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# **Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery**

## **(Republic of Georgia)**

### **No 710bis**

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**Official name as proposed by the State Party**  
Gelati Monastery

#### **Location**

Tkibuli district  
Republic of Georgia

#### **Brief description**

*Gelati Monastery is currently one part of the serial property of Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery. This major boundary modification is for the reduction of the property to enclose only Gelati monastery and its monastic precinct.*

On the lower southern slopes of the mountains of the Northern Caucasus, Gelati monastery belongs to the 'golden age' of medieval Georgia, a period of political strength and economic growth between the reigns of King David IV 'the Builder' (1089-1125) and Queen Tamar (1184-1213). It was David who in 1106 began building the monastery near his capital Kutaisi on a wooded hill above the river Tskaltsitela. The main church was completed in 1130 in the reign of his son and successor Demetré. Further churches were added to the monastery throughout the 13th and early 14th centuries.

Gelati was not simply a monastery: it was also a centre of science and education, and the Academy established there was one of the most important centres of culture in ancient Georgia.

The monastery is richly decorated with mural paintings from the 12th to 17th centuries, as well as a 12th century mosaic in the apse of the main church, depicting the Virgin with Child flanked by archangels. The monastery also contains the tomb of David the Builder.

#### **Category of property**

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is currently a serial nomination of two *monuments*.

The proposed modification is for a reduction to one single *monument*.

## **1 Basic data**

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

None

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

29 January 2014

#### **Background**

The currently serial property of *Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery* was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1994 on the basis of criterion (iv). It was inscribed on the World Heritage List in Danger in 2010.

At its 37th session (Phnom Penh, 2013), the World Heritage Committee, in decision 37 COM 7A.32:

4. *Expresses its deep regret that despite previous decisions the re-building of Bagrati Cathedral has been completed and considers that the Bagrati Cathedral has been altered to such an extent that its authenticity has been irreversibly compromised and that it no longer contributes to the justification for the criterion for which the property was inscribed;*

5. *Requests the State Party to submit, by 1 February 2014, a request for a major boundary modification for the property to allow Gelati Monastery to justify the criterion on its own;*

The State Party submitted a major boundary nomination on 31st January 2014 and this was assessed by ICOMOS. At its 39th session (Bonn, 2015), the World Heritage Committee, in decision 39 COM 8B.35, referred the major boundary modification of "Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery", Georgia, back to the State Party in order to allow it to strengthen management arrangements at Gelati Monastery and in particular to:

- a) *Clarify management procedures and responsibilities of the various agencies and organisations involved;*
- b) *Provide details as to how a higher level of commitment might be put in place by the major stakeholders to ensure adequate protection and management of the property;*
- c) *Submit the revised draft Management Plan for review;*
- d) *Provide a timetable for when physical and visual protection for the buffer zone will be formalised and when clear guidelines and guidance for management and any development within the buffer zone will be put in place;*

The World Heritage Committee also recommended that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) *Giving urgent attention to providing adequate resources for long-term programmes of restoration for the fabric of the monastery and its mural paintings;*
- b) *Avoiding further reconstruction work particularly on the excavated ruins north of the Academy building;*
- c) *Developing a clear system of documentation for any conservation and restoration work;*
- d) *Putting in place tri-dimensional measuring and monitoring to help gain a better understanding of the overall stability of the various buildings in the monastery;*
- e) *Submitting any future proposals for a visitor centre, or new visitor arrangements, or for new accommodation for monks, to the World Heritage Committee for examination, at the earliest opportunity and before any commitments*

are made, in accordance with paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines.

On 1 February 2017, the State Party submitted supplementary information in relation to this Committee decision. This included the following: the Management Plan 2017, the Action Plan 2017-2021 (Annex to the Management Plan), and the Amendments to General Conservation and Rehabilitation Plan, 2008, in the light of recent excavations, including proposals for covering excavated cellar areas next to the Academy; the location of new domestic quarters for monks and to outline of new visitor access arrangements.

### Consultations

ICOMOS consulted several independent experts.

### Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 26 to 30 October 2014.

### Additional information received by ICOMOS

ICOMOS sent a letter to the State Party on 22 December 2014 requesting:

- Clarification of the responsibilities of the various agencies and organisations involved in the management of the site;
- Details as to how a higher level of commitment might be put in place by the major stakeholders to ensure adequate protection and management of the property;
- Details as to how adequate resources will, or might, be made available for the long-term programme of restoration of the fabric of the monastery and its wall paintings;
- A timetable for when physical and visual protection for the buffer zone will be formalised and when clear guidelines and guidance for management and any development within the buffer zone will be put in place.

A response to ICOMOS' letter was received by the World Heritage Centre on 4 March 2015. As this was after the 28 February 2015 deadline set out in the *Operational Guidelines* for submitting additional information, the material has not been reviewed by ICOMOS.

The State Party provided further information on conservation work in its State of Conservation report submitted on 30 January 2015.

### Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

10 March 2017

## 2 The property

### Description

The two sites of the serial property, Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery, although nominated together because of their historical and spiritual connections, are 12 km apart, are of different dates, and illustrate different stages of Georgian medieval architecture and culture.

The major boundary modification proposes a reduction to the property, involving the removal of Bagrati Cathedral, and a justification for Gelati Monastery to satisfy criterion (iv) on its own.

The following description focuses on Gelati Monastery.

#### Gelati Monastery

The monastic precinct is surrounded by an enclosing wall within which are a main Church of the Nativity of the Virgin (1106 AD), the churches of St George and St Nicholas (both 13<sup>th</sup> century AD), a bell tower (13<sup>th</sup> century AD), two gates, the former Academy building (partly 12<sup>th</sup> century AD), and a number of dwellings and subsidiary structures including a building used as accommodation for monks since the 1990s when monastic life was renewed.

The whole complex is sited on a natural terrace with wooded hills above and a village and river below. The main church of the monastery, the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin, is flanked by the Church of St George to the west, with the two-storeyed Church of St Nicholas and the Academy building behind it.

#### Church of the Nativity of the Virgin

The Church of the Nativity of the Virgin was begun by King David the Builder in 1106 and completed under his son, King Demetre I in 1130. King David's tomb is in the south porch which was the original entrance.

The church is constructed of yellowish limestone blocks in a cross-in-square plan, with the dome resting on the corners of apse walls and on two massive piers. To the west is a narthex, from which three large doors lead to the church. The façades of the church are decorated with blind arcades and their turned columns and capitals echo those around the windows.

The chapels of St Andrew and St Marina to the east and west of the southern porch date from the 12<sup>th</sup> century although the latter was reconstructed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The northern porch and the chapel of the Saviour to its east date from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. The second chapel of St Marina was added in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Murals and Mosaics

Within, the main church is richly decorated with mosaics and paintings. The mosaics were executed between 1125 and 1130 and cover around 50 square metres of the conch of the apse. They depict the Virgin with Child flanked by archangels on a luminous gold background.

The lower parts were damaged in a fire of 1510 and replaced with painting in the following decades.

The oldest wall paintings, executed between 1125 and 1130, are found in the narthex. The centre of the vault features the Ascension of the Cross by the Archangels, while the remainder of the vault and the upper registers of the walls display the seven ecumenical councils, while around the window is St Euphemia's Miracle at the Council of Chalcedon. The murals are among the best surviving examples of 12th century Georgian wall painting. Here we have the earliest surviving representation of the seven ecumenical councils in the East Christian world. Apparently, the murals of Gelati reflect the disputes between the Diophysites and Monophysites that took place in the Caucasus in the early 12th century.

The rest of the mural paintings in the church, covering much of the remaining interior, date from the period after a fire of 1510 and were executed in several stages during the 16th century. As well as images of Christ Pantokrator and the prophets, the Divine Liturgy, the Communion of the Apostles, and scenes from the life of the Virgin, the murals also contain numerous portraits of royal donors. They include more than 40 portraits of kings, queens, and high clerics and are unparalleled in Georgia.

Murals are also found in the chapels of the church. The most significant are the wall paintings in the Chapel of St Andrew commissioned by the King David VI Narin and dating from 1291 and 1292. They contain a double portrait of the king.

These paintings reflect the zenith of mural painting in Georgia. While Georgian mural paintings show influences from Byzantine style, during their peak in the 11-13<sup>th</sup> centuries a unique Georgian hagiography emerged that diverged from Byzantine forms.

Later murals are found in the first Chapel of St Marina which belongs to the so-called folk tradition which prevailed in West Georgia in the 16th century. Murals in other chapels date from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries.

The Church of St George was constructed to the east of the main church in the mid-13th century. It is a reduced copy of the main church, but with more elaborate stone decoration typical of its date. Its murals were painted between 1565 and 1583 by order of the Catholicos Evdemon I Chkhetidze and King George II of Imereti.

The Church of St Nicholas, to the west of the main church, dates from the late 13th century. The church is two-storied, which makes it unique in Georgian church architecture. All four sides of the lower storey consist of arches, supported by corner piers.

The Bell-Tower was constructed in the 13th century above a pool and spring to the northwest of the main church.

The Academy, a large rectangular hall to the west of the Church of St Nicholas, according to established opinion, housed the Gelati Academy and was founded by David the Builder. It is thus considered to date from the foundation of the monastery.

The Academy was restored in the 20th century after falling into ruin. In the past few years excavations have been undertaken to the north of the Academy building and a complex system of foundation walls and cellars of different ages has been uncovered. These contain an underground tunnel linking between the so-called wine cellar of the Academy to other buildings.

#### Royal graveyard

Within the four hectares monastic enclosure are royal graves, reflecting the monastery's role as a burial place for the Georgian Royal family.

#### Domestic buildings

There are also three 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century domestic buildings used by the church.

#### History and development

Christianity became established in Georgia as early as 1st century when it was adopted as the state religion in what was then Iberia (East Georgia). Stone churches are believed to have been constructed from the 4th century onwards. The characteristics of the ecclesiastical architecture which emerged, were influenced by its location at the interface of Byzantine and Sassanian Iranian cultures.

In the 9th century, a strong Kingdom was formed in South Georgia (mostly in what is now Turkey) ruled by the Bagration dynasty. In late 10th century, King Bagrat III united most of Georgia under his rule. He moved his capital to Kutaisi, (in the centre of what is now Georgia) an ancient city reputed by the Greeks to be the final destination of the Argonauts and the residence of the legendary Colchian King Aëtes. In Kutaisi, Bagrat III built a new cathedral (completed in 1003) known as Bagrati after his name.

The revival of Georgian culture that started with the unification of the country continued in the 11th century but was hampered by political instability, resulting from invasions of Seljuk Turks in the 1060s.

It was David IV, crowned king in 1089 and later named "the Builder", who completed the unification of Georgia as a result of reforms to the army and administration, and alliances with the Crusaders that allowed him to expel the Seljuk Turks from the Caucasus. His reign is the beginning of what is known as the "Golden Age" of Medieval Georgia when Georgian culture flourished. This period lasted for around 120 years until the end of the reign of Queen Tamar (1184-1213).

The Gelati Monastery and the Gelati Academy both reflected the cultural and intellectual development of this Golden Age. King David wanted to create a centre of knowledge and education of the highest international standard of his times. He made every effort to gather the most eminent intellectuals to his Academy such as Johannes Petritzi, a Neo-Platonic philosopher best known for his translations of Proclus, and Arsen Ikaltoeli, a learned monk, whose translations of doctrinal and polemical works were compiled into his *Dogmatikon*, or book of teachings, influenced by Aristotelianism. He went on to found the smaller Ikalto Academy.

Gelati also had a scriptorium where monastic scribes copied manuscripts (although its location is not known). Among several books created there the best known is an amply illuminated 12th century gospel, which is kept in the National Centre of Manuscripts.

As a royal monastery, Gelati possessed extensive lands and was richly endowed with icons, including the well-known gold mounted Icon of the Virgin of Khakhuli (now housed in the Georgian National Museum).

After the disintegration of Georgia in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Gelati monastery became the property of the Kings of Imereti. In 1510, the Monastery was partially burnt by the invading Turks. King Bagrat III restored the buildings and in 1519, established an Episcopal See. Between 1565 and 1578, the See of the Catholicos of West Georgia was moved from Bichvinta (in Abkhazia) to Gelati and the Church of St George became a Catholicate Cathedral.

In 1759, the monastery was again set on fire by the Lezghians (from Dagestan) and almost immediately King Solomon I made efforts to restore it. After the conquest of the Kingdom of Imereti by the Russian Empire in 1810, the Catholicate of West Georgia and the Gelati Episcopal See were abolished. However, the monastery continued to function until the Soviet occupation of Georgia. In 1923, it was closed and turned into a branch of the Kutaisi Museum. Religious services and monastic life resumed in Gelati in 1988.

By the early 20th century, the structures of the major buildings of the Gelati monastery, except for the Academy, were in a relatively good condition. Some conservation and restoration works were undertaken in 1962 and 1963. A major conservation programme was begun in 2009 and is still ongoing.

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

#### **Comparative analysis**

The main purpose of the analysis included in the nomination dossier is to demonstrate that Gelati on its own does not have any comparators within Georgia that might also have similar value and attributes.

The analysis shows how the general layout of Gelati illustrates the Georgian monastic architectural tradition of free standing buildings within a walled courtyard. Although the same general concept can be seen in medieval monasteries such as Ikalto, Nekresi, Shiomgvime, Martvili, etc, none of them is as large as Gelati or as elaborate in terms of their architectural form or decoration.

The cross-in-square plan and multi-domed form developed in East Georgia in the 10th and 11th centuries. It can be seen in the Cathedral of Bichvinta (now in Abkhazia) which was built by King David III in the 10th century and may have influenced Gelati. At Gelati, though, the unusual width of the main dome of the main church and the abundance of light in the interior recall middle Byzantine churches and reflect its royal status.

The system of façade decoration with blind arches and wide window frames was developed in East and South Georgia in the 10th century. Around 1000, it was introduced into West Georgia being notably applied in Bagrati Cathedral, which must have been the source of inspiration for the builders of Gelati.

The main church of Gelati displays a masterful synthesis of these architectural developments in and outside Georgia. The creative skill and proficiency of its architect makes the church the most outstanding example of such synthesis now surviving intact in Georgia.

What further differentiates Gelati from other monasteries are its interior mosaics and murals. Study of the plaster in the apse attested that from the beginning, the conch was prepared for mosaic decoration, while the apse was prepared for murals in *secco* technique. Thus, the mosaic was incorporated into the original decoration of the church. The combination of mosaics and murals is rare in Middle Byzantine churches. Although the mosaic reflects the artistic principles of the Middle Byzantine mosaic art, its images are also rooted in local Georgian art. The practice of decorating churches with mosaics was not widely spread in Georgia. The few other examples are either preserved in small fragments (Tsromi) or completely destroyed (Akhiza). The mosaic is the only well-preserved mosaic decoration of a sanctuary in the larger historic region of Eastern Asia Minor and the Caucasus.

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis demonstrates that within current day Georgia, and within greater Georgia, Gelati is the best example of a Georgian monastery from the 12th century onwards due to its considerable size, clear spatial concept, and the high architectural and decorative quality of its main buildings. It reflects in an exemplary way the cultural and intellectual developments of the "Golden Age" of Georgia. After the reconstruction of Bagrati Cathedral, the property has become the most distinguished reflection of architecture of this Golden Age.

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

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

Gelati is being nominated alone to express similar values to those for the inscribed property of Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati monastery.

The original justification for inscription of the serial property on the basis of criterion (iv) was for the way both Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery represent the highest flowering of the architecture of medieval Georgia.

As set out above, the two sites illustrate different stages of Georgian medieval architecture and culture. While Bagrati was constructed by King Bagrat III in 1000 and reflects the culture emerging at the time of the country's unification, Gelati was built between 1106 and 1131 during the reign of David IV, known as David the Builder, and his son, at the beginning of the more stable Golden Age that followed the expulsion of the Seljuk Turks in 1121. Over a century separates their construction, they reflect different political circumstances and uses and, while Bagrati was badly damaged by the Turks in 1691 and was a ruin at the time of inscription, Gelati has survived as a complete monastic ensemble.

The following summarises the reasons the State Party has put forward for how Gelati justifies specific aspects of the flowering of medieval architecture in Georgia.

Gelati Monastery is:

- The highest expression of the artistic idiom of the architecture of the Georgian "Golden Age".
- Distinguished for its harmony with its natural setting, a well thought-out overall planning concept, and the high technical and artistic quality of its buildings.
- A magnificent architectural ensemble that illustrates the Georgian appropriation of the Imperial idea of power.
- One of the most powerful visual symbols of Medieval Georgia and the most vivid reflection of cultural and intellectual development in the "Golden Age", which was a significant expression of the power and high culture of Eastern Christianity at this time.

ICOMOS considers that this justification in general is appropriate but that it should be augmented with specific references to the considerable size, clear spatial concept, and the high architectural and decorative quality of the main buildings of the monastery, and that clearer details should be provided of the main attributes. Furthermore, ICOMOS considers that Gelati's royal associations, its relationship to the royal capital of Kutaisi and its role as one of the most important centres of culture and learning in ancient Georgia should also be noted.

ICOMOS considers that these additions also reflect the views set out within the 1993 ICOMOS evaluation report that stated:

*"Gelati Monastery is a well preserved historical ensemble. It is of special importance for its architecture, its mosaics, its wall paintings, and its enamel and metal work. Gelati was not simply a monastery: it was a centre of science and education, and the academy established in the Monastery was one of the most important centres of culture in ancient Georgia. By virtue of its high architectural quality and the outstanding examples of art that it houses, Gelati Monastery is a unique Georgian cultural treasury, and a rare case in the history of world culture."*

### **Integrity and authenticity**

#### **Integrity**

ICOMOS considers that no important original feature of the monastery from the 12th and 13th centuries have been lost during the centuries. The whole monastic precinct is included in the nominated property and contains all the buildings of the monastery; it thus fully meets the notion of wholeness. All the attributes necessary to express the Outstanding Universal Value are present and included in the area.

All of the main buildings of the monastery as well as the buildings added in the 13th century are intact but not all are in a good state of conservation.

ICOMOS considers that there are also vulnerabilities related to the buffer zone and wider setting. Although the natural setting of the monastery has generally been preserved, some development pressures exist, but the level of threats is low and the processes are currently under control.

#### **Authenticity**

ICOMOS considers that the fabric and decoration and the spatial planning and layout of the property are authentic in form and design.

Overall, the architectural forms, spatial arrangement and decoration fully convey their value.

For a long period, major parts the mural paintings were in a bad state of conservation. . With the repair of the roofs, the process of degradation has been slowed down and restoration work undertaken. Although vulnerable, the paintings are in authentic state (see Conservation below).

The one area where there is a loss of authenticity is in the Academy building. At the time of inscription, in 1994, the Academy building was a roofless ruin. Although ICOMOS "expressed grave doubts about the projects being discussed ... for the re-roofing of the Academy building at Gelati", in 2009 the upper parts of the ruin's walls were rebuilt, a new wooden roof constructed and the interiors re-shaped. Although a usable space has been created, the building has lost its atmosphere and spirit and the work has not been undertaken on the basis of evidence of what existed before it became a ruin. There

has thus been some loss of authenticity for this important element of the monastery.

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ICOMOS considers that overall the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met although authenticity has been to a degree weakened by the re-roofing of the Academy, and is vulnerable due to the fragility of some of the wall paintings.

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

Both Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery together were inscribed in 1994 under criterion (iv): *Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery represent the highest flowering of the architecture of medieval Georgia.*

Gelati Monastery alone is now being justified under cultural criteria (iv) as follows:

Criterion (iv): *be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;*

Gelati Monastery is the masterpiece of the architecture of the "Golden Age" of Georgia and the best representative of its architectural style, characterized by the full facing of smoothly hewn large blocks, perfectly balanced proportions, and the exterior decoration of blind arches.

The main church of the monastery is one of the most important examples of the cross-in-square architectural type that had a crucial role in the East Christian church architecture from the 7th century onwards. Gelati is one of the largest Medieval Orthodox monasteries, distinguished for its harmony with its natural setting and a well thought-out overall planning concept.

The main church of the Gelati Monastery is the only Medieval monument in the larger historic region of Eastern Asia Minor and the Caucasus that still has well-preserved mosaic decoration, comparable with the best Byzantine mosaics, as well as having the largest ensemble of paintings of the middle Byzantine, late Byzantine, and post-Byzantine periods in Georgia, including more than 40 portraits of kings, queens, and high clerics and the earliest depiction of the seven Ecumenical Councils.

ICOMOS considers that the justification is appropriate.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

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ICOMOS considers that criterion (iv) can be justified for Gelati alone and that Outstanding Universal Value of Gelati Monastery has been demonstrated as a specific aspect of the flowering of the architecture of medieval Georgia.

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## **4 Factors affecting the property**

ICOMOS considers that potential threats are not negligible, but most are restricted.

The main vulnerability is the lack for a legally agreed boundary for the Church's ownership (see Ownership below). There is an urgent need to resolve these issues as currently there are no precise reference points to define the territory of the Gelati Monastery and, apparently, since 2013 several newly defined land plots have been registered to private owners adjacent to the land occupied by the Gelati Monastery, all of which creates legal uncertainty.

Threats from development in future appear to be unlikely, if the extensive proposed buffer zone is effectively managed.

Traffic of heavy trucks from a nearby existing stone quarry do result in noise and pollution, although, the impact on the property is fairly limited. ICOMOS notes that no extension of its activities is currently planned. Furthermore, the Master Plan provides possible solutions to resolve this issue, notably with a proposed new road access to the quarry. The supplementary information submitted in 2017 does not provide any further information on the proposed road, although the Management Plan highlights the issue of lorry traffic as a disturbing factor for which the government and the owner are presently discussing options to solve this problem.

Should the number of monks increase considerably, the present monastic buildings would not be spacious enough to host all of them. The Conservation Master Plan, 2008, (see Management below) designates a possible location outside the boundary of the property where a new building of limited size (length and height) could be constructed. In the supplementary information provided in 2017 that updates part of the Master Plan, an alternative is set out. This is for a proposed living zone for monks within the monastic complex at its north-eastern corner. No details of proposed buildings have been provided or of their capacity and both would be needed before its potential impact could be assessed.

A non-negligible threat could come from new buildings for tourist infrastructure in the village. ICOMOS considers that it will be essential to ensure that new guest-houses or hotels are not built near the property and are limited in number. Furthermore, their dimensions should be strictly controlled, with a height of two storeys. The negative impact of a new three storey guest-house facing across the Tskaltsitela River is evident.

Earthquakes are a risk across the whole of Georgia. The comportment of the main buildings should be monitored for seismic activities. ICOMOS notes that the buildings have withstood earthquake dynamics for nine centuries and any risk prevention improvements should avoid irreversible measures.

A Risk Preparedness Plan is being discussed to address fire, severe weather events and significant temperature changes etc. and should be progressed. Furthermore, Georgia has a painful memory of recent war and the risk of military conflict is an unfortunate reality that can lead to evacuation or other necessary measures of protection.

As Gelati is located far enough from the city of Kutaisi, currently there are no particularly acute air pollution problems.

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ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are potential inadequately regulated development in the buffer zone and uncontrolled tourism pressures and the main vulnerability is the lack of formal registration of the Patriarchate's land rights.

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

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

The proposed boundary for the property is identical to the one as clarified in 2010 under the Retrospective Inventory process. It includes the entirety of the monastery within its surrounding stone wall, together with a strip 30 metres wide beyond the wall.

The delineation of the proposed enlarged buffer zone is based on the work of an interdisciplinary group of experts and on GIS modelling. Data used includes field observation and inventories of the many monuments in the region (58 monuments, among them 10 chapels, including the Motsameta Monastery), as well as satellite chapels of the monastery and David's watchtower. ICOMOS notes that account has also been taken of historical context and social and cultural links between the monastery and its setting, as well as visual links with Kutaisi.

The resulting buffer zone not only consists of the immediate surroundings of the monastery and the entire wooded hillside, but the visual envelope of the valley. The Minister of Culture and Monuments Protection approved the boundary on 9 January 2014.

A municipal cemetery is located to the east in the immediate surroundings of the monastery. This contributes to regular visits to the monastery by the inhabitants of the village and to intensifying relationships between the local population and the monastery site. ICOMOS noted in 2015 that its transfer to another location is apparently being considered in order to allow expansion.

In the revised Management Plan, it is suggested that as the villagers wish to have the cemetery close to the Monastery there is conflict of interest between the development of the tourist infrastructure, the possible extension of the Monastery, and the cemetery. There is

a need to define the limits of the present cemetery and for an alternative site to be identified by the Municipality.

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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**

In accordance with a Constitutional Agreement concluded between the State of Georgia and the Apostolic Orthodox Church of Georgia in 2002, all ecclesiastic buildings in Georgia, Gelati Monastery among them, are owned by the Georgian Orthodox Patriarchate of Georgia. However, it is made clear in the supplementary information provided in February 2017 that, although the Monastery is attributed to the Georgian Orthodox Church, such ownership right has not yet been registered in the Public Registry. This is because the boundaries not yet been fully agreed with private owners of adjacent plots and the State.

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ICOMOS considers that ownership rights of the Patriarchate needs to be formally registered as soon as possible in order to avoid ownership disputes.

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### **Protection**

Gelati monastery has been a Listed Monument of National Significance since the Soviet period. It was listed in the Georgian National Register of Monuments by presidential decree on 7 November 2006. It is managed under the Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage Protection. A Code on Cultural Heritage (CCH) has been developed which has chapter on the protection and management of the World Heritage in Georgia.

The buffer zone is also protected by the Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage Protection in relation to monuments and protective regimes (i.e. Individual physical and visual protection areas as stipulated in the Law). The protection area was enlarged beyond Gelati Monastery to encompass the buffer zone in a Decree of the Minister of Culture and Monument Protection dated 9 January 2014.

The conservation and protection of the natural values of the surrounding landscape are regulated by the Forest Code of Georgia, the Law on Soil Protection, the Law on Environmental Protection and the Water law that constitute the legal framework for the management of the forests and the rivers in the area.

Applications for new constructions or reconstructions, including the infrastructure and earthworks within the Buffer Zone require the approval of the Cultural Heritage Protection Council – Section for Cultural Heritage Protected Zones and Urban Heritage of the Agency.

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ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place is adequate for the property.

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## Conservation

Since 2009, works have followed a Conservation Master Plan 2008 (see Management).

### Conservation of main structures

This covers: the rehabilitation of each of the main buildings of the monastery and its perimeter wall; an archaeological study of the monastic complex and its surrounding territory; conservation and strengthening of damaged building stones; conservation of the wall paintings and the mosaic; organization of the drainage system;

Conservation of the fabric of the south and east gates, the bell tower and St. Nicholas church have been completed. Current work includes strengthening the eaves of the churches in preparation for roof restoration. The temporary roof coverings will be replaced by glazed striated tiles, fragments of which were found during archaeological excavations. So far the dome of the bell tower and domes of the churches of St. Nicholas and St. George have been covered with glazed tiles. Work on stone conservation is on-going. The work is based on the principles of 'minimal intervention', and limited to cleaning, filling in missing joint-mortar of lime, in rare cases inserting loosened stones, fixing and plastering damaged blocks.

Work on the conservation of the murals is also on-going. The main dome of the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin has recently been strengthened with the insertion of a ring beam of steel and lime mortar. A joint ICOMOS-World Bank mission visited the property in January 2015 to consider the efficacy of this intervention and to make overall recommendations on the conservation and monitoring approaches.

The mission concluded that the overall bearing structure of the church – foundation (*stereobate*), *crepidoma*, walls, arches – is mostly in satisfactory condition and do not seem to require heavy structural interventions. They nevertheless recommended further surveys and modelling as well as the introduction of a permanent monitoring system.

ICOMOS notes that the interior paintings in the main church as well as in the church of St. George have been a cause for concern. Their poor state of conservation was mainly due to former water penetration from roofs and upper windows, now stopped, and additionally to the effects of condensation. Currently, only urgent measures are being undertaken and these are executed with a high standard of professionalism.

A minor issue, but still important for long-term conservation, is the maintenance of services such as the existing historic water system, but also drainage, electricity, water under pressure, sewerage, heating-ventilation, interior and exterior lighting and safety systems. While some of these have been implemented in recent years, others are still awaiting adequate funding.

What has still not been assured are adequate resources for long-term programmes of restoration for the fabric of the monastery and its mural paintings. Also no details have been provided as to whether a clear system of documentation has been introduced for all conservation and restoration work and whether tri-dimensional measuring and monitoring has been put in place to help gain a better understanding of the overall stability of the various buildings in the monastery, both as recommended by the World Heritage Committee.

### Cellars adjoining Academy building

In 2014, ICOMOS noted that in the near future it would be important to consider and evaluate approaches to recent archaeological discoveries adjoining the Academy building, and that no new construction to shelter these remains should surmount the height of the ground before excavation.

The supplementary information provided includes proposals to cover the excavations of possibly 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> cellars with a double roof of light weight translucent sheeting supported by metal frames. The height would be considerably above the previous ground level.

Although photographs of various comparators are provided showing similar light weight construction above archaeological remains, most shown are at archaeological sites with few standing buildings. In the case of Gelati, it is crucial to consider the impact of this proposed construction on the atmosphere of the intact, and comparatively small, living monastery. From the material provided, this impact would appear to be negative. Although the excavations would be made visible to the public, the introduction of utility roofs could have a very jarring visual impact on the monastic complex.

### Protection of graves in entrance gates

The supplementary information provided in 2017 also outlines proposals for re-arranging the visitor access route to allow visitor to enter the Monastery through the southern gate, which recent archaeological investigations have shown to be the main way in. In order to facilitate greater use of this gate (and the eastern gate), there are proposals to protect gravestones with glass, for those on the floor, and with perspex, for those on the walls.

Although these proposals are modest and appropriate, they and the cellar roof highlight the need to clearly define the balance between a living monastery and an archaeological site.

### Proposals for new monastic quarters

ICOMOS considers that taking into consideration that the property is a living monastery and a monument at the same time, precise zoning of the territory of the monastery to ensure on the one hand privacy for monks and on the other hand adequate space for visitors is important.

In case the number of monks should exceed the present capacity, the location for new monastic buildings was in 2014 proposed outside the monastery grounds. The new



revisions to the Conservation Master Plan now suggest an area within the wall of the monastery, based on recent archaeological surveys. No details are provided as to the extent of new buildings or the number of monks for whom the facilities will be provided.

If brought forward, full details of proposed new buildings and of the archaeological profile of the chosen area, should be submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review by ICOMOS at the earliest opportunity and before any commitments are made, in accordance with paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

ICOMOS considers that financial and institutional support for essential conservation and restoration work on roofs and wall paintings is urgently needed in order to allow a sustained work on both. Allied to this urgent work is the need for a programme to address restoration of stone facades and provision of adequate services.

The proposals for temporary roofs over the recently exposed cellars and other protective measures underlines the need to ensure the monastery is presented as a living site with modern interventions been introduced discreetly and in a way that doesn't conflict with the visual harmony of the complex.

Details of proposals for the development of monastic buildings within the boundary wall need to be further reviewed by ICOMOS before any commitments are made.

## **Management**

Management structures and processes,  
Including traditional management processes

Day to day management is entrusted to the monastic community. Gelati Monastery (unlike many other monasteries in Georgia) is open for visitors. With its 30 monks living in the precinct, the monastery administration is responsible for the current management of the site. That comprises basic cleaning and maintenance inside the churches, general upkeep of the territory, especially for the area within the enclosure walls, and ensuring safety.

Long-term interventions are implemented by the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia. Its local representative agency is the Kutaisi Historical Architectural Museum-Reserve, which is responsible for monitoring and management of the property, maintaining it in a good state of conservation and for providing a proper methodology for interventions.

The Agency also caters for the general management framework. It issues permits and would act in case of illegal or inappropriate intervention. Finally, it ensures proper documentation and recording of the site and prepares reports to World Heritage Centre. In future, it will run the new visitor centre with facilities and information for tourists.

The Agency's human resources are however limited, in number as well as in capacity.

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

A draft Management Plan was submitted with the nomination dossier in 2014. The Committee considered that the management framework needed strengthening and clarifying and there needed to be a higher level of commitment from major stakeholders. ICOMOS submitted a Technical Review of the draft Plan to the State Party in April 2016.

The text of a revised Management Plan, 2017-2021 was submitted in February 2017 and is said to have taken account of the recommendation of the Technical Review. It also reflects contributions of the key stakeholders, the Church, and relevant government bodies and community groups, who were involved in the consultation process. The aim has been to develop a shared vision for the property.

The new Management Plan has been developed in harmony with the revised Conservation Master Plan (2015), with the Imereti Tourism development strategy, and with the 2014 management plan for the Imereti Protected Areas that includes the valley and canyon of the Tskaltsitela River in the buffer zone.

The Plan sets out clearly the scope of the property and the issues that need to be addressed. The main weakness is that as yet the Management Plan has no status: it can only provide recommendations. The text highlights that structures may need to be adapted to give a legal basis for implementation of the Plan. However, it does suggest that the Management Plan might be regarded as a task-oriented long term state programme, undertaken to fulfil State obligations under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. On that basis, the Management Plan could be approved by the Minister of Culture and Monument Protection under the current legislative framework after which it would become operational and enforceable by the Ministry with active participation of a Management Committee. That clearly is what needs to be achieved.

The Management Plan does not set out formal lines of responsibility or how the main stakeholders cooperate beyond outlining their main roles and responsibilities. A possible management system is set out in the Management Plan but one that is not yet implemented.

A Management Committee for the Gelati Monastery property remains to be appointed. When it is, it will have the status of an advisory organ of the Minister of Culture and Monument Protection and with the Advisory Committee on World Cultural Heritage created by the Order of the Minister on 27 February 2007.

What also remains to be defined is how the operationalisation of the Management Plan will be financed.

The revision of the Management Plan is thus a positive step forward in bringing stakeholders together but it lacks adequate structures, authority and resources to allow it to make a real impact.

#### Conservation Master Plan

From 2006 to 2008, the Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia elaborated a Conservation Master Plan for the Gelati Monastery in collaboration with the Orthodox Church of Georgia. This plan covered conservation of the built structures as well as proposals to support the revival of monastic life that started in the 1990s and the needs of visitors.

The Conservation Master Plan 2008 contains documentation of all components of the monastery. It sets out rehabilitation projects for each of the architectural components as well as plans for archaeological excavations and the conservation of wall paintings.

The plan provides a framework for the National Agency responsible for the implementation of conservation works, and subsequent conservation activities have followed this plan. In the 2014 submission, it was noted that as the Master Plan does not meet all of today's requirements, it would be updated in 2015. The supplementary information submitted in 2017 provides a further update of the plan in a few specific areas: new accommodation for monks, roofing of archaeological excavations adjacent to the Academy building and a new visitor access route (see Conservation above).

A proposal for co-operation with the World Bank is being considered to allow construction of a visitor centre outside the site. The plans include improved visitor access routes to the site. The proposals were submitted to ICOMOS for review in 2013 and revised plans addressing ICOMOS's comments were submitted in 2015. In its second review of December 2015, ICOMOS supported the plans subject to the development of a visitor management strategy, including access for people with reduced mobility.

Recently, a Memorandum on Collaboration on Cultural Heritage Issues between the Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia has been signed. It concerns all properties of the church. Nevertheless, it seems that an unresolved management conflict still exists. It is essential that clarification is provided of procedures and specific responsibilities for the special case of Gelati Monastery.

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ICOMOS considers that the structure of the overall management system for the property is adequate but it is essential that clarification is provided for responsibilities and procedures.

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## 6 Monitoring

The property is documented by good quality architectural plans. In addition, a series of good professional photographs have been made. ICOMOS notes that precise tri-dimensional measuring is lacking. Such data is essential as a basis for monitoring movements on the buildings on a regular basis. Especially in the event of an earthquake, it would be extremely important to be able to compare data before and after the event.

ICOMOS did not find it possible to verify how extensively current conservation work is documented. Although no documentation of recent intervention was available, it cannot be assumed that it did not exist. Such documentation should include descriptions, illustrations and justification for conservation interventions, as well as documentation of the state of conservation before, during and after work.

Formal monitoring needs to be related to the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value. These are not clearly set out as indicators in the Management Plan and need to be defined.

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ICOMOS considers that monitoring should be strengthened to encompass tri-dimensional measurements and that a full documentation process for conservation work should be put in place. Further, monitoring indicators need to be defined that relate to the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value.

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## 7 Conclusions

This major boundary modification has been assessed in the context of decision 37 COM 7A.32 of the World Heritage Committee.

ICOMOS considers that Gelati Monastery alone can be considered to reflect certain specific aspects of the flowering of the architecture of medieval Georgia in an outstanding way and that the major boundary modification thus can be justified.

In terms of how the recommendations of the World Heritage Committee have been addressed in relation to strengthening and clarifying management procedures and defining commitment to protection and management from all key stakeholders, the revised Management Plan is a step forward. ICOMOS appreciates the work undertaken to revise the Management Plan to bring together the key partners. Currently, though, the Management Plan is weak in lacking a management structure and a Coordinating Committee for the property and a clear status for the Plan and clear responsibilities for its implementation. Thus, the Plan is currently only able to make recommendations without any obligation that national or local authorities will respect it.

Although there are no major threats facing the property, it is vulnerable to incremental change in the buffer zone and the authorities will have a challenging job to balance economic growth with the conservation of the setting of the property, as well as the demands of tourists with the needs of a living monastic community. Moreover, an overall conservation work on the main buildings still needs long term commitment and resources. For these reasons, there is a need to define a management structure that has the authority to address these challenges, and that provides a formal status for the Management Plan or at least that part of it that deals with planning processes.

ICOMOS recommends that the major boundary modification should be approved but that the State Party should be requested to report further to the World Heritage Committee as part of the State of Conservation process on the conservation of the property to show how a robust management system can be defined and implemented.

## 8 Recommendations

### Recommendations with respect to inscription

Recalling decision 37COM 7A.32 of the World Heritage Committee at its 37th session which “*Requests the State Party to submit, by 1 February 2014, a request for a major boundary modification for the property to allow Gelati Monastery to justify the criterion on its own*”; ICOMOS recommends that the major boundary modification of Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery, to exclude Bagrati Cathedral, to become Gelati Monastery, Republic of Georgia, **be approved**.

### Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

#### Brief Synthesis

On the lower southern slopes of the mountains of the Northern Caucasus, Gelati monastery reflects the 'golden age' of medieval Georgia, a period of political strength and economic growth between the reigns of King David IV 'the Builder' (1089-1125) and Queen Tamar (1184-1213). It was David who, in 1106 began building the monastery near his capital Kutaisi on a wooded hill above the river Tskaltsitela. The main church was completed in 1130 in the reign of his son and successor Demétré. Further churches were added to the monastery throughout the 13th and early 14th centuries. The monastery is richly decorated with mural paintings from the 12th to 17th centuries, as well as a 12th century mosaic in the apse of the main church, depicting the Virgin with Child flanked by archangels. Its high architectural quality, outstanding decoration, size, and clear spatial quality combine to offer a vivid expression of the artistic idiom of the architecture of the Georgian “Golden Age” and its almost completely intact surroundings allow an understanding of the intended fusion between architecture and landscape.

Gelati was not simply a monastery: it was also a centre of science and education, and the Academy established there was one of the most important centres of culture in ancient Georgia. King David gathered eminent intellectuals to his Academy such as Johannes Petritzi, a Neo-Platonic philosopher best known for his translations of Proclus, and Arsen Ikaltoeli, a learned monk, whose translations of doctrinal and polemical works were compiled into his *Dogmatikon*, or book of teachings, influenced by Aristotelianism. Gelati also had a scriptorium where monastic scribes copied manuscripts (although its location is not known). Among several books created there, the best known is an amply illuminated 12th century gospel, housed in the National Centre of Manuscripts.

As a royal monastery, Gelati possessed extensive lands and was richly endowed with icons, including the well-known gold mounted Icon of the Virgin of Khakhuli (now housed in the Georgian National Museum) and at its peak, it reflected the power and high culture of Eastern Christianity.

**Criterion (iv):** Gelati Monastery is the masterpiece of the architecture of the “Golden Age” of Georgia and the best representative of its architectural style, characterized by the full facing of smoothly hewn large blocks, perfectly balanced proportions, and the exterior decoration of blind arches. The main church of the monastery is one of the most important examples of the cross-in-square architectural type that had a crucial role in the East Christian church architecture from the 7th century onwards. Gelati is one of the largest Medieval Orthodox monasteries, distinguished for its harmony with its natural setting and a well thought-out overall planning concept.

The main church of the Gelati Monastery is the only Medieval monument in the larger historic region of Eastern Asia Minor and the Caucasus that still has well-preserved mosaic decoration, comparable with the best Byzantine mosaics, as well as having the largest ensemble of paintings of the middle Byzantine, late Byzantine, and post-Byzantine periods in Georgia, including more than 40 portraits of kings, queens, and high clerics and the earliest depiction of the seven Ecumenical Councils.

#### Integrity

The whole monastic precinct is included in the property and contains all the main 12th century buildings as well as those added in the 13th century. All the attributes necessary to express the Outstanding Universal Value are present and included in the area. No important original feature of the monastery from the 12th and 13th centuries have been lost during the centuries, and its landscape setting remains largely intact. Not all buildings are in a good state of conservation.

Some development pressures exist, in the buffer zone and the wider setting of the property but the level of

threats is low and the processes are currently under control.

#### Authenticity

Overall, the architectural forms, spatial arrangement and decoration fully convey their value. For a long period, major parts the mural paintings were in a bad state of conservation. With the repair of the roofs, the process of degradation has been slowed down and restoration work undertaken although some remain vulnerable.

The one area where there is some loss of authenticity is in the Academy building which was roofless in 1994 at the time of inscription as part of the series, but re-roofed and the interiors re-shaped in 2009. The extensive buffer zone allows a full appreciation of the harmony between the enclosed monastery and its natural setting.

#### Management and Protection requirements

Gelati monastery has been a Listed Monument of National Significance since the Soviet period and was listed in the Georgian National Register of Monuments by presidential decree in 2006. The cultural protection area was enlarged beyond Gelati Monastery to encompass the buffer zone in a Decree of the Minister of Culture and Monument Protection in 2014. The buffer zone is protected for its monuments but also for visual attributes. The natural values of the surrounding landscape are regulated by the Forest Code of Georgia, the Law on Soil Protection, the Law on Environmental Protection and the Water law that constitute the legal framework for the management of the forests and the rivers in the area. Applications for new constructions or reconstructions, including the infrastructure and earthworks within the buffer zone require the approval of the Cultural Heritage Protection Council, Section for Cultural Heritage Protected Zones, and Urban Heritage of the Agency.

Conservation work is guided by the Conservation Master Plan, produced by the Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia in collaboration with the Orthodox Church of Georgia. This plan covers conservation of the built structures as well as proposals to support the revival of monastic life that started in the 1990s and the needs of visitors. Adequate resources for long-term conservation programmes still need to be assured. A system of documentation for all conservation and restoration work and tri-dimensional measuring and monitoring of the overall stability of the various monastic buildings need to be put in place.

A Memorandum on Collaboration on Cultural Heritage Issues between the Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia has been agreed for all properties of the church. Day to day management of the property is entrusted to the monastic community who live in the property. Longer term interventions are implemented by the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia. Its local representative agency is

the Kutaisi Historical Architectural Museum-Reserve who is also responsible for visitor reception.

The Management Plan, 2017-2021 reflects contributions of the Church, and relevant government bodies and community groups who were involved in the consultation process. It aims to set out a shared vision for the property. The Plan was developed in harmony with the Conservation Master Plan, with the Imereti Tourism development strategy, and with the 2014 management plan for the Imereti Protected Areas that includes the valley and canyon of the Tskaltsitela River in the buffer zone. It needs approval by the Minister of Culture and Monument Protection to become fully operational and enforceable by the Ministry. A Management Committee for the property remains to be appointed and it is necessary for key roles and responsibilities to be established.

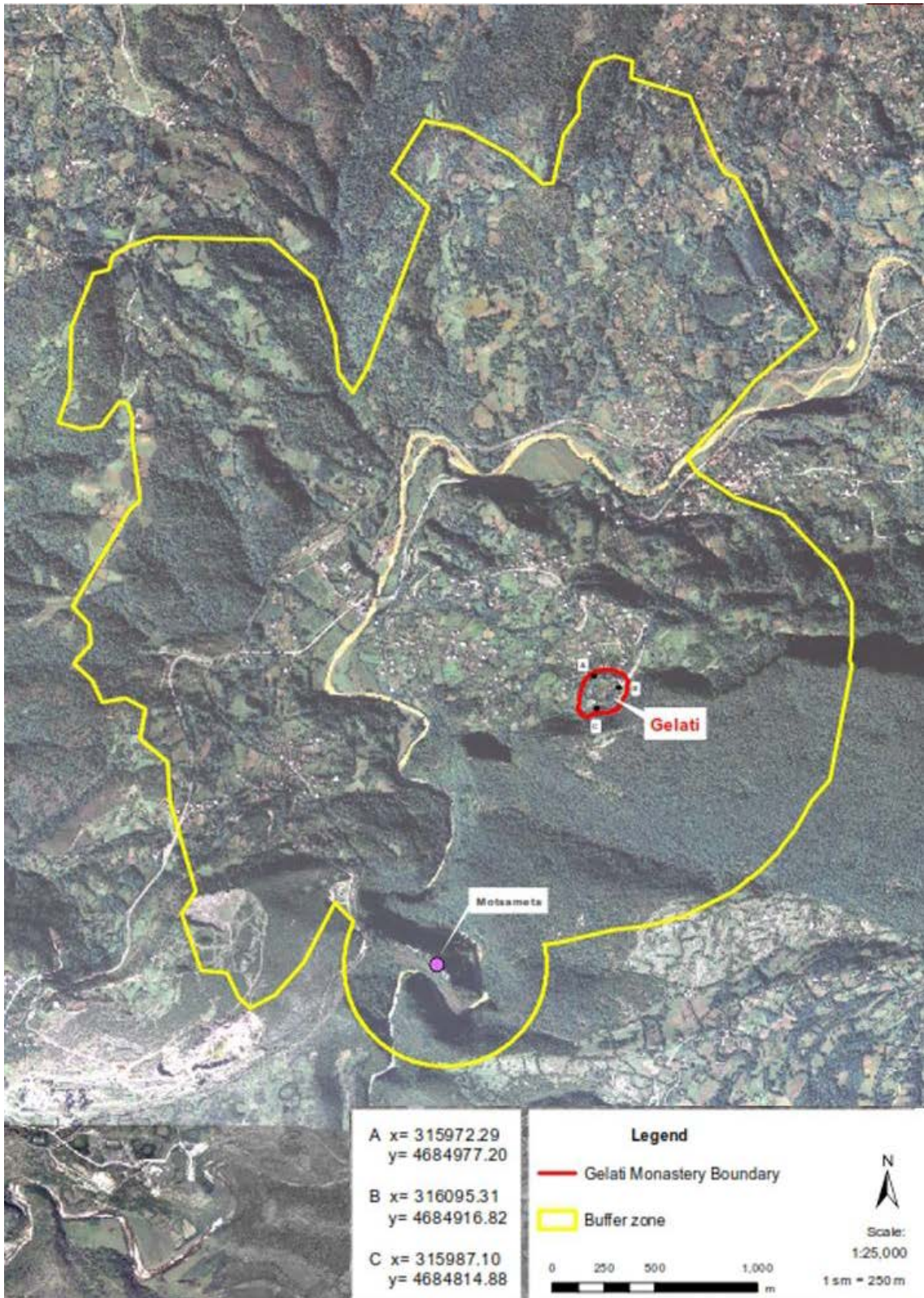
#### Additional recommendations

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

- a) Providing adequate resources for long-term programmes of restoration for the fabric of the monastery and its mural paintings,
- b) Developing a clear system of documentation for any conservation and restoration work,
- c) Putting in place tri-dimensional measuring and monitoring to help gain a better understanding of the overall stability of the various buildings in the monastery;
- d) Approving and implementing the management structure for the property with clear responsibilities for the various agencies and organisations involved in its management,
- e) Setting up a Coordinating Committee for the property with representation from key stakeholders,
- f) Putting in place a mechanism that will allow the Management Plan, or part of it, to have status in planning processes,
- g) Registering as soon as possible the land rights of the Patriarchate in order to avoid land disputes,
- h) Submitting full details of proposals for covering excavated cellar areas next to the Academy, outlining the new visitor access arrangements and location of new domestic quarters for monks, including the archaeological profile of the chosen area, to the World Heritage Centre for review by ICOMOS at the earliest opportunity and before any commitments are made, in accordance with paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*,

- i) Augmenting the monitoring indicators to reflect the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value,

ICOMOS further recommends to submit to the World Heritage Centre by 31 December 2019 a State of Conservation report on the progress on the above-mentioned recommendations, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 44th session in 2020;



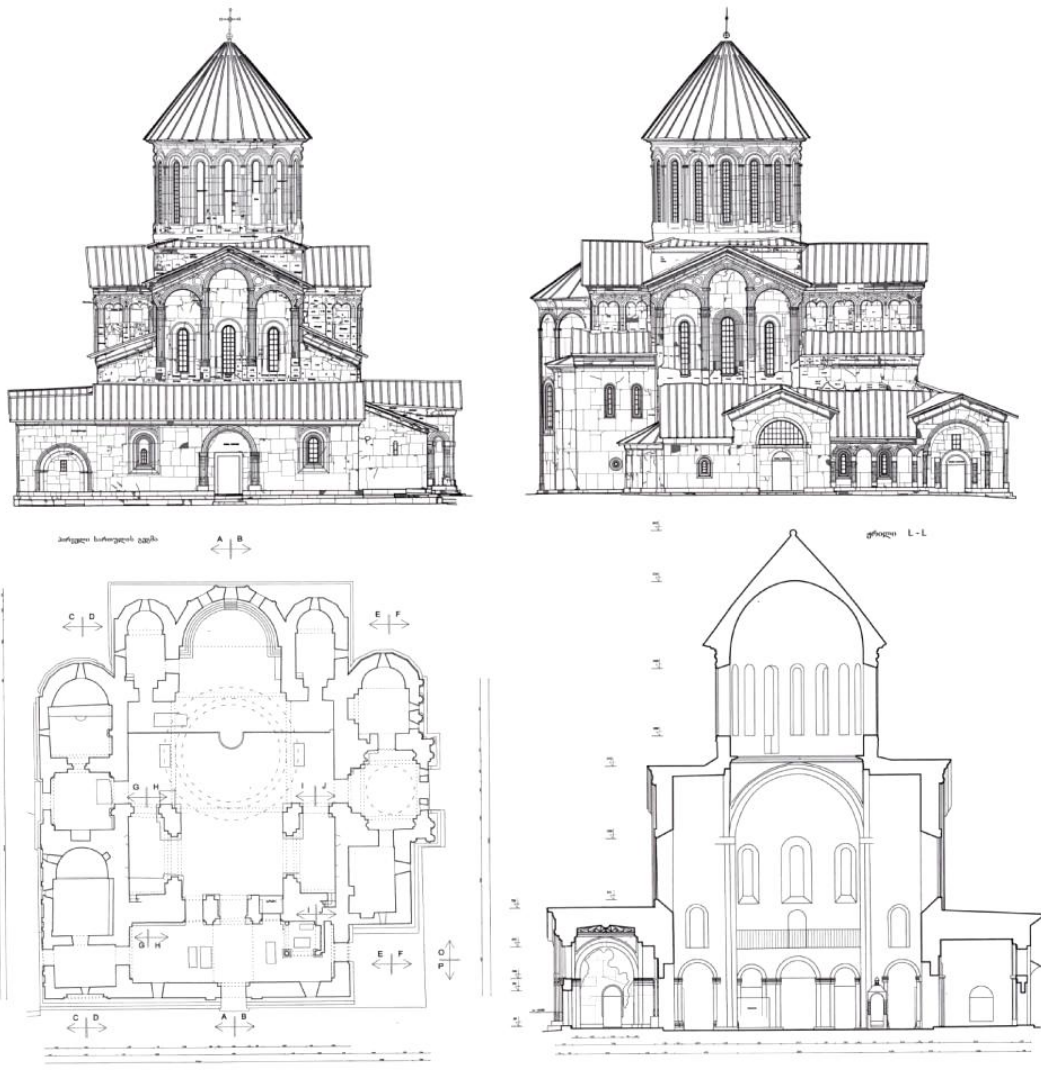
Map showing the revised boundaries of the property



Gelati Monastery seen from the south-west



Academy, Church of St Nicholas, and bell-tower seen from the south



The main church, measured drawings of west and north elevations, plan and cross-section





Main church, interior view looking east