
Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars region (Islamic Republic of Iran) No 1568

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars region

Location

Firuzabad, Kazerun and Sarvestan
Fars Province
Islamic Republic of Iran

Brief description

This serial nomination proposes 8 selected archaeological site components in three geographical area contexts at Firuzabad, Bishapur and Sarvestan, all located in the south-eastern Fars Province of Iran. These fortification structures, palaces, reliefs and city plans date back to the earliest and latest moments of the Sassanian Empire, which stretched across the region from 224 to 658 CE. The sites include the founder of the dynasty, Ardashir Papakan's, military headquarters and first capital, a city and architectural structures of his successor, the ruler Shapur I, as well as a monument testifying to the transition between the Sassanid and Islamic eras constructed around the end of the dynasty in the 7th and 8th century.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a serial property of 8 *sites*.

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

The Firuzabad site components were included as an individual archaeological site on 20 May 1997. The so-called ensemble of Historical Sassanian Cities in Fars Province was included on 9 August 2007.

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre

30 January 2017

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management and several independent experts.

Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 25 to 30 September 2017.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent by ICOMOS to the State Party on 28 September 2017 requesting further clarification and additional information on the serial approach and serial composition of the property, the protection status of the buffer zones, disaster preparedness and risk management, the composition and cooperation of the management authority, and specifications on the monitoring system. A response was received from the State Party on 3 November 2017.

On 22 December 2017, ICOMOS sent an interim report to the State Party, which requested the State Party to refocus the context of justifying the Outstanding Universal Value on the commencement and early expansion period of the Sassanian Empire, to consequently withdraw the Sarvestan Monument from the serial composition, and to realign the boundaries of the remaining site components to encompass the landscape features surrounding the archaeological testimonies. The State Party responded on 26 February 2018. All responses received throughout the evaluation process are incorporated into the relevant sections below.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

14 March 2018

2 The property

Description

The serial nomination of the Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars region presents eight archaeological sites in three geographical contexts of former Sassanian cities. The overall area nominated encompasses 639 hectares which divide into 392 hectares in the five Firuzabad components, 222 hectares in the two Bishapur components and, finally, 25 hectares in the Sarvestan component.

Firuzabad

The Firuzabad group is located approximately 110 km south of Shiraz and contains 5 individual sites. These comprise the Sassanid archaeological remains of the Tang-i Ab valley, a valley of strategic importance, and include the sites of Qaleh Dokhtar, the Ardashir Investiture Relief, the Victory Relief of Ardashir I, Ardashir Khurreh (the Middle-Persian name of Firuzabad) and Ardashir Palace.

Qaleh Dokhtar, at the northern entrance of the valley, was selected as a stronghold by Ardashir Papakan (who reigned 224-243 CE) when preparing his revolt against the Parthian King. This site component presents the remains of a large, 71 hectares, fortress, which included a monumental palace, built by Ardashir before his victory over the Parthians in 224 CE. The inner fortress was developed as a palace-like residential unit, which was surrounded by open spaces, auxiliary structures and the

outer fortification walls. The fortress is arranged over three levels: a lower access level with an entrance hall, an intermediate terrace with vaulted halls, and the uppermost level, where the private rooms of the ruler's family were located.

Less than one kilometre south of Qaleh Dokhtar on the right bank of the valley lies the second serial component, the first of several stone bas reliefs put up by Ardashir during his reign. Its dimensions are 7 by 3.7 metres and it depicts Ardashir's investiture by Ohrmazd, the Zoroastrian creator God, who is standing behind and investing Ardashir by handing the ring of sovereignty to him over a fire altar. In the vicinity of the relief are the remains of a bridge, described as *"the best dated example of Sassanian masonry from the fifth century"* and highlighted in the additional information submitted on 26 February 2018 in response to the ICOMOS interim report as the key evidence of 5th century Sassanid architectural production in the property. However, this ruined bridge is not only in an extremely poor state of conservation, it is also not currently included in the property boundaries.

At the southern end of the Tang-i Ab valley, here forming a gorge, is the third site component, the rock carved bas relief of Ardashir's victory. It depicts a scene of Ardashir's victory battle against the last Parthian king and measures 18 metres long by 4 metres high. Leaving the gorge southwards onto the open plain, one finds the remains of Ardashir's capital city, Ardashir Khurreh. This circular city was constructed in a previously swampy area created through water transfer from Tang-i Ab River.

At Ardashir Khurreh are the archaeological remains of a city laid out in a perfect circle with a diameter of 1,950 m, divided into twenty equal sectors by means of a precise geometric system of twenty radials and several concentric streets. It was surrounded by a defensive wall, a 35 metres wide ditch and another outer wall. This site component covers the entire circular city and its defensive structures amounting to 314 hectares. The administrative, ceremonial and religious structures were located in the centre of the city, surrounded by civil and residential structures in the outer circle. The ruins of Takht-i Neshin, a cuboid free-stone building, stand at the very centre of the city. It is thought to have been Ardashir's fire temple.

The circular city expanded beyond its walls into the wider setting. The radials, consisting of traces of canals, paths, walls, and field boundaries, continue up to 10 km distance from the central tower. The serial component of Ardashir's Palace is located on one of these axes two kilometres north-west of the capital city. Built after Ardashir had fully established his supremacy, the palace does not include significant defensive structures. It rather replicates and improves the layout of the inner fortress of Qaleh Dokhtar. The palace measures 55 by 18 metres and is built of rubble stone masonry with mortar, in the most representative sections with internal plaster. It is characterized by several arched and domed halls used as reception and residential rooms. In the additional information submitted by the State Party on 26 February 2018, it is highlighted that some

arches were strengthened by pillars constructed into the arch during the middle Sassanian period. In ICOMOS' view these pillars are repair measures intended to strengthen the arch, perhaps after a risk of or actual collapse of the arch.

Bishapur

The remains of the key city created by Ardashir's successor Shapur I (reigned 243-273 CE), named Bishapur (the city of Shapur), are located about 100 km west of Shiraz, 23km north-west of the modern city of Kazerun. The ancient city was bounded by the Shapur River to the north and surrounded by a rampart and moat facing towards all other directions. The remains of the rectangular city with orthogonal streets and four gates cover an area of 155 hectares. The settlement was surrounded by two walls; one which encircled the royal quarter in the west of the city and a significant defensive rampart which encircled the entire settlement. All architectural structures were built using stone, lime and gypsum mortar. Much of this Sassanian city has been built upon during the Islamic era so that very few areas have been excavated which testify to the Sassanid era. The key complex discovered in this area was likely a fire temple with an impressive cupola spanning more than 20 metres, likely the largest existing in the Sassanian Empire at the time.

Two fortresses, Qaleh Dokhtar and Qaleh Pesar were added to the defence system, overlooking the city on the nearby Shapur mountain ranges. In the narrow gorge of Tang-e Chogan leading further eastwards, seven rock carved stone reliefs depicting different scenes and portraits are included in the nominated property. The gorge ultimately leads to Shapur's Cave, the second site component in the Bishapur group. This cave exhibits a 6.7 metres high statue of Shapur I carved out of a stalagmite formed in situ. It is sculpted in much detail illustrating the physiognomic features, garments and elaborate jewellery of the ruler.

Sarvestan

The third archaeological group consists of only one component, the eighth and last site component of this nomination, Sarvestan monument. This monument was originally also considered to be early Sassanid. However, radio-carbon samples undertaken date it to the Late 7th, mid 8th and late 9th century respectively. This leads to the conclusion that it illustrates transitional architecture at the end of the Sassanian and, more predominantly, beginning of the Islamic era illustrating the continued use of Sassanid inspired designs in the Islamic era. The site is placed in a flat plain, 13km south of modern Sarvestan. It is locally called Qasr-e Sassan (Sassan's palace) or Chahar-taqi (the square with four arches or short barrel vaults). It was long understood to be a palace structure of a late Sassanian ruler; however, contemporary research suggests that it may have been a fire temple which was still in use in the early Islamic era. Its architecture is characterized by a central domed hall, two columned hallways, an internal courtyard and two ayvan.

History and development

The Sassanian Empire commenced in 224 CE with Ardashir Papakan's victory over the Arsacid Royal House of the then declining Parthian State. The Sassanian state was initially governed from the newly constructed capital of Ardashir Khurreh. From there, Ardashir captured the city of Ctesiphon, annexed parts of Roman Armenia and northwest Arabia and installed himself as the king of kings. He also claimed the eastern Roman provinces and fought several battles on the Western front against the Romans, conquering for example Hatra.

Towards the end of his reign Ardashir made his oldest son Shapur co-regent and when Ardashir retired in 240 CE, Shapur became his successor and sole ruler. From his reign, archaeologists have identified several inscriptions, among them one multilingual one in Greek, Parthian and Middle Persian on the walls of the Kaaba-e Zardosht at the archaeological site of Naqsh-e Rostam, which gives us information on the exact extent of his territories. The remains at Naqsh-e Rostam, although located in the Fars region, are not included in the serial nomination. He took over most of Roman Armenia and plundered several cities in Syria and Cappadocia. He depicted his victories in a number of rock reliefs at Darabgird, Bishapur, and Naqsh-e Rostam.

Following Shapur's reign in the last quarter of the 3rd century, the Sassanian Empire lost its strength and most of the former Roman provinces fell back under Roman control. Almost four centuries of Sassanid rule, with its cultural and organisational innovations and expansions, followed, which are scarcely represented by the proposed property. Merely the very latest stage of the fall and transition of the Sassanian towards the Islamic Empire is said to be exhibited by the site component at Sarvestan. This monument might have been constructed during the reign of Yazdegerd III (634 to 652 A.D.) which lasted twenty years and saw the end of the Sassanian Empire with a successful attack by the Muslim Arabs expanding north-east. However, recent radio-carbon dating of the Site component suggest an even later construction date of significant architectural components of the structure, which would date it after the Sassanid era.

3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis is guided by two sequential methodological approaches. In the first step, the overall composition of the series is compared to two other so-called archaeological landscapes. They are both predominantly pre-Sassanid in context: Pasargadae, the first dynastic capital of the Achaemenid Empire, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2004 under criteria (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv), and Persepolis, the second capital of the Achaemenid Empire, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979 under criteria (i), (iii) and (vi). These two World Heritage properties inscribed as single archaeological sites are compared with regards to their ability to reflect a

larger archaeological landscape beyond the boundaries of the ancient settlements.

Following on, individual prominent structures of the component sites are compared to structures of similar typology, such as Qaleh Dokhtar to other fortresses, or Ardashir Khurreh to other circular cities, predominantly non-Sassanid sites. Considered are the Aramaic city state of Sam'al near modern-day Zincirli in southern Turkey, which predates Ardashir Khurreh by a millennium but shares its circular plan, and Hatra, a fortified city under the influence of the Parthian Empire and capital of the first Arab Kingdom, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1985 under criteria (ii), (iii), (iv) and (vi), which is compared for its similar centralized arrangement, although not in a perfect circular shape. These are followed by post-Sassanid cities, such as Darabgrid, located 300km south-east of Shiraz, a circular settlement of similar size to Ardashir Khurreh and likely inspired by it, as well as Baghdad, commissioned in 762 by the Muslim Caliph al-Mansour. Comparisons are also presented for the fortress of Qaleh Dokhtar, the city of Bishapur, and Sarvestan.

ICOMOS notes that the methodology selected for the comparative analysis is not assisting in identifying exceptionality of the serial property. The two so-called archaeological landscapes compared are not well known for landscape features and predate the nominated property considerably. They therefore do not well compare in terms of typology or timeframe. The remaining comparisons are focused on individual components rather than the whole nominated property. ICOMOS notes the lack of comparators from the Sassanid era, with the exception of two Sassanid fortresses compared to Qaleh Dokhtar. ICOMOS further notes that the rock carved reliefs were not compared at all.

In ICOMOS' view several other significant sites, both in Iran and outside, could provide relevant representations of the Sassanid Empire, none of which were included in the comparative analysis. These are, for example, the archaeological sites of Naqsh-e Rostam and Naqsh-e Rajab, Taq Kasra, a palace likely constructed by Shapur I, and Gundeshapur, often referred to as the intellectual centre of the Sassanid Empire. In particular, the first two, Naqsh-e Rostam and Naqsh-e Rajab might be considered to form an ensemble representing early key structures of the Sassanid Empire and they have been included in the Tentative List of the Islamic Republic of Iran as witnesses to the early Sassanid era, containing architectural remains and 10 bas reliefs.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis does not justify the selection of components of this serial nomination and does not consider adequately the other important Sassanid sites in and beyond the Fars region. ICOMOS does not consider that the proposed serial property includes a relevant selection of sites to represent what could be considered the archaeological landscape of the Sassanid Empire.

However, based on additional research undertaken and the expertise of its network of specialists, ICOMOS recognizes that the serial components of Firuzabad and Bishapur include the most significant remaining testimony of the earliest moments, that is the commencement under Ardashir and establishment of power under Ardashir and his successor Shapur I, of the Sassanid Empire. As such, a nomination of these two archaeological contexts could be considered as bearing potential to demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value in relation to providing the most complete and dense archaeological and artistic evidence of the emerging Sassanid Empire. However, the current serial composition is not suitable to illustrate this potential Outstanding Universal Value.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis does not justify consideration of this serial property in its current composition for the World Heritage List.

Justification of Outstanding Universal Value

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The property which is presented as the Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars Region is identified as the nucleus representing the most original innovations which materialized during the Sassanid civilization in the fields of: land use, special settlement pattern, urban planning, architecture and monumental iconography;
- This archaeological landscape contains a varied set of urban structures, castles, palaces, outstanding monumental buildings, inscriptions and other relevant relics forming and evolving under Sassanid rule over a span of 400 years;
- The serial components illustrate the starting point of Sassanid architecture and urban planning as well as its latest moments and transition towards Islamic rule in the Sassanid territories.

In its first request for additional information, ICOMOS asked the State Party to clarify its rationale for the serial composition of the property, which was not laid out in the nomination dossier. The State Party responded on 3 November 2017 that the selection proposed demonstrates how “*the Sassanid dynasty approached the establishment of towns in different environmental contexts*”, and constructed buildings with different functions over the centuries, “*stressing a diachronic perspective which from the early Sassanid period (Firuzabad) reaches into the late Sassanid and subsequent early Islamic period (Sarvestan)*”, as such showing the evolution of Sassanid architecture. These according to the State Party’s view had to lie in the Fars Region, described as the cradle of the Persian civilizations.

In its subsequent interim report, ICOMOS suggested to the State Party to refocus the rationale and justification of Outstanding Universal Value on selected components’

role as the cradle of the Sassanid Empire. To this end ICOMOS suggested to remove the Sarvestan Monument from the serial composition as it does neither provide evidence of the significant early Sassanid era nor could it be said an exceptional representation of Sassanid architecture more generally. In its response of 26 February 2018, the State Party highlighted that the 8 components did provide evidence of various historic moments of the Sassanid Empire, highlighting in particular the presence of the 5th century Mihr Narseh Bridge in Firuzabad, which is not currently included in the property boundaries, and later repair works at Ardashir’s Palace.

While ICOMOS acknowledges that some archaeological and architectural evidence points towards the habitation and use of the sites past the initial establishment of the Sassanid Empire, ICOMOS considers that the capacity of representing a property of potential Outstanding Universal Value derives from the earliest evidences of Sassanid reign, most specifically those features created under Ardashir and Shapur I in the 3rd century CE.

ICOMOS considers that this justification provided by the State Party that the serial components illustrate “*the continuity of the Outstanding Universal Value through the Sassanid period*” is not appropriate because the serial selection cannot convey a comprehensive representation of Sassanid architecture and town planning. ICOMOS considers that the focus on the Fars region is restrictive when aiming to represent an empire that stretched far beyond the boundaries of this central region in the contemporary Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Fars region, however, was the locale in which the Sassanid Empire established itself to its strength and power and as such several components of the series contain what can be considered the earliest great achievements of the Sassanid rulers. However, if the Sassanid era is to be considered in its entirety, significant other settlements and monuments were created outside the region would need to be considered and included in such a broader serial approach.

ICOMOS considers that it is conceptually impossible to represent an ancient empire, which lasted over four centuries and spread over a few thousand kilometres through three areas, which are rather constrained in the timeframe and regional context they present. Such approach would provide the false impression that Sassanid architecture and urban planning was entirely homogenous over these vast territories and time span, which in ICOMOS’ view is not the case. This is also illustrated in the variety of other Sassanid sites, which are currently included on the Iranian Tentative List.

The focus on the Fars Region further hinders the ability to illustrate the interaction and cross-fertilization of Sassanid architecture with remains of the Parthian Empire, Roman, Islamic and other influences. In the light of the above concerns, ICOMOS does not consider that the justification of Outstanding Universal Value in the nomination dossier

can be supported. In consequence, ICOMOS does not consider that the current serial approach is justified. This does not mean however, that individual sites are not of value in terms of the way they reflect particular aspects of the Sassanid Empire. On the contrary, ICOMOS considers that some components of the series have strong potential to demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The State Party considers that given its concise legal protection and appreciation by the rural communities, the nominated property enjoys a high level of integrity. In terms of the serial composition, the State Party explains in the additional information provided at the request of ICOMOS on 3 November 2017, that the three archaeological areas show the complete evolution of Sassanid architecture, ranging from the very beginning (Firuzabad) to a more mature stage (Bishapur), until the very late and post-Sassanid period (Sarvestan). Despite ICOMOS' request to reconsider this all-encompassing approach, the argument is reiterated in the additional information submitted on 26 February 2018.

In ICOMOS' view, the composition of the series remains problematic. The property in its serial composition cannot be considered an exceptional or unique representation of the architectural and artistic production throughout the Sassanid Empire. On the contrary, the sites gathered merely present its very beginning and perhaps end but by no means an evolution over four centuries. ICOMOS also notes that the emphasis on the 5th century Mihr Narseh Bridge given in the additional information provided on 26 February 2018 raises further concerns in terms of integrity, since the remains of the bridge are not currently within the property boundaries.

While the notion of an archaeological landscape expressed in the interaction between the natural topography and the early Sassanid architectural and artistic production seems important to the nomination, the current boundaries of the serial components are too tightly drawn and do not include the landscape surrounding the architectural and archaeological features.

The nominated property does not suffer from negative effects of development, except for two component sites: Ardashir Palace has been affected by the expansion of a settlement to its east, which, however, seems now to be controlled by the protection zone set up; and Bishapur, which has been impacted by a road built half a century ago. In Ardashir Khurreh, agricultural activities are affecting the buried archaeological remains and thus the integrity of the site. In addition, several site components are affected by processes of serious decay and deterioration.

In relation to the agricultural practices, the State Party committed in the additional information provided on 26 February 2018 to undertake surveys in order to fully

determine the extent of archaeological remains as opposed to areas near the city, which have been used for agriculture since Sassanid times and should hence continue this function. In order to prevent extension of farmlands into areas with potential archaeological evidence, these would then be taken into possession by ICHHTO.

As a result of a lack of conservation strategies and activities in the past, some remains are very fragile and scarce when compared with what must have existed during their time of construction and use. This relates in particular to the site components of Qaleh Dokhtar, Ardashir Palace and Sarvestan, which are heavily deteriorated. Also Bishapur city remained without any consolidation after the archaeological mission left and rapid processes of deterioration can be observed. The former excavation trenches and slopes remain open and exposed to erosion with some vertical sections that have already started to collapse.

Authenticity

In terms of authenticity, the site components differ considerably. Qaleh Dokhtar, Ardashir Palace and Sarvestan, despite having been affected by past earthquakes and deteriorating heavily, can be considered authentic in form and design. However, the many and repetitive restorations done on the structures at these sites, namely where wall revetments have been applied, include today a large percentage of new materials, namely plaster and black cement, with new stones used for the facing of the walls. This situation, in ICOMOS' view, directly affects the authenticity of the monuments within the nominated property. The entrance of Ardashir Palace in Firuzabad has been completely reconstructed using concrete and stone facings.

The rock reliefs of Ardashir and those of Tang-e Chogan seem to retain a largely authentic condition. Despite the transformation of the land due to agricultural activities, Ardashir Khurreh still preserves its authentic form and design. Nevertheless, this is rather vulnerable as it could change very quickly with adjunctions of parcels of land as a result of inheritance or other division which would affect the shape of the plots and could eventually remove part of the original design of the city. In general, the settings of most of the components still preserve their authentic aspects as they were during the Sassanid period. The few exceptions include the new buildings related to agricultural activities at Ardashir Khurreh, the Qa'emieh–Kazerun road to the east of Bishapur city, and the police station below the Bishapur Qaleh Dokhtar.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have not been met at this stage for the serial property, but that authenticity could be met for selected individual site components.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

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

Criterion (i): *represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that *“the Sassanid archaeological landscape represents a masterpiece of human ingenuity due to its multiple innovations during the 3rd century of the first millennium AD”*. The most significant innovations include the invention of the chahar-taq architecture, a type of dome squinch, which makes doming on a square-shaped space possible.

ICOMOS confirms that chahar-taq is indeed an architectural element invented in early Sassanian times, which has been referenced and utilized during later eras and in other cultural regions. However, ICOMOS also considers that while the palace of Shapur I contains a significant number of chahar-taq, some of these have been affected by restoration measures which have limited their material authenticity. ICOMOS notes that a number of other early Sassanid sites contain other examples of chahar-taq, which have not been considered in the comparative analysis. ICOMOS considers that this criterion cannot be applied to the serial nomination suggested, as only two of the overall eight components can make a potentially relevant contribution to this criterion.

While the State Party argued that the contribution of the other monuments and urban structures to the magnificent surrounding landscape would also merit recognition under this criterion, ICOMOS considers that this would not be an adequate justification for the application of criterion (i).

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

Criterion (ii): *exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the Sassanid archaeological landscape was influenced by the Achaemenid and Parthian cultural and ritual traditions as well as their architectural and artistic approaches and cultural interchange with Roman art, contemporaneous with it, had a significant impact on urban planning, architecture and artistic approaches of the Islamic era.

ICOMOS considers that the sites selected illustrate little to no interaction with other earlier, such as Achaemenid and Parthian, cultural influences, the contemporary Roman, and later the Islamic era, except perhaps the latter for Sarvestan Monument, which is partly constructed in post Sassanid times. ICOMOS therefore

considers that the justification for criterion (ii) is not appropriate.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

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

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the Sassanid archaeological landscape provides evidence of cultural traditions in architectural and urban planning knowledge, and legitimization of power, ritual ceremonies and the hierarchy of power. Among these, the most important is the construction of religious chahar-taqs, which has had a direct correlation with the expansion and stabilization of Zoroastrianism under Sassanid rule.

ICOMOS considers that the justification provided in reference to the Sassanid architectural and urban planning being considered a cultural tradition is not appropriate. However, ICOMOS considers that it might be more appropriate to discuss whether the nominated property could feature as an exceptional testimony of the Sassanid Civilization, also considering its contribution to the development and stabilization of Zoroastrianism. ICOMOS notes that some serial components may have potential to represent important moments, achievements and developments which indeed characterize the architectural and urban development under the very early reign of the Sassanids. However, it cannot be said that all property components equally represent such potential, in particular in reflecting their capacity to present integrity and authenticity in terms of this criterion.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified for the proposed series.

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

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that *“the propagation of the dome on squinches above a square hall may be regarded as the most significant Sassanid landscape contribution to Middle-Eastern architecture.”* It is further explained that this development of Sassanid chahar-taq took place in the ruins of Takht-i Nishin in the city of Ardashir Khurreh.

ICOMOS considers that chahar-taq domes within the serial property can also be found in Qaleh Dokhtar of Firuzabad, in Ardashir Palace and, only partly preserved, in the monument at Sarvestan, yet with varying degrees of authenticity. However, it has not been demonstrated in what way these domes can be said outstanding as required for the application of this criterion. ICOMOS considers in addition that the serial property presented

cannot as a whole contribute to this criterion as domes are features only in some serial components.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

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

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that *"the Sassanid archaeological landscape represents a perfect example of an efficient system of land use and exploitation of natural topography as well as creation of a cultural landscape in the Sassanid civilization."* This landscape is said to be supported by use of indigenous construction materials and *"based on optimal exploitation of earth topography"*.

ICOMOS considers that it has not been demonstrated in which way the serial property of eight components presents an exceptional landscape which illustrates specific aspects of land-use or traditional settlements as required by this criterion. The fact that defensive fortresses are placed on hills or cities fortified against rivers, etc., does not seem exceptional and is shared by numerous other historic sites.

While some site components of this proposed property could be seen as exceptional in their interaction between the natural topography and the early Sassanid architectural and artistic production, unfortunately at present the natural topography, which would be an essential attribute to such concept, is not encompassed in the property boundaries. For the above reasons, ICOMOS considers it not possible to apply this criterion for the current composition of the serial property.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified for the proposed series.

ICOMOS considers that a serial approach could potentially be justified to represent specific architectural or urban typologies or exceptional testimonies of the early Sassanid Empire situated in a unique topographical landscape but ICOMOS considers that the current series as well as the selection of sites is not appropriate.

In conclusion, ICOMOS does not consider that any of the criteria have been justified and does not consider that the series proposed meets the conditions of integrity and authenticity at this stage.

4 Factors affecting the property

The nominated property faces very few threats of urban or infrastructure development, which are currently limited to Ardashir's Palace, located in the vicinity of a village which has expanded in recent years, and the Kazerun-Qa'emieh road which was constructed between the Qaleh Dokhtar and Bishapur city several decades ago. Tourism pressures are also extremely limited although, given the state of conservation of the sites, appropriate visitor behaviour is essential to prevent further dilapidation.

Wind as well as water erosion, as a result of both rainfall and surface water, is a serious risk for at least four property components; Qaleh Dokhtar, Ardashir Palace, Bishapur and Sarvestan. The site managers' acknowledge this significant risk and aim to reduce it by means of sacrificial layers, which are to be applied to the top of the walls and the floor surfaces. However, the surfaces which are at risk are very large and the sacrificial layers need to be applied in a way that respects the authenticity of the property. This sacrificial layer is made of Kah-gel, a clay and chaff mixture, prepared on site and spread on the exposed surfaces. While this indeed protects against rain-water erosion, it creates a new risk of retained humidity when applied to larger areas such as entire floors. Risks of surface water are observed only in Sarvestan, which lies in a depression in which water collects from the surroundings. The result is capillary humidity migration into the walls causing damage and detachment of stones, thus also affecting the structural stability of the monument.

Vegetation growth is a significant risk at several site components, such as Qaleh Dokhtar, Ardashir and Tang-e Chogan Reliefs at Firuzabad and the Qaleh Dokhtar of Bishapur, and is affecting the stability of these structures. Another risk observed is pigeon and bat droppings at the serial sites of Ardashir Palace, the Shapur Cave and Sarvestan. Here, pigeons are present in considerable numbers and use parts of the monuments as their nesting grounds. Moreover, in Shapur Cave bats occupy cavities where sunlight does not reach, and their droppings are everywhere in the cave including the statue of Shapur I. In Ardashir Khurreh, impacts of informal human occupation, in particular at night, have been noted.

Agricultural activities inside the site component of Ardashir Khurreh pose a significant risk. Deep ploughing is likely to affect archaeological remains but also the roots of planted trees and shrubs can have destructive effects on buried remains. Often the agricultural activities require vehicular or animal movements on the fields, creating pressure and vibrations on underground archaeological remains. In its additional information provided, the State Party envisages surveys to ensure the absence of underground archaeological structures in agricultural areas or otherwise protect these from agricultural practices.

The nominated property is located in a highly earthquake prone region and experienced significant damage from earthquakes in 1970 and 1994. In its request for additional information, ICOMOS inquired as to the preventive

measures—undertaken as well as risk preparedness and disaster management plans already in place. The State Party reported in the additional information submitted on 3 November 2017 that when looking at the issues with a Swiss-French proposal for preventive stabilization, they resorted to traditional local building techniques in stabilizing vertical structures which might be affected, to increase their resilience to seismic movements. ICOMOS further observed two concrete protective measures implemented at Qaleh Dokhtar, a terraced reinforcement for the outside vertical walls as well as a system of wires stabilizing the upper levels, in particular to support the dome. In Bishapur, a numbering system has been applied to the stones of the Anahita Temple, aimed at ensuring that stones are identifiable in case the monument collapses, which would enable a post-disaster reconstruction.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are its decay and deterioration advanced by wind and water erosion, agricultural use and vegetation growth, as well as the high seismic risk in the area combined with a lack of adequate risk preparedness and disaster response planning.

5 Protection, conservation and management

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The boundaries of the eight serial components encompass a total area of 639 hectares. Several serial components in each of the three geographical areas are combined in a shared buffer zone, with an overall buffer zone of 12,715 hectares presented in the nomination dossier. In two of the three geographical areas, Firuzabad and Sarvestan, the buffer zone is further surrounded by a landscape zone, covering about 48,500 hectares. The boundaries and buffer zones are marked *in situ* by red and blue cylindrical post markers.

ICOMOS observes that the boundaries encompass all identified archaeological remains, with perhaps the exception of the 5th century Mihr Narseh bridge foundation near the bas relief of Ardashir's investment (component 2). However, in the additional information provided by the State Party on 3 November in response to ICOMOS' request, the State Party highlighted that the serial components were selected to illustrate the important relationship between the archaeological remains and the specific surrounding landscape, in both cases of Firuzabad and Bishapur being marked by the transition of a mountain range towards an open plain and in the vicinity of a narrow mountain range passage in the form of a gorge.

ICOMOS notes that the relationship between the archaeological elements and the landscape is indeed striking and at times is a prerequisite for the historic remains, for example the vertical gorge walls which allowed the production of rock-cut bas reliefs or the mountain ranges with narrow passages which gave strategic

importance to the location of cities. However, ICOMOS notes that these very landscape features are not presently located within the property and hence are not able to contribute to the attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. ICOMOS considers that the buffer zones are the delimited areas which indeed contain the landscape features of this nomination and which would allow the nominated property to feature as an archaeological landscape. ICOMOS concludes that accordingly the boundaries are not adequate to reflect an archaeological landscape as intended by the State Party.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property are too narrowly drawn to reflect the notion of an archaeological landscape and that the buffer zones are adequate to surround the current serial sites proposed but would also need to be enlarged if the larger setting was included in the property to reflect the archaeological landscape.

Ownership

Seven out of the eight site components are owned by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and administered by the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO). Only parts of the Ardashir Khurreh component are currently in private ownership, which creates pressures in terms of their agricultural use.

Protection

Cultural heritage has an essential place in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran as Article 83 of the Constitution Law (1920) recognizes its importance. Ownership transfer of public monuments and properties considered to be part of the national heritage is forbidden, unless approved by the Parliament. The individual site components were listed rather early on as monuments and archaeological sites at the national level, such as Qaleh Dokhtar, number 269 in 1315 A.H (1936 CE), Ardashir Palace, number 89 in 1310 A.H (1931 CE), Ardashir Khurreh, number 17 in 1310 A.H (1931 CE), Sassanid Atashkadeh (fire temple) of Ardashir Khurreh, number 289 in 1316 A.H, (1937 CE), the historic city of Bishapur, number 24 in 1310 A.H (1931 CE), and Sarvestan monument, number 23 in 1310 A.H (1931 CE).

With the context of these designations, the State Party developed specific regulations, not only for the property areas but also for the buffer zones and, where existing, landscape zones. These are relevant and effective with one single exception, the site component of Ardashir Khurreh. Here, the regulation specified for the property in its regulation 5 allows for the continuation of agriculture on private properties, merely forbidding its expansion. ICOMOS considers that these continuing agricultural activities have a strong potential to damage underground archaeological remains within these farmlands and need to be reconsidered. In its additional information provided on 26 February 2018, the State Party committed to surveys aimed at identifying underground archaeological remains in agricultural areas to prevent future negative impacts. Problematic in this site component is also a factory in the

buffer zone, located in immediate proximity to the property, which contradicts the buffer zone regulations. ICOMOS recommends that the State Party may wish to consider relocating this factory to a more appropriate location.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the legal protection regulations in place are largely adequate and should be consistently applied. ICOMOS considers, however, that within the property boundaries of Ardashir Khurreh agricultural practices should be permitted only in areas which by means of the envisaged surveys have proven free of underground archaeological remains.

Conservation

The site components are documented through photographic recordings, often conducted in the course of previous conservation works, and lately a 3D scanning initiative of several structures. Several studies have been undertaken into the material composition and construction techniques of individual components, which were published in the form of administrative reports. In addition, a MoU was signed with the Italian National Research Council and Bologna University to conduct further research initiatives.

The current state of conservation differs considerably between the different site components. The most concerning conditions can be observed at Qaleh Dokhtar, where most of the core structures are exposed due to the loss of surface stones. Previous restorations to ensure stability brought in concrete and black cement, and vegetation growth in the exposed parts of the walls and their cores, that are not repointed or protected, is jeopardizing their structural stability. Past works were not always carried out under adequate supervision. For example, at the level of the second floor open courtyard, a section between two buttress walls was recently removed by the restoration team in order to clear the space in the second floor. This rubble removal should in fact have been a properly documented excavation and undertaken by archaeologists. In addition, the clearing left a void between the two walls with a friable section, which could collapse at any time putting the third floor level and its dome structure in immediate danger.

In Ardashir Khurreh, ICOMOS observes several conservation issues for underground archaeological remains, such as on the roads used to access the site – which are historic access routes full of visible archaeological remains, but also used for agricultural activities as described above. In Ardashir's Palace one finds a synthesis of reconstructions (such as the entrance hall) and decayed wall structures in need of consolidation.

In Bishapur, several conservation issues emerged with the completion of archaeological excavations. Some excavated walls, in particular in the eastern section of the site, were left exposed to weathering and erosion. These are at present rather fragile with some sections at immediate risk of collapse. As described above, bird and bat droppings are impacting the historic surfaces at several sites, most significantly in Shapur's Cave where the statue of Shapur is heavily affected. Similar situations can be

observed at all rock-carved reliefs in the nominated property.

In Sarvestan significant damage arises from capillary humidity migration into the walls. In addition, structural problems lead to instabilities, such as masonry cracks which jeopardize the structural stability of the monument. In all components, CCTV cameras are fixed directly onto the historic structures in inappropriate ways.

The State Party has addressed the above identified conservation issues, including the repointing of remaining stones to the exposed cores of the walls, construction of terraced bases to stabilize walls, covering of wall and floor surfaces with sacrificial layers, and regular removal of vegetation growth. In addition, some of the exposed verticals in excavated sections have been stabilized by different sacrificial layers and one excavation section in Ardashir Khurreh has been covered by a temporary roof. In winter time, some architectural structures are covered with plastic sheets to avoid immediate rain penetration. Reconstructions are at times extensive, in particular at Ardashir's Palace, where walls and the vaulted entrance were reconstructed with partial use of historic materials found on site.

In ICOMOS' view, the overall state of conservation is rather critical. A programmed conservation approach which avoids reconstructions is needed to ensure the long-term preservation of the property. It is indicative that within the context of the management approaches described for the nominated property such a structured approach is envisaged. It is therefore important to adhere to this aim in close cooperation with qualified conservation specialists and integrate a conservation plan within the envisaged management plan.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the property is critical, with some elements at immediate risk of collapse. The anticipated coordinated approach to conservation described needs to be laid out in a conservation plan and implemented immediately and consistently to ensure the long-term preservation of the property.

Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

The Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO) is responsible for the conservation and management of the nominated property. The property is administered by a structure established for the purpose of its management, which is referred to as SALF Base (Sassanid Archaeological Landscape in the Fars Region Base). The Base reports to both the Deputy Director of Tourism and the Deputy Director for Cultural Heritage Conservation in ICHHTO but is coordinated primarily through the Cultural Heritage Conservation department. The Base is advised and guided by a Steering and a Technical Committee.

Whilst the Base manages the overall serial nominated property, two teams have been divided to the Firuzabad and Bishapur components with officers locally responsible for day-to-day supervision and monitoring. Each area team is composed of approximately 12 permanent staff. The teams are supported by security officers controlling access and visitor behaviour through a dense network of CCTV cameras installed on site.

Risk preparedness or disaster response plans are not available despite a high risk of seismic activity and, in some components, risks of fire. ICOMOS recommends preparing adequate risk preparedness and disaster response plans and to consider in this context detailed 3D scanning surveys of all components based on a rigorous geodetic network surveyed, prior to the scan which would generate adequate documentation providing clues as to the location and structure of components in case of a disaster.

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

Within the nomination dossier, the State Party presented its anticipated management plan by means of a preview of key objectives and approximate fields of action to be implemented in the short-, medium- and long-term. These are previewing to address a number of key issues but need to be detailed within an integrated management and conservation plan for the property. Following its completion, the management plan should be officially adopted at the national level.

For the presentation of the property's significance, displays have been designed at all components. Explanatory panels include brief information about the individual monuments and specific attributes as well as a location map and, at times, drawings or sketches illustrating constructional details or ground plans. However, ICOMOS noted that these panels seemed of a temporary nature and were not fixed on proper foundations. As a result, they could easily be moved or displaced. Information kiosks with rest places have recently been added at Bishapur and Qaleh Dokhtar but no other visitor infrastructure exists within the vicinity of the nominated property. Guidebooks and a small museum in Bishapur are other means of disseminating information.

Involvement of the local communities

It appears that there is not a strong involvement of the local communities in this nomination initiative. ICOMOS therefore recommends integrating local communities more closely in management initiatives, in particular in locations where community interests, such as agriculture, could pose risks to the preservation of the nominated property.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the management team has adequate personnel resources and is aware of the key challenges the property faces. However, ICOMOS considers that these challenges need to be addressed by a comprehensive conservation and management plan, which guides coordinated action in the property. This management plan should also include dedicated sections of risk preparedness and disaster response.

6 Monitoring

Monitoring activities are divided into two levels, technical supervision of measures undertaken, and daily inspections regarding the state of conservation of monuments. For the first level, indicators are identified during the planning of conservation activities and selection of methodologies. The day-to-day state of conservation monitoring is based on a number of indicators presented in the nomination dossier, including, among others, erosion levels of materials, condition and size of cracks, moisture levels in floors and walls, and documentation of visitor numbers as well as training activities.

ICOMOS considers that whilst the State Party has identified critical indicators, which need to be observed in order to assess the state of conservation, the monitoring system does not seem to fully facilitate this. Whilst within the presentation of indicators relevant areas are identified, they are not currently integrated within a monitoring system, which outlines responsibilities and means of assessment and documentation. Previous monitoring exercises have not been undertaken and an arrangement that could be considered a monitoring system is yet to be established. ICOMOS therefore recommends including the establishment of a monitoring system into the objectives of the envisaged management plan.

Whilst site authorities have identified several key indicators to be monitored, a monitoring system is yet to be set up based on assigned responsibilities and agreed upon means of assessment and documentation.

7 Conclusions

The Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars Region is presented in 8 selected archaeological site components located within three geographical contexts at Firuzabad, Bishapur and Sarvestan, all located in the south-eastern Fars Province of Iran. This series of fortification structures, palaces, reliefs and city plans dates back to the earliest and possibly latest moments of the Sassanian Empire, which stretched across thousands of kilometres from 224 to 658 CE. The property is presented by the State Party as the nucleus representing the most original innovations which materialized during the Sassanid civilization and as an archaeological landscape which contains outstanding monumental buildings, inscriptions and other relevant relics forming and evolving under Sassanid rule over a span of 400 years.

In ICOMOS' view this justification is problematic, as the serial site components testify only to architectural and artistic creations of the very beginning and the very end of the Sassanid Empire. To illustrate the 400 years span of Sassanid presence in the wider geographical region, other sites outside the Fars Province would be better suited and more representative. With view towards the end of the Sassanid Empire, ICOMOS further notes that Sarvestan Monument, said to represent this phase, has been dated into the 7th, 8th and 9th century respectively by radio-carbon dating and hence dates also into the subsequent Islamic era.

Nevertheless, ICOMOS acknowledges that a number of site components within this series have strong potential to demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value. ICOMOS recognizes that the serial components at Firuzabad and Bishapur include the most significant remaining testimony of the earliest moments, the commencement under Ardashir I and establishment of power under Ardashir I and his successor Shapur I, of the Sassanid Empire. As such, a refocused nomination including only these two archaeological contexts could be considered as having potential to demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value in relation to providing the most complete and dense archaeological and artistic evidence of the emerging Sassanid Empire. However, the current serial composition is not suitable to illustrate this potential Outstanding Universal Value. ICOMOS regrets that the State Party did not follow its suggestion to withdraw component 8, Sarvestan Monument, from the serial composition to allow for a thematic focus on the early Sassanid Era.

ICOMOS further notes that the property has been proposed as an archaeological landscape and acknowledges that the interaction between the natural topography and the early Sassanid architectural and artistic production is important to the understanding of its strategic location for the first Sassanid capital. The current boundaries of the serial components however are too tightly drawn and do not include the landscape surrounding the architectural and archaeological features. In ICOMOS' view the interaction of both natural topography and early Sassanid architectural and artistic response constitutes a potential attribute of Outstanding Universal Value, and it is hence essential that the natural topography becomes part of the property.

In result, for the serial selection and the boundaries currently presented, ICOMOS cannot confirm that any of the criteria has been demonstrated. ICOMOS considers that while authenticity could be met by individual sites, authenticity and integrity cannot be said demonstrated in the context of the present series.

However, a series reduced to 7 of 8 components (excluding Sarvestan Monument) presented with enlarged boundaries, combining the five serial components in the Firuzabad area within one shared boundary as well as combining the two serial components in Bishapur to become a second site component, could be considered as presenting an exceptional archaeological landscape.

Such landscape would have potential to demonstrate criteria (iii) and (v) as a testimony of the early establishment of the Sassanid Empire within the landscape, which enabled its strategic location and architectural and artistic creation.

ICOMOS is concerned about the poor condition of some component sites as well as risks of further dilapidation and even collapse at selected components. A programmed conservation approach which avoids extensive reconstructions is needed to ensure the long-term preservation of the property. Such a structured approach is envisaged within the overall management aims. It is therefore important to adhere to this aim in close cooperation with qualified conservation specialists and integrate a conservation plan within the envisaged management plan. Specific geophysical surveys are envisaged at the Ardashir Khurreh component to prevent the possible destruction of underground archaeological remains through agricultural practices.

The State Party presented its anticipated management plan by means of a preview of key objectives and approximate fields of action to be implemented in the short-, medium- and long-term. These preview to address key issues but need to be detailed within an integrated management and conservation plan for the property. This management plan should also pay special attention to risk preparedness and disaster response planning and establish a systematic approach to site monitoring. Following its completion, the management plan should be officially adopted at the national level.

8 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS regrets that the State Party did not follow the suggestions made in the Interim report.

ICOMOS recommends that the examination of the nomination of the Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars Region, Islamic Republic of Iran, to the World Heritage List be **deferred** in order to allow the State Party, with the advice of ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre, if requested, to:

- a) Refocus the justification of Outstanding Universal Value on the exceptional testimony the property provides in relation to the commencement and early expansion of the Sassanid empire under Ardashir I and Shapur I (224 – 273 CE),
- b) Remove the serial site component of Sarvestan Monument from the serial nomination,
- c) Adjust the boundaries of the remaining components, aimed at combining the five serial components of Firuzabad and the two serial components of Bishapur into one site component boundary for each, encompassing the previously separated archaeological features and the topographic

landscape features between them, which constitute essential attributes of the potential Outstanding Universal Value,

- d) Finalize an integrated conservation and management plan for the property, including strategies on risk preparedness and disaster response,
- e) As part of the overall conservation and management plan, prioritize immediate conservation activities at all serial components which are at risk of collapse or in a condition of serious deterioration;

Any revised nomination should be visited by a mission to the sites.

Additional recommendations

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

- f) Prioritizing the geophysical surveys envisaged for the site component of Ardashir Khurreh to restrict the permissibility of agricultural practices to areas which are ascertained to be free of archaeological remains,
- g) Establishing a monitoring system based on assigned responsibilities and defined means of assessment and verification;



Ardashir Palace



Ardashir Palace, main *ayvan*