
Erbil Citadel (Republic of Iraq) No 1437

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Erbil Citadel

Location

Kurdistan Region, Erbil Governorate

Brief description

Erbil Citadel is a formerly fortified settlement which has grown up on the top of an imposing ovoid-shaped tell. The continuous wall of tall 19th century house façades still conveys the visual impression of an impregnable fortress dominating the city of Erbil. The citadel features a peculiar fan-like street pattern dating back to Erbil's late Ottoman phase. Written and iconographic historical records document the antiquity of settlement on the site – Erbil corresponds to ancient Arbela, an important Assyrian political and religious centre - while archaeological finds and investigations suggest that the mound conceals the levels and remains of previous settlements.

Category of property

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

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

8 January 2010

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre

18 January 2013

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages and several independent experts.

Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 24 to 28 August 2013.

Additional information requested and received from the State Party

None

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

6 March 2014

2 The property

Description

Erbil, the capital of the Autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq, is located in northern Iraq, in a fertile plain lying 420m above sea level between the Great and the Lesser Zab rivers, close to the Iranian and Turkish borders. Erbil has today about 1.3 million inhabitants, is the fourth largest town in Iraq and is one of the economic hubs of the country.

Erbil Citadel, situated today at the very centre of modern Erbil, consists of a formerly fortified urban complex built on top of a 20-30m high irregular oval-shaped archaeological mound (*tell*). It is currently not inhabited.

The defensive walls of the Citadel have not survived: in their place a continuous wall of house façades rises from the outer edge of the urban settlement. Combined with the bare and conical slopes of the mound, they still convey the visual impression of an imposing fortress.

The nominated property features an intricate street pattern with narrow lanes and cul-de-sacs fanning-out from the southern Grand Gate (currently under reconstruction). The dense urban fabric is cut through by a large road, built in 1958, connecting the Grand Gate and the northern Ahmadi Gate, which dates from the 1920-30s.

Today, the urban fabric of 'Erbil Citadel', articulated since the late 19th century into three districts (Saray, Topkhana and Takiya) according to their main urban functions, comprises mainly residential buildings dating back to the 19th – 20th centuries, and, to a lesser degree, to the 18th century. Their typologies and sizes differ according to the family's status and era of construction. Almost all houses have a courtyard, where the plot size allowed an *iwan* (a room with no front wall) and a *tama* (portico) to be inserted. Their supporting structure is in fired-brick masonry, whilst the ceilings and roof structures have a timber frame, as do the *tamas*. Some of the earlier residences exhibit elaborate brickwork, plasterwork, and alabaster detailing.

A few public buildings still survive: the Great Mosque (Mullah Afandi Mosque) has retained almost intact only its *minbar* (a sort of pulpit from which Imams deliver sermons) and the minaret, whilst the present single-domed roof was reconstructed in 1959, replacing the previous multi-domed roof; the *Hammam* dates back to 1775; it was subjected to major works in the 1950s and went out of use during the 1960s; some *takiyas* (buildings used for religious gatherings), and *diwakhanas* (large private mansions used also for community meetings) still exist, but are no longer in use. At the very centre of the town a well – out of use – has survived.

A good part of the Citadel's built fabric today consists of informal shelters and shacks erected since the mid-20th century up until the early years of the 21st century, using available materials taken from vacant buildings.

The tell

Archaeological investigations have confirmed that the artificial mound on which Erbil Citadel stands consists of material remaining from previous earth structures and subsequent occupation levels. It is the second largest tell in the region, after Kirkuk, covering nearly 11ha at the top and over 15ha at the base of the mound. Its height varies between 20 and 32m and decreases towards the centre of the tell.

The mound likely contains the remains of different phases of Erbil and possibly the vestiges of its Assyrian phase: ancient Arbela. In contrast to other tells, the process of mound formation has continued until very recently.

The buffer zone

A portion of the lower city corresponding southwards to the quarters of the old lower city and northwards to the former citadel moat acts as a buffer zone for the nominated property. In its southern section, the buffer zone includes the bazaar, the Arab, Taajeel and Khanaqa districts as well as several protected historic buildings, disclosing a compact urban form dating back to Erbil's Ottoman period, whilst in its northern part, the area of the now-silted ditch houses governmental and administrative detached buildings erected in the 1930's-40s. In the lower city Al-Mudhafariah (known as Choli) Minaret survives as the only above-ground monument dating back to the 12-13th centuries AD.

History and development

Written, documentary, and iconographic sources document Erbil's long settlement history which dates back, according to archaeological discoveries, to the Chalcolithic period (4500 – 3200 BC), although the earliest historical records mentioning Erbil (Urbilum) date from the 23rd – 21st centuries BC.

The city has retained the same name throughout the millennia, although with different inflections – Irbilum, Urbilum, Arba ilu, Arbela, Arbira, Irbil. Arbela functioned as a religious and political centre in the Assyrian period (20th – 6th centuries BC), after Nineveh and Assur, gaining importance during the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods (13th- 6th centuries BC) as one of the provincial capitals of the empire, along with Kilizi (modern Qasr Shemamok), Idu, Talmushshu and an economic centre with direct ties to southern Iraq, Palestine and Western Iran. A bas-relief from Assurbanipal's North Palace (668- c.630 BC) depicts Arbela city and fortification walls, the acropolis and the Temple of Ištar. Infrastructures for water catchment and distribution were also built (traces of a 22km long underground canal from the Bastura river have been found, although the nomination dossier does not provide information on the topographic location of these remains within the city area).

With the fall of the Assyrian Empire (6th century BC), Persians, Greeks, Parthians, and Romans took control of the region until Sassanid domination prevailed (3rd – 7th centuries AD). Following the conquest of Northern Mesopotamia by Muslims in 642 AD, Mosul grew in importance at Erbil's expense. Centuries of power struggles among different dynasties in the region fragmented the territory into independent emirates. Nevertheless, in this period Erbil became a well-known economic centre: written records attest to the existence of a Qalat, with continuous fortified towered walls, a gate and a moat, whilst the lower city was a separately fortified unit housing a market and other administrative buildings and residences. The Choli Minaret was probably built at the end of this period, shortly before the Mongols took over the region. Following the Ottoman conquest, in the early 16th century, Erbil became a stronghold on the border between the Ottoman and Persian empires and the population sensibly decreased. Erbil Citadel's built fabric and fortifications seems to have suffered major loss in 1743, when the town was besieged by the Persians, as the building periods of most of its existing edifices would suggest.

It is only at the end of the 19th century that Erbil witnessed some signs of recovery; however, until the 1950s, its population remained confined within the Citadel and in the few quarters of the lower city, which at that time was still distinguishable from its rural surroundings.

The 20th century brought several changes to the fabric of the nominated property: in the 1920's-30's the Ahmadi Gate was opened in the northern section of the perimeter houses, and in the late 1950s the southern Grand Gate was demolished to open a new vehicular road which cut through the dense urban fabric of the Citadel from south to north. The Gate was reconstructed in the 1970's-80's; however a large reconstruction project is currently ongoing to reinstate the gate to its former appearance. Physical changes were accompanied by social upheavals: the Citadel's residents began to move away, leaving their houses abandoned. The building stock fell into disrepair and subsequent waves of immigration since the 1960s and then between 1986 and 2006 further contributed to the decay of the urban fabric. Difficult social and health conditions within the Citadel convinced the Kurdish Regional Government to evacuate the Citadel in 2006. The High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalisation was established and mandated to ensure full documentation of the Citadel's historic heritage and its revitalisation.

3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity

Comparative analysis

The nomination dossier has developed the comparative analysis focusing on Erbil's peculiarities of being a still living 'citadel town' erected on the top of an archaeological mound. The comparison has firstly examined several examples of tells – most of which are archaeological sites – from across the former fertile

crescent region and central Asia. These were grouped according to different typologies (uninhabited isolated; uninhabited at the outskirts of settlements; occupied by defensive structures in an urban context; occupied by villages grown with no organic evolution; inhabited within an urban context). Erbil would fall into the fifth category and would stand apart from the first two categories as it is still a living town. The analysis has then focused on four examples of tells within living urban settlements claimed to be particularly relevant to the nominated property: the Citadel of the Ancient City of Aleppo (Syrian Arab Republic, 1986, (iii) and (iv)), Kirkuk, Tell Afar and Qalaat al-Madiq – Apamea (Syrian Arab Republic, Tentative List), concluding that Erbil Citadel stands alone for its continuity of settlement, the peculiarity of its street pattern and its urban character.

ICOMOS observes that the present nomination has focused on three aspects of the property: the exceptional long-lived occupation of the site, its continuity of occupation and still surviving urban character. Therefore the comparative analysis should have examined these dimensions against the relevant selected examples and not limited the analysis only to some of them. In this regard, tells which are today archaeological sites would not be fully appropriate parallels in relation to the proposed justification. However, with regard to uninhabited tells, ICOMOS notes that Qalat Sherqat, ancient Assur, or the mounds of Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus – part of ancient Nineveh - have not been included in the comparison.

As for the comparison carried out with the four examples claimed to be specifically relevant to Erbil, ICOMOS makes the following remarks.

In the case of the Ancient city of Aleppo, the inscribed property comprises, beyond the citadel, also the surrounding lively and multi-layered historic town whose built fabric and monuments bear tangible and exceptional witness to its millennial history. Aleppo citadel, for its part, conserves its circuit of imposing defensive walls. Qalaat al-Madiq exhibits a similar road pattern and its setting is less compromised by urban development, and the remains of the Ancient city of Apamea bear significant tangible witness to the continuity of settlement of the site. Kirkuk would have been the most relevant case and, despite the destruction it has suffered, would have deserved a more analytical examination. Tell Afar retains part of its fortifications, albeit restored, and its ditch.

Although mentioned in the comparative analysis, ICOMOS observes that arguments regarding the *Ancient City of Damascus* (Syrian Arab Republic, 1979, (i), (ii), (iii), (iv) and (vi)) and *Samarkand – Crossroad of Cultures* (Uzbekistan, 2001, (i), (ii) and (iv)) should have been more thoroughly articulated also in relation to their urban fabric and monuments, which bear tangible witness to their several historic phases as well as to their Ottoman past.

ICOMOS notes that the comparison does not encompass other World Heritage properties relevant for this nomination, e.g., Historic Cairo (Egypt, 1979, (i), (v) and (vi)), or the Kasbah of Algiers (Algeria, 1992, (ii) and (v)), both vibrant historic cities with their own citadels exhibiting tangible evidence of a millennia-long history, or the Old City of Acre (Israel, 2001, (ii), (iii) and (v)) which could have been considered for its urban structure and history. At the national level, Khorsabad/dur-Sharrukin, Gir-e-pan and Satu Qala would also have provided the closest parallels to the nominated property.

ICOMOS further believes that, if the derivation of the present urban configuration from the older layouts of the Citadel is not demonstrated through specific association with surviving traces of previous structures, the location on the top of a tell remains a valuable peculiarity which, however, does not justify limiting the comparative analysis to this type of settlement but should be expanded to include other examples of urban settlements with a similar pattern of evolution and historical /typological background.

In this regard, the city of Amedy (Iraq, Tentative List) is claimed to not be comparable due to the fact that it stands on a natural rocky spur; however, examination of its urban fabric and of its evolution could have been deepened. Additionally too, the Citadel and Walls of Diyarbakir (Tentative List of Turkey) could have been considered in relation to its historical and geo-cultural background.

On the other hand, a privileged focus on residential architecture and urban fabric, details of which have been provided in the nomination dossier, would have required the development of an ad-hoc comparative analysis that examined this specific aspect of the nominated property against other relevant examples.

In conclusion, ICOMOS observes that the comparative analysis reflects some lack of clarity in the nomination as it has considered several properties that do not appear particularly relevant for this nomination but has not deepened the comparison on all aspects of the nominated property when examining the closest parallels. Some outstanding relevant examples are also missing in the comparison.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis does not justify consideration of this property for the World Heritage List at this stage.

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:

- It is a rare example of an urban settlement which has developed over a period of at least six millennia on the top of an archaeological mound in a continuous process of transformation and accumulation.

- The still clearly legible peculiar urban structure of the Citadel town dating back to the Ottoman period has resulted from the stratification of previous layers of occupation and bears witness to Erbil's long history.
- The millennial continuity of occupation of the Erbil site is also attested to by the remarkable permanence of its name, although under various spellings (Irbilum, etc), in several historic sources since Sumerian times.

ICOMOS considers that this justification is not appropriate for the reasons explained below.

Although many written and epigraphic sources attest to Erbil's antiquity, and archaeological finds suggest the millennia-long occupation of the area, material evidence of occupational continuity is scarce and recently revived archaeological research has pointed out only the potential for further discoveries, also within the larger setting of the Erbil plain. Additionally, for the many periods that Erbil Citadel had historical significance, other excavated sites exist that are of greater importance and bear exceptional testimony to the relevant civilisation (e.g. Nineveh, Aššur, Nimrud or Kalhu).

The nominated property today consists of 19th and early 20th century mainly residential built fabric and a few public buildings, the latter largely transformed, erected on top of an unexcavated tell. The defensive wall system that would justify the appellation of citadel has been replaced by a wall of tall house façades, which happened possibly sometime between the 18th and 19th centuries. The intricate street network fanning out from the Grand Gate appears a peculiar feature but only augmented historical, architectural and archaeological research on the urban structure and surviving buildings may shed light on the relationship between the Ottoman urban structure, the functional partitioning and the earlier phases of the settlement.

ICOMOS further observes that a discussion on the surviving traces of the lower town(s) is missing, despite them being briefly mentioned in the nomination dossier. Additionally, the only standing structure attesting to Erbil's history in the city's most recent affluent period – the Choli Minaret – is located in the buffer zone.

ICOMOS considers that the tangible evidence does not appear sufficient, at this stage, to support the claim of uninterrupted continuity of occupation going back several millennia nor to demonstrate that the actual urban form has been influenced by previous layouts.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The State Party has assessed the integrity of the nominated property from three different perspectives: as an archaeological mound, as an historic urban landscape, and with regard to its built fabric. The assessment

concludes that the main issues concern the built fabric of Erbil Citadel; however the problems have now been identified and are being addressed through an integrated conservation programme.

ICOMOS firstly observes that, according to the proposed justification for inscription, the boundaries of the nominated property do not encompass all the relevant components: the Choli Minaret which attests to Erbil flourishing in the 12th-13rd centuries, is in the buffer zone; and those areas of the lower town, including the bazaar, that were contained within the perimeter of the ancient lower city, have not been included in the nominated property. Besides this, the surviving archaeological remains witnessing different historic layers of the lower town have not been considered as a reference to delineate the boundary of the nominated property or of the buffer zone.

ICOMOS further considers that the interventions carried out during the 20th century – the demolition of the Grand Gate (rebuilt in 1979), the opening of the north-south road, the alteration of the Mosque roof, along with the encroachment upon traditional structures and the erection of shelters using looted building materials (252 shacks out of 588 inventoried buildings) have considerably undermined the integrity of the nominated property. The relocation of all the Citadel inhabitants elsewhere has also unfavourably affected the social and functional integrity of the urban fabric as a traditional organically-evolved urban settlement. The state of conservation of the nominated property remains fragile, despite the work already carried out, whilst the historic neighbourhoods of the buffer zone suffer from disrepair and urban pressure.

ICOMOS observes that while the tell has not been excavated, and should therefore be largely intact, the nomination dossier reports on the deficiencies of the sewerage system built in the 1920s which could have compromised the condition of archaeological remains concealed within the mound.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity of the nominated property pose considerable concerns in relation to the congruence with the proposed justification for inscription, to the condition of its urban fabric and to its social and functional dimensions.

Authenticity

ICOMOS considers that Erbil Citadel's urban form and built fabric have retained their legibility as part of a 19th-20th century Ottoman settlement on the top of a tell. However, the lack of sufficient physical evidence from ancient periods does not allow extension of this statement beyond the above-mentioned temporal limit. Further field research would be necessary to demonstrate credibly that elements from previous layouts have influenced and survive in the actual urban form and/or built fabric.

Written and epigraphic sources suggesting that Erbil played an eminent role in antiquity lack correspondence

with physical evidence; however the imposing presence of the tell does evoke this long history. The fact that Erbil Citadel is currently uninhabited detracts from its sense of place as a town.

ICOMOS observes that the urban layout and part of the surviving built fabric reflect only the 19th century Ottoman phase of the nominated property but cannot at this stage provide evidence in an understandable and credible manner to previous urban configurations.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have not been met at this stage.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iii), (iv) 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 Erbil Citadel contains several layers of human millennia-long occupation and therefore bears exceptional witness to cultural traditions and civilisations that have disappeared. The nominated property would also exemplify a rare case of an urban settlement on the top of a tell which has evolved over time by reshaping the surviving substance of previous layers, until very recently.

ICOMOS holds that, although written, epigraphic and iconographic sources suggest that Erbil has had a long history since earliest times and played important roles in different eras, particularly during the Assyrian period, the tangible archaeological evidence of this ancient past appears currently still scarce and insufficiently elaborated, therefore it cannot appropriately support this claim. Additionally, compared to other uninhabited tells, the nominated property exhibits a limited potential to yield substantial tangible evidence through extensive excavations, due to the desirability to preserve the structures built on top of it as well as its current layout.

The second part of the proposed justification of criterion (iii) would better fit criterion (iv); however the nomination dossier does not adequately relate the property's physical evidence of the 19th-20th century Ottoman settlement with possibly surviving traces of previous layouts.

Additionally, the most recent activity of construction on the tell has not produced outstanding examples of a continuing building tradition; rather it has contributed to encroachment upon the surviving Ottoman edifices.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not 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 nominated property represents an outstanding example of a *tell*, which conceals several layers of human occupation throughout six millennia. The fortified urban settlement erected on the top of the mound has largely retained its physical morphology, determined by previous layouts, as well as several buildings dating back to the 19th century Ottoman period.

ICOMOS observes that, whilst the powerful visual impression of the citadel at the top of the *tell* has been retained, the relation of the peculiar fan-like street pattern with previous layouts has not been demonstrated on the basis of archaeological/ historical evidence. The study of previous house plans, of the use of former foundations, and of the modification of open and closed spaces is necessary to clarify the possible connection with previous configurations.

The replacement of the walls with houses has only been mentioned but not elucidated in relation to the possible emergence of changing needs. The nomination dossier does not explain how, when and at what rate this substantial modification occurred nor does it provide historical and architectural evidence for this change. Neither a construction date, nor any study on the building typology or building materials/techniques in relation to the former walls is provided for the perimeter houses.

ICOMOS finally observes that 19th century Ottoman urban features, i.e. house typology in relation to building technologies, climatic conditions, social structure, public buildings, social articulation in relation to physical configuration (i.e. the Ottoman Topkhana, Saray and Takiya districts are only mentioned but not described) are not documented in the nomination dossier sufficiently to demonstrate an outstanding universal value.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been demonstrated at this stage.

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 Erbil Citadel outstandingly represents a traditional urban settlement which has grown up on the top of an archaeological mound featuring a dense built fabric, mainly residential, circumscribed by a continuous wall of houses, which replaced its defensive walls between the 18th and 19th centuries. Subsequent layers

of use since antiquity have reshaped previous surviving layouts in a continuous process of superimposition and transformation.

ICOMOS considers that the first part of the justification for criterion (v) would be more appropriate for criterion (iv). However, the nomination dossier does not provide sufficient arguments explaining how and to what extent the surviving physical evidence of the Citadel's urban fabric supports the justification for this criterion. The contextualisation of Erbil Citadel and of the lower town within their larger territory and the ancient road network would also be needed for a better understanding of Erbil's role in past times and of its interaction with its larger settled environment, the documentation of which is ongoing thanks to recently revived archaeological campaigns in the region. The relocation of the inhabitants makes it difficult to consider Erbil Citadel as an example of an organically evolving 'tell' urban settlement.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

In conclusion, ICOMOS does not consider that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met at this stage and that the criteria have been justified at this stage.

4 Factors affecting the property

ICOMOS observes that the instability and soil erosion of the slope of the archaeological mound and the precarious state of conservation of the historic built fabric within the Citadel are among the most critical factors for the transmission to the future of the nominated property. The poor condition of the nominated property also increases its seismic vulnerability.

Erbil Citadel is owned by the government, therefore does not suffer from direct development pressure from private investors. Urban Design Guidelines for the Buffer Zone of Erbil Citadel have been elaborated to ensure that building development within this area respects the visual integrity of the citadel and its relationship with its setting.

However, ICOMOS notes that the effects of development pressure already visually affect the nominated property and the buffer zone with inappropriate and out-of-scale constructions.

Currently, tourism is not a concern for the nominated property, however, visitor increase may be expected, for Kurdistan has been growing as a tourist destination in recent years. The tourism-oriented regeneration strategy adopted for Erbil Citadel may contribute to intensifying this trend in the nominated property, although not in the near future. However, ICOMOS believes that this approach is likely to affect the traditional character of the nominated property and the sense of place.

Finally, considering the large scale conservation programme undertaken, ICOMOS recommends that a cautious approach and clear guidelines for conservation interventions be adopted to ensure respect for the authenticity of the nominated property and to avoid unevenness in the results of conservation works.

Finally, ICOMOS expresses its concerns regarding the incongruence between the nominated property and its setting and the architectural design chosen for the project of the National Kurdistan Museum which is to be built on an area north of and directly facing the Citadel.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are soil and structural instability of the mound, the still-fragile condition of the architectural fabric of the Citadel, coupled with possible over-restoration, incongruous buildings and project proposals within the buffer zone (e.g., the project for the Kurdistan National Museum), and strong urban development pressure in surrounding areas.

5 Protection, conservation and management

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The boundaries of the nominated property (approx 15ha at the bottom of the tell) run around the base of the archaeological mound and comprise the formerly walled settlement on the top of the tell and the tell itself.

The buffer zone (approx 268ha) encompasses a section of the lower city enclosed by the 30-Metre Road or Barzami Nam Str. and comprising also the area of Minaret Park. It consists of two zones, subject to different levels of building and planning regulations, depending on their character. The first one, delimited by the inner ring road, features a still valuable urban fabric and buildings, including the bazaar, and several public and religious structures, whilst the second comprises predominantly modern constructions and affords regulations intended to protect the visual corridors towards the citadel.

ICOMOS considers that the uncertainty in the nomination approach emerging from the comparative analysis has also affected the rationale for selecting the relevant components of the property. For instance, given the proposed justification for inscribing Erbil Citadel on the World Heritage List, which is based on its long-lived continuity of settlement, the boundaries of the nominated property might also have included the Choli Minaret, the only standing structure in Erbil dating back to the 12th-13th centuries AD, and the historic quarters of the lower city, now included in the buffer zone.

Equally, when considering the archaeological potential of Erbil Citadel's setting, the buffer zone has been designed with the visual integrity of the nominated property in mind and has overlooked the archaeological traces, i.e. minor

mounds, and other modifications of the terrain, attesting to the ancient past of the city.

ICOMOS further observes that recent non-destructive archaeological investigations in the urbanised areas of Erbil have been yielding promising results that could provide useful inputs for any reconsideration of the boundaries of the nominated property and its buffer zone.

ICOMOS notes that the 2013 revised version of the Urban Design Guidelines for the Buffer Zone (made available to ICOMOS during the mission) contains a perimeter of the buffer zone which differs from the one contained in the nomination dossier. Clarification on this point is needed.

ICOMOS finally considers that a closer verification of the limits of the currently proposed buffer zone and of its role in protecting and contributing to Erbil Citadel's significance appears necessary.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property and of its buffer zone reflect the lack of clarity of the nomination approach which would gain from further work so as to better clarify its focus and subsequently outline appropriate boundaries for both the property to be nominated and its buffer zone.

Ownership

The nominated property has been owned by different bodies of the Kurdistan Autonomous Region's government since 2006. The buffer zone comprises mainly privately-owned buildings and areas; however several institutional facilities are in public ownership.

Protection

Erbil Citadel has been formally protected since 1937 under the provisions of the Law for Antiquities and Heritage of Iraq nr. 59/1936, now replaced by Law nr. 55/2002. The reformed law provides for the inventory, documentation and official protection, where appropriate, of antiquities and heritage immovable properties. State competences in this matter have been transferred to the Kurdistan Regional Government and a Regional Directorate of Antiquity was created in the 1990s.

The legislation in force provides that owners are obliged to take care of their properties if registered under the aforementioned law. The current legislation does not foresee financial support for private owners, therefore, in case they cannot comply with their obligations, the Department of Antiquities can substitute for them, provided that the owner renounces his occupation rights to the Department.

Within the framework of the Revitalization of Erbil Citadel Project (see subsequent section), to grant further protection to the Citadel, a buffer zone, which is articulated into two sub-zones – A and B - has been drawn, and covered by planning regulations contained in the *Urban Design Guidelines for the Buffer Zone of the Erbil Citadel* (2011). These aim at increasing the legibility of the historic urban fabric and at controlling the visual impact of urban

development along the main road axes towards the Citadel by establishing height limits for new buildings. They are complemented by a *Conservation Handbook for the Buffer Zone of the Erbil Citadel*, which however has no compulsory status. The Guidelines were adopted in 2011 by the Kurdistan Governorate and are being implemented at the municipality level. A revised version of these guidelines has been elaborated in 2013: they slightly widen the boundaries of the buffer zone to include both sides of ring-road 60, so as to better control construction heights, and provide more details. The revised guidelines have not been adopted yet.

ICOMOS underlines that implementation of the above measures constitutes the key point for an effective protection of the Citadel and its setting and considers that the approval of the drafted revised version of the Guidelines (2013) would improve the protection of the nominated property.

ICOMOS finally observes that, whilst the architectural and landscape aspects have been comprehensively addressed by the Guidelines, the archaeological potential of the buffer zone has not been adequately considered in designing planning and building regulations. Appropriate measures should be set up to ensure that building activity within the buffer zone does not damage buried archaeological traces.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place would benefit from the introduction of aid mechanisms to support private owners in their conservation duties. ICOMOS considers that the protective measures developed for the property are adequate, although appropriate measures to protect buried archaeological remains should be integrated into the *Urban Design Guidelines for the Buffer Zone*.

ICOMOS recommends that all protection measures in place should be carefully implemented to ensure the safeguarding of the nominated property and its setting and considers that the approval of the drafted revised version of the Guidelines (2013) would improve the protection of the nominated property.

Conservation

The state of conservation of Erbil Citadel has been a preoccupation since the 1950s and a number of studies have been elaborated since the 1970s to address this issue. Due to the severe decay problems affecting Erbil Citadel and its built fabric, after its evacuation, in 2007 the High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalisation was established and a Memorandum of Understanding with UNESCO's Iraq Office was signed to carry out the Revitalization of Erbil Citadel Project. Phase I of this programme has been completed and Phase II is under completion.

A Conservation Master Plan for the Citadel has been elaborated to manage the progressive implementation of interventions. Within this framework, documentation of the architectural heritage and its condition as well as emergency and stabilisation works on various buildings

have been or are being carried out. In parallel, a comprehensive study of the buffer zone was developed and guidelines elaborated.

ICOMOS notes that much work has been done to document the current conditions of the Citadel's built fabric, identify the problems and prioritize intervention. The task is huge, but the framework to continue the conservation activity has been set up. ICOMOS further observes that, whilst the architectural and urban heritage of the Citadel has received much attention, the stability and conservation conditions of the Citadel mound and of its slopes should have been given priority and should be addressed urgently. A detailed study for a comprehensive conservation project for the immediate setting of the Citadel is also recommended.

Despite the Kurdistan authorities' huge undertaking, ICOMOS observes that much work is still to be done to ensure the preservation of the surviving built fabric of the Citadel and of the buffer zone, and that involving private investors in the process appears crucial for the accomplishment of the task.

ICOMOS finally underlines that the main challenge for the Citadel remains the compatible, equitable and participatory social and economic revitalization and in this regard the proposed revitalisation formulas appear excessively tourism-oriented and do not pay adequate attention to the regeneration of the social fabric within the Citadel.

ICOMOS considers that many efforts have been made to set up a framework for the study and the conservation of the nominated property, but much remains to be done, in particular the stability problems of the mound need to be urgently addressed. ICOMOS notes that the compatible, equitable and participatory revitalisation of the nominated property remains a major challenge and, in this regard, recommends that adequate strategies and tools should be set up.

Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

The High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalisation (HCECR) has been established since 2007 by the Kurdistan Regional Government to manage the nominated property. It comprises a Board of Members acting as a steering committee, a Management Office, and an Advisory Group. However, the current structure of the HCECR has not been defined nor has its mandate been established formally; in addition, its competencies have never been formalised.

Until the creation of HCECR, Erbil municipality granted building permissions within the Citadel, whilst the Directorate of Antiquities continues to maintain its responsibilities with regard to archaeological properties.

The Management Plan suggests the consolidation of both competencies under one single authority - the HCECR.

Implementation of the Guidelines for the Buffer Zone is entrusted to the Licensing and Monitoring Committees with an executive and supervisory role respectively; relevant authorities are represented in both committees.

Financial resources to carry out the revitalization programme have been so far allocated only in modest percentages by the Iraqi national or Kurdistan regional governments, the majority deriving from international agencies and other donors.

ICOMOS considers that HCECR's configuration and role needs to be formalised as soon as possible; coordination mechanisms among the different relevant authorities, commissions and committees are also urgently required in order to ensure effective protection and management.

Given the enormous work still to be done, ICOMOS further recommends that a strategy to develop robust public/private investment partnerships should be elaborated and implemented.

ICOMOS observes that the technical staff of the HCECR management office should be integrated with at least one archaeologist, and one expert in project financing and public/private partnerships. Training programmes for the staff should continue.

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

A Management Plan for Erbil Citadel was completed by 2012. It builds upon previous instruments, particularly the Conservation and Rehabilitation Master Plan and the Urban Design Guidelines for Erbil Citadel Buffer Zone, and examines other strategic plans developed at the regional level. The Management Plan defines a strategy for the nominated property based on 8 different thematic axes, for each of which activities and priorities have been identified, including visitor management.

The Management Plan is complemented by an Implementation Plan that identifies priorities, timelines and budget needs.

ICOMOS notes that the management framework has been envisaged for the nominated property only very recently and under special conditions, thanks to the financial and institutional assistance of the UNESCO Iraq Office and other foreign partners. ICOMOS recommends that a capacity-building strategy for regional and local public institutions be set up to strengthen their long term effectiveness in managing the nominated property.

Involvement of the local communities

The Management Plan recognizes the need to improve Erbil residents' information on and participation in the revitalisation process.

ICOMOS believes that this is of utmost importance for the future and long-term conservation of Erbil Citadel's significance as a heritage and symbolic place. In this regard, ICOMOS recommends that the HCRECR takes into account the role that previous residents may play in the revitalisation process of the Citadel and foresees the return of former inhabitants if they are willing to do so.

ICOMOS considers that, given the complexity and number of the actors involved, special attention is needed for the coordination among the authorities responsible for the nominated property, the buffer zone and the wider city. The huge task of the Citadel's conservation and revitalisation requires that a robust public/private partnership be built so as to involve economic stakeholders, NGOs, and individuals. The viability of, and opportunity to return former inhabitants of the Citadel as permanent residents should also be considered.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the management system should be extended to include a capacity-building strategy for regional and local institutions. Furthermore, ICOMOS recommends that the role, structure and organisation of the HCECR be formalised urgently on the basis of the appropriate legal tools. Extra attention to public engagement, particularly of former residents of the Citadel, in the management process is also advisable.

6 Monitoring

The HCECR is the monitoring authority. The system foresees specific and sectorial monitoring activities, especially concerning the conservation conditions of the built heritage, but also for building activity within the buffer zone.

ICOMOS considers monitoring is a tool that aids site managers to assess the extent to which defined management goals are achieved. In this regard, ICOMOS believes that a comprehensive monitoring system based on management objectives should be set up. Specific monitoring exercises should be part of it.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring system for the nominated property should be expanded beyond the structural or conservation issues of the built fabric to include all activities foreseen by the Management Plan. Monitoring mechanisms should ensure the effective use of collected data.

7 Conclusions

Erbil Citadel with its elevated position on the top of an impressive artificial mound rising up from the plain in a region which witnessed the birth of the first cities, continues to create a strong visual impression. Abundant written and epigraphic records also evoke the long history of the site which has been documented since Eblaite

times and flourished as a political and religious centre in the neo-Assyrian period. The permanence of its name down the centuries reinforces the idea of a long continuity of settlement.

The nomination proposal appears influenced by these three factors but as soon as tangible evidence is called on to support the claims of the selected criteria, the dossier reveals a certain degree of ambiguity and lack of clarity. The comparative analysis, the boundary delimitations and the arguments put forth in the nomination dossier do not contribute to demonstrating the proposed justification for Outstanding Universal Value at this stage.

In fact, the fragmented surviving built fabric of the nominated property and of the buffer zone bears witness to the most recent period of Erbil's history, between the 18th and early 20th centuries. As for Erbil's previous historic phases, the surviving substance of the nominated property does not support the arguments presented in the nomination dossier nor does it demonstrate to what extent and how previous occupation layouts have determined the present configuration of the Citadel. Further historical, archival and morphological studies as well as archaeology may aid in this regard.

The tell constitutes the only massive physical evidence of ancient occupation phases, but in the absence of systematic archaeological investigations, information on previous levels remains at the potential stage and cannot concur to support the arguments put forth in the nomination dossier. At this stage, little material evidence and scientific documentation exist which demonstrate that the tell conceals important archaeological traces and coincides with the site of the Assyrian Arbela.

The integrity of the nominated property equally poses considerable concerns: most of the components that would make up an historic fortified urban settlement no longer exist or have suffered major transformations. Only a few clusters of 19th century residential buildings survive in precarious and fragmented condition.

ICOMOS congratulates the Kurdistan Autonomous Region for its important achievements in preserving Erbil Citadel. However, it notes that the ambitious conservation and revitalisation programme initiated in 2008 is still at its beginnings and needs a long term political commitment and substantial institutional capacity to be completed.

Some major projects – e.g. the on-going reconstruction of the Grand Gate, based on limited historical and graphic documentation of its pre-1980 configuration, and the Kurdistan National Museum directly facing the Citadel – also arouse concerns regarding the retention of the already undermined integrity of the nominated property and of its authenticity.

8 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the examination of the nomination of Erbil Citadel, Iraq, to the World Heritage List be **deferred** in order to allow the State Party to:

- Deepen the research on the urban-architectural heritage and of the archaeological context of the nominated property and its setting to bring into focus the areas of potential significance of the property in relation to its tangible evidence and complete the comparative analysis, in order to understand whether the property might be considered of Outstanding Universal Value;
- If such a study suggests that a robust case could be made to justify the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, then:
 - Amend the boundaries of the nominated property and of the buffer zone if and where necessary;
 - Formalise through appropriate legal means the role, structure and competencies of the High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalisation as the management authority and provide it with adequate and stable financial and staff resources to allow its proper functioning in the long term.

ICOMOS considers that any revised nomination would need to be considered by an expert mission to the site.

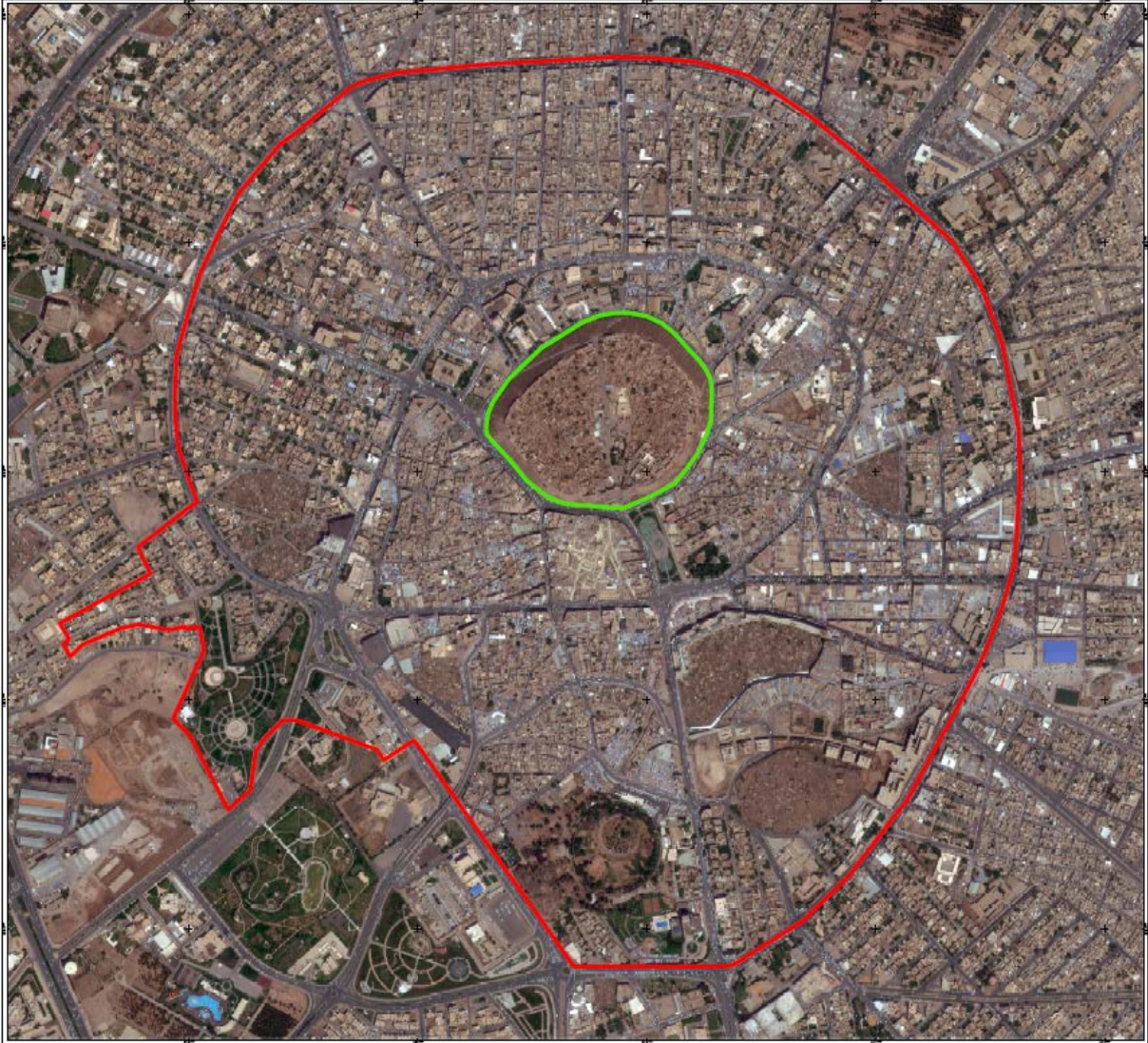
Additional recommendations

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

- Addressing the stabilisation of the slopes of the archaeological mound with the maximum urgency;
- Reconsidering the location of the Kurdistan National Museum or substantially revising the architectural design of the current project to harmonise with the Citadel and its relationship with its setting;
- Surveying, documenting and mapping surviving surface archaeological remains of all types and establishing mechanisms to document and protect buried archaeological remains from building activity;
- Elaborating a strategy to attract private investors and to build a solid public/private partnership to implement the conservation and revitalisation programme;
- Undertaking juridical studies with a view to improving the existing legal framework by introducing mechanisms to support private owners in carrying

out their maintenance duties for their heritage properties;

- Strengthening involvement of former inhabitants and of Erbil's civil society at large in the revitalisation of the Citadel and providing adequate instruments to ensure their effective participation in this process.



Aerial photograph showing the boundaries of the nominated property



Aerial view of the Citadel



The Citadel, mound and south-eastern perimeter



Narrow lane



Courtyard