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## **Pearling (Bahrain) No 1364rev**

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### **Official name as proposed by the State Party**

Pearling, testimony of an island economy

### **Location**

Kingdom of Bahrain, territorial waters  
Kingdom of Bahrain, Muharraq Island, Muharraq  
Governorate

### **Brief description**

The traditional sea-use of harvesting pearls from oyster beds in the Persian Gulf shaped the island of Bahrain's economy for millennia. As the best-known source of pearls since ancient times, the Gulf industry reached the apex of its prosperity at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The wealth of what had become a global trade is reflected in the development of the merchant quarters of Muharraq city. A few distinctive commercial and residential buildings remain as a testimony to this proud but dangerous and demanding economic activity which suffered a sudden and catastrophic demise in the 1930s as a result of the development in Japan of cultured pearls from freshwater mussels.

The property includes seventeen buildings embedded in the urban fabric of Muharraq city, three off shore oyster beds, and a part of the seashore at the southern tip of Muharraq Island, from where the boats set off for the oyster beds.

### **Category of property**

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a serial nomination of 15 components consisting of four sites, nine monuments and two groups of buildings.

## **1 Basic data**

### **Included in the Tentative List**

14 May 2008

### **International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination**

None

### **Date received by the World Heritage Centre**

27 January 2010

31 January 2012

### **Background**

This is a referred back nomination.

At its 35<sup>th</sup> session (UNESCO Headquarters, 2011), the World Heritage Committee adopted the following decision:

Decision: 35 COM 8B.20

*The World Heritage Committee,*

1. *Having examined Documents WHC-11/35.COM/8B and WHC-11/35.COM/INF.8B1,*

2. *Refers the nomination of Pearling, testimony of an island economy, Bahrain, back to the State Party in order to provide a more detailed conservation approach for the urban buildings that sets out how the conservation of original fabric will be optimised, how the necessary skills will be put in place for the restoration of decorative woodwork and plasterwork, and how the overall conservation work will be phased and implemented,*

3. *Recommends the State Party to extend the boundary of the Bū Māhir fort site to cover its archaeological remains,*

4. *Also recommends that the State Party requests an advisory mission to the site.*

On 31 January 2012, the State Party provided an update to their first nomination dossier. This included information on:

1. Conservation and management processes
2. Architectural and urban conservation
3. Initiatives for capacity building
4. Minor extension of the boundaries

### **Consultations**

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committees on Intangible Cultural Heritage, Underwater Cultural Heritage and Earthen Architectural Heritage and several independent experts.

Comments on the assessment of this property were received from IUCN on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2011. This information has been carefully considered by ICOMOS in reaching its decision and recommendation.

### **Literature consulted (selection)**

Dayaratne, Dr. Ranjith, *The Traditional and the Hybrid Architecture of Bahrain*, Department of Architecture, University of Bahrain.

El Masri, Souheil & Yarwood, John, *Al Muharraq: Architectural Heritage of a Bahraini City*, 2005.

Fuccaro, N., *The Making of Gulf Ports Before Oil*, in Liwa, Journal of the National Center for Documentation & Research, June 2010.

### Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 6 to 11 October 2010. An ICOMOS Advisory Mission visited the property from 1 to 3 December 2011.

### Additional information requested and received from the State Party

By letter on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010, ICOMOS requested supplementary information from the State Party in relation to the detailed conservation and restoration of buildings.

A response was provided in a letter of 7 November 2010 which set out outline plans for future work of restoration and adaptation of most of the structures. This information is included under the relevant sections below.

### Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

14 March 2012

## 2 The property

### Description

This is a serial nomination of fifteen sites of which three are located in the northern territorial waters of Bahrain and the remaining twelve on the island of Muharraq, the second largest island of Bahrain, located just to the north-east of the main island.

Until the discovery of artificial pearls in the 1930s, Bahrain was the centre of the natural pearl industry which, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, became global, with the resultant international trade bringing substantial economic benefits. This prosperity, and the structure of the industry, is reflected in buildings remaining in the merchant quarter of Muharraq Island. The source of the prosperity is recognized by three extensive under sea oyster beds, while the link between land and sea, and the route of the boats and divers, is commemorated by a stretch of seashore which includes a fort that helped safeguard the trade.

The property consists of:

- Three Oyster beds:
  - Hayr Bū-l-Thāmah
  - Hayr Bū'Amāmah
  - Hayr Shtayyah
- Bū Māhir Seashore & Qal'at Bū Māhir fortress
- Muharraq city:
  - Al-Ghūṣ House
  - Badr Ghulum house
  - Al-Jalahma House
  - Al-Alawi House
  - Fakhro House
  - Murad House
  - Murad Majlis
  - Siyadi Shops
  - Amārāt Ali Rashed & Yousif Abdurrahman Fakhro (group of three storehouses)
  - Nūkhidhah House

- Siyadi complex – two family residences and mosque.

These are considered in turn:

- Three Oyster beds:
  - Hayr Bū-l-Thāmah
  - Hayr Bū'Amāmah
  - Hayr Shtayyah

The oyster beds chosen for inclusion in the nomination represent the most productive of the oyster beds to the north and north east of Bahrain, and the areas described in the historical literature and by informants as having produced the best quality pearls and the highest density of oysters.

The two deeper oyster beds (Hayr Bū-l-Thāmah and Hayr Bū'Amāmah) are separate, discrete oyster beds. The larger, shallower oyster bed, Hayr Shtayyah, is an amalgam of six, adjacent, historically exploited oyster beds that form a crescent around the edge of a huge seabed dome, the centre of which is free of oysters and thus forms part of the buffer zone. Apart from the oyster beds themselves, there are no tangible remains of the oyster harvesting traditions.

- Bū Māhir Seashore & Qal'at Bū Māhir fortress  
*The Bū Māhir* Seashore is the only stretch of authentic sand shoreline remaining in Muharraq (the remainder has been reclaimed). The shore was the point from which the pearl diving boats set off for the oyster beds and is where the festivals associated with their departure and return were held. The nominated shore is some 110 meters long and between 2.5 and 25 meters deep, depending on the tide.

The fortress of *Qal'at Bū Māhir* protected the shore and the harbour basin beyond from pirates or opponents. Of its original four towers, only one tower and an attached wing remains. The upper parts are reconstructions dating to 1977-79.

- Muharraq city:  
The urban properties form a linear route through the southern part of Muharraq city, each of which adds to the overall picture, and tells part of the story of pearling.

They consist of ten houses, belonging to wealthy merchants, three shops, three storehouses, and a mosque, next to one of the family houses. They have been chosen to represent different social and economic aspects of the pearling culture, and particularly the houses of the merchants, who organised the boats and team of pearl divers, and who supplied materials such as timber for ships.

The traditional urban architecture of Bahrain shares many of the characteristics of the wider Gulf region and with the Middle East. However, there are distinct characteristics in the Bahraini architecture particularly in the form, construction and decorative details, reflecting

influences from the many countries involved in the pearl trade. The houses that remain reflect the major rebuilding that took place as a result of the upsurge of the global industry in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The urban houses are arranged around one or more courtyards the centre for movement in and out of the surrounding enclosed spaces. The number of courtyards is varied depending on the family wealth and social status.

The main construction material is coral rubble set in mud mortar and plastered. The flat mud roofs are supported on closely spaced mangrove poles above which are laid split bamboo, woven mats and a layer of stone and mud. Many of the houses are elaborately decorated with perforated gypsum panels, carved doors, fretwork windows, and sometimes decorated ceilings, and a few also have a distinctive recessed decoration on the external facades.

- Al-Ghūṣ House

This single storey building dates to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and at that time occupied the southernmost tip of al-Ḥālah Island. The building stood on the route from the Muharraḡ Sūḡ to Qal'at Bū Māhir, which until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century was located on a separate island just to the south. It is a modest structure for the low-income crew members of the pearling dhows. *Al-Ghūṣ* House was originally of three closed rooms and an open *līwān* (colonnade) arranged around a central courtyard.

- Badr Ghulum house

This house was built in c.1912 by Badr Ghulum, who, as a barber and folk healer, was one of only a handful of people to offer medical services in Muharraḡ in the last years of the pearling economy, and it is upon this basis that the building has been nominated. The property is a two-storey building constructed around a central courtyard garden. In addition to living quarters, the building contains treatment rooms used by Badr Ghulum and his family. It is attached to the adjacent Turabi house (built by a business colleague of Badr Ghulum) by a common wall. The house still belongs to the family but is leased by the Ministry of Culture and will be used as an interpretive centre around the history of traditional medicine in Muharraḡ.

- Al-Jalahma House

Al-Jalahma House is a large and complex residence of an influential family of *ḡawāwīsh* (pearl merchants) and traders. The building occupies both sides of a street and is linked by Muharraḡ's last remaining *ṣabāḡ*, a sort of roof-like bridge which links the two portions of the building. One half of the building is in a generally good state of repair and retains most of its original features. The other half is in a poor condition, although it too retains most of its original features and layout. The house has extensive quarters for women.

- Al-Alawi House

Al-Alawi House was built by Mahmoud Muhammad al-Alawi, a trader who gained his income from supplying the pearling dhows at sea with fresh water, tobacco, food, and other basic necessities, through so-called sweet water boats. The building was originally located at the south eastern edge of the historic main island of Muharraḡ, within a busy water area known as *al-Dūṣah*, which at one point connected Muharraḡ to *al-Ḥālah* Island. The construction of al-Alawi House started in 1932 on newly reclaimed land. The houses includes one of Muharraḡ's last example of a *malḡif al-hawā'* or wind tower, one of the traditional local methods developed for cooling buildings. The building also demonstrates high quality workmanship with mostly local materials, and includes some items which were imported by the owner during his trade expeditions.

- Fakhro House

This house was built by Yousif Abdurrahman Fakhro, a merchant who dealt in timber and construction materials, and had a fleet of up to 50 boats and his own dock. The complex was originally on the seafront. As Fakhro's family grew, so the property was expanded by reclaiming land from the sea until the property had four courtyards, only one of which remains today in its entirety, dating to the pearl boom years at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The other three survive as archaeological remains. Half is still lived in by the family and has been modernised. The remaining half is in urgent need of restoration having been last lived in 1954. It contains elaborate pierced gypsum panels and highly decorated fretwork windows above which are arched fanlights with the remains of multi-coloured glass.

- Murad House & Murad Majlis or guesthouse

The house and its adjoining guest house face each other on two sides of a small public square separated by a mosque. They are seen as the best preserved examples of a merchant's house and guest house. Constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the main house is arranged around a central courtyard with the rooms around it displaying a rigid repetitive pattern of piers and tall semi-circular niches, above which are square niches with trefoil arches. At one corner there is an upper room that provides shady areas for summer and views towards the sea.

The main room of the guest house retains incised decorative panels above recessed rectangular niches. The southern street facade has rows of tall arched niches.

- Siyadi Shops

These are a series of shops and storehouses in three groups in the commercial centre. Of these, two are within the property and the third is in the buffer zone. The shops were built between around 1860 and 1905. They were owned by pearl merchants who also supplied other produce such as dates, rice, and coffee during periods when there were no pearl traders. They have double wooden doors onto the street but lack the upper

floor with overhanging enclosed balconies that used to be typical.

- Amārāt Ali Rashed & Yousif Abdurrahman Fakhro (group of three storehouses)

One of the storehouses survives only as a ruin, having been demolished in the 1990s. It demonstrates the very recent neglect of buildings associated with pearling, and also, through excavation, at least four phases of land reclamation. The second is preserved as a building with all the internal features of its lofty central space intact, but has not been used since the 1980s and needs urgent intervention to stabilise it. The third storehouse is the only one in the market still in use by merchants who own neighbouring shops. Traditionally all three would have been used originally to store timber logs (for dhows) and dhow equipment to service the boats, and some had stores used as banks before the first central bank was established in the 1920s. Latterly they were all used for the storage of construction materials and food.

- Nūkhidhah House

This house, constructed around the 1920s, includes guest accommodation for divers arriving in Bahrain and where the crews would be formed for the next season – and it is this part of the house alone that has been nominated. Its stout exterior walls, decorated with rectangular niches, have only one small window.

- Siyadi complex – two family residences and mosque

This complex, created by one of the grand pearl merchants, with his own fleet of dhows, consists of three inter-related structures: the family house, a second family house with guest accommodation, and a mosque.

The modest single-storey mosque with a conical minaret was originally built in 1865 and reconstructed in 1910. It opens onto a small square.

The simple facade of the mosque is in strong contrast to the highly ornamental facade of the neighbouring house - the only building of this height - that was constructed in two phases, in 1850 and 1921 by Bahraini merchants with the interior woodwork being imported from Shiraz in Persia.

The centrepiece of the property is the towering structure of the first floor guesthouse with its sophisticated facade of tall slender timber framed windows, with intricately fretted external screens below arched incised plaster panels and above them four rows of rectangular incised plaster panels, emphasising the strong verticality of the design. Within, the rooms still retain their interior woodwork and gypsum plaster decoration. This building is owned by the Ministry of Culture and will become a Museum of Pearls.

The third structure is a private house still lived in by the grandson of the builder. Built in 1931, its impressive tall facade has a plain lower storey above which are regular slender niches decorated with trefoil plaster panels. It is an

integral part of the silhouette of the overall complex of buildings viewed from the south. There is no public access to this building.

### History and development

The nomination provides detailed information on the history of the pearling economy, including its social and economic structures, and cultural associations.

What are being nominated are the buildings and sites that reflect these traditions. The history of the individual buildings is given under Description above. This section provides the context for these structures and sites.

There is evidence that pearls have been harvested from underwater oyster beds in the Persian Gulf since Neolithic times for both local use and perhaps for trade with Mesopotamia. After a lull during the Bronze Age, a large and well organised industry emerged during Roman times, centred in Bahrain, to cater for the colossal demand for these luxury goods in the empire. Bahrain is mentioned by Pliny in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD as being famous for the finest pearls although he mentions that the pearl industry in Sri Lanka was the most productive – and their pearls seem to have been better known to the Romans.

In the medieval period there was a resurgence of the pearl trade for the Umayyad and early Abbasid elites, with its focus still remaining in Bahrain. Pearls were also traded to the Black Sea and beyond by Genoese merchants. It should be noted, however, that until the late Middle Ages the term Bahrain referred to the wider region of Bahrain and not to the two islands that now constitute Bahrain. Ibn Battuta's use of the term in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to refer only to the islands is one of the earliest uses of the term for this limited area.

Under the Safavids, who took control of Bahrain from around 1602, the wealth from the pearls was used to finance a great expansion of Shi'a religious institutions in Persia and the Safavid dependencies.

Between the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, there appears to have been a serious contraction of the industry, as reflected by a drop in the number of boats recorded by writers from around a thousand in 1490 AD to a few hundreds. This was related to the discovery of alternative sources of pearls in the New World, particularly the coast of Venezuela, although this competition proved to be relatively short lived.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century the pearl industry in Bahrain came under the control of a local religious elite which led to the development of a system whereby the prayer leader/merchants advanced funds to the villagers to finance their dives and in return they were obliged to offer their catch to the merchants.

From the late 17<sup>th</sup> century a series of migrations occurred with Arab tribes coming to exploit oyster beds

in the light of the renewed expansion of the industry in response to demand from India.

The wealth derived from pearls became a key factor in the struggles for the control of Bahrain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when it fell victim to a series of attacks from the Omanis, Huwalah, Persians, and 'Utub which led to much destruction and decline of urban centres. And during the same time of conflict and instability, several other cities found the opportunity to develop as pearling centres, such as Qatar, and Kuwait, with large ships purchased from India in response to the increasingly global demand for pearls.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bahrain was invaded by both the Omanis and the Al Sauds. In 1820, a treaty between Al Khalifa rule and Britain, then the dominant military power in the Persian Gulf, granted the Al Khalifa the title of Rulers of Bahrain.

This stability allowed Muharraq to emerge as the major pearl trading city with a population of some 6,000, the largest in the Gulf. Peace also brought new types of trade which meant that Bahrain was no longer solely dependent upon pearling, and by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century it became the pre-eminent trading centre in the Persian Gulf.

The pearling boom reached its apogee in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bahrain continued to maintain its position as the region's major pearling centre, although it faced competition from newer centres in the region. The industry suffered a sudden and catastrophic demise in the 1930s, as a result of the development in Japan of cultured pearls from freshwater mussels. As pearling collapsed, more or less co-incident with the discovery of oil on the main island, large numbers of people moved away from the city with the result that buildings were abandoned and fell into disrepair. Comparatively little conservation work has been carried out between the collapse of the pearl industry and today. Some that was carried out in the 1960s and 1970s may need to be reversed in order to return to traditional materials and methods.

### **3 Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and authenticity**

#### **Comparative analysis**

The detailed comparative analysis in the nomination dossier, based on detailed new research, compares the elements, attributes and themes that relate to the potential Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property with other sites in three separate ways. First comparisons are given for other pearling centres on a global scale; secondly the property is compared with other centres in the Gulf region, and thirdly the individual nominated sites are justified in comparison with others in the local area. The nominated property is also compared to existing inscribed properties.

For the global comparisons, the Bahrain pearling industry is compared to other local economies that were sustained by pearls in the Indian sub-continent, Australia-Pacific and Latin America. The evidence is taken from archaeological data, government records, trade statistics and other historical sources such as travellers' accounts. This demonstrates that Bahrain appears to have the oldest known pearl industry; that Bahrain's pearls were renowned over many centuries as the finest in the world; and that the Persian Gulf as a whole was the only regular and substantial supplier to the world's markets from Roman times, apart from a brief period during the 16<sup>th</sup> and late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In terms of the regional profile, the comparative analysis shows that Bahrain was the centre of the Gulf's industry until the early/mid 19<sup>th</sup> century after which it continued to maintain the largest fleet and accounted for more than half the export from the region. Detailed statistical data confirm Bahrain's central role in pearling in the Gulf; and that Muharraq was the centre of Bahrain's industry in terms of the number of boats and the number of divers.

The nominated sites are compared to other similar sites within Muharraq. This shows that the oyster beds are those with a good state of conservation and which are linked most often to memories of the pearling season; that the seashore is the last original sand seashore in Muharraq island (the rest have been reclaimed); that Bū Māhir fort played a greater part in protecting the pearl dhows than the other surviving fort; that Muharraq hosts a full range of pearl related buildings; and that the properties chosen are those that are a good example of their kind, and have a better state of conservation and authenticity than others.

In particular Al-Ghūṣ house is the only modest single storey house still in a reasonable state of conservation; the Badr Ghulum house is the only property associated with medical services; the spatial use of Al-Jalahma house demonstrates the prominence of women in the pearling era; and Al-Alawi is the last middle class residence with decorative and traditional elements and to retain its wind tower.

The comparative analysis clearly demonstrates that there is no similar property on the World Heritage List, given that Bahrain has been a pearling centre that has been a main focus for the industry for almost two millennia, and still has buildings that reflect different facets of that industry.

There are other places in the Gulf region that had substantial associations with the pearling industry where comparable buildings remain that once belonged to pearl merchants.

Although it is the case that such places cannot be said to have the same long-standing association with the industry, it has to be acknowledged that in Muharraq the nominated buildings are largely a testimony to the final

flourish of the industry in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and do not reflect its earlier periods or its overall longevity.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis demonstrates that Muharraq can be seen as reflecting an essential component of a pearl industry that flourished around the Gulf Region, and particularly its final flourish and demise.

The analysis also fully justifies the choice of the serial nomination within Bahrain.

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ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

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### **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:

- Pearling is an outstanding example of a traditional sea use, which shaped the single product economy and cultural identity of an island society;
- This millennia-long practice is the most significant example globally of a natural pearl-collection tradition and is based on the Persian gulf oyster beds north of Bahrain, which are the best-known source of pearls since ancient times;
- Although the pearling economy collapsed as a result of irreversible economic change in the 1930s, many of its characteristic features and practices survive. The natural resource remains in the surviving oyster beds Hayr Bū-I-Thāmah, Hayr Bū'Amāmah, and Hayr Shtayyah. The architectural testimony in Muharraq (in 17 architectural structures) is the last remaining example which comprises residential and commercial structures that are tangible manifestations of all major social and economic roles and institutions associated with the pearling society and acts as a memory marker for the cultural identity it produced and still maintains. Beyond the nominated sites, place names, family names, social hierarchies, surviving legal systems, songs, stories, poetry, festivals and dances are associated with these physical resources and assist in transmitting the grand narrative of the pearling economy.

The serial approach has been justified in connection with the individual sites all reflecting different aspects of the pearling economy.

ICOMOS considers that the pearl-collecting traditions of Bahrain were amongst the oldest in the world and have consistently delivered pearls to the world's market over some two millennia and the nominated sites do bear witness to these pearl-collection traditions and their related social and economic activities.

ICOMOS considers that the collection of structures, most of which have survived relatively unaltered since the collapse of the pearl industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century do bear witness to distinctive building traditions that the industry fostered, and particularly their high standard of craftsmanship in timber and plaster. Currently, in their fragile state these buildings do evoke memories of that industry and its supporting social and economic structures.

The record is however extremely fragile, with the buildings embedded in the more modern city of Muharraq. If these buildings were to be over-restored, the strong associations might become very much less strong.

The buildings may be considered as a collection of good remaining buildings associated with the pearling industry that possess a coherence and relate to still strong pearling traditions.

### **Integrity and authenticity**

#### **Integrity**

The sites that make up the property were selected to reflect the buildings created as a result of the great prosperity of the pearl industry in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and its economic structures. The undersea sites reflect the oyster beds upon which the prosperity was based and the seashore is the link between land and sea.

The boundary around the fort has been extended to allow it to encompass associated archaeological remains.

The way each of these relates to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value is clearly set out in the nomination dossier. The oyster beds are not under threat and neither is the sea shore or fort.

The choice of urban sites was limited by the neglect of the pearl industry's heritage since the industry's demise in the 1930s almost until the new millennium. As a result many buildings were demolished and those that remain have suffered from neglect and the adverse effects of new development around them. The urban sites chosen reflect extensive architectural, anthropological and historical surveys and are seen as those that carry the memory of the pearling industry for the local community. They variously reflect the key activities of merchants associated with the pearl industry as well as its building traditions.

The nominated urban sites are thus islands within the city. They are still extremely vulnerable with many of the buildings needing extensive work to give them satisfactory stability.

ICOMOS considers that the condition of integrity has been met but that to maintain integrity, great care will be needed in stabilising and conserving the structures so that the optimum amount of original fabric can be kept and traditional materials and processes are used.

#### Authenticity

The authenticity of the property is related to its ability to convey the Outstanding Universal Value in terms of transmitting information about the social and economic process of the pearl industry. In terms of the buildings this relates to their ability to manifest their status, use, architectural form, local materials and techniques and their craftsmanship – particularly the exceptionally high quality of some of the craftsmanship deployed in timber and plaster work.

Many of the urban buildings are highly vulnerable in terms of their fabric and decoration as a result of lack of use and maintenance. Any work will need to ensure minimum intervention in order that as much as possible of the original material is conserved so that the buildings may still provide tangible links to the decades of their former glory while being robust enough for use and a degree of access. For the fort there is a need to reverse some of the restoration of the last few decades and to re-introduce traditional materials.

The underwater oyster beds are still thriving, although there is nothing to convey their sea-harvesting traditions; the sea shore, although a fraction of what used to exist and now much compromised by later development nevertheless adds an important attribute, and is a focal point for important intangible cultural associations that relate to pearling.

ICOMOS considers that the fragility of the urban fabric presents a potential threat to authenticity as conservation, if over done, could erase the memory that the buildings currently evoke.

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ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met for the present but both are highly vulnerable in terms of fragility of the urban fabric. In order to ensure that authenticity and integrity persist into the future, there is a need for the agreed restoration and conservation strategy to be carefully implemented.

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#### Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iii) and (v).

*Criterion (iii): bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the spatial and architectural testimony of the pearling economy in Muharraq and the northern waters of Bahrain reflect the culmination of more than six

millennia of pearling history in the Persian Gulf. The property is the last remaining, and outstanding, example that represents the complete narrative of the cultural tradition of pearling, which dominated the Persian Gulf between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the related human system established in a single-product island economy. While the economic system subsided, the remaining testimony continues to carry the grand narrative it produced, which is still the most significant source of Bahraini cultural identity.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated sites do bear witness to an important centre for the cultural tradition of pearl-collecting.

In order for the buildings to continue to bear a testimony to this tradition, it is essential that they are conserved with the minimum intervention in order to sustain physical links with the era of pearl-collecting.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

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*Criterion (v): be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that pearling, and the testimony it brought forth in Muharraq, is an outstanding example of traditional sea-use and human interaction with the environment, which shaped the economic system and cultural identity of an island society. The oyster beds and the architectural testimony of this socio-cultural and economic system are representative of a tradition that became vulnerable and was gradually abandoned in the 1930s. The collapse of the international natural pearl market value in face of the global economic crisis and the introduction of large-scale cultivation of pearls have irreversibly impacted on the system's viability and vitality.

ICOMOS considers that the justification put forward could be applied to other places in the Gulf Region. Also there are few tangible remains of the sea harvesting traditions. The majority of the nominated property is an architectural testimony that reflects the trading of pearls rather than sea use.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

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ICOMOS considers that the serial approach is justified.

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ICOMOS considers that conditions of authenticity and integrity and criterion (iii) have been met and Outstanding Universal Value has been demonstrated.

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## 4 Factors affecting the property

### Development pressures

ICOMOS considers that over-development of the sites themselves, and over-development of the buildings that provide their context, is a real danger. Although the buildings nominated are mostly not surrounded by buildings of similar age, neighbouring buildings are however mostly of a similar scale, and, if this scale were to be interrupted either in terms of height or width, then the urban grain would have a negative impact on the nominated sites.

In an effort to reduce the impact of vehicles in the old city, there is a proposal for the provision of vehicle parking in the form of multi-storey car parks on empty land in Muharraq city. The need is clear – the impact of cars on the city is a real problem. And while such new buildings will fill in currently open areas that have resulted from previous demolitions, and thus restore the dense nature of the built environment in the areas, ICOMOS considers that extreme care will have to be taken to ensure that whatever is proposed is sympathetic to the scale and form of the surrounding historic environment.

If the property is inscribed, any proposals that could impact on the remaining sea shore, such as further land reclamation work, would need to be submitted to the World Heritage Centre in accordance with paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*.

### Tourism pressures

A tourism management strategy is outlined in the Management Plan based on the principle of Limits of Acceptable Change, under which limits are set not only for visitor numbers, but also for the impact visitors have on the various components of the property. A baseline survey will be carried out, upon completion of the conservation work, to document the condition of the property and to determine standards and indicators, as well as carrying capacities. Subsequently, surveys will be conducted regularly to ensure that the standards are maintained and that the established carrying capacities are appropriate.

IUCN notes that tourism pressures related to the property include potential impacts from marine tourism including unauthorized collection of oysters and coral. IUCN considers that an effective system of regulations, supported by an adequate on-water presence to ensure enforcement, is required, taking particular account of any increased pressures that might result from inscription on the World Heritage List.

### Environmental pressures

IUCN notes there is oil and gas exploration being undertaken in the region, as mentioned in the nomination dossier, and that exploration and possibly exploitation is foreseen in the buffer zone of the marine

component. The protection of the pearl beds should be a clear priority in relation to such activities, and IUCN considers that both exploration and exploitation would be better located outside of the marine buffer zone that has been established. The marine component of the property should not be subject to exploration or production activities for oil and gas. IUCN recommends that proposals for exploration and exploitation in the region around the property should be assessed for their impact on the marine component and its buffer zone, and should the property be inscribed such activities should include prior consultation via the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, in line with the procedures outlined in the *Operational Guidelines*.

The risk of an oil spill that affects the offshore and coastal element of the nomination is real, given the major existing oil industry in Bahrain. However, although oil spills have been recorded within Bahraini territorial waters in the past, none are known to have impacted the oyster beds.

In the event of a spill, the National Oil and Hazardous Spill Contingency Plan (SEACOR, 2009) will be activated and subsequently the National Incident Command System will direct the allocation of resources, to assist in the surveillance, protection, and cleanup activities.

In a closely packed urban environment such as Muharraq, fire is a very real potential threat to the historic fabric of the nominated sites. The nomination's risk preparedness and management plans describe a series of measures for reducing that risk and also for dealing with such an event.

### Natural Disasters

Localised flooding, after the infrequent, but heavy, rains Bahrain is subject to, is considered a potential major risk to the historic fabric of properties in Muharraq. The management system addresses factors such as the urban drainage system that increases the likelihood of flooding, and provides for the upgrading of the relevant urban infrastructure in the buffer zone that will prevent or reduce the likelihood of floods in the future.

Although unlikely, earthquakes are identified as a potential risk. The potential damage of an earthquake is exacerbated by the poor condition of some of the historic properties and many other structures in the urban buffer zone. The management system attempts to reduce the risk of the built historic fabric's collapse by proposing adequate techniques for stabilising the fragile structures.

### Impact of climate change

Any change in sea level could impact on the remaining sea shore and also those buildings nearest to it through rising ground water levels; any change in the water temperature, brought about by higher temperatures could adversely affect the health of the oyster beds; and any dramatic increase in the quantity of rain and the rate



at which it falls could have a detrimental impact on the fragile mud and coral buildings. All these threats need to inform a risk preparedness strategy.

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ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are insensitive development in the setting of the nominated sites and fire but considers that the proposed response to fire is adequate while controlling development will need to be achieved through the application of the strengthened planning regulations. A more wide-ranging risk preparedness strategy needs to be developed to consider the potential impacts of climate change.

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## **5 Protection, conservation and management**

### **Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone**

The boundaries of the urban properties are tightly drawn around the buildings but their context is encompassed within the primary protection zone of the buffer zones – with each of the nominated sites having its own primary protection area. The secondary protection zones of the buffer zones merge to form a linear corridor around the urban sites. The boundaries of the nominated sites and the buffer zone are adequate.

In the supplementary material submitted in January 2012, the boundaries of the fort have been extended to encompass the foundations of the demolished part that were uncovered through archaeological excavations in 2011. This is in line with item 3 of World Heritage Committee decision 35 COM 8B.20.

The buffer zone remains unchanged.

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

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### **Ownership**

The majority of the nominated urban properties in Muharraq are owned by private individuals or families. Three of the properties are owned by the Ministry of Culture; one has been purchased by a private organisation, the Shaykh Ebrahim Bin Mohammed Al Khalifa Centre for Culture and Research; and two are owned by *awqāf* (family based charitable trusts). For those properties in private ownership the Ministry of Culture has negotiated formal agreements with all the property owners setting out management and conservation conditions.

### **Protection**

#### **Legal Protection**

The three oyster beds and their marine buffer zone are currently generally protected at a national level in terms

of Decree (2) 1995 with respect to the Protection of Wildlife; Legislative Decree No. 21 of 1996 in Respect with the Environment (Amiri Decree); and Decree (20) 2002 with respect to the Regulation of Fishing and Exploitation of Marine Resources.

A legislative decree that specifically designates the marine sites and buffer zone as a national marine protected area was approved in 2011.

The Bū Māhir Seashore and the individual sites in Muharraq all have national protection as designated national monuments under *Decree Law No (11) of 1995 Concerning the Protection of Antiquities* on 10 January 2010, and their future management resides under the Ministry of Culture.

In November 2011, the Ministry of Culture drew up a Vision for the development of old Muharraq – both the sites being nominated and the entire area of old Muharraq that surrounds them, which includes the Buffer Zone. This sets out a holistic approach for preserving the historic character of Muharraq. The document addresses two key 'perspectives':

#### **i) legal framework**

This will include new building regulations that complement existing regulations and aim to limit the increase in unplanned construction or population and prevent the deterioration of the special character of the urban fabric, and a new law to protect sites, urban settlements and antiquities. The final draft of this law should be completed by the end of 2012 and it is expected to come into force at the end of 2013.

#### **ii) Societal framework**

This approach aims to assert the identity of the Old Muharraq area, preserve memories of its association with pearling and upgrade living standards; it will include specific restoration projects for the nominated sites. More broadly it aims to enforce established procedures for all 'old areas' of Muharraq, to implement a programme for dilapidated houses including through offering incentives, to advise residents on design matters and to upgrade sanitation infrastructure.

The buffer zone of the urban properties is divided into primary and secondary protection zones. The primary protection zones comprise the immediate surroundings of the properties and contain cultural assets that are related to the property in visual and other terms. The character and urban design of the primary protection zones are controlled to protect these associations. With the new Vision outlined above, the ministry will now be able to extend its conservation approach to the whole of the historic settlement of Old Muharraq. This will allow for the Buffer Zone to be managed as the urban context for the nominated sites and for them to be part of a living dynamic city. It is also hoped that the nominated sites

will become a catalyst for the conservation of the built environment more widely.

#### Traditional Protection

This applies at the moment in terms of owners of buildings keeping their buildings largely as they are. However the strong community engagement undertaken as part of the nomination means that the community will have a role as guardians of their heritage and even if they may not actively participate in building conservation, their regular maintenance will be crucial.

#### Effectiveness of protection measures

ICOMOS encourages the State Party to put in place all the measures outlined above.

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ICOMOS considers that the planned measures to protect the property are adequate.

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### Conservation

#### Inventories, recording, research

A comprehensive architectural survey of Muharraq was carried out by the Ministry of Culture in 2008, which identified the 17 historic buildings that comprise the nomination dossier. This survey has been followed by detailed recording and documentation of the nominated properties. All this material together with environmental and architectural survey data gathered between 1993 and 2009 has been incorporated into a GIS Database housed in the Ministry of Culture. The GIS also contains maps (historical, topographic, cadastral, bathymetric), a range of historical and modern aerial photos, historical and modern photographs of the properties, a wide range of scanned documents relevant to the various properties, and detailed, current plans of all the urban properties. This project database is available online and allows easy access to data, at whatever level required, by anyone associated with the project.

#### Present state of conservation

IUCN states that the three nominated oyster beds appears to include important biodiversity values of national and possibly regional significance, and a survey undertaken in 2009 found the beds to be in excellent condition.

The Bū Māhir Seashore comprises a well-preserved natural beach and adjacent seawaters, including a traditional fish trap.

The standing remains of the Qal'at Bū Māhir fort were 'restored' and partially rebuilt in the 1970s.

The buried, archaeological portions of the fort were the subject of an archaeological excavation early in 2010 and in 2011 which revealed that the foundations of most of the fort, including internal buildings, still survive. The supplementary information submitted in January 2012

provides details of proposals to remove cement render from the standing portions of the fort and to rebuild the destroyed parts.

The general state of conservation of sites in Muharraq reflects the downturn in the city's fortunes after the collapse of the pearling industry in the 1930s. The properties are in various states of conservation from good to a state of almost collapse and many were acknowledged in the nomination dossier as being in urgent need of conservation.

More than half the sites remain inhabited and in daily use and have been maintained by owners or tenants. Most preserve the vernacular built fabric and architectural elements of the late pearling era but almost all have, over time, also been modified and adapted to modern living/use requirements. Most of the alterations and additions to these properties have been carried out using modern materials. In most cases these additions are reversible without impacting on the historic fabric.

Those properties which are not in daily use have generally undergone fewer changes to their built fabric, but are now vulnerable through lack of maintenance and repair.

#### Active Conservation measures

The first nomination dossier provided a general architectural conservation plan which set out outline approaches to the way the buildings were to be restored and in some cases adapted for use.

In response to concerns expressed in the first ICOMOS evaluation about the degree of intervention proposed and the dangers posed by excessive restoration, the State Party has provided further detailed information on the development of conservation approaches in its supplementary documentation submitted in January 2012.

This provides details of the process of conservation that is based on sequential stages that identify the precise extent and state of the historic fabric, its vulnerabilities, and its socio-cultural needs which will inform the optimum conservation strategy.

Each of the 17 sites will eventually have a detailed conservation plan which will set out precise prescription for each of the component parts including justifying the approach to be taken for removing additions, replacing missing components and introducing new services.

The overall cycle for the first phase of conservation works is expected to last until the end of 2017. This has been deliberately elongated to allow for capacity building on architectural conservation and training on traditional materials and their sources (as traditional sources are mainly no longer available). The State Party has acknowledged that the development of the nomination has highlighted the lack of local capacity for the

preservation of vernacular buildings and this is now being addressed through fostering competencies in the private sector.

Restoration on two sites has been completed. These are Nūkhidhah House, which has been opened to the public with a temporary display on pearling, and the Siyadi Shops B for which pearl trader tenants are currently being sought. Both of these were comparatively simple projects that did not call for specialist expertise in plastering and woodworking.

Between 2012 and 2014 a further seven sites are planned to be completed. These are:

- 1 Qal'at Bū Māhir
- 2 Amarat Ali Rashid Fakhro I
- 3 Siyadi Majlis
- 4 Siyadi Mosque
- 5 Amārat Yousif A. Fakhro
- 6 Fakhro House
- 7 Siyadi Shops A

#### Maintenance

Maintenance is carried out largely by the owners. As part of the new approach to conservation in Old Muharraq, owners will now have the benefit of advice and guidance.

#### Effectiveness of conservation measures

The process of conservation is slow – which is entirely appropriate given the highly fragile state of many of the buildings and the need to build up skills and knowledge as well as confidence in a minimum intervention approach. The integration of the conservation approaches to the nominated sites within a much larger project to improve conservation of the urban landscape and buildings of Old Muharraq is a very positive development and will help to spread the benefits as well as engage more stakeholders.

The approaches set out for conform internationally accepted practice encompass a satisfactory staged process based on the attributes of OUV that includes documentation, analysis of the structural material and architectural components, risk preparedness and mitigation, full photographic recording before site works, future maintenance and monitoring.

The ICOMOS Advisory mission reported high quality skills and techniques being applied, conforming to best of practice and international charters. The interventions result from documentation, condition surveys, investigations, experiments and laboratory research and testing. There is also team debate about how and how much to conserve, and the issues of intervention reversibility all of which illustrate professional conservation sensitivity.

The mission did also acknowledge the considerable challenges that were being faced. For instance, the preservation of the original renders is not straight

forward. Many renders have been repeatedly patched and often overlaid with cement renders. These have to be removed due to their adverse effects on original structure and finishes and the original render provided with a protective coat which will allow for future examination and possible re exposure. Considerable efforts are being addressed at insuring the optimum amount of original fabric is being retained and that there is recognisable differentiation between old and new work.

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ICOMOS considers that the conservation approach is satisfactory.

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#### Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

The Ministry of Culture and Information, Sector for Culture and National Heritage coordinated the preparation of the management plan. The Ministry has since been split and the newly formed Ministry of Culture is now the responsible lead for management. A dedicated Site Administration Unit has been established within the Ministry to co-ordinate the implementation of the management system. The Unit, which reports to the Undersecretary for Culture, consists of an interdisciplinary team including historical researchers, conservation architects, an urban planner and rehabilitation specialist, a marine biologist and environmental specialist, a site manager for the urban properties and a GIS specialist, all supported by an administrative team which deals with finances, marketing, etc.

A Steering Committee has been established as the governing body of the management and administrative system for the nominated properties. The Committee brings together at ministerial level, members of the 12 governmental agencies representing the full range of partners and stakeholders in the project, as well as representatives of the private owners of the Muharraq properties and the businesses in the urban buffer zone. The Steering Committee is chaired by the Minister of Culture.

The Steering Committee has established five thematic, technical subcommittees to support the Site Administration Unit in its activities. These subcommittees are the decision-makers with respect to management activities in their respective areas of expertise and their members are drawn from the Steering Committee, the Site Administration Unit and from the wider cultural heritage sector. The subcommittees established to date are for Marine Heritage, the Bū Māhir Seashore, Urban Regulations and Project Design, Urban and Architectural Heritage, and Tourism Development and Promotion.

The Steering Committee is responsible for taking overall decisions concerning the management policy and for approving all major activities related to the site. It also

provides a platform for conflict management through the discussion of interests, and for generating ideas for the management of the heritage site through contributions from representatives of all stakeholders. The Site Administration Unit reports to the Steering Committee twice yearly on progress and in this sense, the Committee functions as a monitor of the management plan.

Where properties in Muharraq are owned privately by individuals or organisations, formal memoranda of understanding have been negotiated between the owners and the Ministry of Culture. These define the rights and duties of both partners within the management system.

At a local level, there is co-operation between the Muharraq Municipal Council, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Municipalities and Agricultural Affairs which has resulted in a number of protective initiatives linked to and driven by the nomination.

In August 2009, the Minister of Municipalities and Agricultural Affairs announced a freeze on the construction of apartment buildings in the historic district of Muharraq, including the nominated area and its buffer zone.

The supplementary information provided by the State Party in January 2012 has now set out further initiatives for legal, planning and social tools to further conservation in the wider areas of Old Muharraq and thus draw the buffer zone into the management framework.

A clear overall management framework thus exists to coordinate the management of the serial components and bring together all the key stakeholders.

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

A Management Plan was developed during the preparation of the nomination dossier and the system that will ensure its effective implementation is being developed as the planned legislative and policy changes come into effect. The Management Plan is oriented towards relevant government agencies, both municipal and national. It also addresses and serves the wider public - stakeholders such as property owners and the local communities who have an interest in the properties. The plan emphasises architectural conservation, urban upgrading, historical and social research and the creation of visitor and interpretation facilities. In addition, it provides guidance with respect to the long-term protection and operation. The Plan will become fully operational if the property is inscribed.

Currently there is very little visitor interpretation. There are proposals to create three interpretation centres along the urban linear route at the Bū Māhir Seashore, the

Siyadi Complex at the other end, and at the ruined Amārat Yousif A. Fakhro. There are also proposals to relate the sites to the intangible heritage of the pearling era, such as songs and boat building. The visitor centre for the Bū Māhir Seashore is a new building which it is anticipated will be completed by the end of 2012.

A scheme to mark the route and providing visitor facilities in the form of street furniture that was under consideration when the first nomination was submitted has been dropped in response to ICOMOS's concerns at its intrusiveness.

The supplementary information provided by the State Party in January 2012 also stated that arrangements were now being put in place to take the Bū Māhir fort out of use as a navigation centre, to restore the missing parts of the fort (based on archaeological investigations) and to allow visitor access and interpretation.

Risk preparedness

This forms part of the Management Plan – and is mentioned above in relation to fire and oil spills.

Involvement of the local communities

This has been a fundamental part of the whole nomination project.

Resources, including staffing levels, expertise and training

The nomination dossier including the necessary research has been well resourced. At the time of the first nomination it was reported that the property has an administration unit with funds for 15 posts of which 4 are currently vacant as it has been difficult to find people with the necessary expertise. The supplementary information provided by the State Party in January 2012 demonstrates that much progress has been made and there is now a professional and dynamic team of conservators.

The ICOMOS advisory mission reported that, the State Party is committed to training, at a practical site level and as part of university education, with workshops and training schools. Lectures are already being given to undergraduate architectural students. Within the next two months 16 girls are to be employed and trained in fine conservation work, augmenting three university trained dynamic skilled conservators.

Workshop training of staff and general contractors has been implemented and it was confirmed that this approach is to be extended. This may include bettering the skills of general site workers, though noting their often transitory employment.

Effectiveness of current management

The current management arrangements are adequate and seem to be effective. The level of inter-departmental and inter-agency co-operation and degree of co-ownership of the nomination from government agencies,

non-governmental organisations, the private sector and property owners, is impressive. The Management Plan is supported by national institutions at the highest level and is beginning to be implemented.

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

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## 6 Monitoring

Monitoring has been given a high priority and detailed monitoring indicators have been developed for all the key attributes of the property in an exemplary way. Detailed monitoring is also part of the conservation strategies for each of the sites.

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ICOMOS considers that monitoring is adequate.

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## 7 Conclusions

The nominated properties, and in particular the urban structures of Muharraq, form a highly fragile reminder of the great days of the pearling industry, of the enormous wealth it generated and of the distinctive buildings that were once commonplace in the city, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In order to keep this link with an industry that died around eighty years ago it is essential that as much as possible of the traditional fabric of any nominated buildings is conserved and that the atmosphere that the buildings currently have is not removed through over restoration.

The nomination process has been characterised by a comparatively unrushed approach with all the necessary research being undertaken to allow full engagement of the stakeholders and this is to be commended. ICOMOS considers that a similarly careful approach is needed for the restoration of the individual buildings in order to ensure that they can fully express their value through original fabric and craftsmanship as well as through plan and form.

The supplementary material provided by the State Party in January 2012 has set out clearly that this careful conservation approach has now been put in place and how it will over-arch the conservation of the 17 historic buildings over at least the next five years. This conservation work will be allied to capacity building in architectural conservation and training of craftsmen in the skills necessary to work on intricate plaster and woodwork.

Supporting this work will be a wider initiative to foster heritage conservation of the whole area of Old Muharraq through a mixture of legal, planning and socio-economic tools. This aims to encourage and support appropriate conservation of the urban landscape that

forms the context for the nominated sites. Such an initiative will also allow interpretation of the narrative of pearling to encompass a much larger area. It should also bring in more stakeholders and allow the nominated sites to be part of, and related to, the living dynamic city.

### Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that Pearling, testimony of an island economy, Kingdom of Bahrain, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (iii)**.

### Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

The traditional sea-use of harvesting pearls from oyster beds in the Persian Gulf shaped the island of Bahrain's economy for millennia. As the best-known source of pearls since ancient times, the Gulf industry reached the apex of its prosperity at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The wealth of what had become a global trade is reflected in the development of the merchant quarters of Muharraq city. A few distinctive commercial and residential buildings remain as a testimony to this proud but dangerous and demanding economic activity which suffered a sudden and catastrophic demise in the 1930s as a result of the development in Japan of cultured pearls from freshwater mussels.

The property includes seventeen buildings embedded in the urban fabric of Muharraq city, three off shore oyster beds, and a part of the seashore at the southern tip of Muharraq Island, from where the boats set off for the oyster beds.

The architectural testimony comprises residential and commercial structures that are tangible manifestations of the major social and economic roles and institutions associated with the pearling society. Most of the structures have survived relatively unaltered since the collapse of the pearl industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and bear witness to distinctive building traditions that the industry fostered, and particularly their high standard of craftsmanship in timber and plaster.

These buildings evoke memories of that industry, its supporting social and economic structures, and of the cultural identity it produced.

**Criterion (iii):** The ensemble of urban properties, fort, seashore and oyster beds is an exceptional testimony to the final flourishing of the cultural tradition of pearling which dominated the Persian Gulf between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Although the pearling industry has died, these sites carry the memory of its prosperity and the building traditions that it fostered.

Integrity

The property reflects the buildings created as a result of the great prosperity of the pearl industry in the late 19<sup>th</sup>

and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and its economic structures. It also reflects the oyster beds upon which the prosperity was based and the seashore link between land and sea.

The choice of urban sites was limited by the neglect of the pearl industry's heritage since the industry's demise in the 1930s almost until the new millennium. As a result many buildings were demolished and those that remain have suffered from neglect and the adverse effects of new development around them. The urban sites chosen reflect extensive architectural, anthropological and historical surveys and are seen as those that carry the memory of the pearling industry for the local community. They variously reflect the key activities of merchants associated with the pearl industry as well as its building traditions.

The nominated urban sites are thus islands within the city. They are still extremely vulnerable with many of the buildings needing extensive work to give them satisfactory stability. The oyster beds are not under threat and neither is the sea shore or fort.

To maintain integrity, great care will be needed in stabilising and conserving the structures so that the optimum amount of original fabric can be kept and traditional materials and processes are used. It will also be necessary to ensure that the nominated sites can be seen to relate sympathetically to the wider urban structures within which they are embedded.

#### Authenticity

The authenticity of the property is related to its ability to convey the Outstanding Universal Value in terms of transmitting information about the social and economic process of the pearl industry. In terms of the buildings this relates to their ability to manifest their status, use, architectural form, local materials and techniques and their craftsmanship – particularly the exceptionally high quality of some of the craftsmanship deployed in timber and plaster work.

Many of the urban buildings are highly vulnerable in terms of their fabric and decoration as a result of lack of use and maintenance. Any work will need to ensure minimum intervention in order that as much as possible of the original material is conserved so that the buildings may still provide tangible links to the decades of their former glory while being robust enough for use and a degree of access. For the fort there is a need to reverse some of the restoration of the last few decades and to re-introduce traditional materials.

The underwater oyster beds are still thriving, although there is nothing to convey their sea-harvesting traditions; the sea shore, although a fraction of what used to exist and now much compromised by later development nevertheless adds an important attribute, and is a focal point for important intangible cultural associations that relate to pearling.

ICOMOS considers that the fragility of the urban fabric presents a potential threat to authenticity as conservation, if overdone, could erase the memory that the buildings currently evoke.

#### Requirements for Protection and Management

The Bū Māhir Seashore and the individual sites in Muharraq all have national protection as designated national monuments under *Decree Law No (11) of 1995 Concerning the Protection of Antiquities* on 10 January 2010, and their future management resides under the Ministry of Culture. The three oyster beds and their marine buffer zone are currently generally protected at a national level in terms of Decree (2) 1995 with respect to the Protection of Wildlife; Legislative Decree No. 21 of 1996 in respect with the Environment (Amiri Decree); and Decree (20) 2002 with respect to the Regulation of Fishing and Exploitation of Marine Resources. A legislative decree that specifically designates the marine sites and buffer zone as a national marine protected area was approved in 2011.

In November 2011, the Ministry of Culture drew up a Vision for the development of old Muharraq – both the sites being nominated and the entire area of old Muharraq that surrounds them, which includes the buffer zone. This sets out a holistic approach for preserving the historic character of Muharraq under two key 'perspectives', legal and societal. The new laws to limit the increase in unplanned construction or population, prevent the deterioration of the special character of the urban fabric, and protect sites, urban settlements and antiquities should be in place at the end of 2013. The Societal framework will aim to assert the identity of the Old Muharraq area, through upgrading living standards; specific restoration projects and design guidance. This approach will allow for the buffer zone to be managed as the urban context for the nominated sites and for them to be part of a living dynamic city.

A dedicated Site Administration Unit has been established within the Ministry of Culture to co-ordinate the implementation of the management system. The Unit, which reports to the Undersecretary for Culture, consists of an interdisciplinary team including researchers, conservation architects, an urban planner and rehabilitation specialist, a marine biologist and environmental specialist, a site manager for the urban properties and a GIS specialist, all supported by an administrative team which deals with finances, marketing, etc.

A Steering Committee has been established as the governing body of the management and administrative system for the nominated properties. The Committee brings together at ministerial level, members of the 12 governmental agencies representing the full range of partners and stakeholders in the project, as well as representatives of the private owners of the Muharraq properties and the businesses in the urban buffer zone.

The Steering Committee is chaired by the Minister of Culture. A Management Plan is in place for the property.

In order to address the challenges of restoring the fragile buildings within Muharraq, and maintaining them on an on-going basis, there is a need for training in traditional skills, particularly in woodwork and fine plaster techniques, and for the development of knowledge in traditional materials. The State Party has indicated its commitment to this training, at a practical site level and as part of university education. There will also be a need to ensure that the context of the nominated sites is respected within urban Muharraq.

**Disclaimer concerning the text of the evaluation of the nomination 'Pearling, testimony of an island economy', Kingdom of Bahrain**

With reference to the text of the evaluation of the nomination presented by the Kingdom of Bahrain 'Pearling, testimony of an island economy' it should be noted that, according to the United Nations directives of 15 May 1999 (ref.ST/CS/SER.A/29/Rev.1) the term 'Persian Gulf', 'Gulf' and 'Shatt-al-Arab' shall be referred to and used in all documents, publications and statements emanating from the Secretariat as the standard geographical designation of the sea area between the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic Republic of Iran.







View of Bū Māhir Seashore



Anchored pearling dhows



Qal'at Bū Māhir fortress



View of Siyadi complex from the mosque courtyard