Qal‘at al-Bahrain: Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun (Bahrain)
No 1192 Ter

1 Basic data

State Party
Bahrain

Name of property
Qal‘at al-Bahrain – Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun

Location
Northern Governorate, Al Qalah Village District

Inscription
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.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report
6 March 2014

2 Issues raised

Background
The Qal‘at al-Bahrain – Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun was inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 29th session of the World Heritage Committee (Durban, 2005) with the name Qal‘at al-Bahrain Archaeological Site under criteria (ii), (iii) and (iv). In 2006, the 30th session of the World Heritage Committee in Vilnius approved the State Party’s request to change the name of the property to the current Qal‘at al-Bahrain – Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun.

Two year later, in 2008, a request for a boundary extension of the property to include a second component which encompassed the sea channel and ancient sea tower was approved by the World Heritage Committee. Furthermore, a visual corridor extending 12km into the sea was established as the buffer zone (Decision 32 COM 8B.54).

In 2011, the retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SoOUV) of the property was adopted. Through this SoOUV, other attributes that convey the Outstanding Universal Value of the property that are excluded altogether from the existing boundaries of both the property and its buffer zone were revealed.

After being aware of other excluded attributes of the property, on 11 June 2012, the World Heritage Centre received a letter from the Kingdom of Bahrain that informed of the State Party's plans to develop a highway that crosses through the buffer zone of the inscribed property, in the immediate vicinity of the archaeological tell, where numerous unexcavated areas and palm groves are located. Subsequent to the joint WHC/ICOMOS Advisory Mission (July 2012) that was undertaken to assess the potential impact of the proposed project on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, the State Party agreed towards identification of an alternative route for the N-Road. As a result, the 37th session of the World Heritage Committee in Phnom Penh, 2013, through Decision 37 COM 7B.47, commended the State Party for its renewed commitment to the conservation and protection of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

In January 2014, the State Party submitted a request for minor modifications to the property and buffer zone boundaries of the Qal‘at al-Bahrain: Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun.

Modification
The State Party is proposing a minor boundary modification to the Qal‘at al-Bahrain – Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun World Heritage property as well as to the property’s buffer zone boundaries. The proposed modification will extend the boundary of the World Heritage property by 38.2 ha, thus enlarging it to 70.4 ha and the buffer zone from 73.8 ha to a total area of 1311.8 ha.

The proposed extension will enclose the palm groves and agricultural gardens, located west, south and east of the World Heritage property and enlarge the buffer zone to the west and south of the current buffer zone.

The minor boundary modification is proposed with the understanding that the Outstanding Universal Value has not been fully expressed through the current property area, as it does not include the attributes found in the agricultural landscape surrounding the property and that a boundary modification can correct this oversight.

The State Party submitted two types of maps, one clearly showing both delimitations of the inscribed property and the existing buffer zone together with the proposed modifications of the property and the existing buffer zone. The other map that is submitted clearly
shows only how the property will look if the revision were to be approved.

World Heritage property modification

The boundary modification to the east of the Qal’at al-Bahrain – Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun World Heritage property extends towards Qal’at al-Bahrain Avenue, it then follows the road south to the intersection with the path leading to Road No. 3249. Further south, the boundary includes a fraction of the farmland located north and south of Karbabad Avenue. The boundary line then continues towards the roundabout of Qal’at al Bahrain and south of Karbabad Avenue. The boundary line then continues towards the roundabout of Qal’at al Bahrain village.

The proposed boundary extension south of the current property excludes the row of houses which were constructed in the 1970s, with the purpose of relocating the residents whose houses were situated on the archaeological tell within the World Heritage property. The extension also excludes the new houses which are being built at present, south of Avenue 44, with the purpose of relocating the residents once again, this time at their own request, in light of the low construction quality of the previous houses as well as sand and erosion difficulties.

The southern boundary extension includes the gardens south of the previously mentioned residential area of Qal’at al-Bahrain village, it then follows the southern margin of the gardens westwards, towards the intersection of Avenue 44 and Avenue 42.

To the west of the current property, the extension continues from the southern boundary extension area to the north of Avenue 44, excluding the palm water factory situated at the intersection of Avenue 44 and Avenue 42 and continues west until Road No. 6025.

The proposed property boundary continues north of Road No. 6025, excluding a farmland area to the west, due to its poor state of conservation, with two thirds of the land inactive and covered with shrubs. The extension includes the coastal area north-west of the current property.

The agricultural gardens palm groves were selected according to the level of preservation of the attributes which convey the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, their state of conservation and proximity to the property.

Buffer zone modification

The proposed extension of the buffer zone is to the west and south of the current buffer zone. This proposal is to include a minor extension to the south of the existing boundary, towards Avenue 24, incorporating into the buffer zone an archaeological area and a small agricultural area which was previously excluded and which create a backdrop for the southern gardens in the proposed extension.

The proposed western boundary extends the existing buffer zone boundary, following the Al Nakheel Highway, until the western edge of the Karranah Primary Girls School. The boundary then extends north, following Road No. 6037 and borders the Karranah northern residential area.

West of the existing buffer zone, the proposed buffer zone boundary will incorporate agricultural areas which are not part of the proposed extension of the World Heritage property, due to the poor state of conservation and lack of attributes conveying the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. Despite the poor state, these areas are included in the proposal to protect the wider setting of the agricultural landscape.

South-west of the existing buffer zone, the proposed extension would include an area which is designated for residential buildings by the zoning plan, with the purpose of maintaining control on the development and maintaining view access from and towards the property.

Finally, to the north of the existing buffer zone, the proposed buffer zone will include the coastal area, part of the sea as well as a portion of the Nurana reclamation.

According to the State Party, the proposed extension of the buffer zone will, firstly, include areas that are related to the property, but have a poor state of conservation and do not have Outstanding Universal Value, such as the agricultural gardens to the west which will protect the wider setting and control development.

Secondly, the inclusion of portion of the Nurana reclamation in the buffer zone would extend the buffer zone 10 meters onto the reclamation for the purpose of ensuring visual protection of the World Heritage property by creating a green landscape buffer around the future envisaged developments.

Implications for legal protection and management arrangements

The Qal’at al-Bahrain – Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun World Heritage property currently consists of two components which are National Monuments in terms of the Kingdom of Bahrain Legislative Decree No. 11 of 1995, concerning the Protection of Antiquities and Royal Decrees 21 of 1983, 26 of 2006 and 24 of 2008.

In 2012, there was a mission undertaken to the property. Amongst others, the mission noted that a zoning plan for the property has been developed, in cooperation with other government departments, and it provides control to the height of surrounding buildings and the nature of future urban development, thus ensuring maintenance of visual and physical integrity, including the visual corridor and marine elements added to the site by the World Heritage Committee in 2008 (32 COM 8B.54). Moreover, this plan also allow for consultation with the managing bodies, the Directorate of Archaeology and Heritage and the Directorate of Museums in the Ministry of Culture,
who monitor potential threats to the site and follow up conservation issues. This requirement for consultation is in line with the requirement of the Ministerial Order 1 of 1998 that the Directorate of Archaeology and Heritage be consulted before any project is undertaken that threatens any archaeological site.

The 2012 mission further noted that the property is fenced and is provided with on-site security. Visitor access is managed and monitored by the new on-site museum and this museum fulfils a very important role in the presentation/interpretation of the site as well as raising awareness of visitors, since it has been designed specifically to highlight the features of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property and surrounding buffer zone.

No excavations are currently allowed in the property, but there are plans for the management of future excavations and a programme of underwater archaeology, including survey of the ancient channel. The village community situated on the southern boundary of the tell is being moved to a new location away from the site.

The State Party reported that the Ministry of Culture is preparing an amendment to the Heritage Law, Decree 11 of 1995, which will be ready for promulgation in the second quarter of 2014. In order for the cultural landscape of the Qal’a al-Bahrain to be protected at the highest national level, the designation had been made by the Ministry of Culture to include a new subcategory, Cultural Landscape, to the existing category of Immovable Monuments which currently consists of two subcategories, namely, Archaeological Heritage and Historic Buildings and Houses. Cultural Landscapes, as Immovable Monuments will fall under the protection of the Ministry of Culture once the amendment to the Heritage Law has been passed.

Concerning the protection and maintenance of the natural heritage of the agricultural gardens and the Palm groves of Qal’a al-Bahrain, the national legislation on environmental resources is applied. Legislative Decree No. 21 of 1996 concerns control over environmental aspects, and the right to develop and implement policies for environmental protection. Further, Legislative Decree No. 21 of 1983 concerning the protection of Palm Trees (Article 1) states that cutting down or causing the cessation of growth of palm trees is prohibited.

The Ministry of Municipalities Affairs and Urban Planning listed the area of cultural landscape surrounding the property as Unplanned Area for the purpose of protecting the land from any potential development, considering that under the current legislation 30 per cent of agricultural land can be built upon.

The basis for the land use planning and zoning regulations is achieved through the Physical Planning Law of 1994 together with the Municipalities Law promulgated in 2001 and amended in 2006, implemented by the Ministry of Municipalities Affairs and Urban Planning. Under its framework, the most relevant bylaws are Edict No. 20 (2009), Zoning Regulations for Construction and Edict No. 56 (2009), Implementation Regulations Bylaw for Subdivision of land prepared for Construction and Development.

The agricultural gardens and palm groves which are an “indissociable element” of the site are all in private ownership and mostly inaccessible to visitors. A draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been created between the Ministry of Culture and the owners of the properties located within the area designated for the extension of the World Heritage property. The MoU explains the particularities of the responsibilities of each party, the benefits as well as the legal measures which would be taken in case one of the parties violates the understanding.

The current buffer zone is under the protection of the Royal Decree No. 26 of 2006. This Decree instructs the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture to refrain from any land reclamation in the extended buffer zone and prevent the construction of buildings that exceed 3 storeys. The majority of the buffer zone is currently designated as unplanned land.

In addition to the surrounding landscape being declared as Unplanned Area, Legislative Decree No. 11 of 1995, of the Heritage Legislation concerning the Protection of Antiquities, provides legal protection for areas surrounding protected areas. For instance, Article 7 of this law states that:

“No planning or partition projects in the areas of which artefacts are found shall be approved except after obtaining the permission of the competent authority of archaeology which will determine the areas where archaeology landmarks are found to be published in the Official Gazette and notify the authority concerned with planning and partition”.

Furthermore, Article 8 of the same law states that:

“Building or rebuilding permits shall not be given for areas close to archaeological sites and historical buildings except after obtaining the permission of the competent authority to ensure the construction of modern building which shall suitably confirm with archaeological features.”

This article provides the theoretical background for the justification of a buffer zone of the entire site, which will also correspond to the cultural landscape. According to the State Party, the restrictions for the buffer zone of the property will be integrated in the Land Use and Zoning regulations which are subcategories of the Physical Planning Legislation of 1994 at their forthcoming revision in late 2014.

The Integrated Management Plan (MP) for the World Heritage property for 2013-2018 already indicates the necessity for the integration of the cultural landscape into
the property and the enlargement of the existing buffer zone. According to the State Party, this plan is currently being implemented.

ICOMOS welcomes this proposal which will improve and reinforce the protection of the property.

3 ICOMOS Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription
ICOMOS recommends that the proposed minor modification to the boundary of The Qal’at al-Bahrain – Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun, Bahrain, be approved.

ICOMOS recommends that the proposed minor modification to the boundary of the buffer zone for The Qal’at al-Bahrain – Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun, Bahrain, be approved.

ICOMOS also recommends that the State Party provide to the World Heritage Centre:

- A copy of the amended Heritage Law, Decree 11 of 1995, which was planned for promulgation in the second quarter of 2014;

- An indication of when the current draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that has been created between the Ministry of Culture and the owners of the properties located within the area designated for the extension of the World Heritage property will be concluded and the final copy once it has been concluded;

- Land use and Zoning regulations which are subcategories of the Physical Planning Legislation of 1994 once they are finalized at their forthcoming revision in late 2014.
Map showing the revised boundaries of the property and its buffer zone