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# Susa (Islamic Republic of Iran) No 1455

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## Official name as proposed by the State Party

Susa

## Location

Khuzestan Province, Susa County  
Islamic Republic of Iran

## Brief description

Located in the lower Zagros Mountains, in the Susiana plains between the Karkheh and Dez Rivers, Susa comprises a group of artificial archaeological mounds rising on the eastern side of the Shavur River encompassing large excavated areas where has been brought to light abundant evidence, of scientific importance and artistic interest, of its thriving existence over several millennia, between the late 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE and the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. The architectural and urban monuments revealed by the excavations and still in-situ include administrative, religious, residential and palatial structures as well as production and cemetery areas.

## Category of property

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

## 1 Basic data

### Included in the Tentative List

9 August 2007

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

None

### Date received by the World Heritage Centre

1 February 2013

### Background

This is a new nomination.

### Consultations

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management and several independent experts.

### Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 4 to 7 November 2014.

## Additional information received by ICOMOS

On 22 December 2014 ICOMOS sent a letter to the State Party requesting additional information concerning the following:

- expand the arguments to justify the criteria;
- clarify the rationale of the delimitation of the boundaries of the nominated area and buffer zone, in relation to research results;
- provide updated information on legal protective measures and additional cartography;
- provide an implementation calendar for the finalisation of the archaeological map for the landscape and buffer zones; the development of a risk strategy, the envisaged enhancement programmes; and guidelines for constructions;
- strengthen the engagement for inter-institutional cooperation by formalising the commitment of all relevant parties involved.

The State Party responded on 26 February 2015 providing the requested additional information, which has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this report.

## Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

12 March 2015

## 2 The property

### Description

Susa is located in south-western Iran, in the lower Zagros Mountains in the Susiana Plain, formed by the pediment erosion and fluvial accumulation of the Karkheh and Dez Rivers which flow through the plain, and which made the lowlands of Khuzestan highly fertile, facilitating the development of agriculture.

The nominated serial property comprises two components: the Susa archaeological complex and the area of Ardeshir's Palace. Urban development which has occurred along the banks of the Shavur River in the last decades has guided the choice to propose two distinct components encompassed by one buffer zone.

Overall the nominated serial property includes c350ha and is surrounded by a buffer zone encompassing four archaeological mounds, adjacent grounds and parts of the city developed immediately north of the archaeological site and along the eastern bank of the Shavur River, totalling 600ha. Altogether the nominated property with its buffer zone covers 950ha.

### Component 1 - Susa archaeological site

The archaeological site comprises four distinct mounds, which archaeologists have named *Acropolis* ('high city'), the highest and oldest area of occupation, *Apadana* where Darius' palace was erected, *Shahr-e Shahi* (Royal City) and a fourth mound, the lowest and widest one, *Shahr-e Sanátgaran* (*Ville des Artisans* or City of Craftsmen), which is in fact formed of high and low land.

Excavations began at Susa at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and have continued intermittently since then, revealing several layers of human settlement covering a span of time longer than 6000 years (5<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE - 13<sup>th</sup> century CE).

A rough description of the city plan in the Elamite period can be built on the basis of complementary sources, including archaeological excavations, Elamite inscriptions and certain Mesopotamian texts (namely the description of Assurbanipal's sack of Susa). The three millennia of occupation preceding the Achaemenids have yielded abundant finds and left built evidence in the Acropolis, the Apadana and the Royal City mounds.

The *Acropolis* contains the most ancient evidence of settlement and was probably the core of Proto-Elamite Susa. The most significant finding in this area has been a massive brick terrace which has suggested that a system of accumulation and redistribution of resources supported by considerable management capabilities was in place as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE.

During the Elamite phase (2400 – 539 BCE) this area included a sacred sector called *kizzum* where temples dedicated to Inshushinak and Ninkhursak, presumably in the form of ziggurats, were located and where tablets and seals were found. It is in this area that, in 1902, the Code of Hammurabi (18<sup>th</sup> century BCE) was discovered. Another important piece yielded by excavations in the Acropolis is the bronze statue of Napir-Asu (13<sup>th</sup> century BCE).

During the early French excavations on the Acropolis, a castle, known as Susa Castle, was built to serve as the base for the archaeological missions and to conserve finds yielded during the excavations.

The area of the Elamite Royal Palace is presumed to coincide with that of *Apadana*, where the remains of Darius' Palace were discovered and which Darius reshaped completely to build his vast residence by creating a large terraced platform and levelling previous structures. The palace itself comprised several buildings clustered along an east-west axis. Excavations revealed the layout of a large part of this complex and of several open spaces: the Audience Hall, the great enamelled court and related halls, the Treasury court, the forty-columned court, and the northern buildings. Here a large statue of Darius was found in 1972.

According to a contemporary inscription, the construction of the palace was a major undertaking, with construction materials and workforce coming from as far away as Egypt, Bactria, Lebanon and Ethiopia. Apadana Palace is said to have served as the prototype for palaces in Persepolis.

To the east of the Acropolis and of the Apadana, lies another mound, known as *Shahr-e Panzdahom* or Fifteenth City, which excavations proved to have been settled from the early Elamite until the Islamic period. To

the Elamite phase belongs a luxurious residential area, the *Shahr-e Shahi*, where are attested the existence of fireplaces for heating and cooking and sanitary installations (the earliest buildings hail from as early as 1700 BCE).

The area named *Shahr-e Sanátgaran* lies further east of the previous three and revealed sequences of occupation from late Elamite to the Islamic period. It comprises workers' quarters with housing for shopkeepers, artisans and workers, mainly from the Achaemenid period.

In the same area, important remains from the Islamic period of Susa, namely the sugar cane factory (12<sup>th</sup> century CE) and the Grand Mosque (presumed to be 7<sup>th</sup> century CE) were also discovered. The mosque is said to be one of the earliest built in Iran.

Study of aerial photographs has revealed the structure of the early Islamic city.

#### Component 2 - Ardeshir's Palace

On the western bank of the Shavur River, which flows in a north-south direction west of Susa's Acropolis and Apadana, another palace was discovered and excavated since the 1960s. It has been found to have many similarities with Darius' palace in Apadana but is smaller in size: it had a large hall (37.5x34.6m) and subsidiary facilities; here, columns were in wood with stone bases. On the hall walls early evidence of figurative paintings with a wide colour palette (red, carmine, blue and white) were found. It is thought that the palace was constructed by Artaxerxes II in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

#### History and development

Wealth in natural resources and the strategic location along the overland trade routes between Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley contributed to the prosperity of the populations of the Iranian Plateau during the Neolithic and the Bronze Ages.

According to archaeological findings, the Khuzestan region passed from the prehistoric into the proto-historic period in the mid-4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE, and when Susa gained in importance, the region already bore traces of human settlement, as the sites of Jafarabad, Jowi, Band-e bal, Eyvan-e Karkkeh, Chogha Mish or Chogha Zanbil demonstrate. Stamp seals found in the excavations are indicative of ranking within society and of ritual activities possibly aimed at increasing socio-political ties and organisation between Susa and the surrounding sites.

Finds belonging to the Uruk culture suggest that the centre passed through a different phase of cultural/political influences, the nature and duration of which are still debated. Nevertheless, the area of occupation at Susa expanded throughout the Uruk phase.

Evidence has been found that, at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE, settlements throughout Iran were part

of a common cultural network, known as the “Proto-Elamite horizon.” In Susa a wealth of stamp seals and small clay tablets, dated to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium, with texts in Proto-Elamite script, have been found. Similar material was dug out in several centres to the east and north of Susa, where commerce among trade centres and settlements was well established by 3100 B.C, suggesting Susa’s prominent role in the Iranian Plateau.

Excavations and findings in the form of clay tablets attest to the cyclical advance/regression of Mesopotamian and Elamite influence over Susa and its territory until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century BCE, when Susa fell under Elamite control and remained so until the Achaemenids took over in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It is assumed that ecological disasters and political unrest contributed to the decline of Elamite Susa.

Under the Achaemenids, and particularly from Darius’ reign, Susa was one of the elected residences of the Kings. It was probably for symbolic reasons, that Darius built his palace at Susa, which was later reconstructed by Artaxerxes II. The trade routes developed in the previous millennia got a significant boost due to the construction of a royal road connecting the Aegean Sea with Susa through Anatolia and Mesopotamia to continue into the Iranian Plateau as far as Persepolis.

After the fall of the Achaemenids, Susa underwent a Hellenization process and, with the division of Alexander the Great’s empire, it fell under Seleucid and then Parthian spheres of influence. It is assumed Susa became a colony of retired soldiers who settled there and were given land plots to be cultivated. During Parthian rule improvements to the irrigation system contributed to increasing the fertility of the surrounding area.

In the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, the Sassanids rose at the expense of the Parthians and Susa came under their control, when it became an important centre for trade and sugar cane production, which continued also under the Arabs who conquered Susa in the mid 7<sup>th</sup> century CE until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the Mongol invasion marked the definitive decline of the city.

The history of excavations commenced in 1851-1852 with two campaigns carried out by a British expedition. Thirty years later, a French mission inaugurated a long season of campaigns that lasted until 1979.

Early excavations were mainly aimed at revealing the Elamite period, so more recent phases were treated with less attention and often destroyed. First excavations focused on the Acropolis, Apadana and the Royal City. Attempts to develop a stratigraphy for Susa were initiated in the 1940’s and continued in the 1970’s. The Iraq–Iran war stopped archaeological research which was resumed only in the 1990’s.

Since then, the State Party has tried to improve the state of conservation of the excavated remains through systematic maintenance and restoration.

Along with excavations the history of archaeological conservation of the site also began (see Section 4).

### **3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity**

#### **Comparative analysis**

The nomination dossier has first examined comparable sites within the country and then has widened the scope of the analysis to the Near East and Central Asia.

The comparison with sites from Iran has been able to highlight the ancientness and prominence of Susa in terms of continuity and size of settlement, urban development in different epochs, particularly the Elamite one, in respect to other sites which lasted only for shorter periods or were used for specific purposes. The only example that would share some similarities with Susa in terms of long and continuous occupation would be Tell-e Malyan; however research there has been much shorter in comparison to Susa and has not revealed palaces or temples but mainly residential, administrative or production districts.

The comparison with other important ancient cities in the relevant geo-cultural region has highlighted the specificities and importance of each example. However, Susa stands apart for its early settlement, continuity of occupation, size, or density of excavated in-situ monumental remains.

ICOMOS first notes that a number of relevant sites for the present nomination have not been examined, e.g., the World Heritage properties of Ashur (Qal’at Sherqat) (Iraq, 2003 (iii) (iv)), Ancient Thebes with its Necropolis (Egypt, 1979 (i) (iii) (vi)), the Archaeological Site of Troy (Turkey, 1998 (ii) (iii) (vi)), or the Archaeological Sites of Mycenae and Tiryns (Greece, 1999 (i) (ii) (iii) (iv) (vi)). The analysis could also have examined Biblical Tels - Megiddo, Hazor, Beer Sheba (Israel, 2005 (ii) (iii) (iv) (vi)) for the same span of time covered and the biblical references, the city of Balkh on the Tentative List of Afghanistan, or Ugarit, in Syria, for its ancientness; also Knossos in Greece could have been taken into consideration.

Among sites located in Iran, further examples could also have been analysed, e.g., Tepe Yahya, Godin Tepe, or Chogha Mish. As for the Achaemenid period, ICOMOS considers that parallel examples from contemporary competing powers, e.g., Greece, could also have been included.

Nonetheless, ICOMOS considers that Susa provides specific contributions in depicting the history of urbanization processes as well as of commercial and cultural influences and exchanges between the ancient

Near-East, Central Asia and the Indus Valley through the Iranian Plateau, particularly between the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.

Susa does also represent an important early development in Achaemenid royal architecture. Persepolis and Pasargadae appear to represent different functional requirements of the Achaemenid kings: Susa was more an administrative centre located within an urban environment whilst Persepolis is likely to have been a purely ceremonial centre with no attached settlement. In other words, Susa was a vital component of Achaemenid culture.

Although not discussed explicitly in the comparative analysis, also due to the particular nature of the proposed series, ICOMOS considers that the selection of the components is reasonable.

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ICOMOS considers that, despite weaknesses in the comparative analysis, the property justifies consideration 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:

- Susa is one of the oldest known urban settlements in the region and in the world, in which first evidence of activities related to urban dwelling, long-distance trade, administration, monumental and religious architecture can be found;
- Susa exhibits a millennia-long history of continuing occupation from the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE to the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD;
- Susa has been a creative protagonist in urban planning, arts, architecture and metallurgy;
- At the cross roads of other civilisations, Susa played a central role as a hub of cultural exchanges, influences and as a generator of values: Susa was one of the centres in the Middle East where early writing systems began, with the Proto-Elamite script, along with Sumerian cuneiform script.

ICOMOS considers the proposed justification is appropriate: Susa did indeed develop as early as the late 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE as an important centre, presumably with religious importance, to soon become a commercial, administrative and political hub that enjoyed different cultural influences thanks to its strategic position. Archaeological research can trace in Susa the most complete series of data on the passage of Iran from prehistory to history and Susa acted as the converging point of two great civilisations which reciprocally influenced each other: the Mesopotamian and the Iranian plateau civilisations. Susa's long-lasting and prominent role in the region, either as capital of the Elamites, or of the Achaemenid Empire, or as a strategic centre sought by neighbouring powers (e.g., Assyrian, Macedonian, Parthian, Sassanid) is witnessed by the abundant finds, of

disparate provenance and of exceptional artistic or scientific interest, by monuments and traces of urban layout (e.g., the remains of the *Haute Terrasse* in the Acropolis, the Palace of Darius in the Apadana, the residential or production quarters) that more than 150 years of archaeological investigations have yielded or revealed.

#### **Integrity and authenticity**

##### **Integrity**

The nomination dossier holds that the excavated and buried urban/architectural vestiges of Susa have been included in the nominated property, which, despite the fact that most of the finds that emerged during excavations are today in museums, the nominated archaeological site contains the essential attributes to make manifest its Outstanding Universal Value. The buffer zone encompasses further areas that may, in the future, yield other finds or structures from which it will be possible to draw additional information on the property and its significance. The archaeological potential of the buffer zone is protected through ad hoc measures.

ICOMOS considers that major relevant excavated archaeological features and most of the buried traces are included in the nominated property and therefore the boundaries can be considered to cover the elements necessary to express Susa's Outstanding Universal Value. Its size sufficiently ensures the representation of the features and processes which convey the property's significance.

ICOMOS also considers that the components selected to make up the nominated series reflect the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the property. The four mounds and the associated excavated remains bear witness to the long history of occupation and the relevance of Susa throughout the many centuries of its life and to different phases of urban development and design. The Ardeshir palace on the other hand complements Darius' Palace in the illustration of architecture of the Achaemenid period.

However, in the light of the results yielded by the recent resumption of research, ICOMOS asked for clarifications to the State Party with regard to the delimitation of the boundaries of the nominated property and of the buffer zone.

The State Party responded on 26 February 2015, explaining that the Ayadana is an ancient mound where investigations revealed only fragmentary remains from the Parthian period. The site is included in the buffer zone and it is the State Party's intention to purchase, investigate and preserve it. With regard to the Hussein-Ābād cemetery, located south of the Susa nominated area, it has not so far been ascertained if the area corresponds to an Achaemenid cemetery, despite the discovery of two coffins. The ICHHTO has nevertheless planned to purchase the area and investigate it through

geomagnetic survey and, in case of positive results, to excavate it.

ICOMOS considers that the response and explanations provided by the State Party can be considered satisfactory, although it recommends that investigations within and beyond the buffer and landscape zones be continued to highlight further remains relevant for the understanding of the civilisations that made Susa grow as a prominent urban centre over several millennia.

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ICOMOS considers that the integrity of the whole series has been justified; and that the integrity of the individual sites that comprise the series has been demonstrated. ICOMOS also considers that continuing archaeological research and documentation in the surroundings of the Susa archaeological site sustains the integrity of the nominated property.

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#### Authenticity

The finds yielded during extensive and long lasting excavation campaigns carried out over more than 160 years in the nominated property bear credible witness to the enunciated values of Susa. Scientific and archaeological methods have been used to reveal and to date the buried remains or to preserve them once exposed. Urban and architectural structures have been preserved in situ, whilst decorated panels, or architectural elements, have been removed and displayed in museums. Original materials dating back to different eras are crucial for their informative potential, therefore once exposed they have been protected with proven materials and techniques.

ICOMOS considers that more than 150 years of archaeological excavations at the property have yielded a considerable amount of information and archaeological remains that bear credible and exceptional witness to the significance of the nominated property.

ICOMOS however also notes that recent investigation results and a more territorial approach to archaeological research have highlighted the importance of geographical and environmental features as well as of the wider historic setting and of sites or traces discovered therein related to the development of Susa. They could enhance the understanding of the nominated property and its role in its historical and geographical context.

This more comprehensive approach should sustain the safeguarding of Susa's archaeological environment, beyond the strict delimitation of the boundaries of the nominated property and of its buffer or landscape zones.

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ICOMOS considers that the authenticity of the whole series has been justified; and that the authenticity of the individual sites that comprise the series has been demonstrated.

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In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the whole series have been justified; and for individual sites, the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met.

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#### Criteria under which inscription is proposed

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

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

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that Susa represents a masterpiece of human creative genius in urban planning and design, being one of the earliest urbanised settlements in the world. The Apadana with Darius' Palace with its sequences of halls, porticoes, colonnades with gigantic capitols and bases, and ceramic decorations, created an innovative artistic expression characteristic of the Achaemenid Empire. Susa contributed to the development of the technologies for metalwork, glyptic art, the lost-wax technique, ceramics' soldering and enamelling, demonstrating itself to be an active part of a large scale network of interchanges.

The property could indeed represent a masterpiece of human achievement, certainly in relation to the Achaemenid period; however, the nomination dossier does not develop sufficient and persuasive arguments in this regard for the whole nominated property and does not clarify which attributes support, and how, the justification for this criterion.

In its letter sent on 22 December 2014, ICOMOS requested the State Party to expand the justification for this criterion.

The State Party responded on 26 February 2015, providing further arguments to justify this criterion to cover the entirety of the property and the relevant periods. Susa demonstrates outstanding achievements in monumental and proto-urban and urban organisation, illustrating the development of the early state and of urbanization. Thus, Susa is among the few sites in the Middle East where the dynamics and processes that led to these monumental human achievements have been documented.

ICOMOS considers that the expanded justification for this criterion convincingly demonstrates its validity.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified for the whole series.

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Criterion (ii): *exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that Susa's remains and archaeological finds bear witness to an important interchange of influences and values deriving from commercial and cultural exchanges occurring among different civilisations for thousands of years along trade routes of central Asia. Susa played a key role in developing technological knowledge and skills as well as artistic, architectural and urban design within the region.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property could document exceptionality in the archaeological finds, works of art, or monumental and urban structures, shifting cultural affiliations and interchanges over a long period; however the justification for this criterion only alludes to these interactions and would need to be expanded and better linked to relevant attributes.

In its second letter, ICOMOS requested the State Party to further justify this criterion on the grounds of the arguments exposed in the description section and of the relevant attributes.

The State Party responded on 26 February 2015, providing an expanded justification for this criterion. Susa exhibits unique and millennia-spanning cultural interchanges with lowland Mesopotamia, Zagros intermountain valleys, highland Fars, the southern coast of the Persian Gulf and the Iranian Central Plateau. The far-reaching influence of Susa's proto-Elamite civilization has been documented through the widespread presence of its tablets in many sites in Iran and beyond. Archaeological and architectural materials discovered at Susa exhibit a variety of styles and forms, bearing witness to an international ancient city that was both influenced and imitated by its neighbours. Developments in metallurgy, stone carving, glyptics, and monumental building concur to demonstrate the importance and qualities of these interchanges.

ICOMOS considers that the proposed expanded justification fully illustrates the global relevance of Susa as one of the cradles of complex human civilisations.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified for the whole series.

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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 Susa bears exceptional testimony to ancient civilisations – Elamite, Achaemenid and Parthian, particularly – over several millennia. Its remains contain several layers of superimposed urban settlements in continuous succession from the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE to the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. Ancient sources cited Susa as an important centre of civilisation of the then-known world.

In ICOMOS' view, archaeological evidence does indicate that Susa bears an exceptional testimony to the Elamite, Persian and Parthian cultural traditions that have largely disappeared; in particular it bears a unique witness to the prominence of one city throughout several millennia and in subsequent kingdoms or empires.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified for the whole series.

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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 Susa is an outstanding example of urban settlement illustrating the dawn of urban development in the Proto-Elamite and Elamite Periods; whilst from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, as the capital of the Achaemenid Empire, Susa, and in particular Apadana and the Ardeshir Palace, shaped a prototype of ceremonial architecture, which spread within the Iranian Plateau.

ICOMOS considers that the argument proposed for the property being an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural ensemble does not adequately explain how the Proto-Elamite and Elamite phases contribute to demonstrate this criterion.

ICOMOS requested the State Party to expand further the justification for this criterion in relation to the relevant attributes and phases.

The State Party responded on 26 February 2015, explaining that in Susa processes of urbanization crystallized in the late 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. The focal point of this early urban settlement was a large monumental platform at the zenith of which a complex of temples had been erected; parts of the temple complex and the urban architecture have been revealed by scientific excavations and philological research carried out between the 1960s-1970s. They also documented the development of this early urban centre throughout the millennia. Material evidence of this is concentrated in the urban setting of the *Shahr-e Shahi* (Ville Royale), dating back to the Sakkalmah Period (1900-1700 BC). Also, neo-Assyrian stone reliefs from the palace at Nineveh in northern Iraq attest to Susa's town planning and cityscape during the neo-Elamite period (1000-640 BC).

Further information on Susa's political and cultural role and of its heritage survives potentially in the huge parts of the site still non-excavated and unexplored.

ICOMOS considers that the expanded justification provided by the State Party confirms the importance of Susa in town planning and monumental architecture throughout several millennia of its history.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified for the whole series.

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ICOMOS considers that the serial approach is justified and that the selection of sites is appropriate.

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In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) and conditions of authenticity and integrity.

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#### **Description of the attributes**

The site of Susa, in the fertile Susiana plains, between two important rivers and close to the Shavur River, conveys the reasons for its flourishing. The four mounds contain structures from different phases of occupation. The continuous stratigraphy of 27 layers that has been documented by more than 150 years of excavations and archaeological investigations bears exceptional witness to the most complete series of information on the passage from prehistory to history in the region. The Acropolis exhibits the most ancient remains, dating back to proto-history, as well as remains of residential quarters dating back to the neo-Elamite phase. It also encompassed the Haute Terrasse (today lost to a large extent but carefully documented after its excavation), an imposing stepped platform, which attested to the existence of an early but highly complex and organised society capable of achieving a prominent technological and architectural undertaking. The royal ensemble of the Palace of Darius and Apadana, with its tall hypostyle hall and porticos, lofty stone columns, gigantic capitals and column bases, and the wall decorations, altogether represent an innovative contribution to the architectural and artistic development characteristic of the Achaemenid Empire. The royal city with its traces of settlement organisation and palatial complexes attests to the urban nature of Susa. The *ville des artisans* has revealed the Parthian/Seleucid city with its necropolis. The wide corpus of documentation and reports on archaeological campaigns, as well as the wealth of materials and artistic pieces retrieved during the excavations and mostly preserved in the Louvre, contribute to conveying the exceptional importance of Susa. Similarly, its surroundings, where several mounds and areas that have yielded important findings are located, also contribute to shed further light on the evolution of Susa and its region throughout the millennia.

#### **4 Factors affecting the property**

Within the nominated property nobody resides permanently, except for the staff of the ICHHTO Susa base, whilst in the buffer zone there live 4500 inhabitants.

The State Party explains that urban pressure commenced as early as the 1950s but continued more rapidly in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Infrastructures and buildings have encroached upon the immediate setting and the archaeological context of the

nominated property. Rehabilitation is planned in three phases in cooperation with the municipality of Shush.

Some of the conservation problems affecting the remains of Susa date back to the early excavations, which were not carried out according to correct methodologies, to environmental conditions and to consequences of the Iran–Iraq war.

The extreme climatic conditions in combination with the particularly vulnerable materials, also cause damage to building materials, e.g., surface water erosion and mechanical stress. Further problems derive from vegetation growth and nesting of insects and small animals.

The area is prone to earthquakes, although flooding is no longer a problem following the construction of the Karkheh Dam and several dykes upstream of the Shavur, as is explained in the additional information received from the State Party in February 2015.

Visitor pressure does not appear a concern at present, apart from during Iranian New Year, when major numbers of tourists visit the site.

ICOMOS confirms that the assessment presented in the nomination dossier reflects the current situation, although ICOMOS believes that urban development needs to be strictly monitored and urban pressure reduced so as to prevent any further form of encroachment on the archaeological remains.

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ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are rainwater erosion, urban development and earthquakes.

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

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

The nominated area of Susa includes two parts: the four archaeological mounds (350ha) with the most relevant excavated monuments and still-buried relics associated with the development of Susa throughout the millennia, and a second component, the Ardeshir or Shavur Palace (3.5ha), dating back to the Achaemenid phase of the city, lying on the opposite bank of the Shavur River.

The buffer zone of Susa has been designated so that, in addition to the nominated area, potential surviving archaeological traces or structures are also preserved.

Out of the buffer zone, a landscape zone (14,000ha) has been set up, for which measures have been foreseen also to protect potentially-buried archaeological remains.

In relation to recent investigation results, ICOMOS asked for additional clarification from the State Party on the

rationale adopted to define the boundaries of the nominated property and of the buffer zone.

The State Party responded on 26 February 2015, explaining that the mound of Ayadana dates back to the Parthian period and revealed only fragmentary remains, while the cemetery (see integrity section) has not been confirmed yet to be an Achaemenid burial ground. However, both areas are within the buffer zone and their purchase and investigation are planned. The delimitation towards the east of the buffer zone is justified by the fact that the area between the Shavur and the Karkheh Rivers, before the construction of the Karkheh Dam, was flooded, so no settlement could have developed there. Additionally, what is not included within the buffer zone is nevertheless protected by the provisions of the landscape zone.

ICOMOS considers that the additional information provided by the State Party is satisfactory.

However, ICOMOS considers that strict implementation of the protection provisions for the archaeological remains in the buffer and landscape zones is necessary as it is likely that some important archaeological features exist in the surroundings of the nominated area.

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

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#### **Ownership**

The nominated property is owned by the State which manages the property through the Cultural Heritage Base of Susa, a peripheral branch of the ICHHTO. In the buffer zone the ownership is both public and private.

#### **Protection**

The nominated property has been registered in the List of Iranian national monuments since 1932 and thus covered by the provisions of the law for protection of national monuments (1930) as well as other general and specific provisions, e.g., the Constitution Law of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1920), the Iranian Civil law (1939), the Islamic Penal Law (1996), the Law for Punishment of those interfering in the national economic system (1991), the law for Property acquisition for implementing public development, and military projects of the Government (1979).

Further specific provisions for heritage protection include: the Bylaw concerning the prevention of unauthorized excavations (1980), and the Law concerning acquisition of land, buildings and premises for protection of historic properties (1969). Altogether, the legal system in place ensures the protection of registered monuments.

Specific regulations have been elaborated for the nominated property (defined as 'core zone' in the nomination dossier), for the buffer zone and the landscape zone. These regulations must be incorporated into the regulations of the master and detailed plans.

With regard to urban planning, the law for establishing the Higher Council for Architecture and Urban Planning (HCAUP) foresees that all urban plans have to be confirmed by this Council prior to their approval. HCAUP includes among its members the Minister of Culture and the head of ICHHTO. Revisions of urban plans are carried out by the HCAUP technical committee and by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD) Physical Plan Review Office.

Implementation of protection and conservation measures within the nominated property is the responsibility of ICHHTO, and specifically of the ICHHTO Susa Base; however the legislation in force provides that all citizens, governmental and non-governmental organisations shall comply with the law.

The protection measures in place for the 'core zone', 'buffer zone' and 'landscape zone' are all in place and incorporated as prevailing provisions into the planning system.

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ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place is adequate. ICOMOS considers that the protective measures for the property, its buffer and landscape zones, are adequate.

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#### **Conservation**

Conservation of the remains of Susa commenced much later than the excavations: the earliest conservation works on the excavated remains started in the 1940's. But it was only in the late 1960's that systematic conservation entered into the excavation programme.

Between the late 1970's and mid 1990's, conservation was limited to emergency activities; in the following decade, conservation and modest excavations aimed also to improve the readability of the remains; whilst since 2005, photogrammetric documentation of all mounds and archaeological remains has been carried out. Conservation has continued with the aim of correcting previous interventions and preserving exposed remains.

Currently, all conservation operations as well as investigations and archaeological excavations are conducted by the ICHHTO Susa Base in consultation with the Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research (ICAR). Experience gained in conserving and managing the Chogha Zanbil and Shushtar Hydraulic System World Heritage properties is said to have proved useful also at Susa.

Cooperation with experts and university students has been established to build training opportunities for young professionals.

ICOMOS observes that the protection measures for the landscape zone require the urgent completion of the archaeological map for Susa's buffer and landscape



zones. This needs to be implemented as a priority and extended further if research results suggest to do so.

ICOMOS considers that the plan to purchase land near the *Acropolis* and *Shahr-e Shahi* mounds and to remove buildings and to enhance the area is an important measure to improve the visual integrity of the site.

In its second letter, ICOMOS asked for updated information and for an implementation calendar on the above points.

The State Party responded on 26 February 2015, providing an implementation calendar for a number of activities concerning the identification and protection of archaeological remains within the buffer and landscape zones. The implementation calendar also envisages a number of further important actions for the protection and conservation of the property, including purchase of land likely to yield further remains.

ICOMOS considers that the submitted calendar represents an important step to operationalise the envisaged actions. However, ICOMOS also notes that, apart from a few, very urgent activities, which are planned to be carried out within 4-5 years, the time-scale horizon for the other actions is rather long – 15 years – and is the same for all of them. ICOMOS in this regard suggests that the State Party further develops the submitted implementation timeframe, by including the necessary financial resources and institutional/administrative steps, so as to achieve a more detailed action plan for the different envisaged activities that could orient implementation.

ICOMOS suggests that protective layers (*kahgel* plaster and bricks) be finished in a way that allows an understanding of the different textures of the structures they protect.

ICOMOS also considers that preventive conservation strategies should be envisaged to reduce the impact of run-off on the surface of the mounds to safeguard buried cultural deposits.

ICOMOS finally recommends that a comprehensive database and GIS system be established integrating all information and data yielded by the archaeological campaigns and excavations at Susa and in its wider setting.

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In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the nominated property is currently stable, although there are erosion problems that need to be systematically addressed. Overall, conservation measures are adequate although aesthetic improvement of the finishing of protective layers is desirable. With regard to the constructions currently encroaching on the fringe of the nominated property, ICOMOS recognises the State Party's commitment to improving the situation through a programme of land purchase and rehabilitation

and suggests to further develop the implementation calendar so as to use it as an operational instrument.

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## Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

While the ICHHTO Susa Base is responsible for everyday conservation work at the nominated property, long term policies for conservation, enhancement, research and promotion are the responsibility of a Steering Committee supported by a technical committee.

The first encompasses political representatives from the region (i.e. the deputy Governor of Khuzestan Region, the Governor and the Mayor of Susa), regional and local ICHHTO officials, and scholars from the university and the research sphere. The Technical committee includes mainly officials and technical staff from the regional and local branches of ICCHTO and other experts in archaeology.

In the nomination dossier it states that the HCAUP and the ministry of Power as well as the Islamic Consultative Assembly are also represented in the Steering Committee, although the list of names provided in the nomination dossier does not include specifically any representatives from these institutions. It would therefore be useful if they could be included.

With regard to the nominated property, this is managed directly by the ICHHTO Susa Base, which was established in 1993. Initially, its tasks related to carrying out emergency measures for the conservation of the Susa remains.

The management strategy for the nominated property is grounded in regular meetings of the steering and technical committees to achieve a common perspective and to assess the issues and needs of Susa. Areas covered by the strategy and related action plans (developed for short, medium, and long terms) encompass improvement of: quality of restoration and conservation, monitoring, tourism facilities and services, security systems, documentation and databases, education and training plans.

Given that the property is in the ownership of the State and being managed by the same ICHHTO Base of Susa, one single management is granted to the property.

ICOMOS notes that the State Party has set up a comprehensive management structure, however, it seems that some overlapping between the steering and the technical committees could hinder their effectiveness and suggests that their roles be clarified. ICOMOS also recommends that the technical staff from the regional government of Khuzestan from Susa province and from the municipality of Shush be included in the technical committee.

Considering the interrelation of various plans concerning different portions of territory, ICOMOS observes that there is a need to achieve a better coordination of these instruments, their provisions and related action plans.

In its second letter, ICOMOS suggested strengthening the commitment of the concerned authorities for coordinated protection and management

The State Party responded on 26 February 2015, informing that there is a cooperation agreement concerning the integrated management of the property, aimed at ensuring joint cooperation of state administrations, public institutions and NGOs.

ICOMOS considers that the cooperation agreement is a very important step in the improved management and enhancement of the nominated property and its buffer zone. The areas of cooperation and identified actions are concrete and their implementation will improve the protection and conservation of Susa.

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

The territory of the nominated property is covered by several plans at different scales. One is the Development Plan for Northern Khuzestan. The scope of the plan has resulted from a study on the influence of Susa over the surrounding territory – it appears comprised between the Dez and Kharkheh Rivers – and on the potentials and weaknesses of the area. The main goals of the plan comprise: environmental considerations in localising new services and industrial facilities and reorganising existing ones, conserving natural and cultural resources, expanding tourism, reorganising farming activities, and improving communication with other regions.

On the basis of the regional plan above, Susa Development plan has prioritized six areas of activities, including protection and improvement of natural and cultural heritage. Projects related to cultural heritage conservation include: preventing and controlling floods in city suburbs, improving drainage systems, and improving urban traffic and transportation systems with specific attention to the central area of Shush.

In particular, areas belonging to the historical setting of ancient Susa have been delimited and a specific Master Plan has been developed with regulations for land use, building plot subdivision, protection measures for heritage areas, quality of cityscape, façade cleaning, and building materials. In the nominated area and buffer zone, strict regulations apply and any allowed intervention must be approved by ICHHTO.

With regard to the action plan for the nominated property presented in the nomination dossier, it would be important that financial and human resources as well as expertise needed for their implementation are also included.

ICOMOS asked for clarification from the State Party with regards to the need for a specific risk preparedness strategy.

The State Party responded on 26 February 2015, informing that the town of Susa has a municipal crisis management headquarters for natural disasters encompassing also the nominated property. The State Party also clarified that hydraulic works carried out upstream of the Shavur River make flooding impossible.

ICOMOS however notes that, according to the nomination dossier, the development plan for Susa envisages flood control and prevention, therefore ICOMOS considers that risk preparedness considerations that specifically address the cultural value of Susa in relation to this risk be included in the Susa Development Plan and related to the management framework.

Involvement of the local communities

The nomination dossier does not contain any specific item concerning involvement of local communities.

ICOMOS recommends that a program to promote participation of the residents of the buffer zone in the nomination and management process be developed and implemented.

Since the nomination dossier mentions that plans do exist to augment tourism-related facilities, ICOMOS underlines the need to comply with paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines.

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ICOMOS considers that special attention is needed to ensure that the Steering and the technical committees have identifiable profiles and tasks. The latter should include representatives of the technical staff of the municipality of Shush. Additionally, ICOMOS considers that specific risk preparedness considerations be included in the Susa Development Plan and the management framework of the property.

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## 6 Monitoring

The nomination dossier contains different sets of indicators concerning the conservation of the property but also some performance indicators in relation to management objectives. The measurement method and/or tool are also indicated, along with periodicity.

ICOMOS believes that these indicators are a good foundation, which nevertheless require further development as there is a need to distinguish between monitoring objectives and indicators. Additionally, it would be helpful that management objectives be more consistently related to indicators.

Finally, ICOMOS considers that identifying indicators to monitor the implementation of the actions included in the

cooperation agreement would be of help for periodically checking the effectiveness of cooperation.

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ICOMOS considers that the monitoring system should be more closely connected with management objectives and that a clear distinction between monitoring goals and indicators be made. Additional indicators to monitor the effectiveness of the cooperation agreement would also be helpful.

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## 7 Conclusions

Located in the lower Zagros Mountains, in the Susiana plains between the Karkheh and Dez Rivers, Susa comprises a group of artificial archaeological mounds rising on the eastern side of the Shavur River, encompassing large excavated areas where abundant evidence of its thriving existence over several millennia, between the late 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE and the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE, has been brought to light. The architectural and urban monuments revealed by the excavations and still in-situ include administrative, religious, residential and palatial structures as well as production and cemetery areas.

Susa has been archaeologically investigated from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 1970s, yielding a large amount of finds and information on the settlement and on its cultural and economic links. Following the forced interruption of research due to the Iraq-Iran War, investigations have been revived at Susa but also in the plain surrounding the city, revealing a much wider and more complex pattern of settlements and occupied areas, and also shedding light on the characteristics of the natural environment that sustained the nomadic and sedentary communities that were attracted here.

The territorial scope pursued by contemporary archaeology, which in this specific case seems to have provided promising results, is only partly reflected in the nomination. The nominated property includes the components strictly sufficient to reflect the history of excavations and discoveries that made it possible to establish Susa as a major and very ancient urban centre throughout the millennia, and which had been the capital of the Elamite confederacy and then of the Achaemenid Empire. While the buffer zone includes areas close to the nominated property, the established landscape zone makes an effort to recognise the archaeological potential of the wider setting of Susa and to encompass Susa National Protected Monument as of its latest update.

The small village of Shush has grown since the late 1980s to become a town; urban development, in this process, has encroached upon the edges of the mounds and, in a few cases, also inside the archaeological area. Remedial measures have been initiated by the State Party to improve the situation, and these need to be sustained and implemented in a stringent manner, with

the support of all authorities concerned and through the sensitisation of inhabitants and stakeholders.

Considering the richness of remains in the surroundings of Susa and the urban pressures to which the site is prone, being encompassed by the town of Shush (approximately 65,000 inhabitants as of the 2006 census), the implementation of the protection measures established for the buffer and landscape zones should be stringent and closely monitored by the responsible authorities. Adequate resources should be provided to ensure the full implementation of the conservation and enhancement programme of Susa and of its immediate setting.

The territorial scope of contemporary archaeology, in the case of Susa, has led to the identification of several sites that have been revealed to be connected to, or under the sphere of influence of Susa in its close and wider territorial context. It would be wise if the role and influence played by Susa within its closer area and territory of influence were taken into due consideration through appropriate legal and planning protective measures. Interpretation strategies for Susa would gain from a territorial approach, able to integrate different sites that, not being proposed for inscription or not being part of the buffer or landscape zones, nevertheless contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of human occupation, sedentarization and state-building in the region.

## 8 Recommendations

### Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that Susa, Islamic Republic of Iran, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv)**.

### Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

Located in the lower Zagros Mountains, in the Susiana plains between the Karkheh and Dez Rivers, Susa comprises a group of artificial archaeological mounds rising on the eastern side of the Shavur River, encompassing large excavated areas, as well as the remains of Artaxerxes' palace on the other side of the Shavur River. Susa developed as early as the late 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE as an important centre, presumably with religious importance, to soon become a commercial, administrative and political hub that enjoyed different cultural influences thanks to its strategic position along ancient trade routes. Archaeological research can trace in Susa the most complete series of data on the passage of the region from prehistory to history. Susa appears as the converging point of two great civilisations which reciprocally influenced each other: the Mesopotamian and the Iranian plateau civilisations. Susa's long-lasting and prominent role in the region, either as the capital of the

Elamites, or of the Achaemenid Empire, or as a strategic centre sought by neighbouring powers (e.g., Assyrian, Macedonian, Parthian, Sassanid) is witnessed by the abundant finds, of disparate provenance and of exceptional artistic or scientific interest, and by the administrative, religious, residential and palatial, as well as functional structures and traces of urban layout (e.g., the remains of the *Haute Terrasse* in the Acropolis, the Palace of Darius in the Apadana, the residential or production quarters, the Ardeshir Palace) that more than 150 years of archaeological investigations have revealed.

**Criterion (i):** Susa stands as one of the few ancient sites in the Middle East where two major social and cultural developments took place: the development of the early state, and urbanization. Susa is among the few sites in the Middle East where the dynamics and processes that led to these monumental human achievements has been documented, and still holds a huge body of important tangible evidence to understand better the early and mature stages of social, cultural and economic complexity. In its long history, Susa contributed to the development of urban planning and architectural design. The royal ensemble of the Palace of Darius and Apadana, with its tall hypostyle hall and porticos, lofty stone columns and gigantic capitals and column bases, and the orthostatic and ceramic wall decorations, together represent an innovative contribution to the creation of a new expression, characteristic of the Achaemenid Empire.

**Criterion (ii):** The proto-urban and urban site of Susa bears testimony, from the late 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE to the first millennium CE, to important interchanges of influences, resulting from ancient trade connections and cultural exchanges between different civilizations, namely the Mesopotamian and Elamite. Susa has been identified as the focal point of interaction and intersection between the nomadic and sedentary cultures. It played a key role in creating and expanding technological knowledge, and artistic, architectural and town planning concepts in the region. Through its sustained interaction with nearby regions, archaeological and architectural materials discovered at Susa exhibit a variety of styles and forms, shedding light on an international ancient city that both influenced and was imitated by its neighbors.

**Criterion (iii):** The remains of the ancient city of Susa bear exceptional testimony to successive ancient civilizations during more than six millennia, as well as having been the capital city of the Elamite and Achaemenid Empires. It contains 27 layers of superimposed urban settlements in a continuous succession from the late 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE until the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. Susa is on the most ancient of the sites, where the processes of urbanization crystallized in the late 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. A decade of scientific excavations from 1968 to 1978, and philological works at Susa, also documented the development and changing character of this early urban centre throughout the millennia.

**Criterion (iv):** Susa is an outstanding and rare example of a type of urban settlement representing the beginnings of urban development in the proto-Elamite and Elamite periods, from the late fifth millennium BCE. Furthermore, from the sixth century BCE, as the administrative capital city of the Achaemenid Empire, Susa contributed to the creation of a new prototype of ceremonial architecture, which became a characteristic feature of the Iranian Plateau and its neighbouring lands.

#### Integrity

The excavated site of the ancient urban and architectural remains of Susa is included within the boundaries of the property. Even though many of the finds are today exhibited in museums, Susa still includes the essential elements to express its Outstanding Universal Value. The nominated property covers the known part of the ancient city, which is now protected against adverse development. Due to the high archaeological potential of the area that surrounds Susa, continuing archaeological research and documentation sustains the integrity of the nominated property. The recent haphazard urban development of modern Shush threatens the edges and immediate setting of the nominated property; however, strict regulations have been elaborated, integrated into the planning system and enforced. Their stringent implementation is crucial to maintaining the integrity of the property.

#### Authenticity

More than 150 years of archaeological research and historical sources confirm that the nominated property encompasses the site of the ancient city of Susa. The material and form of the architectural remains are historically authentic, although many of the decorative elements are now deposited in museums for protection. As a protected archaeological property, Susa is being conserved using scientific and philological methods and approaches. Therefore, the excavated remains have been stabilized and conserved respecting their architectural and planning design as well as their building materials. From its initial formation and in the course of its development until its final decline, Susa has always remained on its present site; its environmental setting has, however, changed, with the hydraulic works carried out upstream of the Karkheh and the Shavur Rivers; however, these changes do not prevent the understanding of the role played by the environmental setting in the long-lasting prominence of Susa.

#### Management and protection requirements

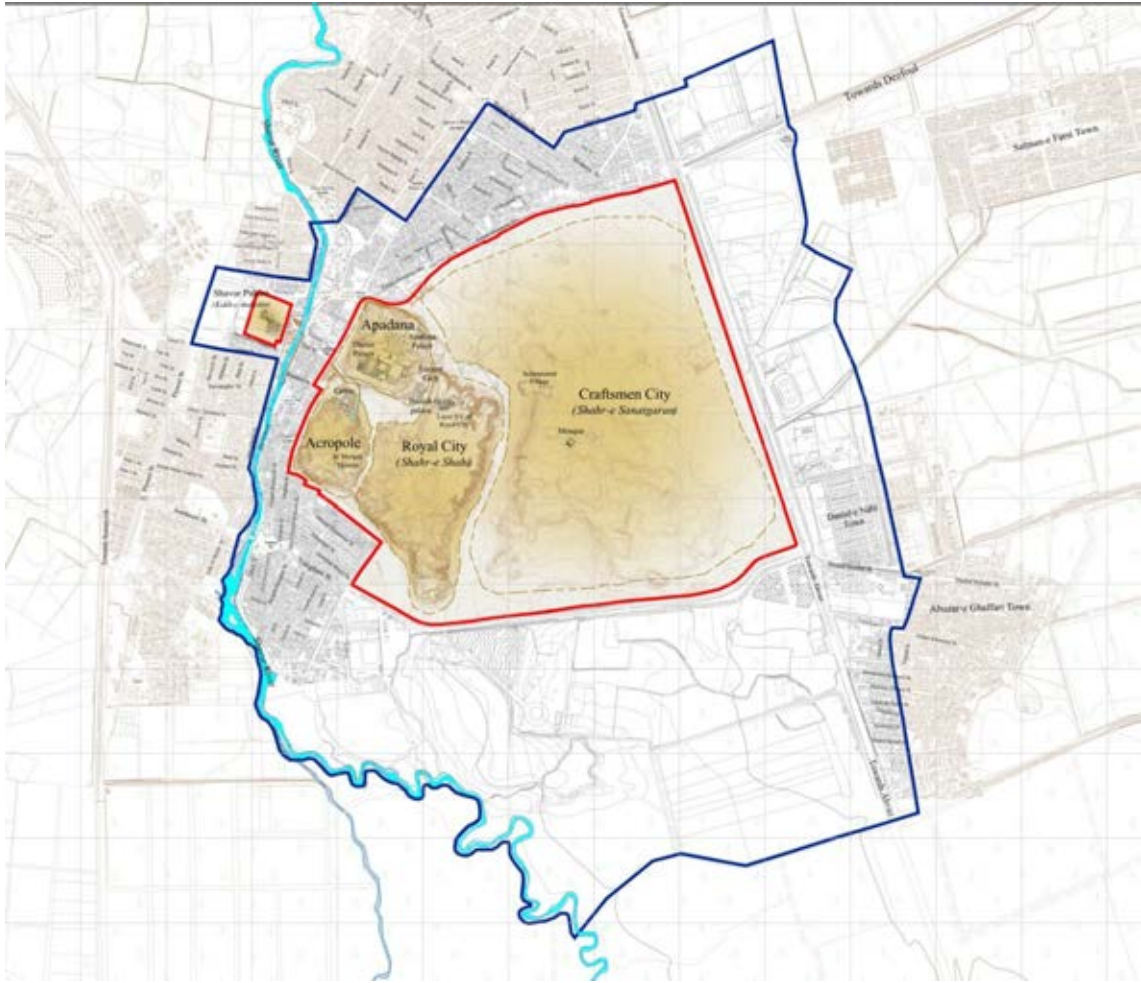
Susa is protected as a National monument and falls under the responsibility of the ICHHTO which protects and manages the property through its Susa Base. Regulations for the property and its buffer and landscape zones have been incorporated into the planning instruments as prevailing norms. Their stringent implementation is crucial to guaranteeing the adequate protection and preservation of Susa's buried and unburied archaeological remains. Inter-institutional cooperation and coordination among existing instruments in the management of the property,

and particularly of its immediate and wider setting, is fundamental to ensuring that urban growth respects the archaeological potential of the area and makes it an asset for a compatible and equitable development of Shush within its wider region.

#### **Additional recommendations**

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

- Ensuring stringent implementation of the protection measures established for archaeological remains in the buffer and landscape zones;
- Including representatives of the technical staff of the municipality in the technical committee;
- Ensuring effective coordination among the territorial and urban planning instruments in force in the buffer and landscape zones;
- Developing ad hoc indicators to monitor the effectiveness of the inter-institutional agreement recently signed;
- Strengthening the protection measures for archaeological remains and mounds within the buffer zone on the grounds of the specific measures for archaeological mounds envisaged in the landscape zone regulations;
- Including risk preparedness considerations in the Susa Development Plan and in the management framework of the property;
- Providing an updated implementation calendar for the action plan, by including the necessary financial resources and institutional/administrative steps as well as a progress report on the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations, particularly those related to the protection of the archaeological remains, to be submitted to the World Heritage Centre by 1 December 2015 and 2016, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 41<sup>st</sup> Session in 2017.



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property



General view of the Susa Castle



View of the Achaemenids Village



View of the Acropolis



Shapur Palace