

## Samarra Archaeological City (Iraq)

No 276 rev

*Official name as proposed by the State Party:* Samarra Archaeological City

*Location:* Samarra Township, Salah al-Din Governorate

### *Brief description:*

Samarra is the site of a powerful Islamic capital city which ruled over the provinces of the Abbasid empire extending from Tunisia to Central Asia for a century. The Samarra Archaeological City testifies to the architectural and artistic innovations that developed there and spread to the other regions of the Islamic world and beyond.

### *Category of property:*

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

## 1. BASIC DATA

*Included in the Tentative List:* 7 July 2000

*International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination:* No

*Date received by the World Heritage Centre:* 17 December 1982  
1<sup>st</sup> February 2006

*Background:* This is a deferred nomination (7<sup>th</sup> session, Paris, 1983).

A first nomination dossier was examined by the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee at its 7<sup>th</sup> session (Paris, 1993). At the time, ICOMOS recommended that: “*the inscription of the cultural property on the World Heritage List be deferred.*”

The Bureau of the World Heritage Committee approved the following recommendation:

“*A revised file should be presented which would precisely indicate the perimeter of protection and which would include a safeguarding plan for the area. The Bureau strongly recommends that a zone non aedificandi be foreseen to afford protection to all of the vestiges of the ancient city, including the pottery kilns.*”

A new revised nomination dossier was submitted to UNESCO on 1 February 2006.

*Consultations:* ICOMOS consulted its International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management.

*Literature consulted (selection):*

Seton Lloyd, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia from the Old Stone Age to the Persian Conquest* (London, revised edition 1984).

Robinson, C (ed), *A Medieval Islamic City Reconsidered, An Interdisciplinary Approach to Samarra, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art* 14, Oxford, 2001.

*Technical Evaluation Mission:* Owing to the circumstances, ICOMOS has not been able to organize a technical evaluation mission.

*Additional information requested and received from the State Party:* None

*Date of ICOMOS approval of this report:* 21 January 2007

## 2. THE PROPERTY

### *Description*

[*Note:* This section is based entirely on the nomination dossier. Since ICOMOS was unable to send a site evaluation mission, it has been impossible to provide an up-to-date report on the present condition of the site and its monuments.]

Samarra Archaeological City is located on both sides of the River Tigris 130km north of Baghdad. The length of the city from north to south is 41.5km; its width varies from 8km to 4km.

Samarra was not surrounded by walls because it was protected by the Tigris River from the west, the Nahr al-Rasasi canal from the north and east, and the Nahr al-Qaim and Nahr al-Sanam canals from the south. Caliph Al-Mu'tasim billah combined military and civil quarters in planning his new city. This is shown by the separation of the mosque from the Caliphal Palace and the division of the residences into sectors, each destined for military commanders and their followers, and by the straight roads and streets organised in an orthogonal plan perpendicular to the Tigris. Crossing them is the main street, the Grand Avenue (maximum width 80-100m).

The city was built in a single layer, 80% of which is unexcavated. The main building materials are fired brick, mud-brick and adobe, with gypsum or mud mortar. After Samarra ceased to be the capital of the Abbasids, a more recent city continued to exist on part of its remains around the shrine of the two Imams Ali al-Hadi and Al-Hasan al-Askari.

The major architectural monuments of the city are:

- *The Great Mosque and its Spiral Minaret*

Built of fired brick and gypsum mortar, at 264m x 159m, it was the largest mosque in the Islamic World when it was built between 849 and 852. Its walls are reinforced by regularly spaced semi-circular towers. The walls are 10.5m high and there are sixteen gates. The mosque consists of four parts surrounding the open courtyard. The Spiral Minaret (*Al-Malwiya*) is the most unusual in the Islamic world. The sides of the square base are 32m long, and above five circular layers rise forming a huge spiral tower 54m high.

- *Abu Dulaf Mosque*

This mosque, situated to the north of the city, was similar to the Great Mosque but smaller, consisting of an open courtyard surrounded on its four sides by porticoes. The walls of the mosque are reinforced by semi-circular towers. The minaret is similar to that of the Great Mosque but smaller.

- *The Caliphal Palace (Qasr al-Khalifa)*

This palace, built on the orders of Caliph Al-Mu'tasim billah, is situated on the Grand Avenue (*al-Shari' al-A'zam*), overlooking the Tigris. It is one of the largest Arab Islamic Palaces (125ha), and includes living quarters, halls, administration rooms, *diwans*, guards' barracks, and facilities for rest and recreation. It is the only example of an imperial palace from later antiquity, the plan of which completely preserved. Excavations have been carried out in the Palace since 1910, but about three-quarters of the area remains unexcavated and the western garden has been flooded.

- *Al-Huwaysilat Palace*

Al-Huwaysilat, which is identified with the Qasr al-Juss in the medieval Arabic chronicles, stands on the West Bank of the Tigris. It was built by Caliph Al-Mu'tasim billah as a palace for relaxation. There are two buildings: the Lower and Upper Palaces. The Lower Palace, the larger and more important of the two, is a square building inside an outer enclosure surrounded by a wall reinforced by a series of towers. The palace includes a number of halls, rooms, and courtyards.

- *Balkuwara (Al-Manqur) Palace*

This palace on the Tigris south of the city was built by Caliph Al-Mutawakkil 'ala Allah for his son Abdullah Al-Mu'tazz around 854. It is rectangular in plan, with its corners oriented to the cardinal points. The building survives as mounds of unfired brick.

- *Al-Ma'shuq Palace*

The remains of this palace look out over the west bank of the Tigris. Built by Caliph Al-Mu'tamid 'ala Allah in 876, it is the best preserved of the Abbasid palaces at Samarra. The plan is rectangular and it is sited on an artificial barrel-vaulted platform, with many courtyards and a number of rooms and halls opening on to the central spaces. The internal division is tripartite. The walls of the palace are all reinforced by round towers on rectangular bases.

- *Bayt al-Zakharif*

This house, one of the important private residences, is noted for its carved stucco panels which form revetments about 1m high. Fifty houses from the 9<sup>th</sup> century city have been excavated, out of a total of c.15,000 (including small housing units).

- *Husn al-Qadisiyya*

The plan of this unfinished city of octagonal shape, built in mud-brick and still unexcavated, was based on a circle 1.5km in diameter. It was built by Caliph Harun al-Rashid on the model of the Round City of Baghdad and abandoned in 796 before the city of Samarra was built.

- *Al-Musharrahahat Palace*

Al-Musharrahahat is about 6km to the east of the modern city of Samarra. It is one of the palaces built by Caliph Harun al-Rashid when he excavated the Nahr Abu al-Jund canal. Debris from the canal excavation was deposited to form a high mound. It was occupied by Caliph Al-Mu'tasim. Caliph Al-Mutawakkil demolished it and built the present palace (*Al-Musharrahahat*) in its place, with the Birkat al-Buhturi basin in front, named after the poem by the Abbasid poet al-Buhturi.

- *Al-Istablal*

The area of al-Istablal is on the west bank of the Tigris 15km south of the modern city of Samarra. The plan consists of a small rectangle containing the palace, connected to a large rectangle with blocks of houses, each surrounded by a massive enclosure wall. This enormous monument is a military camp; it has been identified as the palace of al-'Arus, built by Caliph al-Mutawakkil in 851.

- *Tell Al-Alij*

Tell Al-Alij is an artificial mound for the Caliph to view horse-races, probably built by al-Mutawakkil.

- *Qubbat al-Sulaybiyya*

This domed structure was probably a mausoleum for three of the Caliphs who ruled in Samarra – Al-Muntasir, Al-Mu'tazz, and Al-Muhtadi. It is an octagonal building in the middle of which there is a square hall surrounded by an octagonal ambulatory with a hemispherical dome.

- *Al-Ja'fari Palace*

Al-Ja'fari was the new caliph's palace built by al-Mutawakkil in 859-61 at the north end of the site. It is the largest palace ever built in the Islamic world (211ha). Never excavated, it is well preserved.

Many other buildings are also known at Samarra, either from historical sources or from the archaeological survey. Forty-two palaces, four congregational mosques, and about 7,000 other buildings have been recorded in a database.

### **History and development**

The area of Samarra was only lightly settled in antiquity. It underwent an upturn in its fortunes with the excavation of the Qatul al-Kisrawi, the northern extension of the Nahrawan canal which drew water from the Tigris, attributed to the Sassanian king Khusrau Anushirvan (531-78). To celebrate this project, a commemorative tower (*Burj al-Qaim*) was built at the southern inlet (*Nahr al-Qaim*) south of Samarra, and a palace with a walled hunting park at the northern inlet (*Nahr al-Rasasi*) near to al-Dur. A supplementary canal, the Qatul Abi al-Jund, excavated by the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid, was commemorated by a city in the form of a regular octagon (*Husn al-Qadisiyya*), called al-Mubarak and abandoned unfinished in 796 AD.

In 834-35, Caliph al-Mu'tasim left Baghdad in search of a new capital. He sought a residence for the court and an army base outside Baghdad, and was attracted by a region known for its hunting but otherwise poor in natural resources. The caliph's city was formally named Surra Man Ra'a ('*he who*

*sees it is delighted*'), later shortened in popular usage to Samarra.

Surra Man Ra'a was laid out in 836 on the east bank of the Tigris around the pre-Islamic settlement, with the main palace on the site of a monastery to the north. This palace complex, called in the sources Dar al-Khilafa, Dar al-Khalifa, Dar al-Sultan, and Dar Amir al-Mu'minin, had two major sub-units, the Dar al-'Ammah, the public palace where the caliph sat in audience on Monday and Thursday, and al-Jawsaq al-Khaqani, the residence of the Caliphs and their families, where four are buried.

It is not easy to reconstruct the plan of the original Surra Man Ra'a because of later rebuilding. From the palace an avenue extended south 3.5km to the markets, the mosque of al-Mu'tasim (both now under the modern town), and beyond. Army cantonments flanked this road and others were located outside Samarra. The area east of the city was walled as a hunting park (*al-Hayr*).

With the death of al-Mu'tasim in 842 came a point of decision: would Samarra be abandoned on the death of its founder or would it become a more permanent Abbasid capital? Al-Wathiq (842-47) chose to stay, and what was called a camp (*'Askar al-Mu'tasim*) became a real city. Al-Wathiq concentrated on the economic development of the city. He built a new palace, al-Haruni, on the banks of the Tigris at al-Quwayr, and this continued to be the residence of al-Mutawakkil, later occupied during the 860s by Turkish units.

The reign of al-Mutawakkil (847-61) changed the appearance of the city, for he was a lover of architecture. In a list of his building projects the new Congregational (Great) Mosque and up to 20 palaces are mentioned, costing 258-294 million dirhams. The new al-Malwiya Mosque, built between 849 and 851, formed part of an extension of the city to the east, extending into the old hunting park. Two new palaces with hunting parks were built in the south, at al-Istablât and al-Musharrahah (the Palace of al-Shah). A further palace, Balkuwara was built on the Tigris bank surrounded by a military cantonment for a new army corps under al-Mutawakkil's second son, al-Mu'tazz.

Three racecourses were built east of the main city. Two have an out-and-back course 80m wide and 10.42km long with a spectators' pavilion at the start and the third a pattern of four circles around a central pavilion (5.3km).

Under al-Mutawakkil the city centre reached its greatest extent, and was described in its heyday by al-Ya'qubi after the death of al-Mutawakkil in 861. There were seven parallel avenues; the one adjacent to the Tigris, Shari' al-Khalij, accommodated quays for the river transport, the principal means of supplying the city, and the cantonments of the Maghariba.

In 859, al-Mutawakkil began a new project to replace Surra Man Ra'a with a new caliphal city to the north, called, according to its coinage, al-Mutawakkiliyya, although written sources also call it al-Ja'fariyya. A canal was dug from a point 62km north to supply the new city, crossing the Qatul by an aqueduct, and running on both sides of the avenue, but the levelling was badly calculated, and little water flowed. The main palace, Al-Ja'fari, is located at the inlet to the Nahr al-Rasasi. The city plan is organised around a central avenue leading south past the Abu Dulaf mosque to the cantonments

of al-Karkh, thus similar to that of Surra Man Ra'a. The Sassanian hunting park north of the canal was reworked with a viewing platform at Tell al-Banat close to modern al-Dawr. After the assassination of al-Mutawakkil in 861 the city was abandoned.

The drain on the treasury played a role in the decade of troubles following al-Mutawakkil's death, which led to the making and unmaking of four caliphs, and military action in Samarra in 862-63, 865-66, and 870. More significant was the isolation of the Caliph with his army in Samarra, leaving him exposed to attempts by the soldiery to improve their lot. In the decade after the accession of al-Mu'tamid in 870, the army was removed from Samarra by Abu Ahmad al-Muwaffaq, although it continued to be the official residence of the Caliph until 892, when al-Mu'tadid re-established Baghdad as the capital.

The area around the markets continued to be occupied. The two imams Ali al-Hadi and Al-Hasan al-Askari had a house on the Shari' Abi Ahmad, near the mosque of al-Mu'tasim, and were buried there. The twelfth imam disappeared nearby in a cleft commemorated by the Sardab al-Mahdi in 874. The tomb was first developed in 944-45.

When Samarra was abandoned by the Caliphs at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, occupation continued in a few areas, including the modern city of Samarra. Most of the rest of the site was left as it was until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century since the land lacks water and the soil is poor. At the present time some 80% of the buildings of the ancient city remain unexcavated (estimated to be *circa* 80% of the archaeological area).

### 3. OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE, INTEGRITY AND AUTHENTICITY

#### *Integrity and Authenticity*

Because ICOMOS has not been able to conduct an evaluation mission, the consideration of the integrity and authenticity of this property has necessarily relied on the nomination dossier and the desk evaluations.

According to the nomination dossier, apart from some minor exceptions, Samarra archaeological city may be described as fully authentic. After its abandonment by the Caliphs, occupation continued in a few areas, such as what was to form the nucleus of the modern city. Most of the remaining area was left untouched until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century since the land lacks water and the soil is poor. The west bank of the Tigris was an exception, and the land there was cultivated.

Foreign archaeological missions had been interested in eastern civilizations, and Samarra in particular, since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The German excavations of 1911-13 included exploration of the Caliphal palace, Balkuwara palace, Al-Ma'shuq palace, the Great Mosque, Abu Dulaf mosque, Tell Al-Alij, and seventeen residential houses. The Iraq Directorate-General of Antiquities excavated in 1936-40, and again from 1965 onwards. Starting in 1980, a considerable investment was put into the excavations. Starting in 1983 a map and database of the monuments was prepared by the Samarra Archaeological Survey. However, only a small part

of the site has been excavated: complete excavation would take centuries.

The State Board of Antiquities and Heritage is working to preserve the excavated and standing buildings by conserving those in danger of collapse and restoring parts destroyed by climatic and time factors, working with modern materials to the same specifications as the original materials, so as to distinguish the original from the restored parts. More extensive restorations have been undertaken at the Great Mosque and al-Ma'shuq.

On the matter of integrity, according to the nomination dossier, the site, like almost every archaeological site, is partially preserved, but it is possible to measure the degree to which loss has taken place in relation to the probable original extent of the city. At Samarra that loss is low by comparison with many other archaeological sites. Much of the loss is due to ploughing and cultivation, and to the growth of the modern city of Samarra.

To the extent that it is possible for ICOMOS to evaluate this property without the benefit of an evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the conditions for integrity and authenticity of the nominated property are met.

#### *Comparative analysis*

According to the nomination dossier, although eroded by recent events, Samarra has the best preserved plan of an ancient large city. Nowhere else in the world is the semi-complete plan of a large capital city preserved in all its details, extending from public buildings (mosques and palaces) to the smallest workman's or soldier's houses, sports facilities (racecourses, polo pitches, hunting reserves), cantonments and industrial buildings.

In comparable great capitals of that time such as Baghdad, Rome, Cordoba and Constantinople, comparatively little is preserved, in spite in some cases of long histories of excavations. They have continued to be flourishing cities with continual reconstruction over the centuries. However Samarra was abandoned after a relatively short time and so it retains much of its early plan.

For example, Cordoba, which became the capital of the Umayyad Emirate (later Caliphate) in Andalusia in 786, had no authority over other regions of the Islamic world. It continued to develop up to the present day, leading to the loss of many of its ancient monuments, apart from the mosque, transformed into a cathedral, and the palace complex of Madinat al-Zahra' outside the city. It is not possible to get a clear picture of the planning of the city and its buildings at the time of its prosperity as a capital. The same applies to Baghdad, built by Abu Ja'far al-Mansur in 762 as the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate: the course of history and modern development have destroyed all its remains.

There are many other examples around the world where imperial cities have not retained their original pattern because of continuous occupation and change: Tang Dynasty Chang'an and Yuan, and Manchu Beijing in China, Edo (Tokyo), Kyoto, and Nara in Japan, and the successive cities of Delhi in India.

In terms of monumental architecture, Samarra is distinguished by its mosques and palaces. The Great Mosque,

with its spiral minaret al-Malwiya, is one of the best known and largest ancient mosques in the Islamic world, and marks a new stage of mosque development by using a spiral minaret and a secondary outer enclosure with covered porticoes (Arabic *ziyada*), to provide shelter for Muslims unable to find a place in the mosque for the Friday prayer. Samarra is also the earliest site where archaeological evidence has been found of the *musalla*, the prayer ground outside the city intended for the holiday prayers.

The two caliphal palaces, Qasr al-Khalifa (Caliphal Palace) and al-Ja'fari, are among the largest ancient imperial palaces in the world whose plan is preserved.

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

#### *Justification of the Outstanding Universal Value*

According to the nomination dossier, Samarra is the second capital, after Baghdad, of the Abbasid Caliphate, which extended from Tunisia to Central Asia, and it is the only surviving Islamic capital that preserves all its elements. After the loss of the monuments of Baghdad, Samarra represents the physical trace of the Caliphate at its height. It is the only Islamic capital which retains its original plan, architecture, and arts.

The city preserves two of the largest mosques (Al-Malwiya and Abu Dulaf) and the most unusual minarets, as well as the largest palaces (the Caliphal Palace Qasr al-Khalifa, al-Ja'fari, al-Ma'shuq, and others) in the Islamic world. Various kinds of carved stucco, which spread to other parts of the Islamic world at that time, were developed there and are known as the Samarra style. A new type of ceramic known as Lustre Ware, which imitated utensils made of precious metals such as gold and silver, was also developed in Samarra.

#### *Criteria under which inscription is proposed*

The property is nominated on the basis of criteria ii, iii, and iv.

*Criterion ii:* According to the nomination dossier, Samarra represents a distinguished architectural stage in the Abbasid period by virtue of its mosques, its development, the planning of its streets and basins, its architectural decoration, and its ceramic industries.

ICOMOS considers that the architecture and layout of Samarra show clear evidence of influences from elsewhere in the Muslim world and beyond, whilst later Muslim architecture from this region illustrates the influence of Samarra.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion is justified.

*Criterion iii:* According to the nomination dossier, Samarra is the finest preserved example of the architecture and city planning of the Abbasid Caliphate, which extended from Tunisia to Central Asia and was one of the world's great powers of that period. The physical remains of this state are usually poorly preserved since they are frequently built of unfired brick and reused bricks.

ICOMOS recognizes that Samarra is an outstanding example of Abbasid architecture and urbanism.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion is justified.

*Criterion iv:* According to the nomination dossier, the buildings of Samarra, such as the Malwiya and Abu Dulaf mosques, represent a new artistic concept in Islamic architecture by comparison with those that preceded and succeeded it. In their large dimensions and unique minarets these mosques demonstrate the pride and political and religious strength that correspond with the strength and pride of the state at that time.

ICOMOS is in full agreement with this analysis of the architectural and structural significance of the site.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion is justified.

ICOMOS considers that the Outstanding Universal Value has been demonstrated and that the nominated property meets criteria ii, iii, and iv.

#### 4. FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROPERTY

##### *The Present Situation (2006)*

Following the 2003 war the archaeological area was occupied by the multi-national forces, who used it as a theatre for military operations. The State Board has sent many letters to the parties concerned in order to limit these violations.

ICOMOS is obliged to point out that, because of the continuing unsettled state of Iraq, it was unable to send a site evaluation mission to Samarra. This is regrettable since it means that the Advisory Body cannot supply professional advice and comment based on site evaluation. The information given below is derived solely from the nominations dossier, which in the light of the adverse constraints on the professional personnel of the State Party, which must of necessity be out of date in some particulars.

At the time of submission of the nomination (2006), all forms of activity and control are reduced to a low level because of the political situation. While the present situation continues, the principal danger is increasing intrusion of agricultural activities. The multi-national forces have at times occupied the Malwiya, which was also slightly damaged by a small bomb in April 2005. In August 2005 multi-national forces excavated an earth mound across the archaeological site north and south of the modern city. In February 2006, a bomb destroyed the Tombs of the Imams in Samarra: this monument lies outside the core zone of the protected area.

The present hostilities have had a disastrous impact on the local population, and also on the Samarra Archaeological City. In common with most of the other important archaeological sites in Iraq, Samarra has been exposed to the widespread problems of looting and the illicit trade in antiquities, activities that the State Party has been unable to stop owing to the present conditions in the country.

##### *Development Pressure*

The property has in recent years been subject to transgressions by neighbouring farmers. Solutions to these problems were provided by the Archaeological Law, and

action was taken before the outbreak of hostilities to remove the transgressions that happened before the enactment of the law. Claims were filed at the legal department of the State Board against the transgressors.

Expansion of construction was remedied by means of the law in two ways: at the local level and conducted by the Samarra Inspectorate of Antiquities in collaboration with relevant bodies such as the Department of Agriculture, the Municipality of Samarra, and others, in order to study the projects and grant or refuse consent. The second approach is by using a committee consisting of representatives of the ministries (including the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage), which studies the proposed projects. The State Board of Antiquities and Heritage has the decisive opinion in giving consent or otherwise. The application of this procedure has been in abeyance since 2003.

##### *Environmental pressures*

Climatic factors have a negative impact on the archaeological zone. Winds and rain bring with them dust, leading to the burial of the buildings, and particularly the restored parts.

There is an environmental problem from the dumping of garbage and debris. Up to 2003 the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage was working to prevent these activities and to punish the transgressors

##### *Natural disasters and risk preparedness*

The State Board provided fire-fighting equipment as a precaution against emergencies, but this is no longer operational. The height of the site above the level of the basin of the Tigris makes it safe from the risk of floods. It also lies outside the earthquake and seismic zone.

##### *Visitors/tourism pressures*

Tourism has come to a complete standstill at Samarra because of the political situation. The following comments relate to the period up to the outbreak of war in 2003.

Visitors and tourists in the past have been responsible for graffiti and defacing the walls of the buildings. Protection was provided by intensifying surveillance of the movement of visitors, the provision of tourist guides, and increasing the number of guards at all the main sites of the city, but these actions are no longer viable. An archaeological police department was formed to watch for vandals and stop pillage or violation of any kind, but it no longer has any function on the site.

Because of the large size of the city and the abundance of archaeological remains, the site is theoretically able to accommodate large numbers of visitors and tourists, and these were estimated before 2003 to be *c* 5,000 daily. There is no non-military access to the site at the present time.

ICOMOS considers that the main risk to the property arises from the inability of the responsible authorities to exercise control over the management and conservation of the site, owing to the present political situation. ICOMOS therefore recommends that, should the World Heritage Committee determine to inscribe this property on the World Heritage List at this time, the property should be also be inscribed

immediately on the List of World Heritage in Danger (see below).

## 5. PROTECTION, CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

[*Note:* This section is based entirely on the nomination dossier. Since ICOMOS was unable to send a site evaluation mission, it has been impossible to discuss the extent to which statutory protection and management provisions are being implemented, if at all, at Samarra.]

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

Study of the detailed maps and plans provided by the State Party in the nomination dossier indicates that the area proposed for inscription is logical in that it covers the known caliphate city of Samarra. The buffer zone also appears to have been delineated with careful attention to the physical and visual protection of the nominated site. It should be stressed, however, that ICOMOS has been unable to ascertain the relevance of these boundaries in the field.

Although there has not been an opportunity to carry out an evaluation mission to check the adequacy of the boundaries of the core and buffer zones, ICOMOS considers that these are likely to be realistic and adequate.

### *Ownership*

According to Article 7 of the 2002 Iraqi Archaeological Law No 55, Samarra Archaeological City is considered to be public property in which no dealings are allowed. Ownership is delegated to the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, and registered officially in the name of the Iraqi Ministry of Finance.

### *Protection*

As the property of the State of Iraq, the archaeological buildings in the city are open in times of peace all the year round to receive visitors and tourists. Iraqi Law punishes those who vandalize or trespass on this property in accordance with Article 7 of the 2002 Antiquities and Heritage Law No. 55.

A strict Government decision was promulgated in 1995 which stipulated detention, imprisonment, and large financial penalties for interventions on the Iraqi archaeological heritage by agriculture, building, or digging. The Samarra Archaeological Inspectorate has in the past brought many cases before Iraqi courts which have resulted in imprisonment and fines on transgressors.

Iraqi archaeological law is considered to be among the strictest in the region. No public and private projects may be executed without the consent of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage.

It is forbidden by law to build modern constructions in the protected area. In the buffer zone, coordination and consultation takes place between the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage and the municipal, agriculture, irrigation, and environment departments, and any other relevant parties before every project. Once consent is given by the State Board, conditions are laid down, covering environmental concerns, preservation of specified spaces, and

height limitations. The State Board wrote shortly before the start of the 2003 war to departments concerned for information about any future projects within the buffer zone. The replies received from those departments are not yet being considered.

ICOMOS considers that in theory the protective measures for the property are adequate. However, it is conscious that the present situation in Iraq means that they cannot be adequately enforced, leaving the property with little actual protection. ICOMOS therefore recommends that, should the World Heritage Committee decide to inscribe this property on the World Heritage List, it should also be inscribed immediately on the List of World Heritage in Danger (as discussed below).

### *Conservation*

According to the nomination dossier, all the buildings of Samarra Archaeological City are original and most are still unexcavated (estimated to be c.80% of the archaeological area).

A scientific method was followed up to 2003 in conserving standing remains: modern building materials were used in the work but to the same specifications and dimensions as the original materials (fired brick, mud-brick, and stucco). In this way it was possible for the observer to distinguish between original and restored parts. Consolidation of parts about to collapse was carried out without affecting the original form. Another method consisted of completing parts where the condition constitutes a danger to the building as a whole, without affecting the original form. Buildings where parts have been restored are about 20% of the city:

- *The Great Mosque and the Malwiya:* The external wall and the Malwiya minaret have been restored.
- *Abu Dulaf Mosque:* The arches of the prayer hall and the spiral minaret have been restored.
- *The Caliphal Palace:* The Bab al-Amma (Public Gate), the al-Hayr palace, and the Circular Basin have been restored.
- *Al-Ma'shuq Palace:* Only the facades of the palace and the upper floor of the palace have been restored.
- Restoration work was carried out on the walls of most of the excavated houses and the stucco decorations of the palaces.

These works were executed according to an annual plan prepared by the State Board based on the archaeological law.

Without the benefit of an evaluation mission, ICOMOS cannot provide comment on the state of conservation of this property. Based on the nomination dossier, ICOMOS considers that the overall approach to conservation at Samarra is likely to be acceptable. However, ICOMOS is concerned that some of the use of modern materials in restoration work is not fully consistent with contemporary conservation principles.

### *Management*

### *Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes*

The chain of responsibility passes from the Minister of State for Tourism and Archaeological Affairs to the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, its Museums Department, the Department of Investigations and Explorations, and the Salah al-Din Archaeology Directorate to the Samarra Archaeology Inspectorate.

Since its establishment at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the State Board has followed a working management plan for the property by distributing the responsibilities. This is done centrally through the State Board in Baghdad, through the Inspectorate of Antiquities, or through coordination with other departments in Samarra.

Management in Samarra is divided between the Salah al-Din Directorate and specialised missions in the fields of exploration and maintenance, under the supervision of the State Board. The antiquities inspector at Samarra delegates responsibilities such as the movement of visitors and guides, supervision of guards and security to his staff. Because of the existence of a number of traditional buildings in the modern city constructed around the shrines of the two Imams, Ali al-Hadi and Al-Hasan al-Askari, one of the officials of the inspectorate is responsible for the management of these buildings.

### *Management plans, including visitor management and presentation*

The budget is appropriated for maintenance, excavation, and management by the state centrally and it is spent through the sequence of management described above. The power of the State Board of Antiquities by virtue of its laws is the guarantee for the implementation of any central administration plans, and it is not considered necessary to create plans for each site separately. There is also a project being carried out by an American organisation in coordination with the State Board of Antiquities to prepare plans for the management of the archaeological sites in Iraq.

### *Involvement of local communities*

The involvement of the local communities in the management of the site is minimal, although according to the nomination dossier, there are excellent informal relationships between the site staff and local authorities.

ICOMOS cannot adequately evaluate the management system without the benefit of an evaluation mission. ICOMOS considers that the management system for the property is not adequate at the present time, as a result of the political situation in Iraq, and cannot adequately assess the management system without the benefit of an evaluation mission. ICOMOS considers that it would be desirable to formulate and implement a more formal management plan and structure.

## **6. MONITORING**

[*Note:* This section is based entirely on the nomination dossier. Since ICOMOS was unable to send a site evaluation mission, it has been impossible to provide an up-to-date report on the application of the

procedures outlined below at the present time. It appears highly likely that these are all currently in abeyance.]

According to the nomination dossier, the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage is responsible for adopting standards and criteria in the conservation of the property through priorities. Priority in conservation is given to buildings at greatest risk (e.g. at the Great Mosque, where bricks from its walls were being robbed by local people to build their houses). It is also responsible for conserving buildings of historical importance the remains of which are no longer visible in order to shed light on them and restore their architecture, such as the works performed in the Caliph al Palace (Bab al-Amma).

It is the responsibility of the Samarra Inspectorate of Antiquities to perform daily monitoring of all the buildings to check for any emergency or change. Standard techniques of monitoring and observation are in use, leading to the preparation of periodic reports on the state of the property and changes as a result of natural factors or the effect of visitors.

There is an annual photography programme for the monuments carried out by a specialised section at the Board which maintains a photographic archive.

Administrative arrangements were put in place shortly before the outbreak of hostilities in 2003 to monitor the property, both centrally by the State Board in Baghdad and on site by the Samarra Inspectorate of Antiquities. These measures included the establishment of the central security force (archaeological police), who are responsible for any emergency to which the sites are subjected.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring measures for the property are in theory adequate, although this cannot be fully assessed without an evaluation mission.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

ICOMOS considers that evaluation missions are an essential component of its capacity to advise the World Heritage Committee regarding proposals for inscription of properties in the World Heritage List.

In the case of Samarra, without the benefit of an evaluation mission, the ICOMOS evaluation and recommendations has been confined to reviewing the nomination dossier and consulting experts about this property. Such a procedure can resolve the question of whether the property demonstrates outstanding universal value, and the application and justification of criteria, but is unacceptably limiting to ICOMOS in commenting on the adequacy of boundaries and buffer zones, threats and the responses to them, protection, conservation, and management.

In the absence of an evaluation mission, ICOMOS has also not had the opportunity of forwarding specific questions to the State Party regarding these matters or of ascertaining for itself the efforts being made to mitigate harm to the property.

ICOMOS also notes that this property is but one on the Tentative List for Iraq which might be at owing due to the present situation. ICOMOS is very concerned about Iraq's cultural heritage and the fact that it is extremely difficult for

the State Party to utilise its heritage protection structures generally.

ICOMOS therefore notes that this is an unusual set of circumstances within the context of its role in providing expert advice to the World Heritage Committee on the evaluation of nominations to the World Heritage List.

***Recommendations with respect to inscription***

In terms of its specific findings, ICOMOS considers that Samarra Archaeological City, Iraq, demonstrates Outstanding Universal Value, and that the application of criteria ii, iii, and iv is justified, as summarized above.

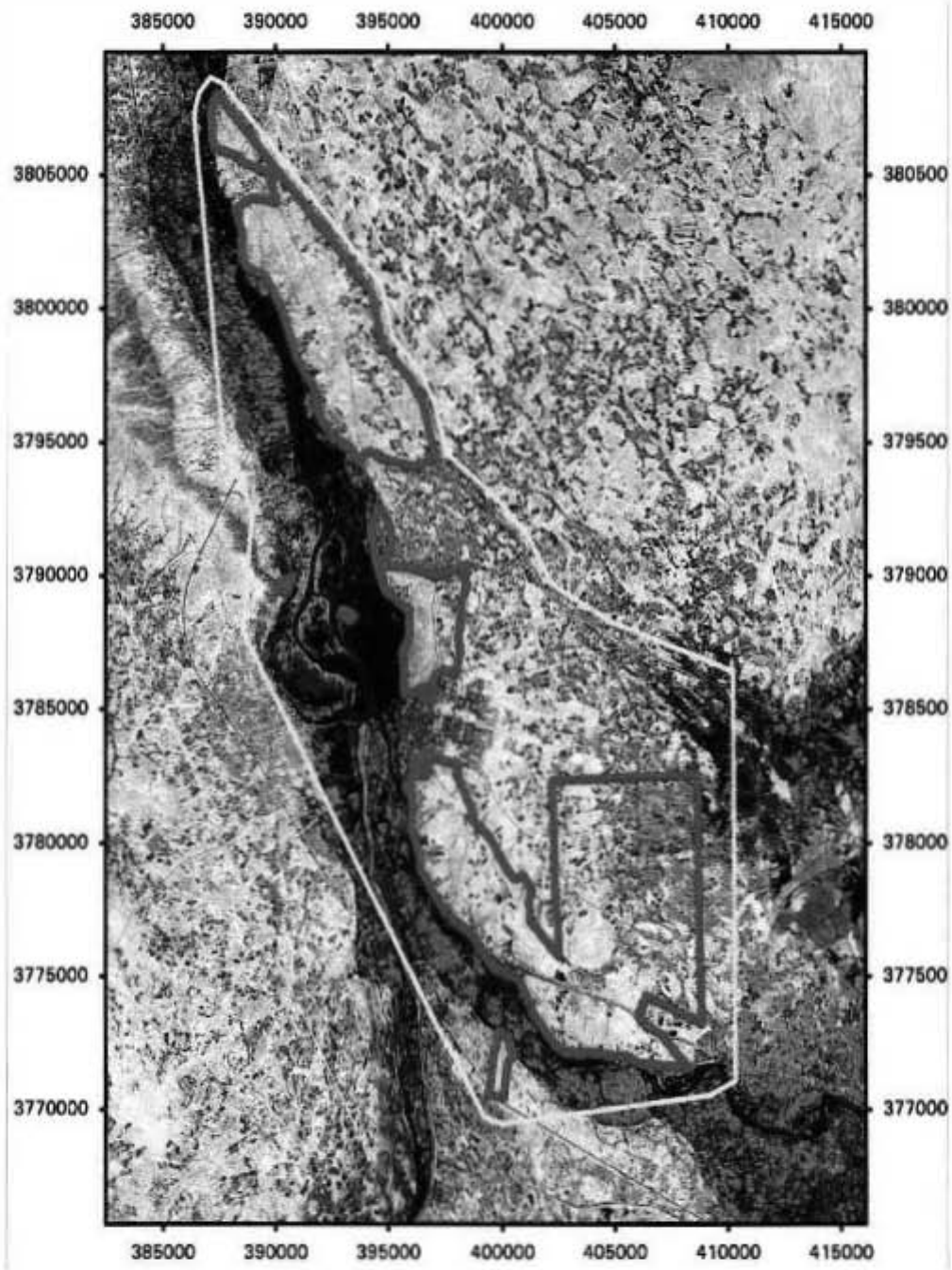
In the absence of an evaluation mission, ICOMOS has no choice but to recommend to the World Heritage Committee that the examination of this nomination be *deferred* in order to allow for a future time when the State Party can reassert its protection of this and other heritage properties, and an evaluation mission can occur.

However, if the World Heritage Committee were to decide to inscribe the property now due to exceptional circumstances, ICOMOS would recommend that it also immediately be inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

Should the World Heritage Committee decide to take this form of decision, ICOMOS recommends that it should subsequently also consider the need to examine the situation of other properties on the Tentative List of Iraq.

In any event, ICOMOS recommends to the World Heritage Committee that it use all possibilities offered by the World Heritage Convention to engage immediately in preventive measures and, when the situation makes this possible, in conservation work for Iraq's cultural heritage generally and for all properties inscribed on Iraq's Tentative List in particular.





Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property



**Great Mosque and its Spiral Minaret**



**Abu Dulaf Mosque**



**Caliph Palace**



**Interior of House no.5**