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## **Bolgar (Russian Federation) No 981 Rev**

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### **Official name as proposed by the State Party**

The Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex

### **Location**

Town of Bolgar, Spasskiy Rayon District  
Republic of Tatarstan  
Russian Federation

### **Brief description**

The archaeological site of Bolgar lies on the shores of the Volga River approximately 40km south of its confluence with the River Kama. It contains evidence of the medieval city of Bolgar, an early settlement of the civilization of Volga Bulgars, which existed between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Bolgar was also the first capital of the Golden Horde in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from references to its spatial organization, the site predominantly preserves its religious buildings, including a former mosque, a minaret and several mausoleums, bath houses, remains of a Khan's palace and shrine as well as its well-preserved defences consisting of ramparts and moat. For Tatar Muslims, the historical complex of Bolgar is sacred and a pilgrimage destination.

### **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**

31 August 1991

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

None

### **Date received by the World Heritage Centre**

29 June 1999  
30 January 2012  
31 January 2014

### **Background**

This is an originally deferred nomination (25 COM, Helsinki, 2001), which had previously been deferred (24 COM, Cairns, 2000).

In 2001, the World Heritage Committee adopted the following decision (25 COM X.C):

*The Committee discussed extensively the authenticity and materials used for reconstruction at the site. Several delegates questioned whether the type of early documentary evidence supplied from the 19<sup>th</sup> century would be sufficient to guarantee authenticity for the reconstruction of the Great Minaret.*

*A number of interventions focused on the importance of the site as historical evidence for a nomadic empire. The Committee encouraged the State Party to submit a revised nomination dossier, which further elaborated the history of movements of people.*

*Furthermore, the Committee suggested that a workshop could be organized on the question of authenticity and reconstruction to provide clear guidance in this matter.*

The State Party submitted a revised nomination dossier on 30 January 2012, which was referred back at the 37<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee (Phnom Penh, 2013) which adopted the following decision (37COM.8B.43):

*The World Heritage Committee,*

- 1. Having examined Documents WHC-13/37.COM/8B, WHC-13/37.COM/INF.8B.1 and WHC-13/37.COM/INF.8B.4,*
- 2. Recognizing the Outstanding Universal Value of the site, refers the nomination of the Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex, Russian Federation, back to the State Party in order to allow it, in collaboration with the Advisory Body (ICOMOS), in particular by inviting an advisory mission to the site, to take adequate measures for an inscription on the basis of criteria (iii) and (vi) at its next session.*

The State Party submitted a revised nomination dossier on 31 January 2014.

### **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 29 September to 4 October 2012. An Advisory Mission visited the property from 30 August to 3 September 2013.

### **Additional information requested and received from the State Party**

In the context of the submission in 2012, ICOMOS sent a letter to the State Party on 18 September 2012 requesting additional information with regard to the cultural character of the property, attributes demonstrating the Outstanding Universal Value, the scope of the comparative analysis, key management mechanisms, developments proposed for the site and its surroundings as well as monitoring arrangements. The State Party submitted 221 pages of additional information which it defined as a revised final version of the nomination dossier, on 16 November 2012. Not all the questions identified by ICOMOS were addressed by this material. Following the provision of the Advisory Mission report on 16 October 2013, the State Party submitted a draft of a further revised nomination for

review on 20 December 2013, to which ICOMOS replied with requests for additional information on 16 January 2014. A once more revised nomination dossier responding to the additional information requests was submitted on 31 January 2014.

#### **Date of ICOMOS approval of this report**

6 March 2014

## **2 The property**

### **Description**

The archaeological and historical complex of Bolgar is located on the shores of the Volga River, approximately 40 km south of the confluence of Volga and Kama and 200 km south of the capital of Tatarstan, Kazan. It is situated on the edge of the 30m high Volga river terrace to the immediate east of the modern village of Bolgar. The property encompasses an area of 424ha and is surrounded by an earthen rampart of up to five metres in height and a moat of two metres in depth. The property is of approximately triangular shape, with its apex facing south. To its north it is bordered by the Volga River shore. The buffer zone is 12,101ha.

The archaeological remains on site present a stratigraphy of 6 layers below the contemporary modern village. The earliest layers of pre-Bolgar settlements date back to the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium. The site further testifies to the Volga Bolgar pre-Mongolian settlement constructed between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and the first capital of the Golden Horde established in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. There are additional layers of the Kazan Khanate period after the decline of the Volga Bolgar civilization in the mid 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and the Russian history period during which time an orthodox monastic complex was added to the site.

The central feature of the historical and archaeological complex at Bolgar is the historic mosque of tetragonal shape, preserved as an architectural ruin and one of the rare surviving architectural manifestations of the early Golden Horde period (late 13<sup>th</sup> century). The minaret of this former mosque collapsed in 1841 but was reconstructed in the year 2000 on the basis of historical drawings made on site in 1827. The new minaret was re-erected on its original foundations and integrates historic stones, which belonged to the original minaret.

A second mosque situated 500 metres south of the large mosque has preserved its original minaret, constructed in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century as a smaller model of the larger one built a few years earlier. This minaret of slightly more than 10 metres height, is the only medieval Bolgar architectural monument which has survived fully intact until the present-day.

A number of mausoleums contribute to the religious significance of the site, which is the historic location at which the Bulgars officially embraced Islam in 922 AD. The so-called North Mausoleum, the shrine of a noble

Bolgar family, is located at the northern façade of the large mosque and the East Mausoleum, the shrine of the Bolgar family Burashbekow, at its eastern façade. The latter was converted into a Russian Orthodox church in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is referred to as St Nicholas's. The Khan's shrine, located north of the smaller minaret, was constructed at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and represents the cubic mausoleum style with central dome, which is so popular all over the Islamic world. Several smaller mausoleums of the 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries are located in the southern part of the historic complex.

The chambers were structures with various functions; some were bathhouses, like the Red or White Chambers, others richly decorated courthouses like the Black Chamber, which is part of the Khan's palace complex. The latter is the only well-preserved civic building in the complex which dates to the early Volga Bolgar rule in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The Church of the Dormition of the Virgin was built between 1732 and 1734 in the centre of the archaeological site, north of the large mosque. Its vertical belfry is now a prominent sight in the Bolgar landscape and provides a reference point. During its construction stone from the ruined buildings of Bolgar was reused and the wall plinths still carry Arabic and Armenian inscriptions. In the 1970s the monastic Church was converted into the on-site Historical and Archaeological Museum.

Three complexes lie outside the defensive structures of the archaeological complex but are included in the property: the Small Township, the Greek Chamber and early settlements identified on the first river island. The Small Township, founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is located outside the southern entrance gate of Bolgar. It comprises a fort with two towers at the southernmost end as well as residential stone buildings. A church called the Greek Chamber is situated at the westernmost extension of the nominated property on the Volga terraces. Built of limestone blocks in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it belonged to the Armenian merchant colony located there. It is believed that the remains of the Armenian colony are evidence of the international trade relations of the Volga Bulgars in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The island located closest to the site, which became an island only after the construction of the Kuibyshev Dam and Reservoir in 1957, contains a settlement of the Bolgar Pre-Mongolian period.

The historical and archaeological complex of Bolgar retains considerable and multi-layered archaeological potential reaching back to earlier periods than the preserved architectural evidence. The earliest settlement layers, discovered close to the Jerusalem ravine, date back to the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Several other locations reveal archaeological evidence of occupations between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **History and development**

The Bulgars were a collective group of nomadic tribes which formed during the period of the great migration of peoples. In the 630's they founded the state of Bolgaria to

the north of the Balkans. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century some Bolgar tribes departed towards the central Volga region and established the nation of Volga Bulgaria. The town of Bolgar became the nation's capital in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and it was here in 922 AD that the Bolgars officially embraced Islam.

Bolgar developed to become a trade centre between Eastern Europe and Central Asia as well as a centre of handicraft production, well-known for its leather goods. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the capital of the Volga Bolgars was relocated to Bilyar. However, Bolgar remained very influential. In 1236 the town was seized and burned by the Mongols and its fortifications were dismantled. Despite this destruction, Batu Khan selected Bolgar as the first capital of the Golden Horde in 1242. This led to a new revival in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and Bolgar became the urban centre of the newly-established state.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century the capital of the Golden Horde shifted southwards to Sarai, while Bolgar remained a vital northern centre. At this time the large mosque, the Khan's Palace and many of the residential structures and mausoleums were erected. Also paved roads, water facilities, public bathhouses and drainage systems were constructed. Feudal discord within the Horde started to weaken the empire in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which fell as a result of the campaign by the Moscow forces led by Great Prince Basil II in 1431. The town of Bolgar was largely destroyed, lost its privileged position and remained from then on a small settlement and Muslim pilgrimage centre. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century all other remains of the Bolgar state were incorporated into the Rus state and the nation of Volga Bulgaria ceased to exist.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Tsar Feodor Alexeevich visited Bolgar and ordered it to be documented and preserved. Soon after, a monastery was established in the centre of the site utilizing the foundations and stones of the Khan's Palace Court. In 1770 the monastery was closed and the village was renamed Uspenskoe, only to be called Bolgary again a century later. The village expanded continuously, reusing building materials from the archaeological site. The minaret of the great mosque collapsed in 1841 as a result of cavities in its foundations dug out by treasure hunters.

In 1864 systematic archaeological investigation of the site commenced with an excavation by V.G. Tizengauzen. In March 1878 the Society of Archaeology, History and Ethnography became responsible for the property. After the Russian Revolution responsibility was transferred to the Department of Museums and Preservation of Monuments and Ancient Buildings, Art and Nature and the Academic Centre of Tatar people Commissariat of Education. In 1923 the area within the ramparts was declared an inviolable reserve and conservation works were carried out. From 1954 onwards systematic conservation of the entire complex was undertaken and a historical and architectural museum opened in 1962. Since 2000 the property has

been called the Bolgar Historical and Architectural Culture Preserve.

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

#### **Comparative analysis**

The comparative analysis of the revised nomination dossier sets out four aspects according to which Bolgar is compared with other historical and archaeological properties: sites connected with the Volga Bolgar civilization in the same geo-cultural region; remains of key settlements of the Golden Horde; properties influenced by Islamic religion and architecture in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and other parts of Asia; as well as other early Islamic civilizations in the Arab States.

The nomination dossier emphasises that Bolgar is without comparators as testimony of the Volga Bolgar rule as well as the centre of the Mongol Empire of the Golden Horde. ICOMOS requested further qualification of this statement by the provision of a comparative analysis of the physical remains with all the later capitals and key cities of the Volga Bolgar civilization and the Golden Horde.

Amongst properties of Islamic influence in architecture and sacred associations, Bolgar is said to have no analogues in the same geo-cultural regions. It could however be compared with other historical and archaeological sites recognized as World Heritage, such as the Minaret and Archaeological Remains of Jam, Afghanistan (2002, (ii), (iii) and (iv)), Takht-e Soleyman, Iran (2003, (i), (ii), (iii), (iv) and (vi)), State Historical and Cultural park "Ancient Merv", Turkmenistan (1999, (ii) and (iii)), Kunya-Urgench, Turkmenistan (2005, (ii) and (iii)), as well as several other inscribed World Heritage Sites.

Further comparison is drawn to early city centers of the Islamic world, including Samarra Archaeological City, Iraq (2007, (ii), (iii) and (iv)), the Walled City of Baku, Azerbaijan (2000, (iv)), and the Al Qal'a of Beni Hammad, Algeria (1980, (iii)), an exceptional testimony of the Hammadid civilization which, like the Volga Bolgar civilisation, ceased to exist.

ICOMOS considers that, as the key settlement centre of the Volgar Bolgars and the early capital of the Golden Horde, Bolgar has historic importance. ICOMOS further considers that the traces of these civilizations are embedded in the continuity of earlier and later civilizations including the Khazan Khanate and Rus State. Whilst ICOMOS does not consider that the comparative analysis has underlined that the physical evidence which remains preserved at Bolgar is outstanding among the other capitals and key cities of the Volga Bolgar civilization and the Golden Horde, it considers that the historical and archaeological site of Bolgar illustrates a unique succession of historical layers characterising the exchanges between eastern and

western influences which Bolgar experienced over the centuries. The comparative analysis does not provide comparators among multi-layered sites with both archaeological and architectural remains in the wider region occupied by the Volga-Bolgar and the Golden Horde. Nevertheless, ICOMOS considers that the recognition of Outstanding Universal Value as requested by the World Heritage Committee in the decision 37COM.8B.43 would be best supported by these characteristics. ICOMOS notes that the World Heritage Committee considered that Bolgar plays a very important reference role for Islam in Tatarstan and wider parts of South-east Europe and Central Asia in relation to its role as the historic location in which Islam was first accepted by the Volga Bolgars and from where it spread to other parts of the region. Based on the decision of the World Heritage Committee to acknowledge Outstanding Universal Value in relation to criterion (vi), it should be assumed that Bolgar is considered exceptional in this context.

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ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis and the additional research undertaken by ICOMOS have illustrated that the Outstanding Universal Value identified by the World Heritage Committee in its decision 37COM.8B.43 can best be related to an exceptional multi-layered site representing all subsequent historic occupations and which is the regional reference point for the establishment of Islam in Central Asia.

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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:

- It is a unique testimony to the existence of an ancient civilization in the Middle Volga region between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, that of the Volga Bolgar, and a unique example of Bolgar-Tatar architecture.
- The historical and archaeological complex is a sacred place for Muslims from all over Russia and other states and was the place at which the Volga Bolgars formally adopted Islam in 922 AD.
- The site contains remarkable evidence of historical continuity and mutual influence of cultural traditions of Turkic, Finno-Ugric, Slavic and other peoples of Eurasia on the part of the Volga Bolgars, the Golden Horde, the Kazan Khanate and the Russian state.
- The Bolgar complex is located at the crossroads of economic, cultural and political communication routes and illustrates in its physical remains the unique interaction of nomadic and urban cultures.

ICOMOS notes that the World Heritage Committee in its decision 37COM.8B.43 recognized the Outstanding Universal Value of the site as a testimony to the period of the Volga Bolgars or the early capital of the Golden Horde, as well as for its religious associations and its memorial value as the location in which Islam was introduced and accepted by the Volga Bolgars in 922 AD.

ICOMOS considers that although Bolgar represents a unique testimony of the Volga Bolgar culture, the historic ancestors of the contemporary Tatars, the authenticity of this testimony, in particular its physical setting, has been compromised through a number of recent reconstruction and construction projects. ICOMOS considers that the historical and archaeological complex of Bolgar cannot justify Outstanding Universal Value as a testimony to a cultural tradition or civilization. Neither the Volga Bolgar nor the Golden Horde material evidence seems to qualify as the most outstanding authentic remains of the respective civilizations.

ICOMOS considers that it is rather the continuity of subsequent layers of different civilizations that contributes to the uniqueness of Bolgar, which provides vivid evidence of the mutual influence and historic cross-fertilization of cultural traditions of Turkic, Finno-Ugric, Slavic and other peoples of Eurasia, including the Volga Bolgars, Golden Horde, the Kazan Khanate and the Russian state. In light of this, the ICOMOS Advisory Mission advised the State Party to consider resubmission of the nomination dossier under criteria (ii) and (vi), highlighting the cultural interchange of values over several consecutive cultural traditions and rulers.

ICOMOS considers that Bolgar provides remarkable evidence of cultural exchanges from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, including exchanges of the cultural traditions of people of Turkic, Finno-Ugric and Slavic origins. ICOMOS also considers valid the argument that Bolgar, as a historic trade centre along the Volga River, illustrates the historic interaction between urban and nomadic cultures.

#### **Integrity and authenticity**

##### **Integrity**

The nominated property contains the complete area of historic occupation by various consecutive civilizations on the upper plateau of the site, including the outer ramparts of the city. In the revised nomination, the property further includes early parts of a Volga Bolgar settlement located in the lower level of the site and on the closest Volga island, now partly submerged following the construction of the Kuibyshev Dam and Reservoir in 1957. ICOMOS therefore considers that the property includes all relevant elements and is of adequate size. ICOMOS also considers that large parts of the archaeological remains on the designated property are not yet known and that the site retains strong potential for archaeological research.

ICOMOS considers that the integrity of the property has suffered adverse effects from development over the past 3 centuries, including some very recent large-scale new constructions. The modern village of Bolgar is located on top of the archaeological remains of the property and a programme to resettle the inhabitants, purchase and demolish existing houses, whilst potentially retaining some buildings to be used for tourism purposes, has been launched. An airport runway previously built on the site

has now been utilized as a car park, and an adjacent site was prepared for use for pilgrim's tents during the annual pilgrimage season. During the ICOMOS Advisory Mission the State Party committed to moving the pilgrim accommodation facilities to an alternative location in the southern buffer zone of the property. The most recent constructions include houses used for exhibitions about traditional local craftsmanship and healing built in 2010, which were placed in close proximity to the historic mosque, the central feature of the Bolgar site. Further constructions include the Memorial Sign, a large mosque-like marble building with a gilded dome next to the historic mosque in the very centre of the property. In particular, the visual proportion of the latter construction has had a negative impact on the site and its landscape character. ICOMOS considers that more sensitive planning of any future interventions or visitor interpretation is necessary to preserve the integrity of the property and that Heritage Impact Assessments (HIA's) according to the ICOMOS Guidance for Heritage Impact Assessments for world cultural heritage properties need to be undertaken for these in order to obtain approval by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies before implementation.

#### Authenticity

The State Party claims that the authenticity of the archaeological and historical complex is high and that the only exception to this is the Great Minaret, which was reconstructed in 1990, but has retained authenticity in design. ICOMOS considers that the number of recent architectural and other interventions is substantial and has affected the authenticity of the site. ICOMOS regrets in particular that several new constructions have been implemented in locations which were documented as early Volga Bolgar settlement structures during earlier archaeological excavations. ICOMOS considers that the reduction of archaeological evidence providing testimony to the Volga Bolgar civilization has restricted the ability of the site to provide a unique authentic testimony to this specific historic period.

Several conservation activities undertaken at the property have included reconstructions and partial rebuilding works. Since the World Heritage Committee expressed its concerns about the reconstruction of the Great Minaret in 2001, the historic mosque has been restored and its walls have been partly reconstructed, up to 4 meters high in the four corners. Among other structures, the Eastern Mausoleum has been restored and received a new roof. Likewise the Black Chamber, which ICOMOS previously considered to be in its original state but in need of consolidation, has now also been restored. ICOMOS considers that the restoration measures conducted are extensive, sometimes without clear justification and that since the ICOMOS evaluation of this property in 2001, its authenticity in material, substance, craftsmanship and setting has been reduced.

However, ICOMOS considers that the property's ramparts and moat remain fully authentic as well as the large-scale archaeological areas yet to be researched and surveyed.

In addition, with regard to the religious reference function of Bolgar to Tatar Muslims, the information sources for location, spirit and feeling retain authenticity and have not been affected by the recent addition of religious structures, such as the Memorial Sign or the White Mosque. Muslim pilgrims continue to venerate Bolgar as the origin of Islam in this region and to conduct annual pilgrimages.

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ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been compromised and remain vulnerable. With focus on the attributes of the Outstanding Universal Value as acknowledged by the World Heritage Committee in its decision 37COM.8B.43 and presented in the revised nomination, the qualifying conditions of integrity and authenticity can be considered sufficient.

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#### Criteria under which inscription is proposed

In the revised nomination the property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (ii) and (vi).

Criterion (ii): *to 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 has been proposed in the revised nomination following the recommendation of the ICOMOS Advisory Mission to the property in September 2013. It is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the cultural heritage of Bolgar is defined by the interchange of different cultural traditions and at least four main stylistic influences, including architectural traditions of wooden constructions which emerged in the forest-rich region, the steppe component of Turkic language tribes, oriental influences connected with the adoption of Islam, and European-Russian styles which dominated after it became part of the Russian state.

ICOMOS considers that the historical and archaeological complex of Bolgar does indeed illustrate the exchange and re-integration of several subsequent cultural traditions and rulers and reflects these in influences on architecture, city-planning and landscape design. The property illustrates mutual exchange of Turkic, Finno-Ugric, Slavic and other traditions in particular under the Volga Bulgars, Golden Horde and Kazan Khanate. ICOMOS considers that criterion (ii) can best be applied to justify the Outstanding Universal Value recognized by the World Heritage Committee.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

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Criterion (iii): *to 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 no longer suggested by the State Party. The criterion has nevertheless been included in this evaluation, since the World Heritage Committee

explicitly referred to it in its decision (37COM.8B.43). ICOMOS assumes that the reference relates to the justification presented in the nomination of 2012, which proposed Bolgar as a unique testimony to the ancient civilizations of Volga Bulgaria and the Golden Horde and as providing the only physical traces of Volga Bulgaria at its height.

ICOMOS continues to consider that the physical remains on site of, in particular, the Volga Bulgars, seem too limited to qualify as an authentic exceptional testimony of this civilization. ICOMOS considers that Bolgar represents a significant testimony of the Volga Bolgar culture, the ancestors of the Tatars, but that this is combined with other significant testimonies relating to earlier and later periods. ICOMOS observed that several other layers of the multi-layered history on the site are far better preserved than the evidence of the Volga-Bolgar civilization. This results from the fact that the authenticity of, in particular, the Volga-Bolgar remains, has been compromised through reconstruction and recent constructions and restorations. ICOMOS considers that the physical remains of the two referenced cultures at the Bolgar historical and archaeological complex cannot be considered outstanding amongst the other capitals and key cities of the Volga Bolgar civilization and historic capitals of the Golden Horde.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

*Criterion (vi): be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that Bolgar historical and archaeological complex is an outstanding example of medieval Islamic culture. It is evidence of an early and northernmost Muslim enclave and connected with the official acceptance of Islam by the Volga Bulgars as the state religion in 922 AD. Bolgar is said to be a place of religious worship and pilgrimage for the Turkic Muslims of Eurasia. The World Heritage Committee recognized in its decision 37COM.8B.43 that this criterion is justified.

ICOMOS considers that Bolgar has become a regional reference point for the Tatar Muslims and likely other Muslim groups of Eurasia. It carries associated religious and spiritual values which are illustrated predominantly during the annual pilgrimage season. Bolgar is, in addition, associated with the historic event of the adoption of Islam as a state religion, which had a lasting impact on the cultural and architectural development of the wider geographical region.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

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In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been sufficiently demonstrated but remain vulnerable and that criteria (ii) and (vi) are best suited to justify the Outstanding Universal Value as recognized by the World Heritage Committee in its decision 37COM.8B.43.

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

Development pressures could theoretically be caused by further urban development of Bolgar city. However, at present, the key development pressure is that of the infrastructure development on-site, which however seems largely completed at this stage. The Memorial Sign in the centre of the property and the White Mosque outside the southern boundaries have been constructed to support the religious functions at the site, but also a Bread Museum and several other exhibition buildings were recently built and new roads were laid out on the property to connect the car park with the river station and the Museum of Civilizations. Whilst it is true that this building is only visible as a one-storey structure from the plateau, it has a considerable impact on the site's landscape appearance when approaching from the river side. The management document submitted with the revised nomination highlights that by 2020, up to 20 different museums could operate in the territory of the Bolgar Complex and its surroundings. ICOMOS considers that any additional structure anticipated on the property or in its immediate vicinity needs to be assessed by means of a comprehensive Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) according to the ICOMOS Guidance for Heritage Impact Assessments for world cultural heritage properties, and will require explicit approval by the World Heritage Centre in consultation with the Advisory Bodies.

Considerable risk factors are erosion and landslides. The elevated water level of the Volga River, which followed the construction of the Kuibyshev Dam, has caused landslides around the edge of the plateau in the past. Potential damage caused by further landslides could be immense and irreversible. Preventive measures, such as large stones which have now been placed at the foot of the plateau, are being taken by the State Party to reduce the risk of future landslides.

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ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are the infrastructure projects as well as potential landslides.

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

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

The boundaries of the property encompass the main archaeological and architectural structures including the early village of Volga Bolgar settlers and the settlement on the island north of the property, which have both become

partially submerged following the construction of the Kuibyshev Dam. The boundaries of the higher terrace components follow the historic ramparts and protective moat which provides a clearly-indicated boundary in the wider landscape.

The buffer zone protects the property towards all cardinal directions and has a stringent regulatory framework attached to it. Towards the north, the buffer zone covers the complete width of the river Volga and the opposite river bank and therefore protects the essential views across the river.

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

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### **Ownership**

The property of Bolgar is predominantly a federal state-owned property which is administrated by the Bolgar Public Historical and Architectural Cultural Preserve, established by a decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Tatarstan (No. 591, dated 19 October 1992). However, the residential houses which remain inside the property boundaries are, until they can be acquired, the private property of their owners.

### **Protection**

Several monuments and archaeological remains within the property, including the so-called Cathedral Mosque, Black Chamber, North and East Mausoleums, the Khan's Shrine, the Smaller Minaret and the Church of the Dormition are registered as cultural heritage of national significance under the Federal Law on Properties of Cultural Heritage (Monuments of History and Culture) of Peoples of the Russian Federation (2002). In addition the complete Bolgar State Historical and Architectural Culture Preserve was placed on the List of Properties of Historic Importance based on the Edict of the President of the Russian Federation on the Confirmation of the Federal (all-Russia) Historical and Cultural Heritage List (1995).

However, ICOMOS notes that in the past the property designation, in place since 1969, did not always succeed in protecting the property from inappropriate constructions and development and that seemingly the regulatory framework attached to these designations might not be sufficient. ICOMOS in its previous evaluation recommended strengthening the protection mechanisms in place and the establishment of approval procedures for reconstruction and constructions that take into full account the integrity and authenticity of the property. In response, the State Party adjusted the General Plan and Scheme of Bolgar Territorial Planning, which now stipulates that any significant changes in the buffer zone must get the permission of federal, regional and municipal executive bodies. It seems further understood that developments on site are only to be permitted in exceptional circumstances after explicit approval from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, in consultation with the Advisory Bodies.

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ICOMOS considers that the protective mechanism for the property and its buffer zone are adequate.

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### **Conservation**

The property has been inventoried and archaeological records of previous excavations exist. Part of this documentary material was made available to ICOMOS during its technical evaluation mission and was further studied during the ICOMOS Advisory Mission. Considering the situation of the archives in which the inventories are presently held, ICOMOS recommends developing a plan to create a comprehensive site archive and store, which collects all data and reports and, as far as possible, all archaeological finds, in a centralized facility in the vicinity of the site.

Conservation measures are continuously undertaken following a programmed approach. However, ICOMOS considers that the restoration techniques and the scale of intervention are often rather extensive and the generally-accepted approach to additions being distinguishable from the historic fabric is missing in many instances. ICOMOS considers that a more cautious and minimal approach to conservation, restricted mostly to consolidation of the historic material, would be desirable.

The present state of conservation is generally acceptable – often rather too perfect following extensive restorations – with the exception of mausolea recently excavated, which are in need of cautious consolidation or backfilling. ICOMOS further recommends reduction of some of the conservation works already undertaken, in particular surface treatments of historic materials in the vicinity of restored additions, which prevents distinguishing between historic and added materials. As part of future restorations of historic surfaces, ICOMOS also recommends replacing the red lines which have been introduced to distinguish additions from the historic fabric by a more rigorous approach in which authentic remains that are to be covered by additions are separated from these by coloured mortar so as not to rely on paint that is easily eroded in the harsh climate.

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ICOMOS considers the attention given to conservation adequate but recommends that conservation activities should be more cautious in order to respect material authenticity.

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### **Management**

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

The Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex has its own management authority (site administration) with, at present, 85 staff members, including several academic heritage specialists in their respective fields. The administration is divided into four key sections dedicated to exhibitions and presentation, museum collections, research and public outreach as well as maintenance and security. The site administration reports via the Head Office for Conservation, Use, Promotion and Public

Protection of Cultural Heritage to the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Tatarstan.

The funding available on an annual basis averaged around 50,000 Euros per year until 2010. Since 2010 the Preserve has been given an annual budget of 10 million Euros to finance the implementation of the infrastructure developments. ICOMOS considers that this generous funding should predominantly be utilized for non-intrusive research and adequate conservation and consolidation measures and not be used for the creation of constructions which might not respect the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the property. Other institutions which have been formally noted as partners in the management include the Bolgar City Executive Committee, the administration of the Spaask Municipality, the Tatarstan Academy of Sciences, the Tatarstan Commission on UNESCO, the Russian National World Heritage Committee, the Russian Commission on UNESCO matters and the UNESCO Chair on preservation of architectural and city-building monuments.

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

As part of the revised nomination dossier the State Party presented revised primary directions for the Management Plan of the Bolgar historical and archaeological museum reserve until 2019. These primary directions are based on revised strategic objectives for management planning which centre on the preservation of Outstanding Universal Value, the preparation and completion of a management plan, and the establishment of sustainable management procedures including through public consensus and involvement.

The revised primary directions establish a number of focus areas including the coordination and administration of the property, its continued study and conservation, as well as archaeological excavation management. ICOMOS appreciates the commitment made by the State Party following the recommendations of the 2013 Advisory Mission to focus research on important questions of the monument development and peculiarities of the sites formation based on non-destructive methods including technologies and methods used in natural sciences, aerial mapping and processing of space satellite information. Initial results from these approaches have been presented in the revised nomination.

The management plan is to be finalized in 2014 and shall be implemented between 2014 and 2019. While many of the visitor facilities on the property have already been developed, ICOMOS welcomes the approaches to participatory small excavation sites and community involvement in the development of visitor infrastructure and services.

Involvement of the local communities

The initial nomination dossier of 2012 did not describe any active processes of community involvement or

participation and it was not evident to what extent the private house-owners who will be relocated have been consulted or involved in the decision. In the revised nomination the management plan directions clearly articulate the desire to involve the community of Bolgar and the wider region, and anticipate that the finalized management plan will provide detailed strategies in this regard. In particular, offers of private accommodation and house cafes are named as potential revenue-generation models for the local resident community.

With regard to its religious use and veneration as a sacred place and pilgrimage destination, Bolgar integrates a strong community component. The religious ceremonies and pilgrimage organization are spearheaded by the religious communities. The administration also envisages Bolgar functioning as a location which facilitates interfaith dialogue and encounter, in particular between the Muslim and Christian Orthodox faiths.

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ICOMOS considers that the management authority is well equipped in terms of human and financial resources and has provided clear strategic objectives for a management plan to be developed in 2014. ICOMOS recommends that this management plan is finalized and the objectives regarding non-intrusive research and community involvement further pursued.

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## 6 Monitoring

As part of the provisions foreseen in the new management plan, a property monitoring department has been created. This department is to document changes happening in the environment, identify emerging conflict situations and hazards that might arise for the property, as well as monitor any new initiatives and projects. No precise monitoring indicators have been provided at this stage but it is assumed that these will be developed as part of the management plan. The outline identified three broad areas of monitoring which include environmental, historical and cultural as well as socio-cultural monitoring. ICOMOS considers that more specific indicators need to be developed as part of the management plan to allow judgements on the changes and condition of the property. ICOMOS therefore recommends the development of a detailed monitoring system including specific indicators, which can provide references for future judgement.

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ICOMOS considers that specific monitoring indicators should be developed to allow for anticipation of threats and challenges and adequate monitoring of the property.

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## 7 Conclusions

The World Heritage Committee recognized the Outstanding Universal Value of Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex in its decision 37COM.8B.43, and highlighted its qualities as a site providing testimony to the period of the Volga Bulgars and the early capital of



the Golden Horde, as well as for its religious associations and its memorial value as the location in which Islam was introduced and accepted by the Volga Bulgars in 922 AD. ICOMOS considers that the recognized Outstanding Universal Value of Bolgar could be best identified as an exceptional representation of regional cultural interchanges in the Eurasia region, which provides vivid evidence of the mutual influences and historic cross-fertilization of cultural traditions of Turkic, Finno-Ugric, Slavic and other origin, in particular during the Volga Bolgar, Golden Horde, the Kazan Khanate and the Russian state periods.

ICOMOS further considers that Bolgar could be recognized as an important reference for Islam in Tatarstan and wider parts of South-east Europe and Central Asia, in particular as the historic location in which Islam was first accepted by the Volga Bulgars and from where it was spread all over the region. It is also an important site for the national identity of the Republic of Tatarstan.

Both qualifying conditions of integrity and authenticity have been affected by recent construction and restoration activities and cannot be met with regard to the testimony of the civilization of the Volga Bulgars or the Golden Horde, as the World Heritage Committee suggested to be recognized as Outstanding Universal Value under criterion (iii). However, ICOMOS considers that criteria (ii) and (vi) can be met and that the conditions of authenticity and integrity – although vulnerable – remain sufficient to provide justification for Outstanding Universal Value in reference to these two criteria.

ICOMOS considers that the site management authorities are adequately equipped in terms of financial and human resources. The State Party submitted a revised outline, strategic objectives and directions for a management plan, which, despite continuous strong focus on visitor attraction, interpretation and presentation, highlights a number of important core areas including conservation, research and administration arrangements. The museum reserve administration has been formally converted to be the Site Management Unit.

ICOMOS considers that several infrastructure projects recently undertaken have had considerable negative impacts on the authenticity of the setting of the property, including the Memorial Sign in the centre of the property (2012), the River Boat Station (2013) as well as several exhibition buildings and new roads built on the property to connect the car park. ICOMOS considers that any future development project anticipated should be assessed by means of comprehensive Heritage Impact Assessments (HIA's) before being approved by the World Heritage Centre in consultation with the Advisory Bodies.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the property and its buffer zone are adequate and that the formal legal protection granted to the property and its buffer zone are sufficient. ICOMOS considers that the attention

given to conservation measures is adequate but notes that these are often too extensive. ICOMOS therefore recommends opting for more cautious approaches to conservation in order to respect material authenticity and to favour backfilling of archaeological excavations, where extensive and reconstructive conservation would be deemed necessary to keep these visible.

ICOMOS recommends that the management plan is finalized to include more detailed implementation strategies and action plans. ICOMOS further considers that a more detailed monitoring system, including specific indicators which provide references for the anticipation of threats and adequate monitoring of the property, need to be developed.

## 8 Recommendations

### Recommendations with respect to inscription

Recalling the decision of the World Heritage Committee at its 37<sup>th</sup> session which, "*recognizing the Outstanding Universal Value of the site, refers the nomination of the Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex, Russian Federation, back to the State Party in order to allow it, in collaboration with the Advisory Body (ICOMOS), in particular by inviting an advisory mission to the site, to take adequate measures for an inscription on the basis of criteria (iii) and (vi) at its next session.*";

ICOMOS re-affirms its original evaluation of the property, and its findings that integrity and authenticity of the property have been affected by recent construction and restoration activities and cannot be met with regard to the testimony of the civilization of the Volga Bulgars or the Golden Horde as the World Heritage Committee suggested to be recognized as Outstanding Universal Value under criterion (iii).

As the World Heritage Committee has already determined that the property should be inscribed, it is the considered view of ICOMOS that this could now be justified only in relation to criteria (ii) and (vi);

Under these circumstances, ICOMOS recommends that the Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex, Russian Federation, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (ii) and (vi)**.

ICOMOS recommends that, if the property is inscribed at the 38<sup>th</sup> session, the World Heritage Committee should invite the State Party to submit by 1<sup>st</sup> February 2016 a report on the below-mentioned recommendations.

### Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

The historical and archaeological site of Bolgar lies on the shores of the Volga River south of its confluence with the River Kama. It contains evidence of the medieval city of

Bolgar, an early settlement of the civilization of Volga Bulgars, which existed between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Bolgar was also the first capital of the Golden Horde in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and remained an important trade centre in the time of the Kazan Khanate. The site preserves its spatial context with its historic moat and walls as well as its religious and civil structures, including a former mosque, a minaret and several mausoleums, bath houses, remains of a Khan's palace and shrine.

Bolgar represents the historical cultural exchanges and transformations of Eurasia over several centuries, which played a pivotal role in the formation of civilizations, customs and cultural traditions. The Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex provides remarkable evidence of historic continuity and cultural diversity, the mutual influences of cultural traditions in particular at the time of the Volga Bulgars, the Golden Horde, the Kazan Khanate and the Russian state. Also, Bolgar was always located at the crossroads of trade, and economic, cultural and political communications and illustrates the interaction of nomadic and urban cultures. The historical and archaeological complex of Bolgar is a symbolic reminder of the acceptance of Islam by the Volga-Bulgars in 922 AD and, to Tatar Muslims, remains sacred and a pilgrimage destination.

**Criterion (ii):** The historical and archaeological complex of Bolgar illustrates the exchange and re-integration of several subsequent cultural traditions and rulers and reflects these in influences on architecture, city-planning and landscape design. The property illustrates the cultural exchanges of Turkic, Finno-Ugric, Slavic and other traditions. Evidence of exchanges in architectural styles includes wooden constructions which emerged in the forest-rich region, the steppe component of Turkic language tribes, oriental influences connected with the adoption of Islam and European-Russian styles which dominated after it became part of the Russian state.

**Criterion (vi):** Bolgar remains a regional reference point for Tatar Muslims and likely other Muslim groups of the wider region in Eurasia. It carries associated religious and spiritual values which are illustrated predominantly during the annual pilgrimage season. Bolgar provides evidence of an early and northernmost Muslim enclave established in connection with the official acceptance of Islam by the Volga Bulgars as the state religion in 922 AD, which had a lasting impact on the cultural and architectural development of the wider geographical region.

#### Integrity

The historical and archaeological complex of Bolgar contains the complete area of layers of historic occupation by various consecutive civilizations on the upper plateau of the site and the outer ramparts of the city. It also integrates early parts of a Volga Bolgar settlement located in the northern lower level of the site and on the closest Volga island. The potential of large sectors of

archaeological resources remains unknown so that the site retains strong potential for archaeological research.

The integrity of the property has suffered adverse effects from development over the past 3 centuries and the State Party has committed to improving the situation by removing a tent village set up for pilgrims during the annual pilgrimage season from the centre of the property. Although it appears that the construction of new infrastructure on the site has reached its completion, more sensitive planning is needed in the case of any future interventions or visitor interpretation and prior Heritage Impact Assessments (HIA's) are absolutely necessary before any interventions can be approved by the World Heritage Centre in consultation with the Advisory Bodies.

#### Authenticity

The number of architectural and other interventions on site is substantial and has affected the authenticity of the overall complex and, in one instance, reduced the archaeological evidence providing testimony to the Volga Bolgar civilization. These also include past conservation activities at the property which included reconstructions and partial rebuilding works. In other places, restoration measures conducted were extensive, sometimes without clear justification and have reduced authenticity in material, substance, craftsmanship and setting.

On the other hand, the property's ramparts and moat remain fully authentic, as well as the large-scale archaeological areas yet to be researched and surveyed. In addition, the religious reference function of Bolgar to Tatar Muslims retains a high level of authenticity, in particular with regard to the location, spirit and feeling which have not been affected by the recent addition of religious structures, built in support of the religious values. Tatar Muslims continue to venerate Bolgar as the origin of Islam in this region, and conduct annual pilgrimages to the historical and archaeological complex.

#### Management and protection requirements

The monuments and archaeological remains within the property, including the so-called Cathedral Mosque, Black Chamber, North and East Mausoleums, the Khan's Shrine, the Smaller Minaret and the Church of the Dormition, are registered as cultural heritage of national significance under the Federal Law on Properties of Cultural Heritage (Monuments of History and Culture) of Peoples of the Russian Federation (2002). In addition, the complete Bolgar State Historical and Architectural Cultural Preserve was placed on the List of Properties of Historic Importance based on the Edict of the President of the Russian Federation on the Confirmation of the Federal (all-Russia) Historical and Cultural Heritage List (1995). In 2013, the State Party adjusted the General Plan and Scheme of Bolgar Territorial Planning, which now stipulates that any significant changes in the buffer zone must get the permission of federal, regional and municipal executive bodies. It seems further understood that developments on site are only to be permitted in exceptional circumstances after approval from the

UNESCO World Heritage Centre in consultation with the Advisory Bodies.

The Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex has its own management authority (site administration), which employs several academic heritage specialists in their respective fields. The administration is divided into four key sections dedicated to exhibitions and presentation, museum collections, research and public outreach as well as maintenance and security. The site administration reports via the Head Office for Conservation, Use, Promotion and Public Protection of Cultural Heritage to the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Tatarstan. The funding available to the administration is generous and should preferably be utilized for non-intrusive research and adequate conservation and consolidation measures, rather than the creation of constructions which might not respect the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the property.

At the time of submission of the revised nomination dossier for this property, primary directions for a management plan were established and a number of focus areas have been identified including the coordination and administration of the property, as well as the continued study, conservation and management of archaeological sites and materials. These directions indicated that future research would focus on important questions about the site's development and peculiarities of its formation and be based on non-destructive methods including technologies and methods used in natural sciences, aerial mapping and processing of space satellite information. The management plan needs to be finalized and be kept up-to-date to ensure the best possible management practices for the property.

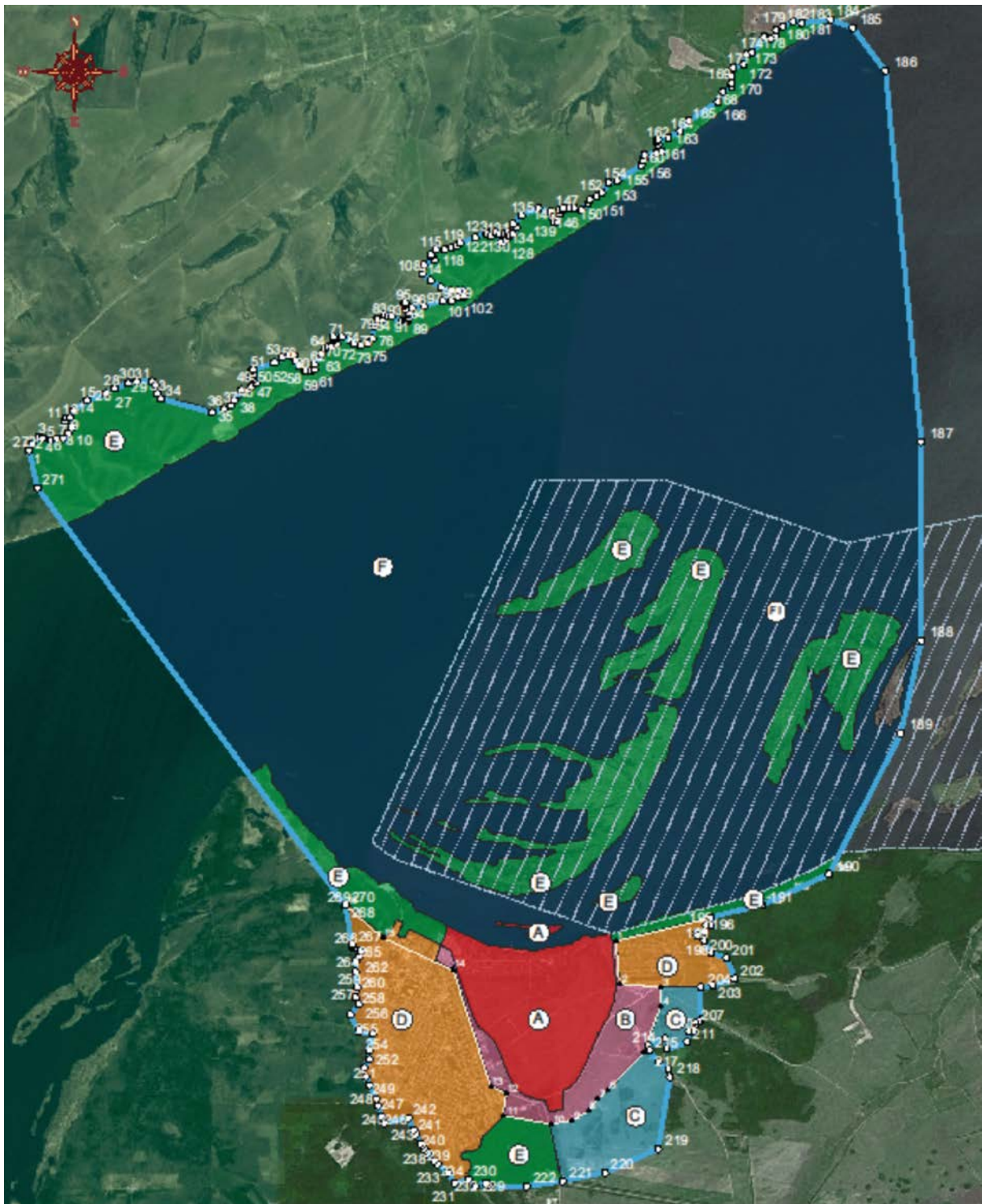
#### **Additional recommendations**

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

- Finalizing the Management Plan including strategies for implementation of the strategic objectives and directions as well as activity schedules and quality assessment schemes;
- Developing a monitoring system with precise indicators to observe and document the state of conservation of the property;
- Formally confirming its commitment to move the pilgrimage village outside of the site boundaries, as assured during the Advisory Mission in 2013 and presenting a plan and timeframe for the relocation;
- Creating a comprehensive site archive and store, which collects all data and reports and as far as possible all archaeological finds, in a centralized facility in the vicinity of the site;
- Reducing some of the conservation works already undertaken, in particular surface treatments of historic materials in the vicinity of restored additions,

which prevent distinguishing between historic and added materials,

- Refraining from developing new projects or visitor infrastructure on the site, except following the explicit approval of the World Heritage Centre in consultation with the Advisory Bodies;
- Submitting, by 1 February 2016, a report to the World Heritage Centre outlining progress made in the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 40<sup>th</sup> session in 2016.



Map showing the revised boundaries of the nominated property



Aerial view of the archaeological and historical complex of Bolgar



The "Cathedral Mosque"



The Khan's Shrine and the Smaller Minaret



Ruins of the White Chamber