

# Qal'at al-Bahrain (Bahrain)

No 1192

## 1. BASIC DATA

<i>State Party:</i>	Kingdom of Bahrain
<i>Name of property:</i>	Qal'at al-Bahrain Archaeological Site
<i>Location:</i>	Northern Region
<i>Date received:</i>	29 January 2004

### *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 *site*.

### *Brief description:*

Qal'at al – Bahrain is a typical Tell – an artificial mound created by many successive human occupational layers. The stratigraphy of the site is continuous, from about 2300 BC to the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD. About 25% of the site have been excavated and revealed structures of different types – residential, public, commercial, religious and military. On the top of the mound there is the impressive Portuguese fort, which gave the whole site its name – qal'a, meaning – fort.

## 2. THE PROPERTY

### *Description*

Qal'at al-Bahrain is an archaeological site. It has the shape and all the characteristics of a typical tell, meaning- an artificial mound, created by successive occupational layers, built one on top of the other. The size of the mound of Qal'at al- Bahrain is about 300x600 meters and its highest point is about 11.2 m. above sea level.

Archaeological excavations at the site started 50 years ago with the Danish expedition, working between 1954 and 1970, followed by French expedition since 1978 and archaeologists from Bahrain, since 1987.

The different excavation areas, covering about 25% of the site, provided the stratigraphy of the occupation layers as well as reach architectural remains.

The earliest stratum on the site is dated to circa 2300 BC, consisting of probably residential structures, uncovered in the northern excavation area, near the sea. This is also the period when a thick masonry wall was constructed, to surround and protect the settlement. About 46 meters of this fortification, built of dry masonry, is visible nowadays.

A later wall, possibly reinforcement of the first one, was erected around 1450 BC. Extensive use of extremely hard mortar and surface plastering took place in this phase,

resulting in still very good state of conservation of the wall. It seems that this wall lost its defense function in about 500 BC, when later residential structures are built against it and on top of some of its sections.

Different occupation layers were uncovered in the central excavation area. The earliest belongs to the same period as the first city wall, or 2200-1800 BC. The main architecture uncovered consists of a street, measuring 12 m. in width, and large, monumental structures, on both of its sides. Parts of these are probably palatial structures, including storage spaces of the palace. In the following period, (Middle Bronze age or 1450 – 1300 BC), the earlier buildings were modified and enlarged, to serve as the palace of the Kassite governor (Kassites were the Mesopotamian colonizers of the site).

The walls of the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC palace were used as foundations for next structures dating to the 11<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (Iron Age). A monumental, two pillared structure, probably a temple, was discovered here. In the same excavation area, several luxurious residences, with private and public spaces and elaborate sanitation system also belong to the same period. Under the floors of these dwellings several graves, in earthen sarcophagi, were discovered.

As a result of this continuous use of the same walls, some of them reach a considerable height of up to 4.5 m.

The archaeological level in the central area shows that around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (Tylos or Hellenistic or Seleucid-Parthian period) the site was densely built. Due to later destruction and plundering, the character and use of these structures is not clear yet.

A coastal fortress measuring 51.5x51.5 m. was excavated on the northern part of the site. This large fortress is not easy to date, but was probably not built before the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. It bears strong resemblance to Sasanian fortifications, particularly its round corner towers. The fortress was in use until the 5<sup>th</sup> century and then abandoned until the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It was then rebuilt for commercial functions and eight of its rooms were used as madbasa (date syrup) workshop. The fortress and the later structures built on its site, are preserved to a height of between 20 to 250 cm. Its building materials were reused for the construction of later the large medieval fort – the Fort of Bahrain.

In the central excavation area two additional strata were excavated. The first belongs to the 14<sup>th</sup> century – Middle Islamic period. The architectural remains include dense urban area and a structure which was probably a suk or a caravanserai. In the second period, dating to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the area was occupied by very modest houses, built of mixed materials, mainly re used from earlier structures.

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the abandonment of the site it served mainly for military purposes. A large fortress which was built on top of the tell dominates the site and even gave it its name. The large fortress of Bahrain has several building phases. The first phase dates to the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when a simple fortified enclosure was erected on the site. In 1529 the first significant enlargement of the fortress and its moat took place, as well as its adaptation to modern artillery.

The third phase is the one which gave the fortress its actual shape. This phase dates to 1561 on, when the island came under Portuguese rule and they added several corner bastions in Genovese style and enlarged again the moat. The strengthening and enlargement of the fortress reflects the growing importance of the sea trade route to India and China, as well as the rivalries between the Principality of Hormuz, the Portuguese, the Persian Safavids and the Ottoman Turks. A written source from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century describes the fortress as useless for military purposes due to being non accessible from the sea. The old access channel, cut in the coral rift, which made the site attractive for centuries, was almost completely silt –up by now, and only small vessels could reach the site, during high tide.

This was also the main reason for the final abandonment of the whole site of Qal'at al-Bahrain, and its gradual transformation from a 4500 years settlement to an archaeological site.

The site is surrounded by palmgroves and there is one row of one floor houses inside the nominated area.

### ***Management regime***

#### *Legal provision:*

The site is protected by the "Law for the Protection of Archaeological Sites" (Law number 11 of 1995). According to this law, the Ministry of Information and its Directorate of Culture & Heritage is the organization responsible for the management of the site.

70% of the site is state property, while activities on the privately owned parts is also restricted and controlled.

The palm groves and trees surrounding the site are protected by special law (Legislative decree No 21 of 1983).

#### *Management structure:*

The site is directly managed by the Directorate of Culture&Heritage. There is a site superintendant and two conservation architects involved in the conservation of the large fortress.

The site does not have a full management plan, which the State Party has promised in writing to complete by the end of 2005. The site does have a satisfactory management system, as required by the Operational Guidelines 108-110. The system is in place and is effective. The site is well managed and conservation and maintenance works are being carried out following agreed plan and by trained professionals.

#### *Resources:*

The conservation and management budget comes from the Ministry of Information, and its only scope is conservation and consolidation of the main fort.

### ***Justification by the State Party (summary)***

The tell of Qal'at al-Bahrain represents an almost 4500 years of uninterrupted human occupation of the site. It is one of the most important archaeological sites presenting all phases of the Dilmun culture. This culture, mentioned

in Sumerian and other sources, was considered until the Qal'at al Bahrain discoveries as a rather historical and philological concept. Since then other excavations in Eastern Arabia exposed remains of the Dilmun culture, but at none of the known sites all periods of this culture are represented. In Qal'at al-Bahrain, in addition there is a representation of all other historic periods – thus the site becomes kind of a catalogue of the cultures of the region.

This phenomenon does not exist on any other site of the East Arabian region.

## **3. ICOMOS EVALUATION**

### ***Actions by ICOMOS***

An ICOMOS mission to the site took place in November 2004.

ICOMOS has consulted the State Party for further information.

### ***Conservation***

#### *Conservation history:*

Some of the earlier excavated areas have been backfilled. Very little conservation and consolidation work has been carried out on the exposed remains. The nomination file is mentioning it as well, while describing future intentions for conservation works.

On the other hand extensive reconstruction works took place on the main fort, much beyond the acceptable according to the professional ethics. Some of it is justified in the file by conservation needs, but the extent of it is far beyond what conservation\consolidation can justify.

The past conservation works have not been fully documented.

#### *State of conservation:*

The central excavated area is decaying and just recently starts getting conservation attention and consolidation. The important coastal fortress has been recently consolidated and seems to be in good state of conservation. The main fortress is in good state of conservation, and most of the work being carried out on the site is on this fortress.

The archaeological expeditions working on the site are not required to carry out conservation works on the remains they are uncovering.

#### *Risk analysis:*

The main risks are urbanization, development pressures, property values and land reclamation. At the moment there are two big projects in the pipeline – one of large urban development to the north of the site and the other one an artificial island. The traditional architecture is of two to three storey buildings only, and therefore does not cause a threat to skyline. On the other hand, it is not known what is planned to be constructed on the new island, and since land is so expensive, it would make sense that buildings there will be higher than the ones on mainland. The risk of the island is also in the fact that the link between the site and the sea as well as the ancient approach from the sea to the

site are an important component of its cultural and historic value.

On the other hand, the site is surrounded by palm groves, and their protection reduces some of the risks.

### ***Authenticity and integrity***

#### *Authenticity:*

As an archaeological site, most of its authenticity is well kept. While this is true for the excavated parts, it is not the same with the main fortress. This important structure has been extensively reconstructed.

#### *Integrity:*

The settings of the site and its relations to the surroundings have been compromised, but not yet to the extent of reducing its values. The main integrity issue comes from land reclamation in front of the site, which gained its importance from the available access from the sea. Therefore keeping this link between site and sea is important.

### ***Comparative evaluation***

The comparative analysis presented in the nomination file is comprehensive and convincing. While there are other sites in the region which represent the same historic periods, none of them represent all periods on one site, as is the case with Qal'at al Bahrain.

### ***Outstanding universal value***

The site has outstanding universal value.

The justification of this statement comes from the importance of the Dilmun culture and its archaeological presence on the nominated site. This land and culture is mentioned in the Sumerian mythology linking Dilmun with the origins of the world. Sumerian texts from the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium describe Dilmun as land blessed by the Gods, graced with abundant fresh water and renowned as an international marketplace. Dilmun was the only marketplace for long distance trade via the Gulf. It was a port of transit where representatives of all countries came to exchange or sell their products, thus also exchange cultural ideas. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC Dilmun is conquered by the Mesopotamian Kassite dynasty and in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC mentioned seven times in the bas-reliefs of Sargon's palace in Khorsabad.

All these historic periods are well represented in Qal'at al-Bahrain, which is considered as the capital of Dilmun and the seat of the king or the administrator – when the Dilmuns are conquered by others.

#### *General statement:*

ICOMOS has no doubt in the high cultural values of the site and the importance of its investigations and conservation for the understanding of the big cultures of the world.

#### *Evaluation of criteria:*

The state party suggests the inscription of the site on the basis of criteria ii, iii, iv and ICOMOS agrees that the site meets these criteria.

Criterion ii: There is no doubt that Qal'at al-Bahrain, being a capital and port on important trade routes, preserves important material testimony of different cultures and exchanges of cultures, which use it as market or occupied it.

Criterion iii: This site bears a unique testimony of Dilmun capital city and culture, of early city planning traditions and of all cultures which existed and lived in the region for almost 5000 years.

Criterion iv: The early Dilmun palaces are unique examples of this type of architecture in the region and of this culture. The different fortresses are outstanding examples of defensive structures from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 15-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, defending the ruling power from the locals, rather than from the outside. The palmgroves, in combination with the site, are outstanding example of an agricultural tradition and landscape which has existed since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

## **4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Recommendation with respect to inscription***

ICOMOS recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopt the following draft decision:

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-05/29.COM/8B,
2. Inscribes the property on the World Heritage List on the basis of ***criteria ii, iii and iv:***

***Criterion ii:*** Being an important port city, where people and traditions from different parts of the then known world met, lived and practiced their commercial activities, makes the place a real meeting point of cultures – all reflected in its architecture and development. Being in addition, invaded and occupied for long periods, by most of the great powers and empires, leaved their cultural traces in different strata of the tell.

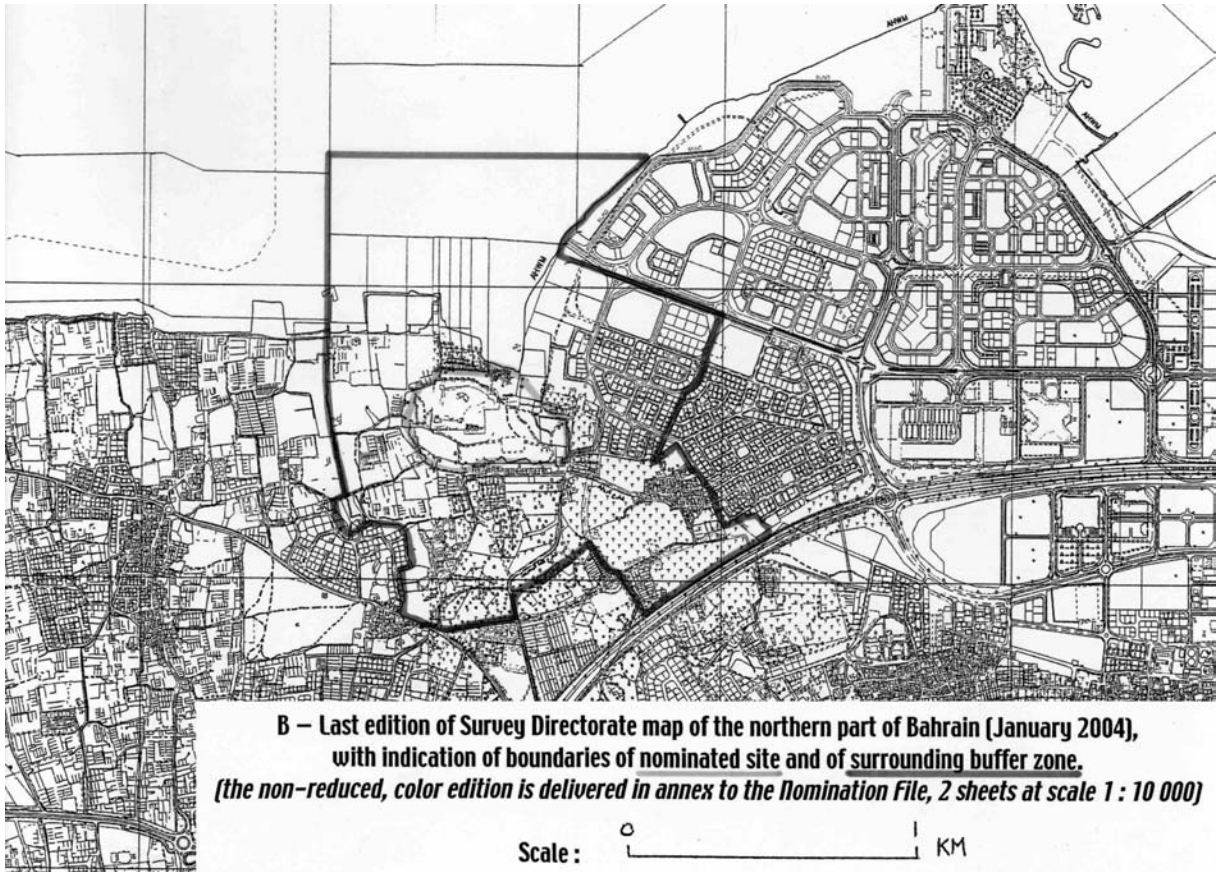
***Criterion iii:*** The site was the capital of one of the most important ancient civilizations of the region – the Dilmun civilization. As such this site is the best representative of this culture.

***Criterion iv:*** The palaces of Dilmun are unique examples of public architecture of this culture, which had an impact on architecture in general in the region. The different fortifications are the best examples of defence works from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C to the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD, all on one site. The protected palm groves surrounding the site are an illustration of the typical landscape and agriculture of the region, since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

3. Requests that the State party submit by 31st January 2006 a complete management plan.

4. Requests that the State Party refrains from approving any land reclamation or constructions in the sea anywhere in front of the site.

ICOMOS, April 2005



**Plan showing the boundaries of the nominated property**



**Aerial view of late Dilmun residence**



**Aerial view towards the south of Bahrain Fort**