

Qal'at al-Bahrain (Bahrain)

No 1192

1. BASIC DATA

<i>State Party:</i>	Bahrain
<i>Name of property:</i>	Qal'at al-Bahrain: Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun
<i>Location:</i>	Northern Region
<i>Inscription:</i>	2005

Brief Description:

Qal'at al-Bahrain is a typical tell – an artificial mound created by many successive layers of human occupation. The strata of the 300 × 600 m tell testify to continuous human presence from about 2300 BC to the 16th century AD. About 25% of the site has been excavated, revealing structures of different types: residential, public, commercial, religious and military. They testify to the importance of the site, a trading port, over the centuries. On the top of the 12 m mound there is the impressive Portuguese fort, which gave the whole site its name, qal'a (fort). The site was the capital of the Dilmun, one of the most important ancient civilizations of the region. It contains the richest remains inventoried of this civilization, which was hitherto only known from written Sumerian references.

2. ISSUES RAISED

Background

At the time of inscription the World Heritage Committee, in recognition of the incompleteness of the management system especially with regard to the protection of setting and sea access, requested the State Party “to submit by 1st February 2006 complete management and conservation plans for the property; Also requests the State Party to refrain from approving any land reclamation or construction in the sea anywhere in front of the site and that the new construction on existing reclaimed land should be checked as to protect the visual integrity of the site and to maintain the principal sight lines of the area nominated;” (WHC-29-COM 8B.26).

The concerns of the Committee became relevant a few months later when proposals emerged to reclaim an artificial island of 600 hectares at 500m distance offshore of the property. The project, known as North Star, was accompanied by two further planned projects of a fishing harbour and a reclaimed highway. It was considered by an UNESCO World Heritage Centre mission (February 2006) and an UNESCO and ICOMOS mission (June 2006).

An extended protection zone consisting of a visual corridor of 7 kilometre distance and 1.8 kilometre width in front of Qal'at al-Bahrain was presented to the World Heritage Committee at its 30th Session in Vilnius, Lithuania. The Committee requested the State Party to formalize the status of the visual corridor by designating it as an extended buffer zone for the property.

During the same session, the Committee approved a name change for the property from Qal'at al-Bahrain Archaeological Site to Qal'at al-Bahrain – the ancient harbour and capital of Dilmun to better reflect its relation to the sea and its role as a port.

The Committee also requested that the sea elements of the site, that is an ancient light tower and a sea channel transgressing a coral reef should, as a reflection of their crucial importance, be included in the core zone of the property. (WHC-30-COM 7B.49)

Modification

The proposed modification is to enlarge the buffer zone to include the visual corridor front of Qal'at al-Bahrain and to include in the core zone a sea channel, partly natural and partly man-made, which was cut through the fossilized coral reef to allow ships to access the port, and a tower structure built on the western edge of the coral reef structure adjacent to the channel.

Since further under-water archaeological research is required to identify precisely the ancient harbour structures, the State Party proposes a separate core zone focused on the identified northern part of the channel. The channel, which was first revealed by aerial photographs of the 1980s, is between 15 and 90m wide and cuts through the rocky coral plate which parallels the Northern Coast up to 1.8 km off shore. The sea tower is built on the western edge of the coral reef, adjacent to the sea channel. The rectangular tower is constructed of two courses of large ashlar stones set directly on the uneven surface of the coral reef. It is assumed by most archaeologists that this structure had an indicative function for the sea channel that can be compared to the function of a light house. So far archaeological evidence has not provided firm dates for either the channel or the tower.

The sea channel and sea tower mark the access route from the sea towards the ancient harbour and capital of Dilmun. They provide essential elements for an understanding of the location and activities in the capital, which was predominantly based on economic gains from sea-trading activities, for which safe access was essential. The channel determined not only the location of the city but also the arrangement of its port and city wall as well as later defence structures.

The core zone of the initial nomination comprised 0.163 square kilometres or 16.3 hectares. The proposed second core zone covers an area of 0.157 square kilometres or 15.7 hectares. The proposed extended buffer zone, enclosing both core zones, extends to an area of 12.38 square kilometres or 1238 hectares.

Criteria

The State Party requested slight changes in the wording of the criteria at the time of inscription; ICOMOS considers that the agreed wording should be maintained.

Threats

The State Party acknowledges that the property 'will most certainly' be affected by land reclamation adjacent to the extended buffer zone which it is said 'will – in the long-term – be unavoidable'. Such future reclamations will in addition be connected via an outer ring road bridged or tunnelled through the visual corridor at minimum 3 km distance from the shore, i.e. 1 km distance from the Northern end of the sea channel and the sea tower.

At the 30th session of the Committee, the State Party was asked to consult the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS on the design of this future project. (WHC-30-COM 7B.49)

Ownership

The sea property covering an initial 600m off shore is under ownership of the Ministry of Information. Beyond this and up to about 4km off shore is currently in the process of being transferred to the status of public property under the authority of the Ministry of Information. The sea outside the 4 km zone is not yet attributed to owners, but a Royal decree on protection of the visual corridor blocks prohibits future sale or distribution.

Protection

The sea tower has been designated a national heritage site. The second core zone has been declared a no construction zone. The proposed extended buffer zone is protected by Royal Decree 26 of 2006. This prohibits any land reclamation and restricts the building heights above 3 storeys on adjacent lands. In addition, all future development measures which may have negative affects on the property are to be coordinated with the authorities for culture and national heritage.

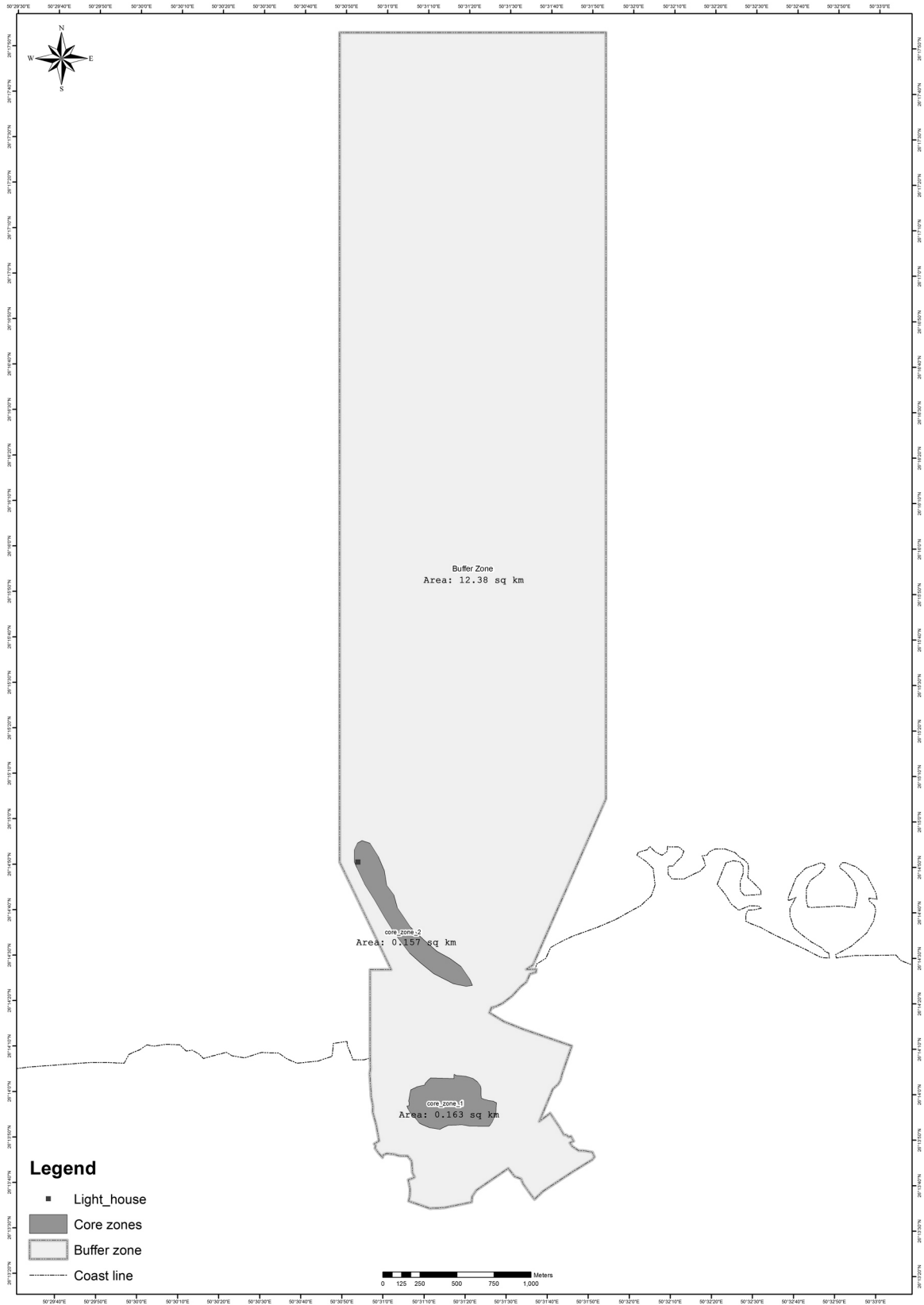
Management Plan

At its 31st Session Committee requested the management and conservation plan to be examined at the 33rd Session of the Committee in 2009.

3. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

ICOMOS recommends that the minor modification to the core zone, and the enlarged buffer zone, of Qal'at al-Bahrain: Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun, Bahrain, be *approved*.

ICOMOS further recommends that if subsequently surveys by underwater archaeological teams reveal evidence to link the two core zones, the State Party should consider a further enlargement of the core zone.



Map showing the revised boundaries of the property