Sheikh Safi al-Din Ensemble in Ardabil (Iran)
No 1345

Official name as proposed by the State Party:
Sheikh Safi al-Din Khānegāh and Shrine Ensemble in Ardabil

Location:
Province of Ardabil
Islamic Republic of Iran

Brief description:
The Sheikh Safi al-Din Khānegāh and Shrine Ensemble in Ardabil was built as a microcosmic city of bazaars, public baths and squares, religious facilities, houses, and offices. It was the largest khānegāh (Sufic place for spiritual retreat) in Iran. During the reigns of the Safavid rulers, this ensemble was of special political and national significance as the most prominent shrine of the founder of the dynasty. It evolved into a display of exceptional sacred works of architecture and art from the 14th to 18th centuries and a centre for Sufi religious pilgrimage and ritual.

Category of property:
In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a group of buildings.

1. BASIC DATA

Included in the Tentative List: 9 August 2007

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination: None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre: 29 January 2009

Background: This is a new nomination.

Consultations: ICOMOS has consulted several independent experts.

Literature consulted (selection):

Petroshevski, I., Islam in Iran. Translated by Kerim Keshavarz, Tehran, Peyam Seven, 1984.


Technical Evaluation Mission: 18-22 October 2009

Additional information requested and received from the State Party: A letter was sent to the State Party on 15 December 2009, requesting the following:

- Information about the timeframe for the approval and implementation of the Ardabil Master Plan;
- Description of how the provisions for the core, buffer, and landscape zones relate to the Master Plan;
- Further information on the structure and implementation of the Management Plan for the nominated property;
- Progress on the implementation without delay of ICHHTO’s plans to relocate the brick workshop;
- Detailed information about the underground multi-level parking which is being built to the west of the museum and related measures to mitigate impact on the nominated property;
- Steps being taken to develop a Landscape Plan for the entire nominated property;
- Possibilities of restoring the original access to the nominated property.

The State Party responded on 28 February 2010 providing additional information. The analysis of this information is included in the present evaluation.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report: 17 March 2010

2. THE PROPERTY

Description
The nominated property, Sheikh Safi al-Din Khānegāh and Shrine Ensemble, consists of a rare assemblage of medieval Islamic architecture from the early 16th century to the late 18th century.

The Khānegāh and Shrine of Sheikh Safi al-Din embody all the principles of Safavi Tariqat in its architectural design. By using the Iranian traditional architectural forms, skilled builders were able to maximize the use of the available space to accommodate a variety of functions (the ensemble comprises a library, a mosque, a school, mausolea, a cistern, a hospital, kitchens, a bakery, and some offices) and to create a route articulated in seven steps to reach the shrine of the Sheikh, which mirror the seven stages of Sufi mysticism, separated by eight gates, which represent the eight ‘attitudes’ of Sufism.

Decoration was also a fundamental means for
expressing and imparting the symbolism of Sufi mysticism. The ensemble incorporates well preserved and richly ornamented facades and interiors, with a remarkable collection of antique artefacts, some of which form elements of the architecture, such as inscribed silver doors and intricately carved wooden grave markers.

In detail, the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili shrine consists of the following components and buildings, all of which are marked on the nomination dossier map:

- Sheikh Safi al-Din Tomb (Allāh Allāh dome)
- Shāh Ismā'il I Tomb
- Muhīyy al-Dīn Muhammad Tomb (Haram Khānā)
- Shāhīnshīn (alcove)
- Dār al-Huffāz (Qandil-khānā)
- Chini-khānā (khānegāh)
- Jannat-sarā
- Sāhat or Sahn (area)
- Shāh Abbāsi Gate
- Middle Courtyard (passageway)
- New Chilla Khānā
- Dār al-Hadith (Dār al-Mutawalli)
- Arsa (The garden court)
- Meydān (square)
- The Second Gate
- Darvāzeh (The Main gate)
- Shahīd-gāh (cemetery of shrine)
- Maqāber courtyard (sepulchres)
- Shāh Ismā‘īl’s mother’s tomb
- Southern chambers of garden courtyard
- Northern chambers of spring-like Kauther
- Sayyed Sheikh Shāh ̣ebn-e Khwāja Hasan
- Beyg Safawi house
- Unit of Sharbat-Khānā
- Remains of spring-like Kauther, discovered 1995
- Remains of shrine bath, discovered 2006
- Remains of Āsh-Khānā, discovered 2006

The following description of the most important elements within the shrine starts from the holiest place, Sheikh Safi al-Din’s shrine, and proceeds outwards along the path used for visits to the shrine, with short accounts of the most significant features of the ensemble.

Sheikh Safi al-Din’s Shrine (c 1334-49), also known as Allāh Allāh Dome because of the repetition of the word Allāh in the inscriptions, is a cylindrical brick structure, built on a polygonal stone plinth after the death of Sheikh Safi al-Din by his son and successor. The plan of the tower is circular on the exterior and octagonal inside. It has a crescent-shaped double-shelled dome decorated with elaborate Koranic inscriptions in Kufic calligraphy. Internally are to be found colourful plasterwork, paintings, calligraphic inscriptions, and wooden works with lacquer paintings, possibly inserted in the 19th century.

Shah Ismail’s Shrine (c 1524-29) is a square room covered by a double-shelled brick dome, decorated externally with coloured tiles and internally with temperas, illuminated inscriptions, and an ornate wooden chest with delicate inlay work and plasterwork inscriptions.

The plan of Muhīyy Alal-Dīn Muhammad’s Shrine or Haram Khānā (c 1323) is more elaborate than the two preceding tombs. It includes a vestibule, a corridor and two spaces, one rectangular and one square-shaped, where the funerary chests were located. This room is covered by a semicircular dome, the shell of which was reconstructed in 1915.

Dār al-Huffāz Hall or Qandil-khānā (c 1339-49) is a rectangular covered space where verses from the Koran were memorized by the faithful. Externally the facade is subdivided in five vertical panels, with two windows in each panel, surrounded by delicate frames in coloured faience. The entrance is on the left side and consists of a richly decorated Timurid portal covered by a semi-dome with stalactites. The facade culminates in a frieze with Koranic inscriptions and a cymatium (cornice) with large stalactites. The gate leads to a corridor from which access is gained via a staircase to the Hall, a rectangular space of double height. There is a double series of window niches on the long sides to give light to the Hall. At the southern end the Hall ends in a semi-domed alcove (shahnishih). The interior wall surfaces of the hall are profusely decorated with floral paintings, inscriptions, and stalactites.

The Chini-khānā (c 1605-11) is square in plan at the floor level and becomes octagonal, through the use of diagonal arches, at the level of the dome impost. It is covered with a double-shelled dome, to which a third internal shell was added to give tranquillity and balance to the structure. Its interior is highly decorated with stalactites and rasmi-bandi. The building materials to be found throughout the ensemble include timber elements, a variety of bricks, stone for foundations and plinths, multi-coloured tiles, faience, glazed tiles, marble in decorations and paving, various woods in funerary chests and grave-posts, chinaware, gold plating, vermilion, cobalt, cotton, gold plate, copper, silver, plaster, lime, and clay mortar.

The Jannat-sarā (c 1524-76) is the largest structure in the shrine and representative of the Safavid architecture in Ardabil. Its facade on the courtyard side is formed by a large arched porch closed by a wooden decorated grille (which is, however, likely to be the result of 19th century modification to the building).

The Sāhat (c 1349) or courtyard is a rectangular open area with a rounded poly-lobed pool (the twelve lobes represent the twelve divinely ordained imams of Shi‘ite belief) in the centre. The courtyard gives access to several of the buildings mentioned above, as well as to the New Chilla Khānā, today in ruins, the Dār al-Hadith, and the Middle Courtyard through the Shāh Abbāsi Gate.

The Dār al-Hadith (built between 1502 and 1541) was
originally a place for religious instruction and for the reception of guests. It is formed by a large central vaulted hall, closed by a wooden decorated grille and flanked by smaller walled and vaulted chambers. The facade is highly decorated with floral motifs and inscriptions on faience coloured tiles.

The Arsa (c 1448) or Garden Courtyard is an elongated trapezoidal open space. In the middle there was a fountain for the ablutions of the faithful. Two portals in the shorter sides connect the garden with the Middle Courtyard or passageway and with the Meydān. The gates were flanked by houses and service buildings.

The Meydān was a tetragonal space, the first that visitors entered after passing through the Main Gate. It has now assumed a rectangular shape as a result of the urban development that has changed the plan of the site. The Main Gate to the ensemble, the Darvāzeh, no longer exists.

The Shahidgāh (c 1502) or cemetery occupies the east and south sides of the Shrine. It was the burial place of the disciples of Sheikh Safi al-Din and of religious and political personalities after the foundation of the Safavid dynasty.

A number of the structures are today archaeological remains that have been only partly excavated, such as the baths, the kitchens, the cistern, and the bakery.

Movable artefacts include medieval pottery, illuminated manuscripts, and other offerings made at the Shrine over centuries by pilgrims from far and wide.

History and development

Sufism (tasawwuf, from sūf ‘wool’ in Arabic or safā ‘purity’) is generally considered to be the inner mystical dimension of Islam rather than a distinct sect. It began to develop into a spiritual movement in the 9th and 10th centuries. Sufism is claimed to have been a definitive factor in the spread of Islam and in the creation of an integrated Islamic culture in Africa and Asia. Sufism flourished between the 13th and 16th centuries throughout the Islamic world as a vigorous religious and intellectual culture with specific directi

When Iran underwent the Islamic conquest, Ardabil was the largest city in north-western Iran, and it remained so until the Mongol invasions, which left the town shattered for three centuries until the advent of the Safavid Dynasty, of which Sheikh Safi al-Din (1252-1334) is the eponym.

Sheikh Safi al-Din followed Sheikh Zāhèd e-Gilānī’s teachings and after his master’s death took his place and developed his own tariqat, which acquired its name and from which Safavi Sufism originated. He founded a khānegāh in Ardabil, which was later to become his shrine.

The ensemble functioned initially as a small, self-contained city with bazaars, public baths and meydāns, religious facilities, houses, and offices.

During the reign of the Safavi rulers, the role and function of the nominated property changed to one of political and national importance as the important shrine of the founder of the Safavid Dynasty. Shah Ismail, Sheikh Safi al-Din’s successor as Sufi leader of the khanegah, became the first shah of the Safavid Dynasty and declared Shi’ism the state religion.

The Safavids spared no expense in enriching and decorating the structure of the shrine of their ancestor with many works of art. The shrine became a focus for pilgrims from around the world and a religious ensemble containing outstanding works of art, ornamentation, and archaeology from the 14th to the 18th centuries.

Four main building phases have been identified by researchers in which the most important structures were built or substantially modified:

- 1300-1349: In this period the layout of the shrine was laid down: Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Khānegāh, Haram-khānā, Allāh Allāh Dome, Sāhat, Dār al-Huffāz Hall, Shāhnishin, the Middle Courtyard, and the New Chilla Khānā were built.
- 1349-1544: In this period Shah Ismail and Shah Ismail’s mother’s sepulchres, Dār al-Hadith, Jannat-sarā, Shahidgāh, and the sepulchre yard south of Sheikh Safi al-Din tomb were built. Most of the building activity has been dated to the 16th century.
- 1544-1752: The Chini-khānā in its present form, the Shāh Abbāsī Gate, and the Garden Courtyard were created.
- 1752 to the 20th century: The school, the toilets, the engine room, and the greenhouse were built, most of them in the 20th century.

The nominated property has maintained its role as a place of worship and pilgrimage.

3. OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE, INTEGRITY AND AUTHENTICITY

Comparative analysis

The State Party has based the comparative analysis on the level of completeness of the complexes considered for comparison and on their influence as sources of inspiration for establishing other similar religious centres.

The comparative analysis includes properties from Iran, Kazakhstan, and Afghanistan that have either already been inscribed on the World Heritage List, such as Soltaniyeh, Iran (2005, criteria (ii), (iii) (iv)) and the
Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, Kazakhstan (2003, criteria (i), (iii), (iv)), or on the Tentative Lists of States Parties, such as Bastam and Kharaghan (Iran), and other similar properties from within Iran such as Sheikh Ahmad-e Jām Khānegāh, the Shah Nemotollah-e Valy Khānegāh, the Sheikh Abdolsamad Khānegāh, the Sheikh Shāh Abdeldin Mahmud-e Ahari Khānegāh and their associated mausoleum complexes, or from other countries within the same geocultural region, such as Molānā Jalāleddin Mohammad-e-Balkhi Khānegāh, Khoja Abdullah Ansari Complex in Afghanistan, or the Pir Husein Khānegāh in Lankaran, Azerbaijan.

ICOMOS considers that the comparison with the selected properties in the nomination dossier is convincing and demonstrates that the nominated property reflects the best of Sufic philosophy in its architectural forms and decorations, has influenced the design of structures that are included in the properties selected for comparison, has retained a greater variety of buildings and spaces, and in this way made manifest in a higher and clearer manner the logical relationship between the ceremonial, service, and worship spaces and the religious path of Safavi Sufism.

ICOMOS considers that other examples, from both the World Heritage List and the Tentative Lists, could have been selected for a relevant comparison with the nominated property. These include Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures, Uzbekistan (2001, criteria (i), (ii), (iv)), which is on the World Heritage List, and from the Tentative Lists the Tomb of Bibi Jawindi, Baha’al-Halim and Ustead and the Tomb and Mosque of Jalaluddin Bukhari in Pakistan, and Ak Astana-baba Mausoleum, Bahoutdin Architectural Complex, and Chor-Bakr in Uzbekistan which could have contributed to deepening the comparative analysis.

ICOMOS notes that the comparative analysis has identified relevant examples comparable with the nominated property and has selected properties that may or may not be inscribed on the World Heritage List and at the national and regional level, which, in this specific case, is the only relevant one.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis, despite certain weaknesses, justifies consideration of this property for inscription on 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 spatial layout of the architectural complex symbolically defines and invokes the path of Sufism, the *Dhekr* (invocation) and the *Safavi Tariqat* (credo). The decorative elements of the ensemble, including inscriptions, wood inlay, wood engravings, murals and wall decorations, carpets, and prayer mats, are all designed to serve the mystical philosophy of *Safavi Tariqat*. Floral motifs symbolizing paradise appear in innumerable inscriptions in the ensemble.

- The design of the Khānegāh and Shrine Ensemble of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili reflects influences from Ilkhānid and Timurid architecture which, when integrated with the philosophy of Sufism, created new spatial and architectural forms.

- The spatial layout of the nominated property became a prototype for innovative architectural expression and a reference for subsequent khānegāhs and shrines in other countries, establishing the world-famous Safavi style in art and architecture.

- As the base of the Safavid Dynasty, Ardabil acquired greater significance than Mashhad and Qom and became the leading holy city of Iran. Even in the 16th and 17th centuries, when the capital was in Tabriz, Qazvin, and Isfahan, Ardabil remained the only national religious capital for the rulers of Iran.

- Sheikh Safi al-Din’s credo developed from the local level to the national and international, and extended beyond the boundaries of Iran and Azerbaijan to Anatolia, Sham [Syria], Ceylon, and China in the east and Yemen in the west, a vast area of the world of that time.

ICOMOS considers that this justification is appropriate in linking the tangible (architecture and artistic collections) and intangible (Sufism and religious practices) values of the nominated property. ICOMOS further considers that the art of design, construction, and decoration of Iranian builders and artists has been imbued with the refined symbolism of Sufi thinking, thus reaching an exquisite elegance, equilibrium, and spiritual character in the sequence of spaces within the complex.

**Integrity and Authenticity**

Integrity

The State Party has analysed different aspects of integrity - visual, structural, functional - for each structure within the nominated property. Most of the structures that make up the ensemble are deemed to have retained their integrity, although in some cases the nomination dossier acknowledges that inappropriate installations or localized damage have had an adverse impact on
The cemetery has been covered with stone aggregate.

ICOMOS considers that all the elements that are necessary to convey the value of the nominated property have been included within the boundaries.

ICOMOS also considers that it is remarkable how, despite its many phases of construction, the site continues to present an image of harmonious composition.

However, ICOMOS observes that the original access to the Shrine through the ‘Seven Gateways’ was an element of great significance in the original design and a major component of its intangible heritage. With the principal entrance for visitors now moved to the south-west corner, the original entrance through the Garden Courtyard has been lost. ICOMOS asked the State Party in its letter of 15 December 2009 to explore pros and cons as well as possible solutions for restoring the original access to the Shrine.

The State Party replied that the original access to the Shrine will be re-established and a special plan has been discussed. The access in use until recently has already been closed. The State Party considers that re-establishing the original access is the best option for practical reasons as well.

Most of the buildings within the nominated property are in a rather good state of conservation. The dome of the Jannat-sarā, however, was reconstructed in the 1970s. This followed a period with flat roofing, due to the collapse of the original dome.

The ornamentation, including the inscribed silver doors and the exquisitely carved wooden grave markers, are still in pristine condition, centuries after they were created. Conservation work on the ornamentation has been restrained and restoration carried out only when there was a risk of acceleration of decay.

Within the nominated property, there was, when the technical evaluation mission was carried out, a large building workshop to the east of the Garden Court owned by the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO), which has supplied the bricks required for the new museums being built within the buffer zone. ICOMOS considers that this workshop intrudes upon the integrity of the site. A letter was sent to the State Party on 15 December 2009 raising the issue of the removal of this structure.

The State Party replied that the brick structure had already been removed and relocated in an empty space near the Friday Mosque. The new workshop will start operation in April 2010.

The cemetery has been covered with stone aggregate.

Although this ensures easy drainage and ease of walking and maintenance, ICOMOS considers that it detracts from the original character of the landscape and may cause damage to the gravestones that are still in situ. ICOMOS recommends that a different solution for the paving be envisioned and applied.

Authenticity

The State Party has assessed authenticity of the nominated property in detail, considering four aspects (design, workmanship, setting, and material), each in its turn being further subdivided for each component of the ensemble. In summary, despite certain losses and subsequent repair, replacement, and restoration interventions the authenticity of the ensemble is claimed to have been retained for all four of the aspects of authenticity considered relevant in relation to the value of the nominated property.

ICOMOS observes that the buildings within the ensemble were built over a period of seven centuries. During that time, some were altered to accommodate new functions or aesthetic purposes. However, apart from the Jannat-sarā brick dome, which was reconstructed in the 1970s, all the standing structures retain their original architectural form.

ICOMOS further observes that, although several centuries have passed and repairs have been necessary, in no case has the authenticity of the material been compromised at the shrine ensemble, thanks to the availability of skilled craftsmen.

The design and architecture for new buildings in the buffer zone, including the museums, have generally followed traditional forms, with only minor exceptions, although reinforced concrete has been used for certain structural elements.

ICOMOS considers that the ensemble has maintained its original religious functions for almost all the spaces within it. Some have been adapted to accommodate modern uses, such as the Dār al-Hadith, which is now appropriately used as a library and a resource room for the conservation staff, and this has been done with care vis-à-vis the character of the space.

However, ICOMOS notes that there is a tendency to plan the reconstruction of the collapsed elements, such as the Darvāzeh Main Gate or the New Chilla Khānā. ICOMOS recommends that maximum consideration should be given to all the alternatives that may ensure the correct interpretation and communication of the value of the nominated property, while keeping reconstruction as a last option, so as to avoid threats to the authenticity of the property.

ICOMOS considers that the architectural spirit of the place has in general been retained. Travellers over the centuries have described a sense of awe and spirituality on entering the Khānegāh, and this continues. It has
been achieved by a high level of maintenance coupled with a restrained approach to conservation.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property shows a high level of integrity and authenticity and recommends the State Party to proceed with its plans to re-establish the original access to the Shrine, as stated in the reply to ICOMOS.

On the basis of the additional information provided by the State Party, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

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

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

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the Sheikh Safi al-Din ensemble represents the highest peak of the artistic and architectural language that characterized the Safavid period from the 16th to the 18th centuries.

The Khānegāh and shrine ensemble of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili is a masterpiece of human genius. The ensemble is composed of spaces within which all movable and immovable elements, including the architectural plan, patterns and motifs, decorative elements of inscriptions and non-inscription, and the styles and meanings serve the requirements of the Dhekr (invocation) and the rituals of the Safavi Tariqat (credo).

The most significant feature is the expression through art and architecture of the seven spiritual stages of Sufism, which were experienced along the path (Soluk) in the ensemble. It begins at the main entrance and ends at the tomb [Rowza = heaven] of the Sheikh.

The Chini Khānā is the most astonishing masterpiece of art and architecture in the entire ensemble. The close interconnection of architectural forms and decoration has created a wonderful work of human genius. The over one thousand glass vessels and containers in the four alcoves of the building and the inscriptions with the words Allāh, Mohammad, and All in the east and west alcoves portray the echo of the invocations of the Sufis in the khānegāh at its best.

The diversity of artistic styles in decorative elements other than inscriptions, the use of mystical symbols in the buildings of the ensemble, and the great harmony between decoration and function in the structures depict the idea of purification and elevation of the human soul.

ICOMOS considers that the conception of the entire ensemble layout, the proportions of internal and external spaces and of the buildings, their design and refined decorations, together with the climax created by the sequenced path to the Sheikh Safi al-Din shrine, all combine to create a unique complex in which aesthetics and spirituality are in a harmonious dialogue.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has 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 Sheikh Safi al-Din ensemble represents an important interchange in the evolution of Islamic architecture of the 16th century. The design of the nominated property was based on Sufic philosophy in its Safavid interpretation, and is deemed to have been the main reference for the development of the Safavid artistic and architectural style, of which Isfahan became the pinnacle. With the construction of the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Khānegāh ensemble a new style for mystically sensitive spaces was created. It still constitutes the best model for khānegāh and shrines.

The nominated property, while having been influenced by contemporaneous and earlier Islamic architecture in the Azerbaijan region, was also a pioneering case in the field of architecture, technology, urban development, monumental artwork, and architectural decoration that has influenced subsequent structures throughout Iran.

The nominated property links the architecture of the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods to the Safavid period. Tall structures and wide openings are some of the central features of the Ilkhanid and Timurid epochs. These have been integrated with the Safavid taste for exquisite decorations and interior forms. The art employed inside this ensemble in inscriptions and other decorative elements promotes exalted human values by the instruction of Safavi Tariqat.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

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 Sheikh Safi al-Din ensemble is a prototype and outstanding example of a 16th century religious complex, which contains all the significant elements which from that time on came to characterize Safavid architecture.

The Khānegāh and shrine ensemble of Sheikh Safi al-Din is a well developed prototype of an institution with social, religious, charitable, cultural, and educational functions. With its versatile spaces, it has met the
physical and spiritual needs of its residents and pilgrims. It includes places to meet the needs of the various fields of education and training (the school, the mosque, Dâr-al Hadith, Dâr-al Huffâz, Khânegâh), livelihood (the kitchen, bakery, civilian houses, windmill, shops), and health care (the hospital Sharbat Khânâ or Shafâ Khâna, and four baths). There are more than 67 spaces and courtyards attached to the Khânegâh, all of which have played a significant role in the training and educational philosophy of Safavi Tariqat. The ensemble has proved to be the most perfect religious complex over nearly four hundred years, from 1301 to 1723, under the leadership of Sheikh Safi al-Din and his descendants.

ICOMOS considers that, among the most special qualities of the nominated property, the wealth of well maintained civil buildings should be cited as a remarkable feature. These were designed to provide for residence, services (kitchens, and storage-rooms), health care (hammams, thermal baths, etc.) as well as maintenance and crafts workshops, a library, and a museum of local pottery. Their existence reflects the fact that Sufi teaching focused on the care of human beings in their integral physical and spiritual dimensions.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

Criterion (vi): be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the Sheikh Safi al-Din ensemble has become the symbol of the introduction of the Shi‘ite religion under the Safavid Dynasty as a state religion. Since that time this has become one of the two principal schools of faith in Islam, alongside Sunni, and under the leadership of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili the tariqat developed from local to national and international levels.

To underline the spiritual significance and the sacred nature of the ensemble, any conflict was forbidden within the Shrine, and even animals and plants were to be safe and secure, in anticipation of paradise.

With the expansion of the activities of the Safavi School by the descendants of Sheikh Safi al-Din, particularly Sadr al-Din Musa and his grandson, Khwajeh Ali Siâh Poush, the Khânegâh ensemble became a centre for spiritual elevation, the propagation of religious messages, and the revival of values.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property is closely associated with the establishment of the Persian Safavid Dynasty since it was founded by the eponym of the dynasty as well as the founder of the religious creed that assumed the name of Safavi Tariqat. The first Shah of the Safavid Dynasty, Ismail I, after being proclaimed sovereign of Persia, established the Shi‘ism of the Twelve Imams as the state religion.

ICOMOS considers that the justification provided by the State Party is founded mainly on reasons of national importance, i.e. the establishment of the Safavid Dynasty. The Safavids made Iran flourish again from the political, economic, and cultural points of view, and religious unification under Shi‘ism also played a fundamental role.

However, ICOMOS considers that these reasons, while certainly important at the national level, cannot be considered alone to be of such universal relevance as to justify this criterion. The demonstration of the spreading of the Safavi Tariqat from the local to the national and international contexts, extending beyond Iran and Azerbaijan to Anatolia, Syria, Ceylon, China, and Yemen, has not been substantiated in the nomination dossier.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (i), (ii), and (iv) and conditions of authenticity and integrity and that Outstanding Universal Value has been demonstrated.

Description of the attributes

- The spatial layout of the Sheikh Safi al-Din ensemble architectural complex, which symbolically defines and evokes the path of Sufism.
- The entire range of structures included and mentioned in the nomination dossier as part of the ensemble.
- The decorative elements of the ensemble, including inscriptions, wood inlay, wood engravings, murals and wall decorations, carpets, and prayer mats, all designed to serve the mystical philosophy of Safavi Tariqat.
- The path through the seven gates to the shrine, which is a materialization of the spiritual path made by Sufi pilgrims and followers when they visited the Shrine.

4. FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROPERTY

Development pressures

The Sheikh Safi Shrine ensemble was originally larger than it is today, in that portions of the open areas and of the cemetery have over the years been encroached upon to build streets and private structures. The shrine ensemble is located in the centre of Ardabil, which is still experiencing a significant rate of growth. However, the present 13ha buffer zone has a population of less than 1,000 people. Height restrictions on new buildings within the buffer zone and regulation of building design by ICHHTO protect the historical character of the setting.

New infrastructure requirements for modern living, such as mobile phone towers or gas pipelines, will require
sensitive planning in order to ensure that there is no loss of historical character or archaeological damage.

However, ICOMOS considered that the multi-level building with an underground car-park now being built on the western side of the buffer zone is of considerable concern. Since vehicular traffic may generate conflicts with the protection of the nominated property, ICOMOS asked the State Party to provide more detailed information on this parking in its letter dated 15 December 2009.

The State Party replied that the structure being built is a cultural/commercial complex of four storeys, two of which will be below the ground level. The maximum height of the construction is 7.5m and it has been designed in consultation with ICHHTO, respecting the forms and materials of traditional architecture. The entire capacity of the parking, which is located at the lowest level of the complex, is 35 vehicles.

With main roads surrounding the site now being put to commercial use, most shopfronts are almost completely of glass. ICHHTO has a project for rebuilding shops in vernacular style.

ICOMOS considers that architectural control is needed to limit the area of glazing.

Tourism pressures

The State Party maintains that the nominated property possesses adequate capacity to accommodate visitors, thanks to the existence of a number of open spaces. However, the State Party acknowledges the need to control the number of visits inside the buildings, especially in Sheikh Safi’s Shrine and Shah Ismail’s Tomb, owing to the limited space and the negative impact caused by the modification of hygrometric and thermal parameters.

ICOMOS has considered that there is an urgent need for a comprehensive visitor plan to be put into place and has raised this issue in its letter sent to the State Party on 15 December 2009.

The State Party responded that measures have been established to manage visitors in the peak seasons, which, according to the monitoring exercise carried out by the management authorities, are spring and summer. These include allocating visitors to groups with scheduled entrance to the ensemble. Short-, medium-, and long-term objectives for visitor management have been developed and are to be incorporated in the Master Plan for Ardabil, the revision process of which is planned to be finalised by September 2010.

ICOMOS recommends that the efforts undertaken to finalise a comprehensive visitor strategy be continued and a visitor plan elaborated as soon as possible and included in the revised Ardabil Master Plan.

Environmental pressures

The State Party states that long cold winters, coupled with a high level of humidity in the ground, cause problems of frost stress and rising damp that make the conservation of the decorated external surface difficult, especially the tile-work. A comprehensive monitoring plan is planned to study the influence of climatic cycle on the elements of the nominated property.

ICOMOS observes that exposed archaeological remains are prone to deterioration, even when covered by a roof. ICOMOS considers that it is necessary to protect excavated foundations by backfilling rather than exposing them for exhibition.

ICOMOS recommends that the envisioned comprehensive monitoring system be implemented and systematic applied research developed to address the aforementioned issues.

An additional source of pressure derives from urban pollution.

Natural disasters

The most probable threats to the nominated property are earthquakes. ICHHTO has taken steps to mitigate damage that may be caused by a seismic event.

Impact of climate change

The State Party has not identified pressures that may be related to climate change other than those included in the environmental pressure section.

ICOMOS considers that unexpected and extreme weather events may be consequences of climate change in the area.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are thermal cycle stress, frost, modification of hygrometric and thermal indoor parameters, and earthquakes. ICOMOS recommends that the planned comprehensive monitoring system should be implemented and systematic applied research developed to address these issues. ICOMOS further considers that the efforts undertaken to finalize a comprehensive visitor strategy should be continued and finalized as soon as possible and included in the revised Ardabil Master Plan.

5. PROTECTION, CONSERVATION, AND MANAGEMENT

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The nominated property comprises several structures, an area of archaeological excavations to the south-west, a garden court, the central-eastern edge, where a
building workshop presently stands, and the Meydān on the northern edge.

The buffer zone for the site consists of 13ha around the nominated property, the boundaries of which have been clearly identified and appropriately selected.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property and of its buffer zone are adequate.

**Ownership**

The Iranian Cultural Heritage Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO) is the owner of the entire nominated property.

Within the buffer zone, the ownership profile is varied and includes publicly owned property by state and municipal governments, privately owned properties and properties owned by religious organisations.

**Protection**

**Legal Protection**

In Iran the legal provisions for the protection of cultural heritage are to be found in general or specific laws.

The Law for the protection of national heritage (1930) defines the procedures for the identification of cultural heritage and establishes the National Heritage List, along with the criteria for inclusion in this list. The law also includes provisions for archaeological excavations, further detailed by the Bye-law concerning unauthorized excavations (1980). Further provisions relating to the acquisition of property having cultural significance are created by the Law concerning acquisition of land, buildings and premises (1969).

The Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization (later renamed the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization - ICHHTO), which was established in 1979, is responsible for ensuring the protection and management of cultural heritage. ICHHTO is in charge of studying, investigating, surveying, and registering movable and immovable cultural property. It is also responsible for providing and enforcing plans for repairing and revitalizing monuments, buildings, and valuable cultural-historical complexes.

The Sheikh Safi Al-Din ensemble was registered on the List of National Heritage Monuments of Iran in 1932 and, by virtue of this registration, the complex enjoys special protection and conservation legislation. The ICHHTO base at the site was established in 2002.

Local regulations ensure that the nominated property and the buffer zone are further protected, i.e. in the immediate surroundings of the nominated property (level 1 of the buffer zone according to Iranian legislation) the height of the new buildings does not exceed 5.5m, while in the buffer zone (level 2 buffer zone according to Iranian legislation) buildings may not be higher than 7.5m. Other regulations prohibit posters and advertising billboards.

The Ardabil Master Plan was first prepared in 1983, revised in 1993 and 2004, and is currently under reconsideration. The master plan is said to have been prepared in consultation with ICHHTO and to include observations on height restrictions in different areas of the town, and to define historic neighbourhoods, permitted land use and other rules concerning building construction. However it has not been possible to examine the Plan since no English translation or summary has been provided.

ICOMOS raised this issue in its letter sent to the State Party on 15 December 2009, and in its reply the State Party explained the general structure of master plans in Iran. They comprise six chapters: the first and the second provide information on the features of the area from the natural, historical, cultural, social, and economic point of view. The third chapter details the features of the town, including urban planning parameters and existing regulations concerning buildings or areas of cultural importance, which are also mapped in the plan. The fourth chapter contains the analysis of this information, on the basis of which the structure of the plan and its related regulations are set out, with special regard to historical areas. The fifth chapter defines long-, mid-, and short-term objectives and projects, and the sixth chapter discusses the zoning and expansion of the town, taking account of issues such as population density, land use, and communication networks.

ICOMOS observes that the area selected to surround the nominated property as the buffer zone is well thought-out and is large enough to ensure the adequate indirect protection of the nominated property.

The provisions concerning the nominated area, buffer and landscape zones, established according to the national legislation for heritage protection, have been incorporated in the revised Ardabil City Master Plan. This has been issued by the provincial working group. It is currently being referred to the Council for Provincial Programming and Development, while final approval by the Higher City Council of Iranian City Planning and Architecture is scheduled for September 2010.

ICOMOS recommends that the programmed schedule to finalise the approval of the revised Ardabil Master Plan be respected and that updated information about the progress made be provided to the World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS at the end of 2010.

**Effectiveness of protection measures**

The legal framework is effective and strictly implemented.

Security from vandalism is ensured by monitoring on
CCTV. Access to the main shrine requires completion of a security check.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place and the protective measures for the property are adequate.

Conservation

Inventories, recording, research

An exhaustive record of archival photographs and the writings of travellers has been collected and exhibited in the Jannat-sarā. Excellent reports are available on movable objects, tilework decorations, and archaeological excavations. The Chinese porcelains and the grave stones still await systematic inventorization.

ICOMOS notes that documentation related to the structures of the buildings is lacking. Furthermore, no record has been provided of the ongoing maintenance of tile and brick architecture that is under way.

A high-definition survey using 3D laser scanning technology has been carried out. It is unclear whether the interior spaces have been scanned or not.

ICOMOS considers that it would be useful for the State Party to undertake systematic technical documentation of the buildings and keep a record of the renewal of old parts and removed sections. Similarly, it would be helpful for the 3D laser scanning survey of the entire complex to be completed as soon as possible.

Present state of conservation

The conservation philosophy for the site is to ensure that the spirit of the place and the dignity of all its elements are respected. All the historic buildings in the nominated property are in a good state of conservation with a systematic process for reviewing and condition assessment on a regular basis.

ICOMOS considers that, although structures revealed during archaeological excavations are at present covered with steel-truss roofing, they need continuous monitoring to ensure that deterioration does not set in. The State Party should give consideration to not excavating archaeological areas so as not triggering accelerated degradation of these fragile items. It should also consider reburying exposed archaeological remains once the documentation is completed.

ICOMOS further observes that some unexplained damp patches are visible on the underlying surface of the dome of the Chini-khānā. This was clad in the 1970s with copper sheets to prevent water penetration, but this cover seems to have altered the behaviour pattern of the brick dome.

ICOMOS suggests the State Party to give consideration to rebuild the masonry wall and roof over Shah Ismail’s mother’s grave, which collapsed in the 1980s, so to restore the sense of quiet seclusion to the courtyard, and should avoid reconstruction of the Darvāţeh, destroyed in the 20th century.

ICOMOS also considers that the display of fragile antiquities in the Chini-khānā requires modern display cases and other security installations that break up the space and do not hide ornamental wall surfaces.

Finally, ICOMOS notes that at the present time the internal and external electric fittings for the illumination of the buildings and artefacts detract from the historic character and integrity of the complex. They seem to be obsolete and to generate heat. However, a new illumination system is being professionally designed to replace them.

ICOMOS recommends that the State Party provide information on any progress with the modernisation of the illumination system.

Active conservation measures

In view of the high number of extremely significant artefacts (ceramics, silver, pottery, wood, paper) in the collection of the ensemble, there is a conservation laboratory on the site, with trained art conservators.

ICOMOS notes that the Governor-General of Ardabil and the City Council have recognized that development controls must be strongly adhered to, with limited vehicular traffic around the site. In recent years ICHHTO has checked encroachments by acquiring land surrounding the nominated property.

ICOMOS asked the State Party to undertake steps to prepare a landscape plan for the entire nominated property in order to ensure appropriate conservation of its gardens.

In its reply the State Party reported that a programme of research activities instrumental for the development of a comprehensive Landscape Plan has been prepared and included in the short- and medium-term objectives of the management plan. Research will focus on archaeological, botanical, and hydrological aspects of the garden in order to acquire sufficient information to restore it to its original layout.

Maintenance

Maintenance is regularly carried out at the property by the ICHHTO Base.

Effectiveness of conservation measures

The conservation measures undertaken by the ICHHTO Base are generally effective. Specific concerns are set out above and incorporated into the recommendations.

ICOMOS considers that the conservation programme is
ICOMOS considers that there are conservation measures in place but that there is a need to address a number of issues, such as paying specific attention to exposed archaeological remains and adopting adequate conservation measures for Chini-khānā and Shah Ismail's mother's grave. Finally, ICOMOS recommends that maximum consideration should be given to all alternatives that may ensure the correct interpretation and communication of the value of the nominated property, while keeping reconstruction as a last option.

Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

At its centre ICHHTO has a High Technical Council that meets periodically on various significant sites. The Council approves budgets and all major conservation proposals. Minor and day-to-day works are handled by a multi-disciplinary steering committee appointed at each of Iran's significant sites. The Sheikh Safi ICHHTO Base has a set of goals administered by its Director, who heads three branches - conservation and restoration, finance and administration, and research. At Ardabil the steering committee is headed by an urban planner and includes engineers, architects, conservation architects, and archaeologists.

The ICHHTO steering committee and staff have ensured that professional systems are in place for carrying out conservation work, documentation, and periodic monitoring.

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

The nomination dossier explains that the management plan integrates the measures included in Ardabil Master Plan, the regulations for Sheikh Safi al-Din Khāneqāh and Shrine Ensemble protected monument, its buffer and landscape zones, the outcomes of the SWOT analysis, and related short-, medium-, and long-term goals.

The general strategy for the management of the site includes among its priorities the establishment of a research centre and a documentation centre, undertaking regular monitoring and data analysis, developing interpretation and presentation programmes and facilities, and organizing periodic meetings of management staff.

ICOMOS asked the State Party to clarify whether the management plan mentioned in the nomination dossier has come into force or is under development in its letter of 15 December 2009.

The State Party replied that the management framework and related actions are the result of eighty years of continuous conservation operations which were carried out in conformity with the previous master plan. These will be incorporated in the revised Master Plan, which is scheduled for final approval in September 2010.

In 2006, 151,000 visitors came to the Sheikh Safi Al-Din shrine (30% higher than 2005), of whom only 1% were foreign visitors. There are several publications available for local visitors. Most street signs are bilingual; each building within the ensemble has well designed bilingual signage explaining its key features. Outdoor areas such as the Garden Courtyard and cemetery have appropriate signage.

ICHHTO has printed bilingual fliers in Persian and English on key structures. These are available free of cost at the site and at hotels in Ardabil and surrounding towns.

Visitor facilities are available on site, and heritage walks linking other museums and sites in the vicinity are being planned.

ICOMOS recommends that details of any further visitor facilities and/or activities should be incorporated into a comprehensive visitor strategy and a plan finalised and included in the revised Master Plan for Ardabil.

Risk preparedness

There is no specific information on this topic in the nomination dossier.

ICOMOS recommends that a risk-preparedness plan should be developed for the property, with special regard to seismic threat.

Involvement of the local communities

The local community and residents have free access to the open portions of the site such as the Garden Courtyard and remain deeply interested in the welfare of the site, but they are not actively involved in day-to-day management issues.

ICHHTO is initiating links with local government, private universities, and NGOs to enable academics, researchers, and civil society organizations to become stakeholders in the preservation of Sheikh Safi Al-Din shrine.

Resources, including staffing levels, expertise and training

Over forty staff members have been allocated to conservation projects at the nominated property. These include conservation professionals and craftsmen in specialized crafts, some of who are hired on a need basis.
Funding for conservation is not a concern at the Sheikh Safi shrine since there are multiple sources of funds available - from the Iranian Government, money generated by ticket sales, money from properties owned by the Shrine in other provinces and rented out, money from offerings to the shrine, and rents from adjoining shops.

**Effectiveness of current management**

The current management of the nominated property by ICHHTO is active, professional, and effective.

ICOMOS considers that the management system for the property is adequate.

ICOMOS considers that the management system in place for the property is adequate. ICOMOS recommends, however, that a detailed timeframe for short-, medium-, and long-term objectives should be established. ICOMOS further recommends that a risk-preparedness plan should be developed for the property, with special regard to seismic threat and that the efforts undertaken to finalise a comprehensive visitor strategy be continued and a plan elaborated and included in the revised Ardabil Master Plan.

**6. MONITORING**

The State Party has set up a monitoring system based on a range of indicators, which are grouped under six headings (conservation, maintenance and security, urban development, research and education, visitors, geology). Selected indicators are linked with the features that illustrate Outstanding Universal Value and with major threats to the nominated property. The timeframe for monitoring varies according to each indicator. The body in charge of monitoring activity is the ICHHTO Base at the site.

ICOMOS considers that the overall monitoring system in place is adequate, the indicators being linked to aspects relevant to Outstanding Universal Value and major threats. However, ICOMOS recommends that records of maintenance works should be kept regularly.

**7. CONCLUSIONS**

ICOMOS considers that the Sheikh Safi al-din Khānegāh and Shrine Ensemble in Ardabil exhibits an exceptional architectural and artistic quality and originality in responding to both spiritual and functional needs. The Outstanding Universal Value of the property has been recognized.

**Recommendations with respect to inscription**

ICOMOS recommends that Sheikh Safi al-din Khānegāh and Shrine Ensemble in Ardabil, Islamic Republic of Iran, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria (i), (ii), and (iv).

**Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value**

**Brief synthesis**

Sheikh Safi al-Din Khānegāh and Shrine Ensemble was built as a small microcosmic city with bazaars, public baths, squares, religious buildings, houses, and offices. It was the largest and most complete khānegāh and the most prominent Sufi shrine since it also hosts the tomb of the founder of the Safavid Dynasty. For these reasons, it has evolved into a display of sacred works of art and architecture from the 14th to the 18th century and a centre of Sufic religious pilgrimage.

The Sheikh Safi al-Din Khānegāh and Shrine Ensemble in Ardabil is of Outstanding Universal Value as an artistic and architectural masterpiece and an outstanding representation of the fundamental principles of Sufism. Ilkhanid and Timurid architectural languages, influenced by Sufic philosophy, have created new spatial forms and decorative patterns. The layout of the ensemble became a prototype for innovative architectural expressions and a reference for other khānegāhs. As the shrine of a prominent Sufi master, who also was the founder of the Safavid Dynasty, the property has remained sacred in Iran up to the present day.

**Criterion (i):** The conception of the entire ensemble layout, the proportions of the internal and external spaces and of the buildings, their design and refined decoration, together with the climax created by the sequenced path to Sheikh Safi al-Din’s shrine, all combined, have concurred to create a unique complex in which aesthetics and spirituality are in a harmonious dialogue.

**Criterion (ii):** The architectural spaces and features of the nominated property have integrated influences of the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods with the religious message of Sufism and the taste for exquisite ornamentation and interior spaciousness, thus giving rise to fresh architectural and artistic forms.

**Criterion (iv):** The Sheikh Safi al-Din ensemble is a prototype and an outstanding example of a 16th century religious complex, combined with social, charitable, cultural, and educational functions, which contains all the significant elements that from then on came to characterize Safavid architecture and became a prototype for other khānegāhs and shrines.
Integrity and Authenticity

The property contains all the elements that convey its Outstanding Universal Value. Most of the elements of the property are in good condition and, despite several transformations, the site continues to present an image of harmonious composition, in which the material realization of the spiritual path through the architectural design is still clearly legible. The State Party has taken steps to restore the original access to the ensemble, which will strengthen the connection between the architecture and the Sufic spiritual messages.

The design form of the entire complex and of individual buildings has been retained and their religious functions have been in most cases maintained. Where they have changed, the new uses are appropriate to the architectural structure in general, and the material and technical authenticity has been retained, as well as the spiritual character of the place. It is, however, important to reduce the tendency to go too far in conservation work.

Management and protection requirements

The nominated property has been protected under the Iranian legislation since 1932. According to the law currently in force, special protection provisions are in place for the property, the buffer zone and for a wider area called the ‘landscape zone.’ These provisions, already in place, are being also incorporated into the revised Master Plan for Ardabil, final approval of which is scheduled for September 2010.

Any project concerning protected monuments in Iran must be in accordance with the provisions of the law and must be approved by ICHHTO, the authority in charge of the protection of Iranian monuments. The management framework established for the nominated property integrates the regulations for Sheikh Safi al-Din Khânegâh and Shrine Ensemble and the provisions of the Ardabil Master Plan.

Management of protected monuments is the responsibility of the High Technical Council of ICHHTO, which approves budgets and all major conservation works. Minor works and day-to-day maintenance is ensured by a steering committee which can avail itself of a multidisciplinary team (the ICHHTO Sheikh Safi al-Din Ensemble Base), which is headed by an urban planner and includes on its staff engineers, architects, conservation architects, and archaeologists.

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

- Establish a detailed time frame for short, medium and long terms objectives for the management system;
- Pay specific attention to exposed archaeological remains;
- Adopt adequate conservation measures for Chini Khana and Shah Ismail’s mother’s grave as soon as possible;
- Give maximum consideration to all alternatives that may ensure the correct interpretation and communication of the value of the nominated property, while keeping reconstruction as a last option;
- Continue the efforts undertaken to finalise a comprehensive visitor strategy and plan as soon as possible and incorporate them into the revised Ardabil Master Plan;
- Develop a risk preparedness plan with specific regard to seismic threat;
- Implement the envisioned comprehensive monitoring system as soon as possible and develop systematic applied technical research on the nominated property for monitoring purposes;
- Proceed with the plans to re-establish the original access to the Shrine and provide the World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS with detailed information on any progress made.

approval in September 2010;
Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property
General view of the nominated property

Dār al-Huffāz (Qandil-khānā)
Dome of Shāhnishin (alcove)

Sāhat