Nisa (Turkmenistan)
No 124

Official name as proposed by the State Party: The Parthian Fortresses of Nisa
Location: Bagyr settlement, Etrap of Rukhabad, Akhal Vilayet

Brief description:
The twin tells of Old and New Nisa indicate the site of one of the earliest and most important cities of the Parthian Empire, which was a major power in the ancient world from the mid 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE. They have been relatively undisturbed for nearly two millennia and conserve the unexcavated remains of a powerful ancient civilization which skilfully combined traditional cultural elements with those from the Hellenistic and Roman west.

Category of property:
In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a serial nomination of two sites.

1. BASIC DATA

Included in the Tentative List: 25 February 1998

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination: None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre: 30 January 2006

Background: This is a new nomination.

Consultations: ICOMOS has consulted International scientific committee for the management of archaeological heritage.


Additional information requested and received from the State Party: ICOMOS sent a letter to the State Party on 18 December 2006, and the State Party provided additional documentation on 12 January 2007.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report: 21 January 2007

2. THE PROPERTY

Description
Archaeological excavations since 1930 in Nisa have revealed richly decorated architecture, illustrative of domestic, state, and religious functions. Two areas are proposed for nomination: the Royal citadel, now known as Old Nisa, where most of the archaeological activity has taken place, and the site of the ancient town, where the majority of the population lived, known today as New Nisa.

Old Nisa
Old Nisa is a 14ha tell surrounded by a high defensive earth rampart with more than 40 rectangular towers. Its contours take the shape of an irregular pentagon with the corners flanked by powerful bastions.

The entire site was built on a natural hill, the top of which had been levelled and flattened with layers of earth (pakhsa). The number and location of the gates have not yet been precisely determined. The most probable location of the main (perhaps the only) entrance was at the centre of the western part of the surrounding wall. Inside the fortress, the buildings are distributed into two architectural complexes: the Northern and the Central.

The Northern Complex includes the so-called Large Square building in which rooms with different functions have been identified: the royal treasury, the wine vault in the northern part, and auxiliary premises in the south-eastern parts. This is where many famous art works of Old Nisa (the Rodogoune marble statue, the Goddess of Nisa marble statue, ivory rhytons, fragments of royal thrones, and 2,700 ostraka of ceramic vessels representing the archives of Parthian house-keeping documents, etc.) were discovered.

In the Central Complex four interrelated buildings have been distinguished:
- the Building with the Square Hall;
- the Building with the Round Hall;
- the Tower-like Building; and
- the North-Eastern Building;
- the Columned Hall.

Paved streets and two water pools have been discovered between those two groups of buildings. Some auxiliary structures have also been revealed, located along the eastern and southern sides of the fortress.

The Building with the Square Hall is the most important building of the Central Complex with an area of c. 1,000m². The walls in some sections are 4-5m thick. The entire space is divided into sub-square halls measuring up to 400m² in area. The building was rebuilt many times, with certain periods characterized by highly decorated features. The main facade, for example, was once decorated with eight openings. Besides this main hall, the building included a few auxiliary chambers. Corridors with floors and the bases of the walls covered with a special red coating and some rooms painted in white have been discovered.

The North-Eastern Building is located to the north-east of the Square Hall Building. It is composed of remains of two decorated yards and several rooms which probably had domestic uses. This building is sometimes considered as a palace of the Arsacid dynasty.

The Tower-like Building is a massive square pedestal (about 20m x 20m) encircled by two rows of dark
corridors, poorly lit by narrow windows. The upper parts of the construction are remarkably well conserved, with traces of a rich architectural decor and wall paintings featuring battle scenes. The south-eastern and north-eastern corners of the building take the shape of jutting out towers, one of which has recently been reconstructed to house a small museum of Parthian paintings and architectural elements.

The Building with the Round Hall is a square building with a massive central round hall inside, 17m in diameter, and plastered with white ghanch (a local alabaster). A round gallery decorated with brick semi-columns surrounds this hall. The cult-related function of this building is clearly recognizable. However, its specific role as a temple, a mausoleum, or a heroon remains to be established.

The inner part of the monumental Columned Hall consists of a large rectangular hall with four columns in the centre. Eight rooms, of different sizes, connect the hall with the northern, western, and eastern sides. The specific function of the building and the adjacent buildings has not yet been established, although its ceremonial character seems clear.

New Nisa

The fortress of New Nisa rises 1.5km north-west of Old Nisa. The 25ha tell is surrounded by powerful walls, up to 9m high on all sides, with two entrances, one from Bagyr settlement and the other from the north-west.

Several periods of occupation can be distinguished. The earliest remains date from the Mesolithic period, but it was during the Parthian period that the city was divided into the two parts that are clearly visible today: the upper one (ark) and a lower one (shakhristan).

The general layout of the hill and the traces of buildings are representative of a densely populated town. The Parthian structures have been identified as remains of the fortress, burial houses, or store-houses.

Unlike Old Nisa, life continued for many centuries after the fall of the Arsacid Empire in this fortress. The development of the town lasted throughout the Middle Ages, with a decline during the 3rd and 4th centuries CE. Old Nisa was annexed by the Arabian Caliphate in 651 and enjoyed a period of great prosperity from the 9th to the 12th centuries. However, Nisa, like many other important towns of Central Asia, underwent siege and destruction by the Mongols.

History and development

Traces of human activity dating back to the 4th-2nd millennia BCE show that long before the beginning of the Parthian Empire the area of Nisa was already colonized by sedentary populations. It is believed that there was a large settlement there as early as the 1st millennium BCE.

Nisa underwent a major development in the mid 3rd century BCE, when impressive buildings were erected by the Parthians, who decided to build a royal residence, probably the first of the Parthian dynasty.

The name of the site, Mithradatkert, and an indication of the date of its foundation are known from an inscription written on one of the 2,700 administrative ceramics (ostraka) found at Nisa. Mithradatkert means ‘the fortress of Mithridat,’ referring to King Mithradat I (174-138 BCE).

In addition, some ancient sources, such as Isidorus of Kharaq, mention the city of Parthaunisa as an administrative and economic centre for the Arsacid dynasty. From their royal residence (Old Nisa) and the adjacent city (New Nisa), the Arsacid dynasty carried out huge conquests over a very large territory stretching from the Indus to the Euphrates. Nisa became a major city located in a strategic point, at the crossroads of many cultures – from Persia, Greece, and Central Asia.

At the local level, the centuries BCE saw the golden age of the fortresses, with the early development stages of its monumental buildings (Old Nisa) and the expansion of its economy. This period seems to have continued for a long time, until the first centuries CE.

In 224 CE, however, the Parthian kingdom collapsed. Ardashir, the Parthian governor-general in Persia at the beginning of the Sassanid dynasty, checked Parthian expansion and conquered their cities and territories. Destruction and diminished populations in Nisa led to its partial abandonment, although it continued to be an important centre until the Islamic period (12th-14th century CE).

3. OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE, INTEGRITY AND AUTHENTICITY

Integrity and Authenticity

The property having been abandoned eighteen centuries ago, all that remains of the palace and its impressive ramparts is a tell surrounded by a high shapeless earthen wall. The two tells do not in any sense represent the original appearance of the Parthian capital, but these are authentic ruins that have not been altered by any human intervention. Their present appearance is due solely to natural erosion.

The integrity and authenticity of the property, and also of the surrounding landscape, in terms of the size of the two tells and the sitting of the capital at the foot of the Kopet-Dag mountains, are unquestionable. This area has remained deserted up to the present day, since the local inhabitants established a new settlement in Bagyr.

The remains revealed by the first archaeological excavations, which have been left unprotected for decades, have suffered from erosion. Only recently have measures been taken to conserve archaeological remains as soon as they are excavated. At Old Nisa, it is considered that half of the site is still untouched, and so these remains are protected by the tell. In New Nisa, archaeological work has been confined to small-scale trenches, with the result that the great majority of the archaeological features survive underground, protected naturally from any environmental and human threats.

ICOMOS considers the integrity and authenticity of the property to be extremely high. It considers, however, that some of the interventions made at Old Nisa for the purposes of access and interpretation, such as the concrete stairs leading to the entrance and the concrete platform to which they lead, have an adverse impact on the property,
Comparative analysis

Many relics from the Parthian period have been discovered, scattered over the vast territory of the ancient empire. Some of these, such as Hatra and Ashur (Iraq) or Dura-Europos (Syria), are very famous and to some extent they are comparable with Nisa. What makes Old Nisa especially significant is the fact that it was built at the beginning of the Parthian Empire and it was destroyed when Parthia lost its political power.

The importance of Old Nisa is also due to the fact that it was a sacred city of the Parthian kings. The exceptional variety of its architectural features (in both layout and decoration) testifies to the coexistence of different cultural traditions – for example, the royal cult of the Seleucids (Greco-Macedonians) alongside other typically Iranian or autonomous cultural forms.

Aerial photographs and satellite images reveal the existence of an organized network of fortified sites in the southern part of Turkmenistan (from the Caspian Sea to the Murgab valley), along what some centuries later became part of the Silk Roads network. Many Parthian sites show structures similar to Nisa, characterized by a high man-made platform strengthened by fortified curtain wall with projecting towers: these structures are almost all built of mud bricks. However, none can compete with Nisa, whether in terms of setting or in terms of size and finds. Nisa is the best known and best documented site enclosed by curtain walls. Merv must have been an important traffic node in Parthian times and subsequently, but the Parthian levels there have never investigated scientifically. Considering the general lack of extensive excavations in these regions, above all for the late periods, Nisa was one of the main sites of the entire Parthian Empire, its royal foundation reflected in the architecture and art of New and Old Nisa.

The construction methods and layout of Old Nisa reflect traditional principles. It was built on an artificial platform obtained by levelling a natural hill which was cut into an irregular pentagonal shape, clearly delineated by powerful defensive walls. Some striking examples of high man-made platforms of this kind are to be found at Yaz Depe in Margiana or the ancient Bactrian constructions of Kuchuk Depe and Tililya Depe. However, unlike these monuments, Old Nisa demonstrates the further evolution of this building technique with the erection on this form of high platform for an entire city.

Other specific developments can be seen in the architecture of Nisa. In Mesopotamia, the buildings of Khatra and Ashur (Iraq), for example, were roofed by an evolved composition of spacious vaulted iwans whereas in Nisa a different building technique using ceiling beams was used to cover large spaces. To embellish the resulting monumental volumes, high-relief images on orthostats were widely used in Dura Europos, but in Nisa the same types of room were decorated with painted sculptures made of baked clay.
In addition, the two impressive historical hills enclosed by defensive ramparts are still visible independently, and the ancient cultural landscape defined by the massive piedmont of the Kopet-Dag has not changed fundamentally since the Parthian period.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed:

The property is nominated on the basis of criteria ii, iii, and v.

Criterion ii: According to the State Party, Nisa is situated at the crossroads of important commercial and strategic axes. The architectural features, the ornamentation, and the objects found in Old Nisa reflect the complex interpenetration of cultures on this region (Greek and Roman influence). The visible remains at Old and New Nisa testify to monumental architecture developed by a civilization open to the rich cultural exchanges of the time and in the region.

Archaeological researches carried out at Nisa since the 1930s have revealed the important events which took place there, and prove how strongly Nisa influenced the history and the culture of Central Asia. The Parthian Empire is known as a brilliant rival of Rome which prevented the expansion of the Roman Empire to the east.

ICOMOS considers that the site of Nisa is an exceptional example of interactions of cultural influences from central Asia and from the Mediterranean world.

Criterion iii: The Parthian Empire came to an end in 224 CE, when Artaban V, the last of the Parthian Kings, was defeated and killed, and Old Nisa is an exceptional testimony to this lost civilization. The Parthian kings began their conquests at Nisa and turned small Parthia into a huge empire of the ancient world stretching from the Indus to the Euphrates.

Craftsmen combined the best features of ancient local traditions and of Hellenistic and Roman art. The architectural remains and the decorative patterns at Nisa bear witness to this lost culture. Nisa is not the unique testimony to, but it is a major symbol of, this civilization which has disappeared.

ICOMOS recognizes the significance of Nisa within the overall corpus of monuments of the Parthian Empire, which was one of the most powerful and influential civilizations of the ancient world.

Criterion v: The remodelling of two hills to create artificial levelled platforms and the construction of the two citadels with their massive defensive walls required the displacement and transportation of huge quantities of soil. Both fortresses are located at the foot of Kopet-Dag mountains, on the fertile plain which extends from the mountains in the south to the Karakum desert in the north. The town is separated from the royal citadel, and the two hills can be seen from one another. In this desert region, Nisa is an example of good land organization at the foot of the mountain, where water could be channelled to produce food for the region.

ICOMOS considers that, whilst the siting and land organization of Nisa are of importance, their significance is not such as to justify the application of criterion v.

ICOMOS does not consider that this criterion is justified.

ICOMOS considers that the Outstanding Universal Value has been demonstrated and that the nominated property meets criteria ii and iii.

4. FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROPERTY

The main factor affecting the property is the humidity, which gradually erodes all the exposed parts. The ramparts are less affected than the recently exposed archaeological remains, which are very fragile. The following are the major threats to this site (in order of priority):

- architectural excavations without conservation;
- lack of financial resources;
- inadequate planning;
- rain;
- development pressure;
- seismic activities.

Archaeological excavations without conservation

The archaeological study of Old Nisa began in 1930 and has continued until the present day. Despite more than 70 years of study, however, Old Nisa has not received the required protection and conservation actions. Whilst these archaeological studies have increased knowledge of Parthian art and architecture, they have caused considerable damage to buried structures, which have been left open without protection. It is estimated that circa 40% of the buried structures have been exposed at Old Nisa.

All the architectural elements are extremely fragile and erode quickly once exposed to rain. In addition, each new excavation trench traps water during the wet winter months, speeding up erosion processes. The chaotic topography of the excavated area is a major cause of deterioration as proper drainage of rainwater is virtually impossible.

The conservation of archaeological sites is a new concept in Tajikistan. Archaeologists have not thought it a priority to conserve the sites that they have excavated, because they lack the required technical knowledge, have limited financial resources, and often have no time left for conservation after their excavation campaigns.

Today, the National Department for the Protection, Study and Restoration of the Historical and Cultural Monuments of Turkmenistan (DPM) makes strenuous efforts to ensure that conservation is taken seriously into consideration by archaeological expeditions. However, DPM is little respected and it lacks the equipment and financial support to implement urgent conservation measures.

Lack of financial resources
Conservation activities are limited, and the site is poorly equipped because of lack of funds. The international assistance programmes (Tirum University, US Ambassador’s Fund, UNESCO Tehran) have slightly improved the situation, but conservation cannot rely on international assistance alone, and new sources of funds at the local level need to be found.

Inadequate planning

Scientific research has been continuous for more than 70 years, but planning to identify and prioritize the main problems has always been lacking. Priority has always been given to excavation. However, conservation activities are gradually developing: the park staff, with the assistance of the DPM staff in Ashgabat, has already done some conservation work. This has, however, not addressed some of the most urgent remedial works that are necessary to prevent rapid deterioration, such as drainage problems.

Environmental pressure

The unpredictable weather (rain and wind erosion) of the region severely affects Old Nisa, as shown by the eroded surfaces and gullies in the earthen walls and the excavated structures, none of which is protected by a shelter. Sacrificial layers of earth and straw are regularly applied as a preventive conservation measure in spring and autumn, especially after continuous rains. Winter is the most destructive period because the frost increases the negative impact of humidity.

Seismic activity

The property is located in an active seismic zone (Ashgabat was completely destroyed in 1948). In the event of a violent earthquake, only the excavated areas would be damaged, but the massive earthen ramparts would not be affected.

The seismic activity for the zone where the sites are located is moderate, and this should be taken into account when preparing the projects of partial restoration and museum presentation. However, the low height of preserved walls (no more than 5m), their considerable thickness (2-3m), and the plasticity of the building materials and mortar do not put seismic impact among the most dangerous factors threatening the property.

Development pressures (encroachment, adaptation, agriculture, mining)

The two fortresses are still protected against encroachment, despite the close proximity of the town of Bagyr, which surrounds them. The property is protected naturally by the topography of the land, since the steep slopes of the ramparts make it very difficult to encroach on them. It is also legally protected, and building new houses within the limits of the Nisa State Historical and Cultural Park (NSHCP) is forbidden. Furthermore, the town development plans show clearly that Bagyr will expand only on the eastern side, towards Ashgabat, and not around the ramparts. The two fortresses are incorporated in the town development plan, which includes the future creation of municipal and tourist infrastructures related to the two fortresses (roads, large dwelling and administrative buildings, hotel complex, restaurant, museum, etc). This will be done in accordance with the Law of Turkmenistan On the protection of the historical and cultural monuments, which guarantees the preservation of monuments and provides restrictions on the use of the buffer zone. Building new houses inside the buffer zone is not permitted, and it is planned to gradually reduce the density of buildings around the nominated territories.

Visitor/tourism pressures

Visitors represent an adverse factor when they are not monitored by the guides. The excursion routes are not well defined, and many unorganized groups of visitors climb on the fragile wall remains. More should be done to channel the flow of visitors in well defined paths.

Number of inhabitants within the property and the buffer zone

There are no houses, administrative buildings, or industrial plants on the territory of the NSHCP, and thus within the nominated territories; the only houses are located within the buffer zone. The exact number of people living in the buffer zone does not exceed 2,000 inhabitants. The General Development Plan for Bagyr does not integrate any new buildings in the buffer zone.

The relationships between the Nisa conservation team and the population living in the buffer zone are in most cases satisfactory. Regular monitoring is, however, necessary to prevent the development of illegal refuse dumps within the buffer zone. Other threats from the neighbouring community include schoolchildren jumping over the walls or throwing stones and unauthorized grazing of cattle.

5. PROTECTION, CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The boundaries of the nominated property are logical, comprising the two tells of Old and New Nisa and a band 50-100m wide around the foot of each. The proposed buffer zone, covering 400ha, links the two tells and stresses their integrity.

Ownership

The nominated zones are the property of the Turkmenistan Ministry of Culture and TV and Radio Broadcasting. The Hakimlik (regional council) of Rukhabad Etrap is the owner of the buffer zone.
Protection

Legal protection

The site is gazetted as one of the 1,300 historical and cultural monuments of Turkmenistan. In addition, Nisa is one of the eight State Historical and Cultural Parks (SHCP) that have been created to protect the most significant sites in Turkmenistan.

The SHCP Nisa was originally established by the Council of Ministers of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic by Decree No. 111 dated 3 March 1980. The precise limits of the SHCP Nisa are given in the Policy for the State Historical and Cultural Park Nisa (1980) and Decree No. 202 of the Council of Ministers of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic dated 4 May 1982.

The Policy rules that it is forbidden on the territory of the Park:
- to carry out any form of economic activity;
- to build new constructions;
- to use cultural assets for domestic purposes;
- to lay cables, pipelines, and electric or other lines which are not necessary for the requirements of the Park;
- to permit dwelling by private individuals, including park staff;
- to guide tourists, carry out archaeological excavation, and all other scientific and educational activities by non-authorized persons, organizations, or enterprises, without the permission of the DPM and the Park administration.

In addition to this policy, Resolution of the Executive Committee of the Ashgabat Regional Council of the People’s Deputies No. 1/61 dated 25 January 1989 defines the buffer zones with increased control over the lands directly surrounding the protected sites. The implementation of these laws is ensured by on-site Park staff and by regional authorities (police, chiefs of daykhan birleshiks).

Means of implementing protective measures

The main actions taken by the Government to protect, conserve, and present the property are:
- appointment of staff (21 permanent staff ensure the protection and the basic maintenance of the site);
- provision of facilities and equipment to carry out conservation work;
- creation of a basic workshop for the production of bricks and stacking of materials, and of a basic office block.

In case of breaches of the law listed above, the Park administration is empowered to liaise with the competent authorities for the immediate punishment of offenders. The staff of the Park, a highly protected monument, has the right to impose fines for the breaches of the policy and rules of the historic and cultural monuments.

Existing plans related to municipality and region in which the proposed property is located

The property comes within the provisions of the Bagyr town development plan. According to this plan, the town will develop on its eastern side, towards Ashgabat, and not around the ramparts of Nisa. The two fortresses are therefore politically protected. The Bagyr development plan also suggests developing specific equipments in relation with the two fortresses, such as tourist facilities and access roads.

ICOMOS considers that the protective measures for the property are adequate.

Conservation

Present state of conservation

Viewed in an archaeological perspective, the site is well preserved. However, it has been weakened not only by the passage of time, but also from insufficiently planned studies, and recent international excavations have accelerated the decay of the remaining architectural features. Although it is legally compulsory for all archaeological teams to conserve any site they excavate in Turkmenistan, they often do not consider conservation as a priority or simply do not allocate time for it during their short field campaigns. On their side, the Turkmen authorities do not have the necessary financial means to undertake all the necessary post-excavation conservation work.

The situation is, however, gradually changing. Remedial work has begun under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, which has appointed qualified staff on site and a small annual operating budget. The Italian archaeological team of Turin is also trying to fulfil its obligations in terms of conservation, and is providing some funding (circa 1,000 US$ annually) to the DPM to undertake conservation work.

In addition, the UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office and CRATerre-ENSAG provided training and an equipped laboratory in 2005 to test the soils used for conservation activities (brick moulding, mortars, and plasters). In 2002, the American Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation granted US$ 9400 to implement a project for the conservation and reconstruction of Nisa wall-paintings, and the organization of the site museum of Nisa art.

Nonetheless, serious efforts are still needed to set up an efficient preventive maintenance scheme that will ensure the survival of recently excavated parts of the site. Funds and the necessary equipment are still lacking.

The nomination process has given the opportunity for these issues to be discussed with the concerned parties. The two archaeological teams operating on the property are fully conscious of the threat; they are ready to participate more in the conservation effort and to adhere to international conservation rules and standards.
There is not at present a defined conservation plan. This should be produced and incorporated into the management plan as a priority.

Documentation

At the present time the documentation relating to past excavation, research, and conservation is not available at one place, on the site itself, but it is scattered among the foreign institutions that have carried out archaeological investigations in Nisa. There is an urgent need to establish a comprehensive and readily accessible documentation system for Nisa, so as to facilitate further conservation and research projects. As a condition of receiving permits to carry out survey and excavation projects, foreign archaeological expeditions should be required to deposit copies (both paper and digital) of all resulting documentation (drawings, including stratigraphic sections and plans, photographs, etc) with the DPM archive.

ICOMOS considers that additional sources of funding should be sought by the State Party to support a revised and strengthened conservation programme. Excavation teams, whether national or foreign, should not be permitted to carry out any further investigations unless these are accompanied by an approved work plan which includes post-excavation conservation, the latter to be funded by the excavation team. It is also important that a comprehensive documentation system should be set up without delay.

Management

The current procedure for nomination to the World Heritage List has improved the ability of the DPM to defend their position and oblige all stakeholders to work under the guidance of a common Management Plan. The main goal of the management plan is to reach better balance between archaeology and conservation, to avoid the complete destruction of the property.

Management is exercised at the site level by the SHCP Nisa office in Bagyr-Ashgabat, and at the national level by the DPM in Ashgabat. NSHCP is responsible for the everyday maintenance of the site, the overall state of conservation, and tourism management. The Department of Restoration and Design of DPM supervises conservation work on the site.

The Park Director prepares an annual action plan which is submitted to the DPM for approval. These annual plans are, however, not adequate for reaching long-term objectives.

Management plans, including visitor management and presentation

There was no broad management plan with long-term views defined for this site when the nomination dossier was prepared, and this was recognized as a problem in relation to the nomination of Nisa. A five-year plan has therefore been formulated for 2006-2010, in order to ensure a better balance between the different activities (e.g. archaeology vis-à-vis conservation) and to combine and harmonize all the existing documents and strategies relating to the site.

The Plan begins by summarizing all existing management documents and policies in order to identify earlier failures to balance the sometimes conflicting needs of planning and implementation, of excavation and conservation. In addition to local management agencies, foreign consultants and archaeological teams participated in the preparation of the plan. Based on SWOT analysis, the Plan defines key issues to be addressed in meeting management objectives and achieving improvements in the overall management of the property.

The following objectives have been agreed upon for this five-year plan:

**Protection:**
- protect the Park lands and control site uses;
- control visitors.

**Conservation and management:**
- improve the management system;
- improve the performances of the technical staff and conserve the excavated sections;
- slow down the processes of deterioration.

**Promotion and education:**
- promote Turkmen history and culture, including the archaeological and architectural monuments of Nisa;
- contribute to archaeological research on the monuments;
- store, conserve, and exhibit finds and scientific collections from the Park’s territory.

This management plan is intended to serve as a tool to ensure:
- partnership and optimal contribution by all parties in reaching the objectives of the plan;
- coherence of all activities developed at the site;
- optimum use of the available resources;
- proper understanding by all stakeholders, and more particularly by the local community, visitors, and the archaeological teams, of the factors threatening the site;
- continuity in the case of changes in management.

**Involvement of local communities**

The public authorities of Ashgabat and the local community of Bagyr are represented on the Scientific Committee.
Resources, including staffing levels, expertise and training

The NSHCP organizational structure consists of the office of the Director, and the Departments for Monument Research, Finance, and Management; the permanent staff numbers 21. NSHCP staff is also responsible for monitoring protected sites in several etraps in Akhal Vilayet (province). The NSHCP has a Scientific Committee, the members of which are representatives of scientific institutions, public bodies, and independent experts; the role of the Committee is advisory, not executive.

ICOMOS considers that the management system for the property, although recently set up in order to fulfil the requirements of the World Heritage Committee, is well designed. More attention needs to be paid to the preparation of subsidiary plans for conservation, interpretation, and visitor management. It proposes that the State Party should be requested to provide annual reports to the Committee on the progress of the implementation of the management plan for the next three years.

6. MONITORING

The DPM, under the authority of the Ministry of Culture, supervises and controls all activities taking place in Nisa. The Director of the Park must seek permission from the DPM to carry out any form of works, and nothing can be done without their approval. Similarly, archaeological missions are not allowed to excavate without the permission of the DPM. The site being close to Ashgabat, all actions carried out on the site must be conducted in the presence of a DPM representative. Monitoring is therefore effectively continuous, since the site can quickly be reached from Ashgabat.

In addition to this constant presence of the National Director of DPM and his colleagues heading the various departments in Ashgabat, the site is also systematically monitored by the Park staff and an official form describing the state of conservation of the site, known as a ‘passport’, is regularly completed.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring measures for the property are adequate.

7. CONCLUSIONS

ICOMOS considers that

• the state of conservation of the site is in general satisfactory;
• the management mechanisms are improving and meet requirements of the World Heritage Committee;
• the site has high level of authenticity;
• the integrity of the site is satisfactory; and
• its legal protection is ensured.

ICOMOS recommends that The Parthian Fortresses of Nisa, Turkmenistan, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria ii and iii:

Criterion ii: Nisa is situated at the crossroads of important commercial and strategic axes. The archaeological remains vividly illustrate the significant interaction of cultural influences from central Asia and from the Mediterranean world.

Criterion iii: The Parthian Empire was one of the most powerful and influential civilizations of the ancient world, and a brilliant rival of Rome which prevented the expansion of the Roman Empire to the east. Nisa, the capital of the Parthian Empire, is the outstanding symbol of the significance of this imperial power.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Nisa was the capital of the Parthian Empire, which dominated this region of central Asia from the mid 3rd century BCE to the early 3rd century CE. As such it formed a barrier to Roman expansion, whilst at the same time serving as an important communications and trading centre, at the crossroads of north-south and east-west routes. Its political and economic power is well illustrated by the surviving remains, which underline the interaction between central Asian and Mediterranean cultures.

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following points:

• replacement, using more appropriate materials and a more sympathetic design, of the present access stairs and viewing platform at Old Nisa; improvement of the facilities for visitors, and more particularly the viewing platforms;
• the need to pay attention in future planning to the conservation of excavated sites, the allocation of financial resources, and the implementation of its Management Plan. This should include a work plan covering the coordinated maintenance, monitoring, and presentation of both sites;
• requiring all excavation proposals as a condition for granting permits to include allowances, in terms of time and funding, for the conservation of excavated structures;
• the creation on site of a comprehensive documentation programme and an accessible database;
• the formulation of plans for conservation, interpretation, and visitor management as subsidiary elements of the overall Management Plan;
• extension of the buffer zone to the south-east of both tells, to include the foot of the Kopet-Dag mountain, and that to the east of New Nisa, which should be increased from 200m to at least 500m.
Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property
General view of the Southern Complex

Excavated corridor in the Southern Complex