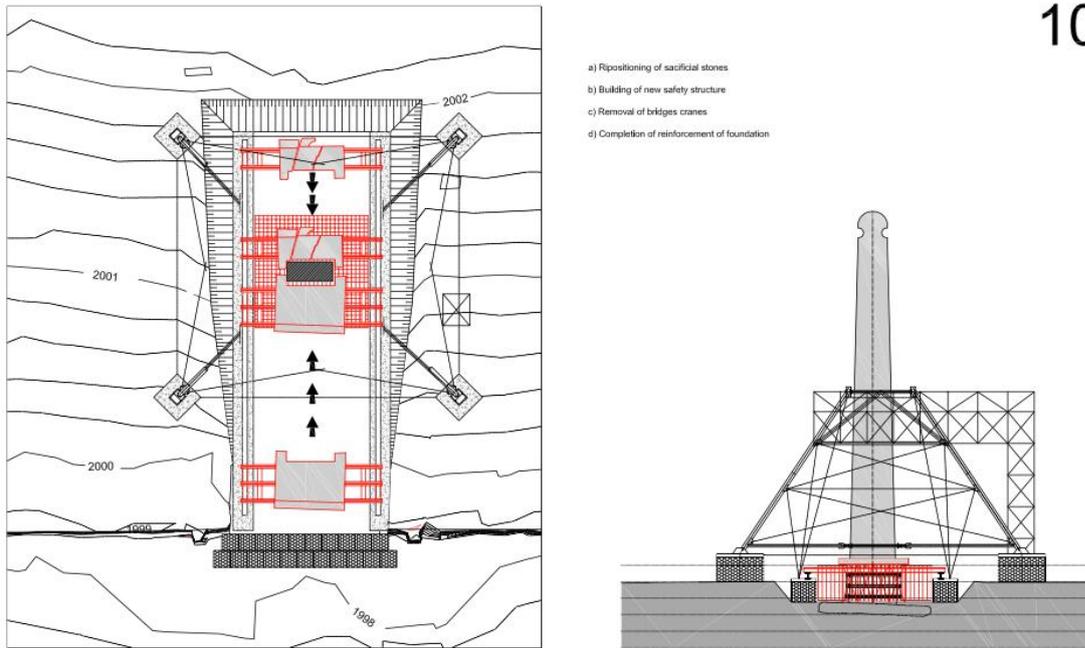


Figure 3. One image from the sequence of steps in the proposed plan for the consolidation of Stela III. The red block at the base of the Stela represents roughly the volume of the proposed concrete footing. (Croci: 2010b, See Annex A.13 for the full sequence of consolidation proposed.)

The Director General of the ARCH indicated to the Mission that this budget has been allocated and work will progress after a second reappraisal of the 2010 Studio Croci & Associati proposal.

The proposal is not without risk, in the opinion of the Mission. This concern is shared by other specialists such as Hagos who firstly cites the original incline of the Stela, who states that stabilizing Stela III to a vertical position would be a *...reconstruction of a distorted history*. (Hagos, 2015). He also fears for the stability of the adjacent underground tunnels and the stability of the proximate Tomb of the Brick Arches. The positions of these are known. Additional cavities have been detected through a non-invasive geophysical survey, Studio Croci identified the presence of a cavity, possibly a burial chamber 4-5 meters below ground level directly to the north-west of Stela III. In fact the whole area around Stela 3 is riddled with sub-surface cavities, making this area very fragile.

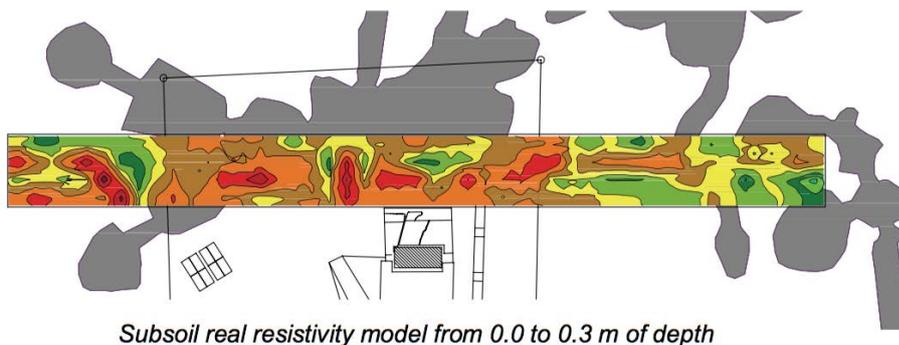


Figure 4. Diagramme from the Studio Croci geotechnical survey report indicating the new cavities proximate to Steal III identified through the geoelectrical tomography survey (Croci: 2010a)

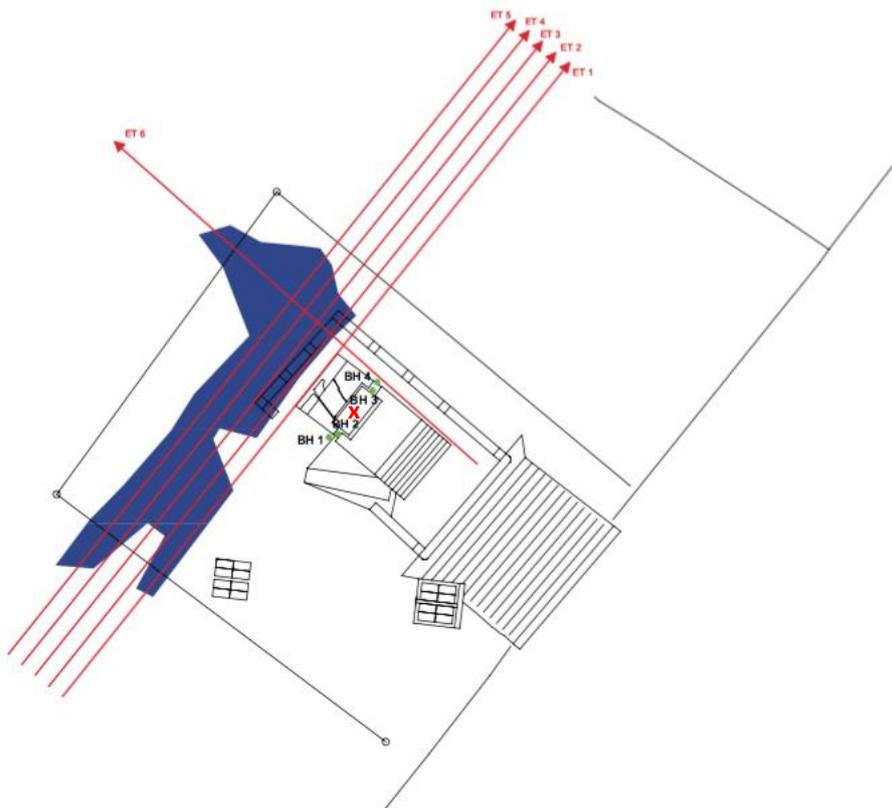


Figure 5. Diagramme from the Studio Croci geotechnical survey report indicating the chambers around Stela III (rectangle, labelled 'x') discovered in the 1980's digs. (Croci: 2010a)

In the light of the above, and taking into account all the unforeseen negative effects of the carefully planned 'Zero Risk Operation'; of the reconstruction of Stela II, and a review of the 2010 Studio Croci Reports, the Mission recommends that:

- The operation of stabilizing Stela III is a high-risk operation and the utmost care must be taken in doing so, despite any other negative effects, such as the continued impact on the visual integrity of the Stelae Field.
- The structural stability of the Tomb of the Brick Arches be should investigated and reported on, and measures take to stabilise it, before stabilisation of the Stela III be undertaken.
- Further investigations should be undertaken to explore the possibility and feasibility of returning the Stela III to its historical inclination, and not the currently planned vertical position.
- It is important to note that the process of stabilising Stela III will destroy the original near 2000-year old foundation of the Stela and with it the evidence of how ancient Aksumites erected these giant Stelae. Therefore any and all excavation at the site needs to be guided by an archaeologist with knowledge of the Aksumite construction technologies lead any excavations. This included excavations leading to the positioning of temporary shoring/scaffolding and the excavations for the positioning of the new reinforced concrete foundation.

- All excavations need to be thoroughly documented to the highest international standards, and this documentation lodged with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and other organisations that might serve as repositories for this knowledge.
- A relocation plan be designed for the display and interpretation of the basal stones and boulders that form part of the historical foundation of Stela III and will be removed in the process of installing the new foundation. The basal stones removed from the foundation of Stela III have been discarded haphazardly on the Stelae Field, without any interpretation, in cases lying on the site upside-down (Hagos, 2015). This cannot be allowed to happen again.
- The stabilizing of Stela III is an operation of high sensitivity, high risk and high international importance. It is imperative that the best advisors and implementers be utilised. It is therefore recommended that Studio Croci e Associati lead and oversee the project to stabilize Stela III, not only if their 2010 Plan or any variation thereof is implemented, but also because of their intimate knowledge of the site and experience with its fragility.
- All plans should be submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review under Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines* and should only be executed after approval is received.

Finally it is the opinion of the Mission that should the execution of the stabilisation of Stela III lead to collapse of any of the underground chambers in the Stela Field, this would mandate an investigation into inscribing the Aksum World Heritage property on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

2. Rising Water Table in the Tomb of the Brick Arches

The problem of rising water in the Tomb of the Brick Arches is a historic problem. Hagos (2015) reports that this phenomenon occurred even before the reinstallation of Stela II in 2008, but that the volume of water increased after that intervention. This seems to reflect a general consensus (2013 mission report) on the cause of exacerbation of the water problem. Hagos (2015) additionally reports that the roof of the Tomb of the Brick Arches also exhibits a fracture, adding to the fragile state of the tomb. This is of great concern and compounds the problems faced in conserving the tomb. The Mission could not confirm the presence of the fracture due to the low lighting levels in the tomb.

In its 2015 state of conservation Report, the State Party reported that it had *...assigned a team of experts to identify the cause of the rising water table in the Tomb of the Brick Arches, where the team has been primary been scheduled to remove the sediments built up inside the Tomb and then to identify the point of water access to the structure.* The point source of the water ingress had, by the time of the 2016 Mission, not yet been identified.

The Tomb of the Brick Arches is largely cut into the earth under the Stela Field. At the time of the Mission inspection, the lowest chambers contained pools of water. It is clear on inspection that the source of the water in the Tomb of the Brick Arches is the natural water table. This is confirmed by the site manager, who reports that the level of the water rises in wet months and drops slowly towards the end of the winter.

At the moment the water level is controlled through mechanical pumping. A centrifugal pump has been installed in the main chamber of the Tomb and operated on a needs be basis. The location of the pump is not ideal as it does not assist in draining all the water from the tomb and has an aesthetic impact on the appearance of the tomb, as does the pipe through which the water is pumped out.

As the problem is a historical one, and the water enters the tomb through its natural stone floor no permanent solution can be imagined. The close proximity of the Tomb of the Brick Arches to the instable Stela III rules out any further excavation in this area. In fact Tekle Hagos, an archaeologist with an intimate knowledge of the site, insists that the best solution to the problem of rising water level would be to backfill the Tomb of the Brick Arches. This would stabilize the roof fracture and assist in safeguarding Stela III.² The appropriateness of this proposal should be investigated as an option when the stabilisation of Stela III is planned.

The Mission finds that formalising the current management solution, a low-invasive non-structural and non-permanent measure, should receive serious consideration as it provides a low-risk option to managing the problem. This system can be refined by repositioning the pump, powering it on a solar photovoltaic system (possibly located on the Archaeological Museum roof) to ensure its independence from the sometimes unreliable electricity grid, and provided with an automated switch. Additionally the Management Plan for the property should include periodic monitoring and reporting of the water level in the Tomb.

Further investigation should be carried out to ascertain the extent of a threat posed by the fracture reported by Hagos (2015), a plan for implementation of corrective measures presented for review to the World Heritage Centre and, after approval, implemented with great urgency.

3. Structural instability in the Mausoleum

During the onsite inspection of the Mausoleum, the site manager expressed his concern at the level of rainwater ingress into the mausoleum and the structural stability of this important archaeological site. At present the structure is already, in one instance, being propped up by a temporary installation of scaffolding tubing.

The Mission was informed about the excavations by Cambridge University under the direction of David Phillipson in the mid-1990s (Phillipson & Phillips, 1995: 28). Phillipson reports that the lintels of side chambers had been cracked at the time of excavation and that these cracks may have been caused when Stela I fell over (Phillipson, 2001: 40). The tomb, originally constructed in a pit, which was subsequently backfilled (Phillipson, 2001: 40) had been backfilled with debris when it was excavated (Phillipson & Phillips, 1995: 28).

The site management have been monitoring the cracks in the stone lintels that cover the side chambers. Archaeologist Tekle Hagos reports that he observed a widening of the cracks in the massive granite roof slabs of the side chambers *...probably due to the effect of the reinstallation of Stela 2...* (Hagos, 2015: np.) This was also noticed by the site management, hence the installation of scaffolding to help support the slabs of the tombs. The

² Personal email communication dated 8 February 2016.

2010 WHC/ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission report (page 23) noted that stone shafts that light and ventilate the Mausoleum were constructed as part of the 2005/2006 World Bank Project that also saw the construction of the Archaeological Museum (in their opinion too close to the Stela Field). This has added to the weight the slabs over the central passage need to carry. These shafts were constructed from heavy stone walls, many meters high. These are covered in such a manner that rain enters the Mausoleum, evidence of which was visible throughout. This leads to situations, according to the site manager, where the tomb needs to be closed to visitors during the rainy season. The high retaining walls at the tomb's entrance also recently collapsed, due to structural pressure from the earth over the tombs. This has been reconstructed.



Figure 6. Evidence of rainwater ingress in the end chamber of the Mausoleum. (Author)



Figure 7. Temporary scaffolding supporting the historically cracked lintels in the Mausoleum. (Author)

It is clear that the Mausoleum requires urgent structural and water proofing intervention. The soil covering the Mausoleum presents a dynamic load, getting heavier during the rainy season when it is saturated, lightening when it dries out. This Mission proposes for consideration a solution to both problems of water ingress and the load on the mausoleum: excavating down from the surface of the Mausoleum, thereby lightening the load, and covering this with a green roof that spans the original pit in which the Mausoleum was installed. Such an approach carries a high risk and careful archaeological and structural investigation would be required before any action is undertaken. In the meantime the structural provisions made by the site manager are welcomed; the situation should receive careful monitoring and, should any additional movement be noticed, additional reversible non-intrusive emergency measures be taken.

Should the situation worsen, and should the structural instability of Stela III not be resolved or get worse, it could be stated that *'the property is threatened by serious and specific danger'* (*Operational Guidelines* Paragraph 177.b) and would it would then be appropriate to inscribe the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger under the provisions of the *Operational Guidelines* Paragraph 179.a.ii.

3.2.3 Delimitation of this serial property

The delineation of the property has been finalised through the gazetting of the 2015 Aksum World Heritage Reserve Area Designation, (Regulation 346/2015). (ANNEX A.7) This document was appended to the 2015 State Party state of conservation report, submitted to the World Heritage Centre by 1 February 2016.

The Maps annexed to this Regulation present the boundaries of the property and its buffer zone, but this map is not specialised through inclusion of street plans and the geography of area in which the property is located, making it very difficult to access the locations of the boundaries in reality. This needs to be rectified and new maps, including street plans and the greater geography, which allow identification of the buffer zone and property on the building scale, should be prepared and submitted to the World Heritage Centre.

This action has in principle addressed the delineation issue affecting the property, except for some concerns from observations made during the Mission that need to be raised, especially in the light of the Terms of Reference that required that the Mission to evaluate the methodology followed in the delineating of the boundaries (Refer to the Terms of Reference for the Mission Annex A.1)

It is worthwhile to here repeat the provisions of the *Operational Guidelines* guiding the delineation of buffer zones in the nomination process:

For the purposes of effective protection of the nominated property, a buffer zone is an area surrounding the nominated property which has complementary legal and/or customary restrictions placed on its use and development to give an added layer of protection to the property. This should include the immediate setting of the nominated property, important views and other areas or attributes that are functionally important as a support to the property and its protection. (Operational Guidelines, Paragraph 104)

The delineation of the boundaries of the property and the buffer zone included in the Aksum World Heritage Reserve Area Designation, (Regulation 346/2015), were driven by current knowledge of the known archaeological areas and did not include, as far as the mission could ascertain, the protection of views to and from the property. This assumption is underscored by the fact that the Stone of Ezana, re-located to a tea-garden and therefore not in its original location, falls in the buffer zone and does not form part of the property. Fortunately due in part to the topography of Aksum, much of the property lies nestled between the Giorghis and Mai Qoho hills, thereby protecting it visually from Aksum New Town. Sites such as Dungur may in future be visually impacted on by distant high-rise development at the Aksum University. This concern was already raised in the 2010 mission Report. The Mission is of the opinion that not enough consideration was given to the inclusion of other extant churches, such as the Monastery Church of St Pantelleon, which form an integral part of the history and living heritage of the EOTC in Aksum. At this juncture it seems prudent to first implement Regulation 346/2015, complete and implement the Management Plan and compose development guidelines for the property and buffer zone, before attempting to modify the boundaries of this serial property to include such sites.

The State Party also confirmed that it will not be pursuing proposals for minor boundary modifications at present, but should communicate this in the required format to the World Heritage Centre.

3.2.4 Current Planning Environment: the 2007 Aksum Master Plan (Hydea 2007), Thematic Masterplan (Rich 2010) and Aksum Structure Plan (under development)

The 2013 High Level UNESCO/ICOMOS Joint Reactive Monitoring mission reported in detail on both the 2007 Aksum Master Plan (Hydea 2007), and the Thematic Master Plan (Rich 2010), noting that neither documents had been forwarded to the World Heritage Centre for review.

As has been noted, the Thematic Master Plan (Rich, 2010) was submitted to the World Heritage Centre as annex to the 2016 State Party state of conservation report, but the Aksum Master Plan (Hydea 2007a) still remains to be submitted. Despite this; the 2007 World Bank Aksum Master Plan has already seen an in-part implementation through the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project (Refer to Section 3.2.3 below).

The City of Aksum has now commissioned a new Master Plan to replace its extant Structure Plan. It became clear during the mission that the new *Aksum World Heritage Reserve Area Designation Council of Ministers Regulation No 346/2015* had not been transmitted to the team involved in this process.

It is unclear what the status of the 2007 World Bank Master Plan (Hydea, 2007) is in informing the new Structure Plan. The Mayor of Aksum however informed the Mission that the Thematic Master Plan (Rich, 2010) is one of the sources for the new Municipality of Aksum Structure Plan. This is problematic as the Thematic Master Plan has only recently (February 2016) been submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review and no Heritage Impact Assessment has yet been undertaken to measure the effects of this Thematic Master Plan as recommended by the 2013 High Level UNESCO/ICOMOS Joint Reactive Monitoring mission. Its adoption, without review, poses a clear potential for negatively impacting the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, as it does contain proposals, which, in the opinion of the Mission, will adversely change the setting of the property.

The Mission therefore recommends that the State Party should clearly indicate to the World Heritage Centre which of the 2007 Hydea Cultural World Bank funded and 2010 Thematic Master Plans are still valid, and those be transmitted to the World Heritage Centre for review, where this has not yet taken place. Additionally all of these as well as the new Structure Plan under development need to be reviewed against new Regulation 346/2015. This mission reiterates the recommendation of the 2013 High Level mission Report that these already extant planning documents be *...put forward for a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) following the ICOMOS Guidance on Impact Assessment in Cultural World Heritage properties (2011) and as augmented by current advances on this topic, and especially within the HUL Approach.* (2013 mission report).

This should be undertaken during the review process of the Structure Plan and before the Municipality of Aksum implements it.

3.2.5 Inappropriate development due to a lack of Development Guidelines and Regulations

A number of new developments were noted during the inspection of the Aksum World Heritage property, located both in the property and in the buffer zone, which are a point of concern. It must be noted up front that these are not only of concern with regards their scale, but also with regards to their architectural language. This, coupled with a clear continuing weakening of the traditional vernacular landscape, threatens the setting of the property. This is not a large-scale trend, but deserves attention. It has been made possible, by amongst others, the past lack of delineation of the boundaries of the property and buffer zone, a situation that has now been resolved. Some illustrated examples follow.

Property

Within the boundaries of the property, new construction is being undertaken adjacent at the Ta'ka Maryam Palace Archaeological site (Figure 1). The Site Management has approved this structure, with a height restriction imposed and an instruction regarding the finishing of the walls of the structure to match adjacent buildings. The roof form, a mono-pitched roof with gable ends, unfortunately does not follow the standard form—a hipped saddle, or pyramid roof—common in its environment, leading to a misfit between the new and extant construction in full view of the archaeological site. And while its materials match the adjacent structures it does not continue the traditions of the vernacular structures that still dominate that environment.



Figure 8. New construction opposite the Ta'ka Maryam archaeological site. (Author)



Figure 9. The urban context of the Ta'ka Maryam archaeological site. (Author)

A new three-storey Public Library is under construction at the site of the old Library/ Patriarch's residence by the Aksumite Heritage. The Old Library is to be converted to use as an Ethnographic Museum. The concept of this development is welcomed as it will not only provide library facilities to the community, but could also become a repository for knowledge on Aksum and its ancient civilization, as well as showcasing cultural development of Aksumites over the centuries in the envisaged Museum. Yet this new construction falls within the boundaries of

the Aksum World Heritage property. Its setting, against the hill of Mai Koho, is able to absorb the bulk of this new construction and it is reasonably masked by extant foliage, but it continues the precedent of inappropriate height for new buildings in the property. On enquiry the site manager informed the Mission that the site had been previously archaeologically explored by the late Prof Ziegert who found no noteworthy archaeological residue located here. On the basis of this study approval was given for the project. The location of the library, on the Italian Square is appropriate and the site is out of sight of the Church Compound and main Stelae Field. Yet the fact that such a large development could proceed without approved development guidelines in place; and the absence of reporting, which should have taken place in terms of Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*, is worrying.



Figure 10. Notice of the construction of the new Public Library. (Author)



Figure 11. The new Public Library, a three-story building, located against Mai Koho. (Author)

Construction is also taking place in close vicinity to the Tomb of Basen where the clear intention is to construct a contemporary-looking double storey building. On the other side of the Tomb of Basen, a tourist lodge, constructed during 2013, pays lip service to the aesthetic of the ancient Aksumite palaces and the local vernacular, but this is inappropriate due to its pastiche like character and scale of three stories. This is a clear indication that more careful development guidelines and regulations are required.



Figure 12. New double storey construction located adjacent to the Tomb of Basen. (Author)



Figure 13. A new tourist lodge constructed close to the Tomb of Basen in a faux traditional style. (Author)

Adjacent to the Church Museum new construction is being undertaken in a highly visible location along the main sight line to the Stelae Field. This development had not been approved by the site management and was subsequently stopped, and a restriction was placed on the height, before approval given for its completion.³ It is unclear what the final aesthetic appearance of this building will be, but it is a point of concern. It also illustrates the knock-on effect of the presence of the Church Museum in the property, also evidenced by other new construction being undertaken on this important route.



Figure 14. New building work adjacent the Church Museum site on the main access way to the Stelae Field. (Author)



Figure 15. New construction in close proximity to the new Church Museum on the main access to the Stelae Field. (Author)

In the developing city of Aksum infrastructure development is not only necessary, but welcomed. The Mission noticed the construction of a large storm water gutter along the road to the Tombs of Kaleb and Gebre Meskel

³ This is based an oral communication from the site manager.

that required groundwork including grading and digging. The ARCCH Head of the World Heritage office informed the Mission that an Heritage Impact Assessment had been done before approval of the project and that care had been taken to avoid impacting important archaeological sites, such as the known Aksumite Villa located directly adjacent the road. The Mission did not have the opportunity to inspect this HIA and notes that the State Party as standard practice should communicate such HIA's to the World Heritage Centre. In the absence of an approved Management Plan and Development guidelines the Mission recommends extreme caution and proposed that any such future activity be communicated to the World Heritage Centre as a development that could potentially impact the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.



Figure 16. New storm water gutter on the road to the Tombs of Kaleb and Grebe Meskel. (Author)



Figure 17. Close-up photograph of the new storm water gutter on the road to the Tombs of Kaleb and Grebe Meskel. (Author)

Buffer Zone

In the buffer zone; a seven-story hotel building is in the process of completion. This is located on the boundary of the buffer zone, and has been under construction since at least early 2013 (it appears on Google Earth photography dated 18 March 2013), therefore predating the delineation of the buffer zone. This fortunately is screened from the Church Compound and the Stelae Field, but has a high visual presence along the lower reaches of the property. It is unknown to the Mission how the façade will be faced, but it is important that this be selected, and if needs be, modulated to limit as far as possible the visibility of the tall structure. It also creates a precedent for further high-rise development in the buffer zone, which cannot be allowed. This building must be seen as an exception, with possible future remedial action through lowering it when the building gets replaced. In other word the current height should not for the bases for future development rights for the property or any others in the buffer zone. This case further illustrates the need for development guidelines and regulations.



Figure 18. New seven-story hotel development located in the buffer zone of the property. (Author)



Figure 19. The new commercial construction on the outer edge of the buffer zone on the road to Dungur. (Author)

The Mission therefore recommends that clear development guidelines and regulations be developed for both the property and the buffer zone. These should include restoration guidelines for extant vernacular and modern structures, height, form, material and aesthetic coding and guidelines for new construction and be regulated through local or provincial proclamation. Until such guidelines have been reviewed by the World Heritage Centre, all large-scale developments and infrastructure projects should be submitted for review to the World Heritage Centre as per Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*.

3.2.6 The Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project (ESTDP)

The Mission, in its Terms of Reference (Annex A.1) was mandated to “evaluate whether the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project is in line with the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme and addresses infrastructure development, visitor management, and community benefits.”

The Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project (ESTDP), a World Bank funded project, came to an end in December 2015. The comments included in this mission report are therefore of a retrospective nature.

The ESTDP project for Aksum consisted of three components: Destination Development, Marketing Development and Institutional Capacity Development.

Destination Development

The ESTDP was based on the 2007 ‘World Bank Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project Aksum Master Plan’. This document in turn informed the 2011 ‘Improvement of Visitors Walk Routs, Plazas and Stelae Field in Axum’, composed by Studio Samson Addis Consulting Architects, Planners & Engineers. This latter plan included the laying of hard landscaping throughout the property, already executed at the time of this Mission, lead to:

1. A large-scale landscaping project, including the three public squares of the property, and the Stela Field. At the Stela Field lighting was installed. In total approximately 30 000m² of cobble stone paving was installed in the property, the buffer zone and beyond. These cobbles were sourced from the vicinity of Aksum, the

patterning based on traditional motifs. The Mission was informed that local stonecutters were trained and employed in manufacturing the cobblestones.

2. A non-executed proposal for a new Ground floor+1 Stela Interpretation Centre at the Archaeological Museum. Due to objections from local archaeologists, this project was relocated to the site of the new Visitor Centre.
3. Restoration of the 'Gebre Sellasie Vernacular House' at the Archaeological Museum.

Additional actions undertaken under the Destination Development project include:

1. The Construction of a new Visitors Centre at the Daero Piazza.
2. Restoration activities to the 16th Century (second) Church of St Mary of Zion.
3. Purchasing of two waste disposal truck for use by the Aksum Municipality.
4. Construction of 22 stone structures with rectangular niches to receive interpretative signage. The signage, designed and ordered as part of the project, had not yet been installed at the time of the Mission, but the mission was told that these signs had been manufactured and were about to be shipped to Aksum from Addis Ababa.

Marketing Development

The Marketing Development Project included matching grants, awarded to 21 companies in Aksum, including hotels and restaurants, for facilities upgrades. Three urban agriculture, 1 tour operator, 1 hospitality training centre and 1 handcraft centre also received support from the matching fund programme. Local tour guides and crafters also received training.

The ESTPD office reported that 31 business ventures were established through the programme, which included craft training programmes, reaching 466 direct beneficiaries.

Institutional Capacity

The Institutional Capacity programme trained three staff from the site management office (Culture and Tourism, Axum Cluster, Tigray Region) people in destination management; simultaneously nine instructors from local technical and vocational training schools went to Mauritius for training. From this same programme, computer and office equipment for the Visitors Centre was purchased.

Mission Assessment of the ESTDP

The ESTDP programme was well aligned with the objectives World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme, with a broad impact and lasting benefit.

However the construction activities carried out through the activities had the potential of negatively impacting the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. This is illustrated by the proposal for a ground+1 Stela Interpretation Centre at the Archaeological Museum, fortunately scrapped due to opposition from local

archaeologists. Had this project been undertaken, this would have adversely affected the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

The landscaping programme has certainly altered the character of the property and the buffer zone, especially at the roads leading to the Stela Square, the Stela Square itself, Dearo Piazza (Italian Square) and the Daero Ela Square (Square of the Four Beasts). The provision of built structures to accommodate the Interpretative signage has been undertaken through the project. For this a single design was developed and executed at 22 places in the serial site with varying visual impact and contextual success. The Mission finds that the aesthetic and material finish of the structures constructed for interpretation are not well aligned with the setting of the property and do not contribute to the harmony of the property. This is less pronounced at outlying sites such as at the tombs of Kaleb and Gebre Meskel and the Dungur Place and Stela Field, than in the town of Aksum and especially the Stela Field. These changes can be absorbed by the capacity of the property site and have not markedly negatively altered the attributes that lead to the property being inscribed on the World Heritage List.



Figure 20. Square of the Four Beast, 2016. (Author)



Figure 21. Square of the Four Beast, 2013. (KA Bakker)

Such a large scale programme certainly had the potential to affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property (both in relation to the first statement of Outstanding Universal Value and the later Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value), and the State Party should have notified the World Heritage Centre of their intention to plan and execute the project under Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*. At the same time this project, due to its scale and potential to detract from the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, should have been subjected to an Heritage Impact Assessment, according to the ICOMOS *Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties* (2011). It also has the potential for setting an unwanted precedent, for instance, for the landscaping of the Church of St Mary of Zion Church compound.

3.2.7 Mooted landscaping development of the St Mary of Zion EOTC Compound

During the meeting with the office of the Patriarch of the EOTC in Addis Ababa the wish was expressed of the hard landscaping programme undertaken under the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project to be extended to the Church Compound of St Mary of Zion. The Nibure'Id of Aksum reiterated this wish during the Mission meeting with him at Aksum.

The Church Compound is an island in the larger property and Aksum as a whole. It is a place with a great continuity of use from ancient times to present. It is also a haven of green, through the protection it has offered to, amongst others, indigenous trees. At the same time the compound welcomes many thousands of pilgrims to its confines. It is in religious use from early morning, when the first prayers take place even before sunrise, through to the early evening. It hosts the most sacred of site in Ethiopia, the Second Church of St Mary of Zion, the Chapel of the Ark of the Covenant, the third, 1957 Church of St Mary of Zion and the Monastery of the Four Animals (The Four Evangelists.) It also contains ancient Aksumite archaeological remains, including the ruins of the first 4th Century Church of St Mary. The artificial pools located at the new Church of St Mary of Zion form an important focal point during the annual Meskel Festival when thousands of pilgrims and crowd the whole of Aksum. There are also cemeteries, management offices, workshops and other uses all located on the same site.

At the same time the Compound has become a tourism attraction.

It is clear that this complex site, with its multiple layers of meaning, function and use requires careful development and management. This is compounded by the overlap in roles of the EOTC and the ARCCH with regards the safeguarding of the values of this site. This goes beyond the safeguarding of the physical fabric and resultant spatial qualities of the site and includes safeguarding its meaning for the many members of the EOTC who regards the site as sacred.

The Development and Management of the site therefore requires very careful study, consideration and consultation.

At this stage it is not clear if the management plan currently being developed will include the Church Compound or not. It is recommended that the Church Compound be subject to an individual process, dovetailed and embedded with the property Management Plan, which clearly stipulates the roles and responsibilities of each involved party. The need for a dedicated manager for the Church Compound has already been discussed (Section 3.1.3).

The redevelopment of the landscape of the Church Compound is a highly sensitive project. It will need to balance the historic character, current religious use, tourism, interpretation and environmental aspects of the site. This requires a multidisciplinary approach with as lead designer a landscape architect well versed in the redevelopment of sensitive historic sites with a living heritage and use. Applying the same principles as the ESTDP project applied for street paving to the Church Compound would have a high negative impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property and its setting. At the same time it must be cautioned that some of the recommendations contained in the 2010 Thematic Master Plan could have a similarly negative impact.

If a landscaping proposal is developed for the Church Compound this should be approached from a landscape architectural perspective, not an engineering perspective, and be submitted for review to the World Heritage Centre under Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*. It would be prudent and is therefore recommended that such a proposal be put forward for an Heritage Impact Assessment following the 2011 ICOMOS *Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties*. This will help safeguard the Setting of the Church Compound and the larger property.

3.2.8 Conservation of the setting of the Aksum World Heritage Property

The integrity of the setting, and the closely aligned concepts of *location*, *spirit* and *feeling* of World Heritage Properties is one of the main attributes that contribute to the authenticity of a property (*Operational Guidelines*, Paragraph 82). A number of factors have the potential to impact on the setting of the property.

1. Conservation of Vernacular Structures

The traditional houses of Aksum contribute greatly to the setting of the World Heritage property and are therefore worthy of protection. Many of these houses are in a poor state of preservation.

These important vernacular houses have already been inventoried by architect Fasil Giorghis in a document that lists the 300 most important of these structures in the old town of Aksum. (The Mission requested a copy of this document but had not received this by the time of submission of this report).

The Mission recommends that further steps be taken to protect these valuable resources. One avenue of investigation would be for the State Party, through the ARCCH, to investigate the vernacular heritage of the property and select those structures that warrant their declaration as monuments at either regional or national level.

2. Protection of viewscales

Regulation 346/2015 provides for the protection of the visual integrity of the property, but does not protect viewscales to the property, as proposed by the 2013 High Level Reactive Monitoring mission. This remains a point of concern, which can be addressed through the mechanism of declaring them as public viewpoints as proposed by the 2013 mission. An alternative would be to include them in the new Structure Plan, currently being developed by the Aksum Municipality. Should the protection of these important viewscales not be ensured in this new Structure Plan at presentation of its first draft, this will need to be corrected before submission to the World Heritage Centre for review.

3.2.9 Relocation of inhabitants in the Western Palace Sites

The State Party has undertaken a large-scale relocation of inhabitants of the areas located over the Ta'ka Maryam and Edna Mika'el archaeological sites. In the process all structures except for the important vernacular structures present at these sites, have been demolished. This process, recorded by Google Earth aerial surveys, took place between 2009 and early 2013. Archaeological excavations were undertaken at the Ta'ka Maryam site by the

Korean Archaeological Expedition to Aksum in association with Aksum University in 2014. This is a positive development, leading to a bolstering of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. The Edna Mika'el site still requires consolidation.

3.2.10 Conservation of movable heritage: The Collection of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

The Mission did not have the opportunity of visiting the treasury of the EOTC at Aksum granted to the 2013 High Level Reactive Monitoring mission but can report that the collection is still housed in the same structure as in 2013. It is not clear if the conditions of the repository of the collection have been improved since the 2013 Mission, but the EOTC through the Nibure'Id assured the Mission that the collection was well catalogued. The Mission did inspect the outside of the treasury building and could see no indication of alterations to the building which would address the concerns regarding the conditions of the storage of the collection expressed by the 2013 mission, repeated below. In the absence of more information this Mission reiterates the concerns of the 2013 mission and recommends the State Party, in collaboration with the EOTC, to urgently implement the recommendations of the 2013 mission where these have not been addressed yet.

- *Exposure of fragile artefacts to mishandling by untrained persons;*
- *Exposure of liturgical objects to undue heat, inappropriate lighting and in some instances, direct sunlight and ultraviolet light;*
- *Exposure to dust both on the surface, underneath and in the interior of several of the display cases; Exposure of textiles, paper and parchment objects and books placed inside wooden cases, to damp and deteriorating conditions;*
- *Placement of unsuitable artefacts in close proximity or on top of each other (i.e. metal or wood objects on top of textiles.*
- *Hanging of vestments or ceremonial garments on uncovered metal or wooden hangers.*
- *Exposed wires of recently installed overhead and case interiors light fixtures are a potential fire and human safety risk.*
- *Covering of painted images (whether book pages or easel painting or icons), with modern textiles may over time brush or scrape off miniscule but irretrievable portions of the painted surface.*
- *Wrapping of artefacts in inappropriate materials, particularly textiles and books.*
- *Storage of holy books and documents in traditional leather containers without appropriate tissues or wrappings may cause deterioration through the oils in the skin.*
- *Labels are in some instances placed on top off, or stuck onto the surface of some artefacts, including wood, metal or textiles may leave residues, which could hasten the deterioration of the artefacts.*
- *Object marking directly on surface of artefacts with unsuitable or irreversible ink markers (even though for inventory or security).*
- *Lack of appropriate storage containers, shelving or cabinets has led to major overcrowding of objects inside storage cases, on floors or on shelving;*

- *Insect, termite or pest droppings were observed inside containers, on walls and in cases;*
- *Placement of artefacts uncovered and exposed on dirty floors, or against walls.*
- *Mixing furniture, equipment or cleaning fluids or utensils with the historical collections may pose threats to the condition of the artefacts.*
- *Lack of regular maintenance or room and/or case cleaning schedules was evident throughout.*
- *Only the most basic provisions of security against fire and theft could be observed throughout. (2013 mission report, page 36)*

3.3 Conclusion: identification and assessment of issues

Factors addressing the Property:

- **Housing:** The State Party has implemented a programme to reduce the number of houses located in archaeologically sensitive areas of the property. The vernacular housing of Aksum requires legal protection and a programme needs to be created to ensure their long-term conservation coupled with an appropriate usefulness to their inhabitants.
- **Interpretative and visitation facilities:** These have in part been upgraded and are in the process of being further improved.
- **Management systems/ management plan:** This remains an issue, which the State Party is in the process of rectifying during this year, but the Mission did not observe any concrete evidence of the compilation of such a document.
- **Water (rain/water table):** The Mission is of the opinion that this is a historic issue (as reported by Aksum specialist) and should be dealt with as part of the management of the Stelae Field. Any disturbance of the site through digging should be avoided.
- **Other Threats: Structural instability of Stele 3:** This remains an issue. The Stelae Field is a highly sensitive site and contributes substantially to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. Stabilisation of the Stelae Field, including Stela VIII, the Mausoleum and the Tomb of the Brick Arches should be a matter of the highest priority and should by preference be approached in a single integrated project. The State Party has magnanimously awarded funds to this aim. Stabilising the Stelae Field is a very sensitive high-risk operation and requires that the best available expertise be sources internationally to execute this project.

Factors identified by previous Missions (not included above):

- **Insufficient delimitation of this serial property:** This has been addressed, although the maps transmitted to the World Heritage Centre (included in Regulation 346/2015) are not detailed enough. New maps should be prepared which relate the property boundaries to the urban layout of Aksum town and the geography of the property to allow for a direct reading of the extents of the property and buffer zone.
- **Lack of appropriate urban planning and building regulations:** Due to the increasing development pressure in Aksum and the World Heritage property, this has become a high priority issue and the State Party should address the factor with haste.

- **Urban encroachment and inappropriate new developments:** This is a result of the lack of appropriate urban planning and building regulations for the property and buffer zone. A number of inappropriate developments were observed during the Mission.

The Aksum World Heritage property of still faces a number of issues that require attention. These are:

Additional Factors affecting the Property identified

1. **Impact of the ESTDP:** The ESTDP project has benefitted the property, in physical, managerial and destination development terms. Despite not having been submitted for review, the Mission finds that the physical interventions did not adversely affect the qualities that make up the Outstanding Universal Value of the property although that risk certainly existed.
2. **Implementation of Regulation 346/2015:** The publication of the *Aksum World Heritage Reserve Area Designation Council of Ministers Regulation No 346/2015* greatly contributes to the protection of the property and its Outstanding Universal Value. This Regulation requires urgent implementation. A visible threat to the property is that posed by uncontrolled development of the property and the buffer zone. Implementation of an appropriate approved Management Plan Development Controls and Guidelines urgently need to be established.
3. **Training:** The need exists for training of site management staff and other stakeholders, such as the EOTC in Aksum and the Municipality with regards the 1972 Convention, the Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, the *Operational Guidelines* and its reporting mechanisms and the 2011 ICOMOS *Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties*. Training of the Aksum based custodians of the property will, it is hoped, improve the pace and thoroughness of communication to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre under Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*.

4 ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF THE PROPERTY

The Mission had the opportunity to visit the majority of the archaeological sites as well as the EOTC Aksum St Mary of Zion compound accompanied by the Site Manger, the ARCCH Head of World and National Heritage Sites Management Coordinating Office and the UNESCO Addis Ababa office Culture Programme Officer. Additionally the Mission took the time offered by free early mornings to explore the property and buffer zone. This section will first report on sites of an Archaeological nature, followed by the living heritage sites, the Church Compound, and the vernacular architecture of old Aksum.

4.1 Archaeological Sites

Aspects of the state of conservation of the main Stelae Field have been dealt with in Section 3.2.2 above. Additional notes follow:

The Stelae Field is well maintained. The ESTDP programme has improved visitor experience to the property and lead to the removal of electrical high-tension wires that impacted the view towards the site.

At the Tomb of the False Door some site work is required to stabilise retaining walls, improve visitor access, and evicting birds that nest in its covering roof (requested in the 2010 UNESCO/ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission report). The eastern part of the Stelae Field also requires further planning and maintenance: a section of the perimeter wall has collapsed and this is now temporary closed in with branches. Much can be done to improve interpretative signage on this site.

In the long run, the roofing over the entrance to the Tomb of the Brick Arches and the Mausoleum will need to be upgraded. This can form part of a larger landscaping programme, which could see the reduction of the water intensive lawns that the site manager is struggling to maintain due to water limitations. An extant 2009 landscape plan was presented to the mission, but this is deemed to be inappropriate to the site.

4.2 The Tombs of Kaleb and Gebre Meskel

These tombs are well maintained and staffed. The tombs remain roofed with steel roofing structures. One point of concern is the state of the rainwater downpipes, which, in some instances, have been broken and instead of leading water away from the tomb, expel water onto the outer walls of the tomb. This needs to be repaired before the next rain season.

4.3 Ta'ka Maryam and Edna Mika'el

These two sites, cleared as recently as 2011-2013, are well maintained. Some of the few remaining vernacular houses, retained on the sites due to their heritage value, are still inhabited, resulting in their continued maintenance. The temporary roofing structures erected over the excavation sites of at Ta'ka Maryam will need

to be formalised in time to protect the exposed archaeological residue. Should further excavation be planned, a visitor route will need to be planned across these sites to avoid impacting the archaeological strata.

4.4 The Dungur Palace and Gudit Stelae Field

The Dungur Palace is well maintained. It is clear that the site management go to trouble to continuously remove vegetation growth from the walls. Through the ESTDP a pathway has been laid around the perimeter of the ruin. The corrugated iron roof covering the baked brick oven in the south-western quadrant of the ruin requires urgent attention to safeguard this important section of this site. This raised platform also needs to be fenced in to stop visitors from accessing it and thereby negatively impacting on its preservation.

The viewing platform provides for excellent observation of the site and the front handrail could be utilised to position site interpretation, which will enhance visitor experience of the site.

This Gudit Stelae Field is still utilised as agricultural land, with small scale fields located between the stelae. The Mission regards this as a positive continuation of a non-harmful tradition. Access control (as discussed under Section 3.1.5) is proving to be a problem.

4.5 Goba Dura Hill Quarries and the Stone Lion

The Mission had the privilege of visiting the Goba Dura Hill Quarries at sunrise on the morning of 05 February 2016, inspecting both the in-situ Stela and the pouncing lion engraving located there. No negative impact could be identified at the sites and the impression given by the site is that tourists do not often visit it.

4.6 The Tomb of Basen

The Mission did not have the opportunity to visit the Tomb of Basen, except for viewing it from outside its perimeter wall. The site was well maintained and no direct conservation issues were noticed. The setting of the Tomb is undergoing change (Refer to section 3.2.5, above). This needs to be better managed.

4.7 Various stone thrones and general comment

No particular urgent threats were identified to the various other archaeological sites. All sites are well demarcated, walled and kept as clean as is possible in the context of the site. In some cases some of the steel sheeting of the roofs over archaeological sites require minor maintenance.

4.8 The Church Compound

The management of the Church Compound resides under the EOTC and has not been subject to the ESTDP upgrade programme (Refer to Section 3.2.7 of this report).

4.9 The Chapel of the Ark of the Covenant and new Annex Chapel

Recent construction on site has not only included the not yet completed Church Museum but also a new sanctuary to host the Ark of the Covenant, constructed between 2009 and 2013. This was in effect constructed in the excavation pit of the first Church of St Mary. While the 2013 High level Reactive Monitoring mission did not report on the impact of the construction of this structure, this mission, while understanding the choice of the location of this new structure, raises its concern at care taken in preparing this location, especially with regards the impact hereof on the archaeology that may, or may not, have laid below it.

The repairs to the roof of the Chapel of the Ark of the Covenant have been completed and the temporary tarpaulin has been removed. The mosaic tiling on the dome of the Chapel low still awaits repair, which should match the extant mosaic tiling.

4.10 Ruins of the first Church of St Mary of Zion

The Ruins of the first Church of St Mary of Zion require better curating in terms of the clearing of vegetative growth and site interpretation. The site contains valuable artefacts, such as capitals that currently lie unattended on the site. This situation can and should be improved.

4.11 The Second Church of St Mary of Zion

The Second Church of St Mary of Zion was subjected to a maintenance round as part of the ESTDP. This was undertaken under the direction of the architect Fasil Giorghis (refer to annex A.10). This included stabilising domes through the introduction of lateral remedial restraints and façade re-pointing using lime mortar. This maintenance was positive and has improved the state of conservation of this holy and value building, which inextricably forms part of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. Challenges still remain:

- The ancient timber door set in the middle of the northern façade, has dislocated from its post-holes, leaving it hanging skew. This needs repair, not only as this door is now in jeopardy, but also because birds make use of the opening now formed to enter the church and roost inside, soiling the inside of the Church. This situation requires urgent attention. At the very least an interim solution could be to blocking the opening with bundles of wire mesh or cloth as a cheap, temporary and completely-reversible measure.
- There are two instances of figs sprouting on the façade of the building, one on the eastern and one on the northern façade. These need to be removed and the roots poisoned. In the long term all the waterspouts need to be bird-proofed to ensure birds don't roost here and leave rock-fig seeds behind.
- Water runs into the porch of the church under the western-most door on the northern façade. This needs to be rectified, but without altering the door or the outside paving or affecting the façade itself.
- Rising damp still affects the columns in the apse of the church and a solution to this problem needs to be proposed.

The site is littered with valuable artefacts, including capitals dating to the first Church of St Mary of Zion (4th Century). A good inventory of this needs to be made and those under threat (and only those under threat) be brought to safety. Such an inventory will need to be checked periodically as an action built into the Management Plan to safeguard these artefacts. These artefacts all form part of the value of the site and their total removal, to for instance the Church Museum, would sanitise the site and erase a large part of its visible history and antiquity.

4.12 The Third (modern) Church of St Mary of Zion

The most recent church building in the compound, constructed on instruction of former Emperor Haile Selassie, is a large domed structure, consisting for a large part of tiled concrete shells. It was completed in 1957. The joints between the tiles were originally grouted but this has started to fail and lose its ability to repel water. This structure requires urgent maintenance due to these tiled surfaces of the domes failing, leading to tiles coming loose, and more worryingly, water ingress into the concrete shell structure, which in turn is leading to degradation of the concrete. Concurrently the box gutter located on the ring-beam at the base of the main dome is also leaking leading to water ingress and damage to the interior.

The EOTC has been repairing the structure to the best of its abilities, repositioning tiles where these have come loose. This is however not enough. The vaults over the apses have all cracked on along their circumferences, indicating a deeper lying problem where steel reinforcing has started to rust.

The extent of the damage to the structure needs to be ascertained, this repaired and all tiling surfaces need to be repaired and re-grouted with a suitable grout. This requires specialist analysis, planning and execution requiring expert knowledge. The box gutter at the spring point of the dome also requires application of a waterproofing system.

It must be noted that the Nibure'ld of Aksum personally leads the inspection of the building, pointing out these problems and conveying his personal concern for the building.

This building requires short-term attention, but it must be stressed that this project requires appropriate specialist intervention. Should a proposal be developed to stabilise this structure, such a proposal should be submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review under Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*.



Figure 22. Cracks along the circumferences of the vaulted apses of the 1957 Church of St Mary of Zion. (Author)



Figure 23. Recent repairs to the lower dome of the Church of St. Mary of Zion. (Author)



Figure 24. Water damage to the inside of the main dome of the Church of St Mary of Zion (Author)



Figure 25. Water damage to the inside of one of the vaulted apses of the Church of St Mary of Zion (Author)

4.13 The old Aksum vernacular houses

Much of the setting of the property is dependent on the abundant presence of vernacular houses in Aksum. They are however in a poor state of conservation. Under the ESTDP the Gebre Sellasie Vernacular House' underwent restoration. This restoration, through attempting to balance traditional technologies with long term maintenance requirements, lead to an unhappy marriage of traditional technologies, such as thatch, with modern materials, such as corrugated iron. The Mission would like to at this point, referring to the ICOMOS Nara Document on Authenticity, stress that the retention of traditional techniques and knowledge systems is a vital part of retention of authenticity.

This restoration project needs to be carefully studied, and lessons drawn from it to inform the future restoration of the vernacular houses of Aksum. Additionally investment incentives (such as rates rebates) could be developed to promote restoration or appropriate continued or adaptive reuse of these houses.

4.14 Review of the maintenance of the Outstanding Universal Value on the basis of which the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List

The Aksum World Heritage property was inscribed on the basis of Criterion (i) for 'The exquisitely carved monolithic stelae dating from the 3rd and 4th centuries AD are unique masterpieces of human creative genius' and Criterion (iv): 'The urban ensemble of obelisks, royal tombs and churches constitute a major development in the cultural domain reflecting the wealth and power of the Aksumite Civilization of the first millennium AD.'

The Mission has found that the Outstanding Universal Value is being maintained, despite the problems faced by the instability of Stela III and the problems present at the Tomb of the Brick Arches. These however require urgent attention. Failing which, and should the worst happen such as a collapse of a tomb or Stela III, this situation could lead to a great loss of values. The clearance of the sites and continued excavation at Ta'ka Maryam and Edna Mika'el have enhanced the property's OUV and have made it even more evident. The Mission is confident that the State Party is dedicated to the conservation of the property, especially of the archaeological attributes, although sometimes this becomes a single focus and other attributes of the property's OUV are left behind.

The greatest threat to the integrity of the Outstanding Universal Value lies in the lack of control of the setting of the property. The absence of a useful and implemented Management Plan and development controls for the property and the buffer zone exacerbates this threat.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Conclusions

The Aksum World Heritage property, as encompassed in the Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, is facing a number of challenges, including the structural and water problems and the main Stelae Field, but also relating to development and management. The gazetting of Regulation 346/2015 has made a large contribution to safeguarding the property. Reporting in accordance with *Operational Guidelines* Paragraph 172 needs to be improved.

5.2 Conclusions on Progress made in applying the Recommendations of the 2013 Reactive Monitoring mission

The Mission finds that the gazetting of Regulation 346 /2015 has addressed in principle the recommendations of the 2013 Reactive Monitoring mission with regards the protection of critical viewpoints. The 2013 mission recommended the various parties draw up a list of prospective projects for submission to the World Heritage Centre. On enquiry by this Mission, the site management stated that they were not aware of any projects.

Yet during the site visits the Mission became aware of a number of mooted proposals, such as landscaping the Church Compound, demolishing the building at the entrance of the Stelae Field and constructing a new entrance building. These two proposals represent such proposed future developments and they, and any similar developments should be communicated to ...*the World Heritage Centre is notified in timely manner of the scope and extent of these developments, to develop appropriate, place specific tool kits for management of the historic urban landscape – as envisaged in the UNESCO Recommendation for Historical Urban Landscape and to ensure that the future management of the site remain integrated and with the OUV as guiding beacon.* (2013 mission report: 48).

Further to this, the Mission found no evidence to indicate progress has been made with regards the safeguarding of the collection of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church at Aksum or developing a conservation plan therefor. Similarly no evidence of closer cooperation between Church Authorities in charge of this collection and the future Church Museum and the Archaeological Museum has been established yet.

Neither the Aksum Master Plan (Hydea, 2007a), or Archaeological Survey (Hydea, 2007b) have been reviewed to allow of the inclusion of the Church Compound and the Thematic Master Plan (Rich 2010) has not been reviewed through an Heritage Impact Assessment process, as proposed by the 2013 Mission.

The ESTDP came to an end in 2015 and the comment of the Mission is retrospective, but provides forward acting insights. The ESTDP addressed Destination Development, Marketing and Institutional capacity and included community benefits. It was broadly in line with the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme. Some of the activities impacts the setting of the property and should therefore have been communicated to the World Heritage Centre under Paragraphs 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*. It is imperative that the designs of the

ESTDP interventions not be applied to other areas of the property such as the Church Compound as they are unsuited to these contexts.

The delineation of the property and buffer zone has been formalised through the gazetting of Regulation 346/2015. However the maps that accompany the Regulation relate only to latitude and longitude coordinates and provide no topographic or urban detail. Detailed maps need to be developed which clarify the physical boundaries of the property and its buffer zone and these submitted to the World Heritage Centre. The Mission has come to the conclusion that these boundaries were informed by current knowledge of the archaeological sites of Aksum, but do not respond to critical view lines and the continued tangible and intangible presence of the Church in the Aksum World Heritage property. The State Party should communicate this in the required format to the World Heritage Centre.

5.3 Recommendation on the implementation of the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL)

The challenges facing the property are to a large extent the result of developmental pressures. Aksum is thriving fast growing city located in a country that currently counts among the world's fastest growing economies. The Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value has also extended the OUV to include structures such as churches that form part of the living traditions of the EOTC on the property. The property cannot be managed as an archaeological site any more.

The State Party should apply the HUL to the management of the property. This will require that the Management and Structure Plans, currently in process of preparation, be tested against the principles of the HUL and adapted accordingly. Additionally, where opportunity exists in collaboration with the World Heritage Centre, workshops and training exploring the HUL could be rolled out across a number of the World Heritage properties in Ethiopia where heritage fabric forms part of everyday life, such as at Harar Jugol, the Fortified Historic Town and the Rock-hewn Churches of Lalibela World Heritage properties.

5.4 Recommendations for any additional action to be taken by the State Party

This Mission recommends:

Reporting and general management

1. The State Party should improve its reporting to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre under Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines* as well as improving the response time in reporting on requests of the World Heritage Committee and recommended by UNESCO and Advisory Body Monitoring missions;
2. The State Party, with the possible assistance of UNESCO and the Advisory Bodies, should implement training in terms of the 1972 Convention and the *Operational Guidelines* for all members of the new Advisory Committee established under Regulation 346/2015, along with all experts employed by the ARCCH and Agency for Culture and Tourism (Axum Cluster), Tigray Region;

3. The State Party should ensure fast implementation of all the requirements of Regulation 346/2015, including the establishment of a site office of the ARCCH in Aksum;
4. The State Party should ensure the official communication of Regulation 346/2015 to all official and civic stakeholders.
5. The State Party should establish on-site information panels, which illustrate the boundaries and borders as overlay over the street plan of the property to the inhabitants and investors in the city;
6. The EOTC should consider appointing a site manager for the Church Compound, not only to manage the heritage attributes of the compound, but also oversee major pilgrimage events as well as tourism interaction with the site.
7. The State Party should ensure that all large development proposals (including infrastructure upgrades) be subject to assessment through Heritage Impact Assessments in line with the 2011 ICOMOS *Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties*. The HIA for the road infrastructure upgrade from the Main Stela Field to the Tombs of Kaleb and Gerbe Meskel should be transmitted to the World Heritage Centre for information as a matter of standard communication practice.

Thematic Master Plan, Master plan, Management Plan, Structure Plan, Development Guidelines and Regulations

1. The Mission recommends that the State Party clearly communicate to the World Heritage Centre which of the 2007 Hydea Cultural World Bank funded and 2010 Thematic Master Plans are still valid, and those be transmitted to the World Heritage Centre for review where this has not yet taken place. Additionally all of these as well as the new Structure Plan under development need to be reviewed against new Regulation 346/2015. This Mission reiterates the recommendation of the 2013 High Level Reactive Monitoring mission report) that these already extant planning documents be *...put forward for a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) following the ICOMOS Guidance on Impact Assessment in Cultural World Heritage properties (2011) and as augmented by current advances on this topic, and especially within the HUL Approach*.
2. The development of the Management Plan should be fast-tracked and this document be tested the provision of Regulation 346/2015 and the provisions of the HUL and this submitted for review to the World Heritage Centre with greatest urgency. This Management Plan should include the Church Compound as a separate, but interlinked component;
3. The provisions of Regulation 346/2015 should be incorporated into the Structure Plan, currently under development and test the Structure Plan against the Management Plan and submitted for review to the World Heritage Centre;
4. The Regulation 346/2015 Advisory Committee should develop or commission with speed, a set of development regulations, codes and guidelines for development in both the property as in the buffer zone. These guidelines should be released for public consultation, submitted for review to the World Heritage Centre and subsequently published in tandem with workshops explaining them to the inhabitants and investors of the property and buffer zone.

The main Stelae Field

1. The stabilisation of Stela III should receive urgent attention, but not without taking into consideration the concerns of this report; including ensuring the employment of only the best available consultant for this high risk operation; safeguarding the stability of the Tomb of the Brick Arches and other cavities located in its vicinity; investigation the possibility of returning it to its original inclination instead of a vertical position, and the rescue archaeology and subsequent display of relocated material;
2. The problem of the rising water in the Tomb of the Brick Arches should by preference be dealt with in a non-invasive and reasonably simple means though formalising the current temporary solution. The State Party should investigate this option, and if found to be workable, communicate their plans to the World Heritage Centre for review before implementation;
3. The Mausoleum should receive short-term intervention to stabilize it structurally and resolve the problem with rainwater ingress and upgrade the electrical lighting installations inside tombs. Such plans too would need to be transmitted to the World Heritage Centre for review before implementation;
4. Ideally all of the above actions should form part of a single integrated project, led by appropriately qualified and experienced professionals and executed by appropriately qualified and experienced contractors.

General maintenance of archaeological sites

A longer-term repair and replacement project for shelters and roofs over archaeological sites and entrances to tombs should be developed and resourced. Such a programme should include the repair and maintenance of boundary walls and fences. This should include annual maintenance of the shelters and roofs.

The Church Compound

1. A Landscape Master Plan needs to be developed for the whole of the Church Compound by an appropriately qualified and experienced landscape architect and provision made for its medium-term implementation after review by the World Heritage Centre;
2. The new Church of St Mary of Zion should be conserved. Conservation works should be planned in collaboration with the EOTC, under the direction of an appropriately qualified specialist team, including a concrete repair specialist;
3. The minor maintenance work should be undertaken at the Second Church of St Mary of Zion to remove plant growth in the walls and repair unhinged doors and prevent water ingress in the rainy season;
4. The archaeological artefacts that litter the Church Compound should be inventoried if no such inventory exists and this inventory should be checked on a regular basis.

The Church Museum

1. The minor façade modification for the Church Museum should be submitted to the World Heritage Centre with urgency and, on review thereof, the project recommenced as it presently has a temporary, but negative impact on the integrity of the Church Compound and therefore the integrity of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property;

2. In reiteration of the recommendations of the 2013 High Level Reactive Monitoring mission, a clear conservation plan should be composed and implemented to safeguard it while awaiting final transfer to the Church Museum.
3. The reports of extant archaeological remains should be investigated as a matter of urgency. Should any remains be identified, these should be documented and stabilised as per international best practice. The State Party should report to the World Heritage Centre if any remains have been identified or not, and if so, the recording documentation and a record of the stabilisation should be transmitted to the World Heritage Centre.

Corrective measures to inappropriate new development

1. Unapproved inappropriate development in the property and buffer zone should be halted immediately;
2. The State Party, Region and Municipal government agencies should engage the developer of the new seven-story new hotel development on the boundary of the buffer zone to ensure the façade design is modulated to be appropriate to the prominent position of the structure within the visual setting of the property, avoiding excessive use of glass and other reflective materials.

On-site knowledge repository

1. The ARCCCH should investigate amending its terms when granting excavation permits at Aksum to include a provision that all research material published deposited in with the ARCCCH and potentially lodge copies with the new Aksum Foundation Library, (which provides an ideal repository for knowledge about the property, its history and its archaeology), thereby contributing to local knowledge on Aksum.

5.5 Recommendation as to whether the level of threats to the property warrants the property being inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger

Despite the challenges facing the property, the Mission finds that these do not at present pose a threat that would merit the inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger. However if the extant threats and factors were to remain unchecked and reach fruition, a situation would arise which would warrant inscribing the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

These include:

- Collapse of Stelae III;
- Structural failure of the Mausoleum or the Tomb of the Brick Arches or any other tomb;
- Continued absence of an approved and enacted Management Plan;
- Continued unchecked and inappropriate development in the buffer zone.

The State Party has however reiterated its commitment both in terms of gazetting Regulation 346/2015 and the allocation of funds for consolidation of Stela III. Work continues on the Management Plan and Structure Plan

and, if these are implemented correctly, and development pressure turned into a positive force, the property will moving towards a commendable state of conservation and management.

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ANNEXES

A1. Terms of reference

DRAFT

TERMS OF REFERENCE

ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring Mission

Aksum – Ethiopia

1-7 February 2016

Following the request of the World Heritage Committee at its 39th session in Bonn (July 2015) for the State Party of Ethiopia to invite an ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission to Aksum (Decision **39 COM 7B.39**),

The mission shall:

- Visit the World Heritage property together with the national and local authorities responsible for the management of the property in order to assess the overall state of conservation of Aksum;
- Review the progress made on the construction of the Church Museum and in modifying its façade, in line with the recommendations of the 2013 Reactive Monitoring Mission, and consider whether the visual integrity of the World Heritage property and its surroundings have been sustained;
- Review the management mechanisms and plans, and evaluate whether the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project is in line with the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme and addresses infrastructure development, visitor management, and community benefits.
- In view of the submission of a Minor Boundary Modification, assess the progress made by the responsible authorities to define the boundaries of property and its buffer zone and discuss their methodological approach;
- Assess the progress made on the consolidation of the Stela III and the investigation of the causes of the rising water level in the tomb of the Brick Arches;
- Consider progress with the implementation of other remaining recommendations of the 2013 Reactive Monitoring Mission.

The State Party should facilitate necessary field visits to key locations and also kindly arrange all the meetings with the relevant institutions and communities involved in the management of the World Heritage property.

Based on the results of the above-mentioned assessment and discussion with the State Party representatives, the mission will prepare a concise mission report in English on the findings and recommendations of this Monitoring Mission for review by the World Heritage Committee at its 40th session (2016). The report should follow the standard format.

A.2. Previous Decision of the World Heritage Committee

Decision: 39 COM 7B.39

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-15/39.COM/7B,
2. Recalling Decisions **36 COM 7B.41** and **37COM 7B.38**, adopted at its 36th (Saint-Petersburg, 2012), and 37th (Phnom Penh, 2013) sessions respectively,
3. Congratulates the State Party for affirming its commitment to financing the consolidation project for the reinforcement of the foundation of Stela III and the investigation of the causes of the rising water level in the Tomb of the Brick Arches; and urges it to keep the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies updated on:
 1. any changes in the agreed-upon project document for Stela III,
 2. the results of the investigation of the rising water level;
4. Acknowledges the reported progress on the construction of the Church Museum but notes that it remains unclear how the façade will be amended to take account of the 2013 Reactive Monitoring mission's views and therefore, requests the State Party to submit relevant plans and drawings;
5. Also notes the reported development of the Management Plan for Aksum in close collaboration with the Department of Archaeology at Aksum University, and encourages the State Party to remain vigilant that the Plan ensures that critical viewpoints are maintained and tools put in place for monitoring visual impacts;
6. Further notes the development of the Thematic Master Plan and also requests that copies of these documents be submitted to the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies once they are finalized;
7. Reiterates the urgency of finalizing the clarification of the boundaries of the property and its buffer zone, according to the specifications for maps provided by the World Heritage Centre to the State Party, and also reiterates its request to the State Party to submit a minor boundary modification to the World Heritage Centre by **1 February 2016** for examination by the World Heritage Committee;
8. Also encourages the State Party to liaise closely with the World Heritage Centre in the development and implementation of the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project;
9. Further encourages the State Party to continue implementing the recommendations of the 2013 Reactive Monitoring mission, and further requests the State Party to invite an ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission to the property, before the end of 2015, to review the progress made on the above issues and to examine the state of conservation of the property;
10. Requests furthermore the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2016**, an updated report, including a 1-page executive summary, on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 40th session in 2016.

A.3. Itinerary and programme

Program for ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring Mission to Aksum WHS, Ethiopia the 01-07 February 2016

	Time	Activities	Venue
01/02/16	01:30	Arrival of ICOMOS Mission to Ethiopia	Addis Ababa
	9:30	Meeting with the Head of World and National Heritage Sites Management Coordinating Office, ARCCH.	ARCCH Head Office
	10:30	Meeting with the DG of ARCCH.	ARCCH Head Office
	12:30	Meeting with Getu Assefa, UNESCO Addis Ababa office Culture Programme Officer.	UN Addis Ababa Complex
	16:00	Discussion with Archaeologist Mr Tekle Hagos.	Hotel
02/02/16	09:00	Visit to the Trinity Church and EOTC Museum.	Addis Ababa
	14:00	Meeting with the Senior officials of the EOTC.	Addis Ababa
	15:30	Guided tour of the Patriarchs Museum, Patriarchs Palace.	Addis Ababa
	16:30	Visit to the National Museum.	Addis Ababa
03/02/16	05:30	Travel to Aksum.	Aksum
	10:00	Site visit (Main Stela Field) and ESTDP project components in Aksum, including new Site Office.	Aksum WHS
	14:30	Site Visit Continued other part of the WHS.	Aksum WHS
04/02/16	10:00	Visit to the Aksum University.	Aksum
	15:00	Meeting the Church authorities in Aksum with site inspection.	Aksum
05/02/16	06:00	Early morning visit to Eastern Quarries.	Aksum
	09:30	Courtesy visit to the Mayor of Aksum and information gathering visit to the Planning Department.	Aksum
	11:30	Return visit to the Stela Field, tomb of the Brick Arches, mausoleum and Archaeological museum and newly cleared western archaeological sites.	Addis Ababa
	14:00	Return travel Aksum to Addis Ababa.	
06/02/16		Morning free.	Addis Ababa
	15:00	Courtesy visit and debriefing meeting with the State Minister of Culture and Tourism.	Addis Ababa
	16:00	Debriefing meeting with the DG of ARCCH.	ARCCH
		Mission Depart.	

A.4. Composition of mission team

The Mission was undertaken by Nicholas John Clarke (Pr. Arch. SAIA, PIA, GIFA, SACAP, ICOMOS) on behalf of the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

A.5. Maps

NOTE: FOR MAPS OF THE PROPERTY PLEASE REFER TO ANNEX A.7

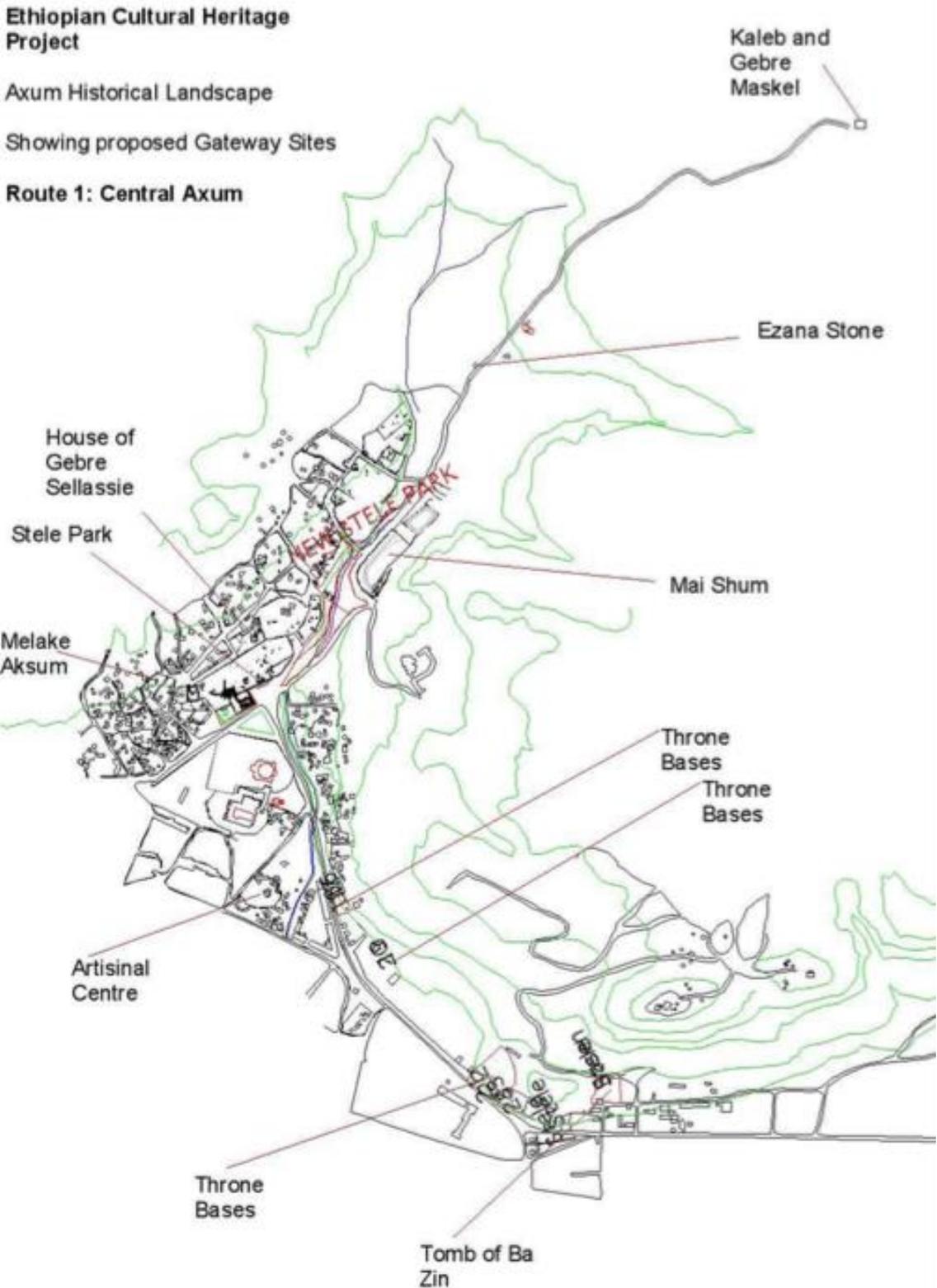
Map 1: Aksum Town with the key historic sites and structures indicated. (Hydea, 2007a)



PRIMARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| 1. Stele Park | 22. Tomb of Etiopis |
| 2. Enda Yesus | 23. Dungur |
| 3. Enda Negas | 24. Gudit Stele Field |
| 4. Northern Stele Field | 25. Beta Giyorgis ruin |
| 5. New Ezania Inscription | 26. Ezana Gardens |
| 6. Tombs of Kaleb and Gabra Masqal | 27. Tomb of Bazem |
| 7. Mai Shum | 28. Throne Bases II |
| 8. Rock Steps | 29. Throne Bases III |
| 9. Rock Tomb | 30. Throne Bases IV |
| 10. Enda Gaber | |
| 11. Yohannes IV Camp | |
| 12. Old Maryam Tsion Cathedral | |
| 13. Throne Bases I and Coronation Throne | |
| 14. Arba'atu Ensessa Church | |
| 15. Enda Mika'el | |
| 16. BIEA ES Site | |
| 17. Enda Sem'on | |
| 18. BIEA IW Site, DAE Building B, DAE Building C | |
| 19. DAE Building A | |
| 20. Ta'akha Maryam | |
| 21. Puglisi's Excavation | |

Map 2: Key tourist attractions in the Old Town of Aksum. (Hydea, 2007a)



Map 3. Aerial Photograph with overlay contextualising key sites in the Property. (Hydea, 2007a)



A.6. Recommendations from the 2013 High Level UNESCO World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS Joint Reactive Monitoring Mission to Aksum

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The mission has been very much impressed by the high commitment, support, and impressive knowledge demonstrated by the Orthodox Church and the National authorities of Ethiopia.

The mission first assessed the context that led to the construction of the new Church Museum. It looked at the location, the justification, its role in promoting communities' values, its relation with the historic area, its design and its overall urban context. The mission also looked at its visual impact, impacts on the integrity of archaeological remains, as well as its impact on the OUV of the property, the planning and legislation that will support its long-term management.

The mission has come to understand the overall role of the Church in protecting the values of Axum and its wider role in country, the historical importance of the Church museum in Axum, the specific location of the museum, the rapid deterioration of the Church treasures and the significance of these elements to the understanding of the property..

Overall the mission team is of the opinion that although the museum construction will have a limited visual impact on the landscape of the Orthodox Church museum compound, it would have a positive impact on the understanding of the overall significance of Axum and will contribute to ensuring the conservation, and accessibility of all the religious treasures that have contributed to understanding the site's values; and that their loss will undoubtedly represent a loss in the understanding the property's OUV.

However, the mission considers that there are a number of recommendations, which need to be made in order to ensure that the current context in which the new museum is being built is improved, with a view to ensuring the sustainable conservation of the WH property.

4.1 Main recommendations:

- **Management plan to be completed including boundaries and management authority:**

The mission team was heartened by the new initiatives at integrated management between the Orthodox Church, the Regional and Local Government, especially around the process of approvals for new developments, as well as around the World Bank funded Thematic plan for Development of Axum.

The parties are encouraged to draw up a list of proposed future developments at the inscribed property and buffer Zones, to ensure that the World Heritage Centre is notified in timely manner of the scope and extent of these developments, to develop appropriate, place specific tool kits for management of the historic urban landscape – as envisaged in the UNESCO Recommendation for Historical Urban Landscape- and to ensure that the future management of the site remain integrated and with the OUV as guiding beacon.

The completed GIS maps delineating the boundaries of the inscribed property and buffer zone need to be integrated in the Master Plans for the property for use by the newly formed integrated management structure – it is recommended that the Boundary plans of the property and buffer zone in the overall GIS based maps of the urban management system be isolated and sent to the World Heritage Centre at the earliest opportunity. It is further recommended that the Department of Archaeology of the Axum University be involved in the preparation of the management plan and in all issues related to tourism management and rescue archaeology.

There is understanding for the fact that core experts were fully occupied in completing the Management Plan for the Lalibela property, and that this caused the Axum management Plan to lag behind - this should however be addressed at the earliest opportunity and it is recommended that assistance be provided to Axum to achieve this.

Regarding management in general, the mission appreciates that there is strongly expressed need for training and capacity building to ensure that these objectives are met in the long term.

The mission recommends that the *Axum Master Plan* (Hydea 2007a) be reviewed in terms of all aspects of heritage management, inclusive of authenticity, integrity, preservation, interpretation and presentation on the one hand, and also the integration of the new Church Museum project into the already developed ideas. Also, the Archaeological Report (Hydea 2007b) for this Master Plan (Hydea 2007a) does not include the Church compound in its investigation.

- **Consolidation of Stele 3**

Taking into account the fact that the technical problem encountered by Stele 3 is the consequence of Stele 2's reinstallation, the mission recommends that the report by Studio Croci & Associati (Italy) be updated. It is essential that the World Heritage Centre and UNESCO Office in Addis Ababa assist the State Party in its fundraising efforts to implement the consolidation project of Stele 3, so as to remove the temporary securing system.

- **Investigations on the causes of the rising water table:**

The mission reiterates the recommendation made by the 2010 WHC/ICOMOS mission that a study by a civil engineer and a hydrologist is carried out to identify the reasons and seek ways to divert drainage away from the chambers. The State Party should submit as a matter of urgency an international assistance request to the World Heritage Centre, so that the civil engineer consultant can be contracted and carry the study as well as provide the needed recommendations.

- **Link between the archaeological museum and Church museum (visitor management and interpretation of Stele field):**

The deficiencies observed by the mission in terms of the execution of core functions of site interpretation, conservation and public education, lead to the conclusion that the role and function of the new Church Museum need to be properly articulated within the management plan for the property. Institutions like this Museum are cornerstones of the communities they serve. Free access to ideas and information is imperative for enjoyment, education, and employment. Empowering communities is one of the World Heritage Committee's strategies, and by creating local institutions such as the new Museum, the Orthodox Church signals its commitment to ensuring the same core values. By increasing access to knowledge and

directing interest to Axum's ancient civilization, it will serve to inspire communal stewardship of Axum's rich heritage and the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage property.

The mission recommends that the Orthodox Church undertake to establish or strengthen exhibition, education, research and promotional policies and programmes that accord with the above goals. While it will be exhibiting its own heritage collections in the new Museum, the institution must necessarily reference the historical context and artistic patrimony of Axum in general, and is thus in a position to also assume the role of a centre of conservation and cultural education. The Synoptic Table indicated below, does provide a schematic image of the symbiotic relationship between the Church, the Axum Museum and the other heritage resources of Historic Axum.

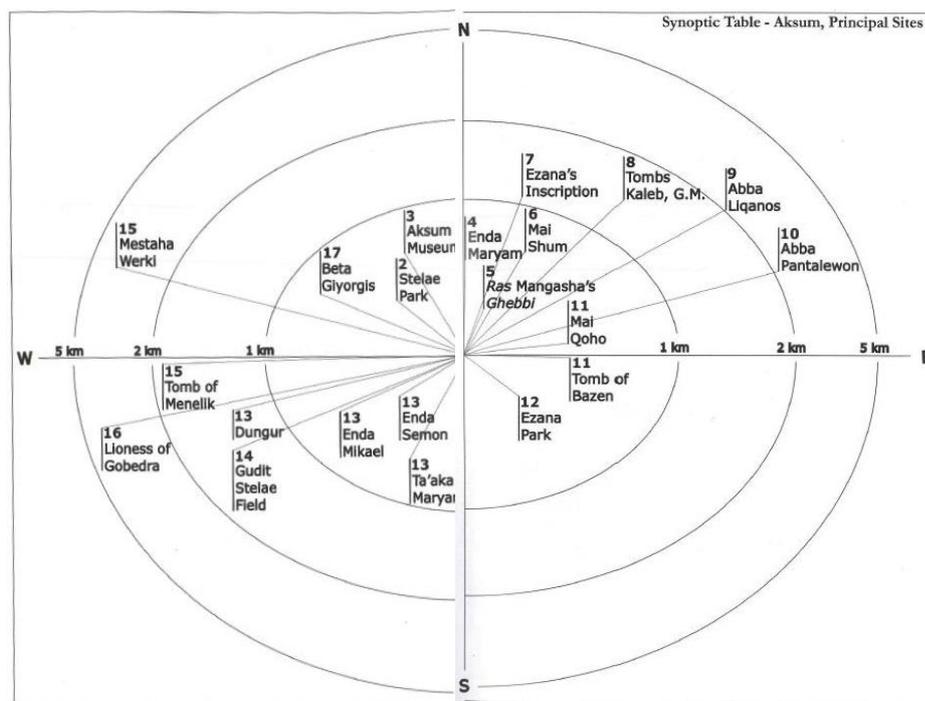


Figure 16. Relationship of the principal sites of Historic Axum (*Guide to Axum and Yeha*, Gian Paolo Chiari, Arada Books, Ethiopia, 2009),)

The process of elucidating and explaining the emergence of early complex societies and states in Ethiopia and indeed the Northern Horn of Africa cannot be demonstrated in one display on its own. However, the new Church Museum can contribute to and complement the scope of public information provided through the exhibition galleries, public programming and publications that it intends to create. It is recommended that collaboration is encouraged and ensured between the Church and its exhibit design team and other national museum and heritage entities, particularly the Archaeological Museum and the National Ethnographic Museum, in order to plan common projects and an integrated approach to illustrating the emergence of the ancient kingdom at Axum, and the role of the Church as a core structure in its expansion and development. With respect to the development of its research and conservation programmes, a key partner that has emerged is the Archaeology Department at Axum University.

In terms of Tourism, the mission recommends that the cultural landscape of 'larger Axum' should be seen as part of the new Museum, that interpretation and presentation of the cultural landscape is required and that the property be made as accessible as possible.

- **Considerations for the draft Retrospective SoOUV that has been submitted by State Party but not yet approved by the World Heritage Committee**

The State Party submitted a Draft Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value as part of the 2012 State of Conservation Report; This Draft Retrospective SoOUV is a large improvement on the original Justification document of 1980 – however, the importance of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the Axumite cultural enclave from the mid 4th Cent AD, and its indivisible role in successive kingdoms has not been considered. The mission is in the view that this should be a supporting element for the OUV's attributes in the property. Not considering this in a way or another could hinder the full understanding of the impacts of the new Orthodox Church Museum by the heritage management fraternity at large, but more importantly also will have a continued future negative impact on the protection and management of all the other attributes of the property. The mission team is in the opinion that the current Draft Retrospective Statement of OUV will have to be revised.. ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre should therefore envisage the best way to approach the State Party and finalize the current review process, so that the World Heritage Committee can adopt the Axum Retrospective Statement of OUV at its 38th session in 2014.

- **Impacts caused by the new Orthodox Church Museum:**

The mission worked with all stakeholders to understand the need for the new Church Museum as part of the goal of the Church to protect the holy treasures and intangible heritage of past millennia of Coptic religion in Ethiopia, to understand the role of this Museum in the total cultural landscape of the World Heritage property and in terms of fuller the understanding, sustenance and transmittal the overall significance of Axum.

The mission additionally assessed the impacts of the new Museum on the attributes supporting the OUV of the World Heritage property, as well as those within the Church compound itself. The mission recommends that:

- The placement, size, form and scale of the new Church Museum is appropriate, the design of the building is responsive to the functional and conservational needs of the Church, and the partially constructed building should be allowed to remain and be completed as intended in the design drawings approved by the Church.
- The overall design of the new Church Museum is semantically appropriate to the history and values of the World Heritage property and need not be revised.
- The overall design needs no mitigation from the perspective of impacts on the main sites of the World Heritage property, but the existing screening of the building from critical viewpoints, currently achieved by means of the treed landscape in the Church compound, must be maintained through provisions in the (future) Management Plan of the WH property.
- The design needs minor mitigation, from the perspective of visual impacts on the current visual quality of the ensemble of the three St Mary Churches, cemetery and Chapel of the Ark of the Covenant.

The mission has come to the conclusion that, if the new Orthodox Church Museum is completed according to the drawings and specifications conveyed to the mission, the OUV of the property would be fully

preserved, and the overall significance enhanced and sustained by the addition. The mission however urges that the World Heritage Centre be provided with a complete set of drawings and specifications for the Orthodox Church Museum, be kept up to date with any changes and be informed when important decisions are taken during the process. The mission recommends that the plan drawing of the Rescue Archaeology at the site of the museum be submitted to the World Heritage Centre.

The mission further recommends that the Orthodox Church temporarily, according to acceptable standards, address the current threats to the collection in the temporary museum, and to move and safeguard valuable treasures from the current deficient treasury under the Chapel of the Ark of the Covenant until the new storage facilities under the Chapel extension become available, or the rectification of the ventilation and rising damp problems in the treasury have been rectified, whichever, and make contact with other international institutions to enhance the protection of the collections, and in terms of aspects like interpretation, presentation and linkage with collections of the archaeological museum, with the other ethnographic and church museums nationally, and internationally, and to look at linkage of related collections and conservation initiatives around the world . The mission would urge that the Orthodox Church be provided with all the necessary advice and contacts to put in place the appropriate collection conservation survey team to give immediate effect to this recommendation.

In terms of the standards to be followed by the future Church Museum, the main areas that it is recommended to focus on in the day-to-day maintenance of the collections, are those of 'collection care' and 'preventive conservation', both according to basic standards of good collection conservation and management as presented in this Report.

The mission recommends that the Architect of the current renewal of the Chapel project also propose solutions for stopping the rising damp in the existing treasury, and that a Mechanical engineer be appointed to analyse the ventilation problems and design and install a suitable ventilation system with conditioned air – however immediate relief is required. For the present the most fragile items need to be placed in safekeeping in drier conditions.

- **General recommendations**

The State Party should also consider the following recommendations:

- Develop a conservation plan for collections and seek support to implement it to ensure long term conservation of the collections (the SP requested advice on how to go about the collections care programme required)
- Develop an interpretation plan of the collections so that the exhibit explain the site's values and the link between history-site-museums to understand the OUV
- Education programming among the youth: work in conjunction with the universities.
- Ensure that the viewscape from the Yeha Hotel Terrace be declared as a public viewpoint with good visitor interpretation of the historic Axum cultural landscape.

4.2 Recommendations for any additional action to be taken by the State Party, including draft recommendations to the World Heritage Committee

Based on the mission's conclusions it is recommended that, apart from continuous scrutiny of the completion of the Museum according to the existing plans as well as the completion of the

recommendations by the State party, no further action is required relating to the Museum, and that therefore no benchmarks have to be set for any actions.

The mission did not have access to the 2013 State of Conservation Report, and subsequently also was not in a position to make detailed comments regarding the State of Conservation of the property. The mission is of the opinion that the State Party Report should submit a SoC Report to the World Heritage Committee at the earliest opportunity – as a strategy the State Party can ask for a new mission to look at the issue of managing the old town, and processes for completing the Management Plan.

4.3 Recommendation as to whether the level of threats to the property warrants the property being placed on or removed of the List of World Heritage in Danger

The mission has come to the conclusion that the impact of the construction of the new church museum, contrary to the World Heritage Committee concern, has a limited visual impact on the property. Therefore there are no major threats to the property, and therefore the conditions to be placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger are not met. If the State Party considers the recommendations made by the mission with regards to the completion of the construction and also the museology, the museum could have a positive impact on the understanding of the property's OUV.