
Ancient City of Bosra (Syrian Arab Republic) No 22 Bis

1 Basic data

State Party

Syrian Arab Republic

Name of property

Ancient City of Bosra

Location

Governorate of Deraa
Syrian Arab Republic

Inscription

1980

Brief description

Bosra, once the capital of the Roman province of Arabia, was an important stopover on the ancient caravan route to Mecca. A magnificent 2nd-century Roman theatre, early Christian ruins and several mosques are found within its great walls.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

10 March 2017

2 Issues raised

Background

The Ancient City of Bosra was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1980 on the basis of criteria (i), (iii) and (vi). A retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value was adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2010 (Decision 34 COM 8E). The property consists of four components totalling 99.8 ha: the Archaeological site area (90.4 ha), the East Pond area (1.2 ha), the Field Hippodrome area (4.7 ha) and the Natural Spring (3.5 ha).

At the time of the World Heritage inscription in 1980, no buffer zone was provided. However, following Unesco missions in 1997-2002, the State Party has established a single encompassing buffer zone of 200.4 ha in 2003. This buffer zone was not presented to the World Heritage Committee for approval, and therefore forms part of this application for minor boundary modification.

Together with the other five World Heritage properties in Syria, the Ancient City of Bosra was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2013 (Decision 37 COM 7B.57) due to the dangers posed by continuing and severe conflicts since 2011. Since that time, monitoring of the property has been difficult. A Damage

Assessment Report was able to be made in June 2015, and damages due to illegal constructions, stone collapses, illegal excavations and damage to many of the historic buildings have been reported by the State Party.

In 2015, a temporary ceasefire agreement was broken in this area, which resulted in further severe damages and illegal excavations; and in 2016, the World Heritage Committee acknowledged the efforts of the local communities to raise awareness of the need to protect the property despite the very difficult circumstances (Decision 40 COM 7A.17).

Modification

The proposed modifications to the property boundary are based on evidence from excavations that establish the contributory historical and archaeological significance of several additional areas. Three site elements are proposed for incorporation in the property boundary:

- Odeon Area, 4.9 ha (site element 12) is located to the southwest of Component 1 and includes remains of the necropolis, Tell Aswad, Roman cemetery, and the round-formed Odeon, dating to the middle of the 1st century and beginning of the 2nd century AD;
- Martyrs Graveyard Area, 7.5 ha (site element 45), located to the south of Component 1 and joins components 1 and 3 together. In addition to the Martyrs Graveyard, this area includes the Ayyubid Tomb;
- Natural Spring Water area, 4.0 ha (site element 46) is located to the northwest of Component 1 and joins components 1 and 4 together. The natural spring is believed to have supplied water to the site.

The effect of the proposed modifications is to join three of the former four components into a single component boundary, rendering the serial property of four components into a property of two components. Most of the land in the areas proposed for inclusion are owned by the State (68%).

Each of these areas is currently located within the buffer zone for this property. The total of the three elements proposed for addition to the property is 16.4 ha; and if approved, the total property area will be 116.2 ha, an increase of approximately 14%.

The State Party considers that the proposed boundary modification will provide a more coherent boundary for this property and include additional archaeological elements that are associated with the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

The property is managed by Directorate of Antiquities and Museums, which provides staff and financial resources. There is no management plan for the site, although the 'Bosra Plan' provides management, information and presentation of the property.

The property is protected under the Antiquities Law 222, as amended in 1999. The State Party advises that revisions to the Antiquities Law commenced in 2016 ('Law of Syrian Cultural Heritage'). The final draft is under review, but the new law is yet to be promulgated.

The proposed minor boundary modification also includes the formal recognition of the buffer zone (200.4 ha), which was established by the State Party in 2003. It encloses all the components of the property.

The proposed buffer zone aims to:

- Protect the visual setting of the property;
- Respect the visual integrity of the designed landscape, including its visual setting;
- Protect the views and vistas, which were key to the design of Bosra.

Legal protection of the buffer zone is provided by Ministerial Decision no. 380/A, dated 14 September 2003, and consists of four zones of protection that provide specific building height limits, site coverage and building design requirements: in zones 1 and 2 (located to the south of the property), additional floors (ground and first floors) to a maximum height of 8 metres are allowed; buildings in zone 2 should be dressed in basalt; in zone 3 (largely agricultural land to the north and north-west of the property), construction is allowed for storage buildings only, no more than 20m² in area, with a maximum height of 3 metres; and in zone 4 (located to the east of the property), trees and seasonal crops can be planted, and constructions of one floor with an average building height of 4 metres are permitted, along with the possibility of having an underground basement. Construction is allowed in sites over 1,000 m² in area with 120 m² built upon.

ICOMOS considers that the proposed modifications to the boundary will strengthen the integrity of this property by incorporated additional related archaeological features, providing a more coherent boundary.

ICOMOS supports the formalisation of the buffer zone, which was established by the State Party in 2003 following a series of missions to this property. ICOMOS notes that the objectives of the buffer zone relate to the visual setting, and considers that the regulations concerning building heights in the zones of the buffer zone could be more precise. ICOMOS furthermore considers that the objectives of the buffer zone should be strengthened in relation to the protection of archaeological features, particularly those associated with the ancient water supply system (eg. elements associated with bringing water from outside wadis such as wadi ar-rakik and wadi az-Zeidi and related canals and aqueducts).

3 ICOMOS Recommendations

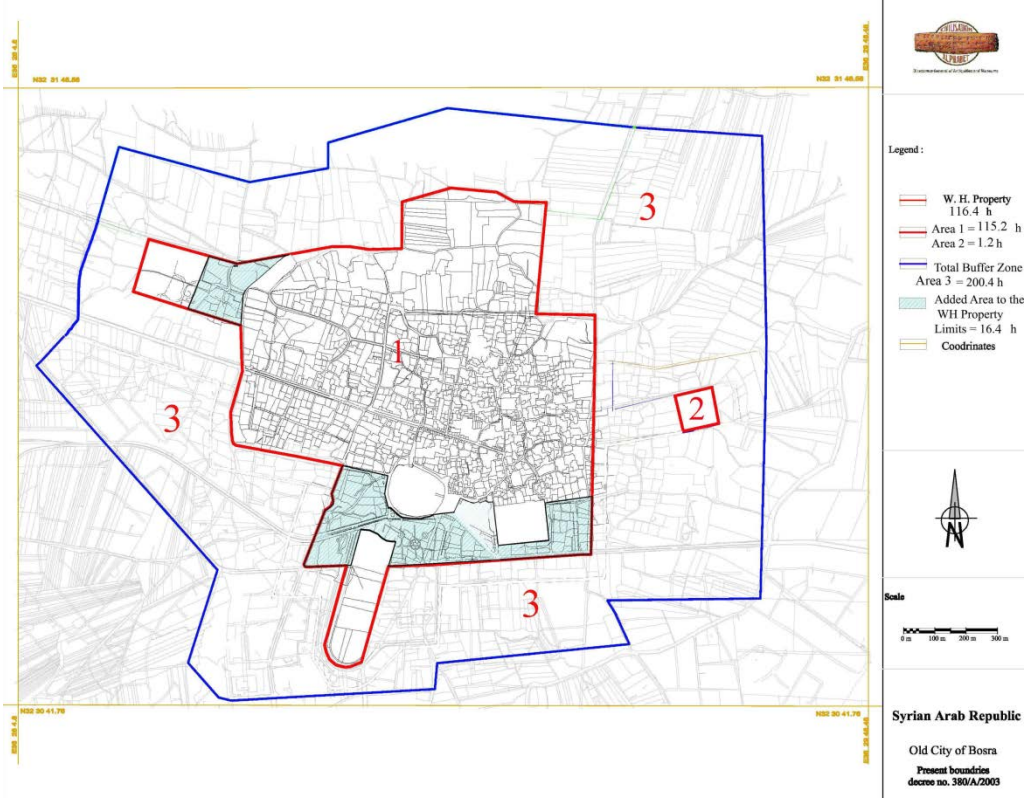
Recommendation with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the proposed minor modification to the boundary and the proposed buffer zone of the Ancient City of Bosra, Syrian Arab Republic **be approved.**

Additional recommendations

To further support the protection and management, ICOMOS recommends that the State Party take the following further actions pending the improvement in the situation of conflict that has affected this property:

- a) Develop clear objectives for the buffer zone and provide more precise regulations concerning the heights of buildings in the buffer zone, particularly in Zones 1, 2 and 4,
- b) Develop the Management Plan for the entire property and its buffer zone, taking into account the challenges of potential post-war reconstruction,
- c) Promulgate and implement the revised Antiquities Law (Law of Syrian Cultural Heritage) as soon as possible,
- d) Continue to improve the understanding and protection of the ancient water supply system;



Map showing the revised boundaries of the property and of the proposed buffer zone