

## Minaret of Jam (Afghanistan)

No 211rev

### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Minaret and Archaeological Remains of Jam
<i>Location</i>	Shahrak District, Ghur Province
<i>State Party</i>	Afghanistan
<i>Date</i>	6 May 2002

### Justification by State Party

The Minaret of Jam is believed to have been built to commemorate a major victory of the sultans of the Ghurid Dynasty from western Afghanistan, which overthrew the Ghaznavid Empire, extensively conquering parts of northern India. Under the patronage of the Ghurid Dynasty the eastern Islamic world's arts experienced a final flowering before being extinguished by the Mongol invasion. During the Ghurid Dynasty elaborate brick decoration was especially encouraged. This highly sophisticated craftsmanship was utilized on the surface of the Minaret of Jam and, even today, most of the exquisite lace-like brickwork which originally covered the Minaret in its entirety can be seen. This exceptional example of Islamic architectural decoration represents a peak of its form.

The Minaret of Jam is one of the few well preserved monuments representing the exceptional artistic creativity and mastery of structural engineering of the Ghurid Period (1000–1220). It illustrates the outstanding artistic endeavour of a civilization which has disappeared.

At 1900m above sea level and far away from any town, the spectacular Minaret of Jam rises in the solitude within a rugged valley in the heart of Ghur Province. The monument and archaeological remains of Jam are surrounded by mountain ranges which reach 2400m in height and which originally provided natural fortification for the ancient settlement area of Jam. Today this extraordinary natural environment provides a spectacular natural setting for the Minaret and Archaeological Remains of Jam.

The Minaret and Archaeological remains of Jam bear unique testimony to the Ghurid civilization, which has disappeared.

#### Criterion iii

The Minaret of Jam is an exceptional example of Islamic architecture and decorative features of the 11th century.

#### Criterion iv

### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is both a *monument* and a *site*.

### History and Description

#### History

The Minaret of Jam probably marks the site of the ancient city of Firuzkuh, the capital of the Ghurid dynasty that ruled Afghanistan and parts of northern India, from Kashgar to the Persian Gulf, in the 12th and 13th centuries. An inscription gives the date of construction as 1194, and another gives the name of the powerful reigning Ghurid emperor, Sultan Ghiyas ud-Din (1157–1202). It is likely that the Minaret was constructed to commemorate his victory at Delhi in 1192 over the Ghaznavid Empire, hence the name sometimes given to it, the Victory Tower.

The site of Jam is believed to have been the summer residence of the Ghurid Emperors. There are indications that the mosque to which the minaret was attached was of modest size, and disproportionate to the dimensions of the minaret, contrary to the basic principles of Islamic architecture.

After the death of Ghiyas ud-Din his brother Muiz ud-Din succeeded him. The Ghurid Empire came under intense pressure from its neighbours, the Kharizm, from south of the Aral Sea, and gradually yielded up its territories. Only at the mountainous retreat of Bamian did the dynasty survive, until its last ruler was captured and put to death in 1215. The town of Firuzkuh was destroyed by the Mongol Ogodai in 1222.

#### Description

##### – The Minaret

The Minaret was built on the south bank of the Hari river at the intersection of two canyon-like river valleys. It rises to a height of 65m from a 9m diameter octagonal base, and is composed of four tapering cylindrical shafts. It is constructed of fired brick bonded with lime mortar. The first balcony, c 36.58m above the present ground level, was made of brick and reinforced with projecting wooden beams; however, in its present condition it is difficult to determine its original form.

A steep double spiral staircase runs through the base and the first cylindrical tier, leading to the summit; there are windows at regular intervals along the staircase. Above the staircases and between the two balconies spanning the interior are six square vaulted brick platforms some six paces apart, connected by steep, narrow steps projecting from the curving wall of the minaret. These platforms are anchored at each corner into the ribs, which run the length of the minaret, starting above the top of the spiral staircase; two sides of each platform are open. The first platform has a small circular hole in the centre and those above square holes. Six arches, which once supported a small cupola, now disappeared, remain at the top of the structure.

The exterior of the shaft of the minaret is completely covered with geometric decoration in relief laid over the plain structural bricks. The inscription recording the date of building around the top of the first level consists of a plain raised band with raised circles; the Kufic script is covered

with turquoise coloured glaze set against plain buff bricks and with a band containing 16 rosettes beneath it.

The first cylinder is the most decorated. It is divided into eight vertical segments, matching those of the base. The three-dimensional ornamental brickwork creates a pattern of light and shade. Each vertical zone has a narrow band of inscriptions running in an unbroken line around each panel. The text is the entire Sura of Maryam, the 19th chapter of the Koran, which tells the stories of the prophets. All 976 words are in Kufic script and made of small carved terra cotta bricks. The areas below the Koranic inscription are covered with geometric openwork patterns in high relief. Just below the corbels on the first platform there are four floral bands in unglazed brick. There are further Kufic inscriptions between the first and second balconies and above the latter.

– The archaeological remains

A group of stones with Hebrew inscriptions was discovered in 1962 on the Kushkak hill between the Minaret and the village of Jam. Believed to date from the 11th–12th century, they probably came from a nearby Jewish cemetery. Subsequently eight further inscriptions have come to light, the oldest from 1012 and the latest from 1202.

The remains of castles and towers of the Ghurid settlement are to be found on the opposite bank of the Hari river, north of the Minaret and high on the cliff. There are also remains of fortifications visible to the east of the Minaret. These give the impression that the Minaret was surrounded not by a settlement but by a military camp (with a small Jewish trading settlement close at hand). The fort was built of thick clay bricks on stone foundations. Also to be seen are the remains of a brick-built reservoir *c* 400m above the Hari river, with outlet pipes which presumably led originally to the fort. The remains of an early bazaar were destroyed by the local Governor in 1964 to permit the construction of an hotel.

## Management and Protection

### *Legal status*

The property is notionally protected under the following legislation: the 1976 and 1981 Laws on Archaeology (which are based on the 1974 Law on Archaeology) and the Laws concerning culture, cultural heritage, museums, etc, published in the Official Gazette of the Ministry of Justice of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, 21 December 1980. However, political changes following two decades of unrest have resulted in the Interim Afghanistan Administration being set up on 22 December 2001. It is responsible for governing Afghanistan pending the adoption of a new constitution on the basis of an interim legal framework which provides for the continuation in force of existing laws and regulations.

### *Management*

In 1982 the property was owned by the Afghan Institute of Archaeology, Ministry of Information and Culture. Ownership and management are now vested in the Interim Afghanistan Administration, working through the Antiquities Service.

There is, however, no form of management mechanism in force at the property and no finance is available for its

maintenance and conservation. The property has no conservation or management staff on site, nor is there any form of central or regional structure in existence, although there is a significant number of trained Afghan personnel (archaeologists, architects, conservators, engineers, and craftsmen) scattered inside Afghanistan and abroad who constitute a significant potential management resource.

The nomination dossier includes a map which delineates the nominated areas (a central core and detached areas relating to the Jewish cemetery, the reservoir, and the watchtowers). These are surrounded by an extensive buffer zone, which would appear to provide adequate protection for the nominated property. The map is at a somewhat unusual scale of *c* 1:86,000 and so it does not show a great deal of detail. It moreover omits any information concerning more recent or contemporary interventions in this area (including the route of the proposed new road). It would be desirable there for the State Party to provide more detailed cartographic materials to meet these deficiencies.

## Conservation and Authenticity

### *Conservation history*

The first official record of the Minaret dates from 1944, in the journal *Anis* of the Society for Afghan History. It was rediscovered in 1957 by André Maricq (CNRS, France). A topographical survey was carried out in 1959 by J Fischer and co-workers from the University of Cambridge, and in 1961–62 Andrea Bruno (Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente) conducted an architectural survey (measured drawings and proposal for restoration).

Reinforcement of the base of the Minaret took place in 1963–64, when a temporary stone and timber dam was built with the assistance of local villagers.

Further surveys were carried out in 1971, 1973, 1974, and 1975 to determine the degree of leaning of the Minaret. This was discovered to be moderate and not to compromise the stability of the monument. Basic precautionary stabilization measures were financed by UNESCO in 1978. These consisted of preventing the river from undermining the base of the monument by means of large stone-filled metal gabions. A number of priority tasks were identified, including regular inspection and maintenance of the gabions, sampling at the base of the Minaret to determine the dimensions and structural characteristics of the foundations, archaeological survey of an area of *c* 40m radius around the monument, monitoring of the amount of water flowing round the monument, consolidation and repair of the base, possible insertion of a reinforced concrete ring (dependent upon the results of the survey of the foundations), and consolidation and counterbalancing of the structure by means of a balancing basin, provision of equipment and buildings. This work came to an abrupt end with the outbreak of the civil war.

In mid 1995 Dr A W Majimi visited the site and recommended that a gabion wall should be built to protect the Minaret from flooding and erosion by the rivers. It was not until 1999 that it was possible to build a wall of stone, reinforced with wood, along the Jam river, which only partially solved the problem of erosion. Later that year, following a further mission by Professor Bruno, a similar wall was built to mitigate undercutting of the base.

A group of experts that visited Jam in August 2001 recorded the fact that erosion was continuing, threatening the foundations of the monument. It was decided to remove the earlier wall, which was contributing to the accelerated erosion, and to create a new 45m long wall of stone-filled gabions 10m upstream along the bank of the Hari river; another, shorter wall was built along the Jam river. At the same dry stone masonry walls were built along parts of the rivers with the same intention.

The most recent technical mission was carried out by Professor Bruno in March 2002. In his report he drew attention to the serious problem of illicit excavations in the neighbourhood of the monument. The protection works carried out in 2000 and 2001 had proved effective and so it was now appropriate to proceed with the complete diagnostic examination of the foundations. There should be a detailed survey of every aspect of the structure and its decoration and the state of conservation of the monument. The report recommended three specific projects, to be carried out simultaneously:

- a. A technical mission to survey the site and the monument, and also a hydrological survey of the valley;
- b. An archaeological mission composed of Afghan and foreign archaeologists to evaluate the illicit excavations and set up a systematic survey and excavation programme;
- c. A study of the impact on the monument of the proposed new road along the Jam river, planned to run in a wide sweep 100m beyond the wall of the Minaret, along with a bridge across the Hari river 150m upstream from the monument.

#### *Authenticity and integrity*

Since the Minaret was built no major reconstruction or restoration work has taken place, apart from the consolidation work around its base described above. The archaeological remains have been surveyed and recorded in the 20th century but without any attempt at restoration or reconstruction, whilst the only excavation has been clandestine and uncontrolled. The level of authenticity of the property is therefore very high.

### **Evaluation**

#### *Action by ICOMOS*

ICOMOS evaluated this property first in 1982, when it was originally nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List. Its evaluation recorded that ICOMOS favoured inscription under criterion iii, but recommended deferral until supplementary details on the zone of protection and the state of preservation, which were lacking in the nomination dossier, were supplied. This recommendation was endorsed by the World Heritage Committee at its 7th Session in December 1983.

When requested to carry out an emergency evaluation of the property in May 2002, ICOMOS readily consented. However, it was decided not to send a site evaluation mission in the knowledge that ICOMOS could have complete confidence in the report of Professor Andrea Bruno, an ICOMOS member and expert, whose mission had, moreover, been organized in agreement with UNESCO.

#### *Qualities*

The architecture and decoration of the Minaret are generally recognized to be of the highest quality. It is an exceptionally fine example of the Islamic architecture and ornament of this period, representing the apogee of a cultural tradition that began with the renowned Tomb of Ismail in Bukhara. The setting of the monument in a rugged valley between towering mountains, greatly adds to its quality. Both the nominated property and its landscape have maintained a high degree of integrity because of the negligible interventions over the past millennium.

#### *Comparative analysis*

Simply in terms of its dimensions the Minaret of Jam is exceptional. It is second in height only to the Qutb Minar in Delhi (inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1993), which was in fact directly inspired by the Minaret of Jam.

The Minaret of Jam is among the earliest surviving examples of the tapering minaret. There are earlier examples in Iran (Sangbast, Damgan, Isfahan) and in Afghanistan (Ghazni, Masud), but none of these represents the combination of large dimensions, elegant decoration, and dramatic siting that characterize the Minaret of Jam.

#### *ICOMOS recommendations for future action*

ICOMOS fully supports the recommendations made by Professor Andrea Bruno (see "Conservation history" above).

It wishes also to reiterate its comments when the property was first nominated in 1982. Whilst it appears to have been stabilized and protected against further erosion and undermining, the overall state of conservation of the monument continues to be poor and in need of urgent attention. There is no management structure or mechanism in existence for the property, which is shown to be at risk from illicit excavation and to be threatened by a highway project.

ICOMOS understands that the State Party wishes this property, if inscribed on the World Heritage List, immediately to be placed on the List in Danger. To assist the achievement of this objective, ICOMOS is therefore recommending inscription, rather than deferral, which would be its usual recommendation in such cases. The property should remain on the List in Danger until legal protection has become a reality, an effective monuments protection agency is in operation, adequate protection and conservation personnel are recruited and operating on site, and a comprehensive management plan has been formulated and is being implemented.

### **Brief description**

The Minaret of Jam is a graceful soaring structure, dating back to the 12th century. It is noteworthy for the quality of its architecture and of its decoration, which represent the culmination of an architectural and artistic tradition in this region. Its impact is heightened by its dramatic setting, a deep river valley between towering mountains.

### **Statement of Significance**

The Minaret of Jam and the archaeological remains that surround it bear witness to the short-lived but influential Ghurid Empire which dominated a vast area of western and central Asia. The architecture and ornamentation of the Minaret itself are outstanding from the point of view of art history, fusing together elements from earlier developments in the region in an exceptional whole and exerting a strong influence on later architecture in the region.

### **Recommendation**

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii and iv*:

*Criterion iii* The Minaret of Jam and its associated archaeological remains constitute exceptional testimony to the power and quality of the Ghurid civilization that dominated its region in the 12th and 13th centuries.

*Criterion iv* The Minaret of Jam is an outstanding example of Islamic architecture and ornamentation in this region and played a significant role in their further dissemination.

It further recommends that, subject to the consent of the State Party and if the World Heritage Committee considers this to be appropriate, this property should be inscribed on the List of World Heritage List in Danger, until such time as all the recommendations listed above are implemented.

ICOMOS, May 2002