

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ
WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 433

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Bahla Fort

Location : the Interior

State Party : Oman

Date : December 23, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the inclusion of the proposed cultural property on the World Heritage List be deferred.

C) JUSTIFICATION

At the foot of Djebel Akhdar (3018 m) lie the fortresses of Rustaq to the north, and Izki, Nizwa and Bahla to the south which, having all been capitals at some time in their history, have played an important role in the history of Oman. It was here that the Kharijite communities resisted all attempts at "normalization" by Caliph Harun al-Rashid, and put into practice their religious concepts which were at once radically puritanical and democratic.

The oasis of Bahla owed its prosperity to the Banu Nabhan who, from the middle of the 12th century to the end of the 15th century, imposed their rule on the other tribes. Only the ruins of what was a glorious past now remain in this magnificent mountain site. Built on a stone base, the adobe walls and towers of the immense fort probably include some structural elements of the pre-Islamic period, but the major part of the construction dates from the prosperous times of the Banu Nabhan with the latest reconstruction dating from the beginning of the 16th century. At the foot of the fort, to the southwest, lies the Friday Mosque with its beautiful sculpted mihrab probably dating back to the 14th century.

These monuments are inseparable from the small town of Bahla and its suq, its palm grove and its adobe ramparts which surround the oasis, covering nearly 12 kms, and is a remarkable work with its towers, doors and its underground irrigation channels.

ICOMOS shares the concern of the UNESCO experts, who since 1977 have been unanimous in evoking the rapid delapidation of the Bahla monuments, all of which are in a critical state. The fort has never been restored, thereby representing a remarkable example of

authenticity, and is not protected by any conservation measures; meanwhile great chunks of wall collapse each year after the rainy season.

The terrace of the Mosque had not undergone maintenance work, and it collapsed between 1981 and 1983, causing the arches to cave in and the wall plastering to be torn away, thus endangering the mihrab in the building, which the Ibadite community has abandoned in favour of the new mosque. A detailed survey was made in 1977 by the Archaeology Department, but the restoration work on the outer wall of the oasis has been delayed due to a lack of funds.

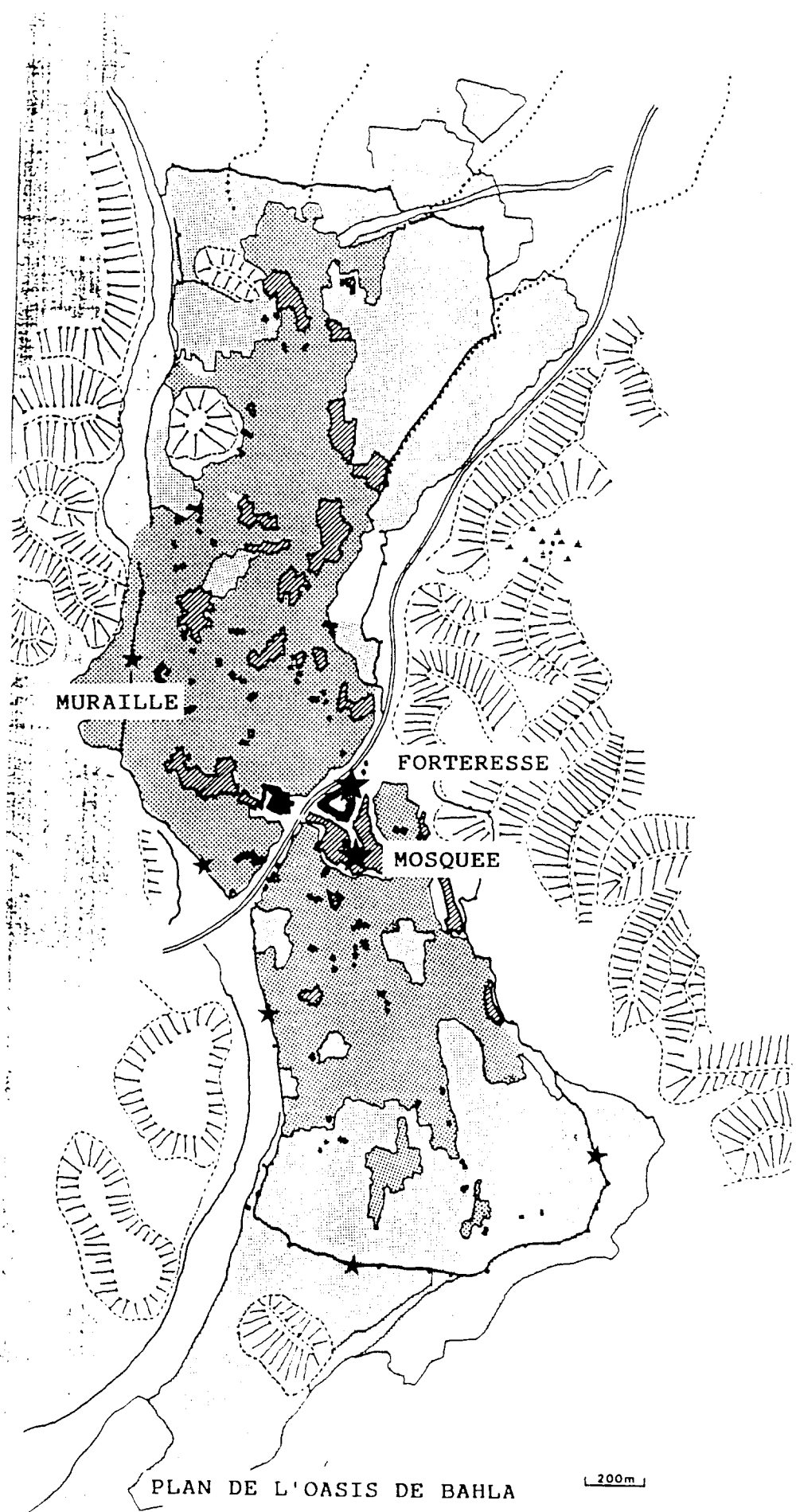
ICOMOS' reticence to include the Fort of Bahla on the World Heritage List can be explained, to a certain extent, by this very serious situation. This restrictive nomination (the town, the mosque, the suq, the oasis and its surrounding wall are not included) could be deferred.

ICOMOS suggests that the following approaches be examined :

- either a global nomination including the oasis and the Fort of Bahla (noting that the oasis of Al Hamra presents a more coherent and better preserved system of traditional dwellings, irrigation and agriculture),

- or a nomination which would group together a characteristic selection of forts in the Oman Sultanate : in which case the ruins of Bahla would be included with the forts of Rustaq, Jabrin, Bilad Bani Bu Ali and the two Portuguese forts in the Bay of Muscat in bearing witness to the rich, multi-secular, military architectural heritage (a similar nomination for the Forts of Ghana was decided in 1979).

ICOMOS, April 1987



MURAILLE

FORTERESSE

MOSQUEE

PLAN DE L'OASIS DE BAHLA

200m

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ
WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 433

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Bahla Fort

Location : the Interior

State Party : Oman

Date : December 23, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion IV.

C) JUSTIFICATION

At the foot of Djebel Akhdar (3018 m) lie the fortresses of Rustaq to the north, and Izki, Nizwa and Bahla to the south which, having all been capitals at some time in their history, have played an important role in the history of Oman. It was here that the Kharijite communities resisted all attempts at "normalization" by Caliph Harun al-Rashid, and put into practice their religious concepts which were at once radically puritanical and democratic.

The oasis of Bahla owed its prosperity to the Banu Nabhan who, from the middle of the 12th century to the end of the 15th century, imposed their rule on the other tribes. Only the ruins of what was a glorious past now remain in this magnificent mountain site. Built on a stone base, the adobe walls and towers of the immense fort probably include some structural elements of the pre-Islamic period, but the major part of the construction dates from the prosperous times of the Banu Nabhan with the latest reconstruction dating from the beginning of the 16th century. At the foot of the fort, to the southwest, lies the Friday Mosque with its beautiful sculpted mihrab probably dating back to the 14th century.

These monuments are inseparable from the small town of Bahla and its suq, its palm grove and its adobe ramparts which surround the oasis, covering nearly 12 kms, and is a remarkable work with its towers, doors and its underground irrigation channels.

ICOMOS shares the concern of the UNESCO experts, who since 1977 have been unanimous in evoking the rapid delapidation of the Bahla monuments, all of which are in a critical state. The fort has never been restored, thereby representing a remarkable example of

authenticity, and is not protected by any conservation measures; meanwhile great chunks of wall collapse each year after the rainy season.

The terrace of the Mosque had not undergone maintenance work, and it collapsed between 1981 and 1983, causing the arches to cave in and the wall plastering to be torn away, thus endangering the mihrab in the building, which the Ibadite community has abandoned in favour of the new mosque. A detailed survey was made in 1977 by the Archaeology Department, but the restoration work on the outer wall of the oasis has been delayed due to a lack of funds.

ICOMOS' reticence to include the Fort of Bahla on the World Heritage List could be explained, to a certain extent, by this very serious situation. This restrictive nomination (the town, the mosque, the suq, the oasis and its surrounding wall were not included) had to be deferred.

ICOMOS suggested that the following approaches be examined :

- either a global nomination including the oasis and the Fort of Bahla (noting that the oasis of Al Hamra presents a more coherent and better preserved system of traditional dwellings, irrigation and agriculture),

- or a nomination which would group together a characteristic selection of forts in the Oman Sultanate : in which case the ruins of Bahla would be included with the forts of Rustaq, Jabrin, Bilad Bani Bu Ali and the two Portuguese forts in the Bay of Muscat in bearing witness to the rich, multi-secular, military architectural heritage (a similar nomination for the Forts of Ghana was decided in 1979).

The first of these two suggestions received a favorable answer from the Omani Government by letter of September 7, 1987. ICOMOS recommends inscription of the oasis of Bahla with its architectural ensemble on the basis of criterion IV.

ICOMOS, October 1987