

# ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES  
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES  
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS  
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

Our Ref. GB/AS/1537/IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 22 December 2017

H.E. Dr. Samira Mohamed Moosa Al Moosa  
Permanent Delegation of the Sultanate of Oman  
to UNESCO  
Maison de l'UNESCO  
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World Heritage List 2018

## **Ancient City of Qalhat (Oman) – Interim report and additional information request**

Dear Madam,

As prescribed by the revised Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies have been requested to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2018. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation process.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to the "Ancient City of Qalhat" was carried out by May Ahmad al-Ibrashy (Egypt) from 18 to 23 September 2017. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organization and implementation of the mission.

On 29 September 2017, a letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding the layout of the city, architectural innovation and commercial importance. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 31 October 2017 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2017, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2018. The additional information, together with mission and desk review reports were carefully examined by the Panel members. This process will conclude in March 2018.

We thank you for the availability of your Delegation to the meeting held on Thursday 23 November 2017 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. During the final part of the ICOMOS Panel meeting that followed, the ICOMOS Panel has identified areas where it considers that further information is needed.

While the ICOMOS Panel considered that the "Ancient City of Qalhat" might have the potential to meet the requirements for Outstanding Universal Value, this has not yet been adequately demonstrated.

Therefore, we would be pleased if the State Party could consider the following points:

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

The ICOMOS Panel notes that the proposed justification of Outstanding Universal Value of Qalhat is based on several factors including a study of its interrelation with other contemporary ports during the time Qalhat was active. The ICOMOS Panel would be pleased if the State Party could provide more documentation that would allow a better understanding of the current state of knowledge on the urban planning dimension and the overall layout of Qalhat.

The ICOMOS Panel notes that justification of criteria (iii) and (v) would need to be further substantiated through the use of the available information and reports of excavations.

Qalhat is being nominated as an outstanding example of a port town that has survived almost completely, mainly in buried form as an archaeological site. In order to better understand just how important its remains are, we do need further precise details of what has survived, not just the monumental buildings but also the more modest structures and the overall layout.

The ICOMOS Panel appreciates the supplementary information that has been provided in terms of images, but there is still a need for more solid documentation that allows an understanding of the current state of knowledge on the overall layout of the city.

Although details are provided in the nomination dossier of the various archaeological programmes, it would be helpful to have a summary of what these have revealed and also of the non-invasive surveys that have been undertaken such as aerial photogrammetry, geo-physical surveys, etc. The nomination dossier mentions on pp 8, 42 and 50 that "the geophysical survey detected evidence for the existence of more than 2800 houses organized in well-planned quarters." The ICOMOS Panel would be pleased to receive further information on the outcomes of this geophysical survey, if available.

Ideally a detailed plan of the city that captures precisely what has been revealed in terms of the different quarters and their uses – religious, economic, fortifications necropolis, etc. and on which historic or physical resources these have been defined would be needed.

In order to be able to more fully assess whether Qalhat is an outstanding example of town planning, exhibiting different quarters, sometimes fortified, defined by their use (religious, economic, etc.), or whether it is an extraordinary reflection of a traditional medieval Islamic port city, it would be helpful if more detailed information on how it compared to other contemporary cities such as the Old and New cities of Hormuz, and whether it influenced or was influenced by the designs of other cities, could be provided.

In the additional information as well as the 'Topographic map of the medieval city of Qalhat (© Qalhat Development Project)', the State Party mentions a city center, administrative buildings and public buildings [B13], [B14] and [B16-17]. Could the State Party clarify the evidences that permitted to qualify the aforementioned buildings as public and administrative ones? Could the State Party explain which evidences allowed to draw the '*Topographic map of the medieval city of Qalhat (© Qalhat Development Project)*' that displays buildings, plots and streets networks of the whole city?

It would also be helpful to understand what further investigations and research might be proposed in the medium and long term, if available, although the ICOMOS Panel understands that in the short term the emphasis is on consolidation.

### **Comparative Analysis**

The ICOMOS Panel notes that at this stage it is not possible to suggest in detail how important Qalhat was as a port in the wider maritime region with which it interacted. Discussions have already started on how ports, or ensembles of ports, associated with the Maritime Silk Roads might be reflected on the World Heritage list; this work may lead in due course to a Thematic Study on the ports of the Maritime Silk Routes which could help to situate the port of Qalhat more clearly in relation to routes to India and Eastern Africa.

Meanwhile, there is a need to clarify as clearly and precisely as possible what role Qalhat played in the narrower area of the Gulf as a port of the Kingdom of Hormuz.

Comparisons have been provided with other ports such as Hormuz, Khor Frkhan (UAE), Siraf (Iran), Julfar (UAE) and Suhar (Sultanate of Oman) but these are based more on what remains of these port-towns rather than how they might have operated.

What would be helpful to understand is how the ports related to one another during the time Qalhat was active. Where there specialisms? Is there evidence that Qalhat was the main port for horses? A quote in the dossier mentions that 'These horses were annually shipped from Qalhat, Dhofar, Al- Shahr, Sohar, Eden and the other Arab coastal cities to Hormuz and India'. And in the additional information provided on 31 October 2017, page 1, it is stated that 'The horse trade underpinned the fabled wealth of the Hormuzi dynasty as well as much of the wealth of the Omani tribes and thrust Qalhat to the forefront of regional politics in a mercantile world, which spanned both sides of the Gulf'. Is there evidence to suggest that Hormuz was the main collecting port for horses? The ICOMOS Panel would be pleased if the State Party could provide further explanation on the tangible evidences that could support the horse trade.

### **Boundaries**

The ICOMOS Panel would be pleased if the State Party could provide further details on the rationale of the delineation of the boundaries and the buffer zone.

The ICOMOS Panel would be pleased if the State Party could consider to include the former harbour within the nominated area. In addition to that a bathymetry survey conducted in 2003 showed that about 600 metres offshore, the depths increase rapidly (50 metres +). The Area between the coastline and the rapid increase in depth to +50 metres is where the big ships anchored up and was unloaded into smaller vessels. The ICOMOS Panel would be pleased if the State Party could consider to include this area in the buffer zone.

In addition, could the State Party consider to move the 800 metre north-south strip south of the southern city gate which does not contain archaeological remains from the nominated area to the buffer zone? And to do the same for the east west strip in Wadi Hilm.

Finally, could the State Party clarify the utilization of the area located beyond the southern wall of Qalhat?

### **Conservation**

The ICOMOS Panel considers that the authenticity of the property is justified through the existence of an archaeological site that has been isolated from development and tourism, providing a storehouse of archaeological materials.

However, the ICOMOS Panel notes that the conservation of the excavated buildings varies from one to another. Some buildings, like the caravanserai, remain untouched, others, like the walls of the grand mosque and houses, are consolidated and partially reconstructed and others, like the small mausoleum, are completely reconstructed. The ICOMOS Panel notes that the conservation of the site of Qalhat is a particular case aiming to maintain the structural and decorative integrity of the excavated buildings and it does not lean towards restoration or reconstruction.

The ICOMOS Panel would be pleased if the State Party could provide further information on its approach and policy of conservation of the excavated buildings.

Taking into account the vulnerability of the excavated and standing buildings of the property and the fact that the coastal setting makes it more prone to weathering and natural disasters, the ICOMOS Panel would be pleased to receive further information on the conservation works needed for the maintenance of the site.

### **Management Plan**

The ICOMOS Panel notes that the Final Draft Management Plan for the 'Ancient City of Qalhat' has not yet been provided.

Therefore, the ICOMOS Panel would be pleased if the State Party could indicate when this plan will be completed and approved. In addition, information on the schedule for the implementation of Qalhat Development Project would be useful.

The nomination dossier indicates on p. 8 and 45 that "systems of prevention against natural threats" exist. Could the State Party clarify what are the currently implemented systems?

### **Tourism management**

The ICOMOS Panel would be pleased to receive further information about the visitor and tourism strategies planned once the site will be open to the public.

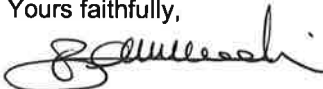
Could the State Party clarify the architectural and design dispositions related to the visitation plan of the site? [the paths, visitation center, parking, administration and services buildings, the archeological finds' storehouse, etc.]

We look forward to your responses to these points, which will be of great help in our evaluation process.

We would be grateful if you could provide ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre with the above information by **28 February 2018 at the latest**, the deadline set out in paragraph 148 of the Operational Guidelines for supplementary information on nominations to be received. Please note that any information submitted after this date will not be considered by ICOMOS in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee. It should be noted, however, that while ICOMOS will carefully consider any supplementary information submitted, it cannot properly evaluate a completely revised nomination or large amounts of new information submitted at the last minute. So we request to keep your response concise and respond only to the above requests.

We thank you for your support of the World Heritage Convention and the evaluation process.

Yours faithfully,



Gwenaëlle Bourdin  
Director  
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to      Ministry of Heritage and Culture  
                  UNESCO World Heritage Centre