

EGYPTIAN WORLD HERITAGE SITES

-III-

ABU MENA



REPORT ON THE ABU MENA SITE

Report 2014
MINISTRY OF STATE FOR ANTIQUITIES



REPORT ON THE ABU MENA SITE

Location: 30° 50' 27.78" N, 29° 39' 48.56" E

The site of Abu Mena was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979s and it was listed the "World Heritage List in Danger," by decision of the World Heritage Committee's 29th session in 2001 in Helsinki, based on a request from the Egyptian Government.

The World Heritage Committee decided in 2013 at its 37th session in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to issue the following recommendations in relation to the Abu Mena site:

- Having examined Document WHC-13/37.COM/7A.Add,
- Recalling Decision 36 COM 7A.20, adopted at its 36th session (Saint-Petersburg, 2012),
- Notes with alarm the devastating effect the de-watering has had on the archaeological remains, and urges the State Party to undertake conservation condition surveys as soon as possible and establish a prioritized treatment programme that could be implemented urgently;
- Also notes the need to delay immediate de-watering of the remaining archaeological areas until adequate stabilization methodologies have been devised and in the meantime to consider burying existing remains on the basis of a detailed re-burial strategy;
- Expresses its concern at the inappropriate dismantling and rebuilding carried out at the Great Basilica and its impact on authenticity, and also urges the State Party not to undertake further reconstruction;
- Requests the State Party to demolish the inappropriate structures that have been built around parts of the monuments (apart from the temporary wooden church and pilgrim rest house to be considered at a later stage) as soon as possible and put in place a moratorium on all construction within the property;
- Recommends that the State Party develops a visitor strategy, within the framework of Management Plan, that allows for a coordinated approach to all visitations and to the

provision of information and interpretation for both visitors to the archaeological site and for pilgrims;

- Notes the progress that has been made by the State Party in recent years, in particular regarding the de-watering of the site, and also requests work on basic surveys and conservation plans or on the Management Plan, all of which are part of the corrective measures;
- Encourages the State Party to continue the work in order that an agreed action plan can be put in place based on the attributes of the property's Outstanding Universal Value;
- Further requests the State Party, on the basis of surveys, to submit a logical boundary for the property and an appropriate buffer zone as a minor boundary modification;
- Requests furthermore the State Party to submit, by **1 February 2014**, a detailed progress report on the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 38th session in 2014; and if the Desired state of conservation is met, the Committee may remove the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger in accordance with the paragraph 191.b of the *Operational Guidelines*;
- **Decides to retain Abu Mena (Egypt) on the List of World Heritage in Danger.**

The following report is herewith submitted in response to the above recommendations:

1. – The Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Abu Mena (Fig. 1) is a place located in the southwest of Alexandria, between Wadi el-Natron and Alexandria. It is an archaeological site that contains the tomb of St. Mennas, who was an officer in Diocletian's army and martyred in 296AD. According to the Christian traditions, St. Mennas' remains were brought back from Phrygia by camels and were buried where the camels refused to walk more. Legend has it that water flows in the desert and makes it possible to grow vines and olive trees, so the site was known as "St. Mennas' Vineyards." Later on, a church is built over the tomb of St. Mennas.

The later 4th and 6th centuries saw the construction of many dwellings, commercial buildings, and service buildings around the Thermal Basilica and a 48,000 square yard monastery was built on the north side of the Basilica. Thus, Abu Mena became one of the earliest Christian cities in the Near East. However, the old city is disappeared after the Persian invasion and was reconstructed by the 11th century. Fortunately, archaeologists unearthed an entire town with houses and cemeteries. They even found the houses of the potters who made the flasks. Among the discoveries, the archaeologists found a group of

shops that sell souvenirs to the visitors of the city. In addition, the remains of some flasks, lamps, and toys were found.



Fig. 1 A view of Abu Mena Site

2-Condition Survey

After visiting the archaeological site of Abu Mena, the following remarks have been noticed and report has been sent to the conservation department at the archaeological site of Alexandria to prepare a complete condition survey of the archaeological remains and preliminary conservation studies.

Remarks:

- The tomb of St. Mennas is covered by the groundwater which affected the walls of the tomb and threatens its ceiling. The conservation department is trying to protect the ceiling as noted in the following photo until an accurate treatment of the groundwater is being implemented.



Fig. 2 A view of the tomb of St. Mennas show the groundwater covering almost the lower part of the tomb



Fig. 3 A view of the tomb of St. Mennas show the groundwater covering almost the lower part of the tomb



Fig. 4 A view of the tomb of St. Mennas show the groundwater covering almost the lower part of the tomb

- The walls of the Romanic Double Bath need immediate and appropriate conservation plan
-
- It has been noted the growing of irregular plants in the archaeological site, but a team work from the Department of Gardens in Lower Egypt and the inspectors in the archaeological site of Abu Mena start to remove the plants.
-
- The stones of the archaeological remains have been badly affected as a result of the high humidity due to increasing the proportion of rainfall. This caused the fragmentation of the stone blocks. The management plan which is formally approved will include maintenance and adequate conservation plan.

3-Regarding recommendation no. 3 which recommends the State Party to delay immediate de-watering of the remaining archaeological areas until adequate stabilization methodologies have been devised.

In response to the above recommendation, the Ministry of State for Antiquities starts to remove the water pumps and will start to burying existing remains. A scientific de-watering methodologies would be prepared before having any treatment.



Fig. 5 Removing of the water pumps.

3-Reconstruction work at the Great Basilica

The inappropriate reconstruction using new blocks are totally removed and the new restoration using the original blocks of the wall starts.



Fig. 6 The removal of the inappropriate construction



Fig. 7 The removal of the inappropriate construction



Fig. 8 The removal of the inappropriate construction



Fig. 9 The removal of the inappropriate construction

4- The inappropriate structures around parts of the monuments

In his meeting with ICOMOS' mission to the archaeological site of Abu Mena, the Minister of State for Antiquities asked the experts of the mission to provide a solution in regard to the temporary wooden church that has been built within the boundaries of the archaeological site. His Excellency requests the committee's advice on how to provide another place to the local Coptic community to practice their own religious rites without affecting the authenticity of the archaeological site.

For the illegal construction built by the local population of Bedouins, as it is included in the management plan, meeting will bring together the local population of Bedouins and the Coptic local community to convince them to cooperate with the Ministry of State for Antiquities for the removal of the buildings they have constructed within the boundaries of the archaeological site to be carried out by both sides at once.

5- Management Plan

The management plan for the site of Abu Mena has been drafted and formally approved by the Director General of the Islamic and Coptic Department for implementation when funds are available (a copy of the management plan is attached)

6- Buffer Zone

A team work from the Geographic Information System (GIS) and the Department of Space and Property accompanied with the Director General of the Department of International Organizations for Culture Heritage, visited the archaeological site of Abu Mena in order to make a land survey, satellite image, and photography for adjusting the new buffer zone of the archaeological site of Abu Mena. The new buffer zone will exclude the two triangles that have been taken out for the reclamation project. The removal of one triangle has been approved by the Minister of State for Antiquities and is being updated by the GIS. The other triangle will be removed within two months.



Fig.

10 The Buffer Zone of the archaeological site of Abu Mena

Report prepared by

Director General of the Department of International Organizations for Culture Heritage

Dr. Shadia Mahmoud

Tel. (+202)27354533, Fax. (+202)27354533,

Cell phone. (+2)01111028045,

Email address: mahmoud.shadia@gmail.com.