
The Ancient City of Qalhat (Oman) No 1537

Official name as proposed by the State Party

The Ancient City of Qalhat

Location

Governorate of Al-Sharqiyya South, Wilayat of Sur
Oman

Brief description

The ancient city of Qalhat is located on the eastern coast of the Sultanate of Oman, approximately 20 kilometres north-west of the city of Sur. The property includes the entire Ancient City of Qalhat, demarcated by its inner and outer walls, which extends over 35 hectares, as well as areas outside the walls where the necropolises are situated. The city was an important port on the East Arabian Coast, which flourished in the 11th to 15th centuries CE under the rule of the Princes of Hormuz. Following Portuguese attacks, it was abandoned in the 16th century and has remained as an archaeological site ever since.

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

23 May 2013

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre

30 January 2017

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committees on Archaeological Heritage Management, on Underwater Cultural Heritage and several independent experts.

Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 18 to 23 September 2017.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

On 29 September 2017, a letter requesting additional information was sent by ICOMOS to the State Party to request further information regarding the justification of Outstanding Universal Value, in particular as it relates to the city's layout, division and original function, its role in regional and global trade networks as well as architectural innovation that could be said to have emerged from Qalhat. A reply was received from the State Party, dated 31 October 2017.

An Interim Report was provided to the State Party on 22 December 2017 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel. A reply from the State Party was received on 27 February 2018 supplying a detailed description of the archaeological remains and their historic functions, augmenting the comparative analysis as well as further details on conservation and boundaries. The State Party also submitted additional images and maps of the property.

All additional information received from the State Party has been incorporated into the relevant sections below.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

14 March 2018

2 The property

Description

The archaeological site of the ancient city of Qalhat is located on a narrow triangular coastal rocky plateau in Al-Sharqiyya province, 45 kilometres north-west of Ras Al-Hadd and 20 kilometres north-west of the city of Sur. The site is separated from the sea by a rocky cliff of approximately 10 to 15 metres in height. The former settlement stretches over an area 1600 metres long at the foot of the Jabal Al-Hajir Al-Sharqi and covers an overall area of 35 hectares. The nominated property, however, encompasses an area of 69 hectares, including among others the city's necropolises. The historic city has been divided into several quarters for the purpose of archaeological documentation and interpretation.

The central quarter is located between two wadis, which are both inside the city walls. It is located at the accessible point from the sea, where boats could land. Archaeological investigations identified this section as the most ancient part of the city, dating back to around 1 100 CE. The quarter contains 140 documented structures and is centred around the Friday Mosque complex. Within this quarter house sizes vary considerably. North of the Friday Mosque larger, scattered buildings with large open spaces and terraces have been documented. To the west and south there are medium-sized buildings distributed in slightly denser urban patterns. On the south-western fringe of the quarter, much smaller and densely-packed architectural structures can be observed.

The Great Friday Mosque is located in the heart of the ancient quarter at the end of the main street which leads from the western gate to the shore. Following its discovery in 2008, it was completely excavated and is now being conserved. As this quarter was the heart of the city, most administrative and official buildings were located near the Friday Mosque along the seashore. Small shop structures in the surroundings indicate the presence of a souq. An area to the north connects 8 buildings by means of a fence. This is assumed to have been a central area with public functions, such as a madrasa, hammam, khan and hospital.

The central quarter is surrounded by several peripheral quarters, such as the north-east quarter. This quarter is composed of buildings on both sides of a straight street which connects the harbour to a city gate in the northern fortification wall, the key access to Qalhat from the direction of Muscat. This quarter also contains the largest single building identified in the city. Although its function is not determined, a palace function, such as for the governor of the city, is suspected by archaeologists.

The north-west quarter is dominated by private dwellings, with clusters of residences and buildings with other functions organized around squares. Three of such buildings along the northern end of the quarter were excavated and have been identified in turn as a small mosque, a dwelling and what was likely a store. The excavations have delivered detailed information about the life of the Qalhatis, their involvement in fishing, agricultural and livestock activities, as well as their trading relations.

The western quarter may have been the productive neighbourhood of the city, since both the excavated units here were probably workshops. One of the two was a pottery kiln producing glazed tiles such as were used in the Friday Mosque, while the other was an artisan's workshop utilizing semi-precious stones and pearls.

The funerary areas surround the ancient city and are partly located inside, partly outside the city walls. More than 2000 funerary structures have been documented, including small mausoleums, cist graves with inscriptions, simple graves of various shapes and funerary terraces. The city was surrounded by a defensive wall with several fortification towers. It should be noted that only a small percentage of the historic city has been excavated and that the archaeological potential for the generation of further knowledge about the Kingdom of Hormuz remains immense.

History and development

The earliest historic evidence in the ancient city of Qalhat is an Iron Age tomb dating to around 500 BC. The most ancient mention of Qalhat is found in the *Kitab Ansab Al 'Arab* attributed to Salama ibn Muslim Al-Awtabi Al-Suhari, which dates its foundation to the early Christian Era. However, oral tradition dates its foundation centuries earlier to the reign of Malik bin Fahm Al-Azdi, who is said to have established the first Omani capital at al-Qalhat. Since no trace of pre-Islamic occupation has been

discovered to date, both the above-described attributions remain doubtful.

Qalhat was important enough in the 10th and 11th centuries AD to be mentioned by Al-'Awtabi in his *Kitab al-Ansab*, which describes the geographies and genealogies of Oman at the time. Several other written documents mention the existence of Qalhat at the same time. It was described as a city with civil, military, political and commercial relations with the newly-established Kingdom of Hormuz.

The Kingdom of Hormuz was initially established by Mohammad Dirham Ko Al-Azdi in the area of Minab. In the early 12th century AD, the capital transferred to Jaron Island and was called New Hormuz. Qalhat became a southern power centre which provided shelter for the princes of Hormuz during times of conflict. However, Qalhat also hosted exiles who were aspiring to regain power and who re-established their armies and fleets to attack the New City of Hormuz.

Qalhat became a regional centre in the 13th century due to the decline of other early Islamic Omani settlements. It became the predominant trade centre on the East Arabian coast. According to Ibn al-Mujawir, the city fell under the control of the Khwarizm ruler Khwajah Radi Al-Din Qiyam Al-Mulk Abu Bakr Al-Zuzani, who collected taxes and traded in Qalhat until he died in 1218-19 AD, leaving behind 64,000 tonnes of silk and 500 horses. In 1219, Qalhat's fortification wall was built which strengthened its economic position further.

In the 13th century Qalhat likely controlled most of the Indian Ocean trade of the Kingdom of Hormuz. It also dominated the eastwards trade towards the coast of Africa. At that time the governor Ayaz split his presence between Hormuz and Qalhat, which in his absence was ruled by his wife Maryam. She, Bibi Maryam, is said to have built the Great Friday Mosque and a mausoleum for her late husband. She continued ruling after her husband's death until at least 1319.

In the 14th and 15th centuries AD trade relations were extensive. A great amount of Chinese porcelain has been found at Qalhat, as have Indian ceramics and carved slabs with Indian motives. The main commodities which Qalhat traded were dates and Arabian horses, for which it was particularly famous. Qalhat, at that time, was a wealthy and cosmopolitan city with a population of Arabs, Persians and Indians, as well as smaller numbers of different African communities. Qalhat kept its status as the second most important city and port of the Kingdom of Hormuz until the arrival of the Portuguese.

In the last quarter of the 15th century, Qalhat was affected by an earthquake. It was still in the process of rebuilding when the Portuguese arrived in 1507. The Portuguese described it as a fortified town of 5000 to 6000 inhabitants. In 1508, the Portuguese attacked and conquered Qalhat. They ransacked and burnt it, destroying most of the wealth and resources stored

within the city walls. The present excavations appear to confirm a large fire through evidence such as thick layers of ash in, for example, the prayer hall, but they do not yet allow for an exact dating.

Subsequently, Qalhat became a Portuguese station where the Lusitanian fleet could anchor and exert duties on the Indian ships at anchor. Oral traditions relate to an Ottoman attack in 1550 AD, but this has not been proven. What is obvious is that Qalhat rapidly declined in importance. Tax contributions dropped continuously and were negligible by the middle of the century. Evidence exists that shows that Qalhat was still inhabited in the second half of the 16th century AD but must have been abandoned at or shortly after that time. From the end of the 16th century onwards, all reports coincide in observing that the city was ruined and abandoned.

3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis is focused on comparing Qalhat with other port cities, firstly in Oman and then in the wider region of the Kingdom of Hormuz. Within Oman, the port cities of Khor Rori and al-Baleed, both serial components of the Land of Frankincense World Heritage property [2000, criteria (iii) and (iv)], are compared. Whilst they can be compared in terms of their location and fortification structures, the first of these had its heyday much earlier, while the latter, although inhabited during the influence of Hormuz, cannot be compared to the role and size of Qalhat.

Further major cities related to the Kingdom of Hormuz were included in the Comparative Analysis and are found in Bahrain (Qala'at Al-Bahrain [2005, criteria (ii), (iii) and (iv)]) and the United Arab Emirates (Ancient City of Julfar in the vicinity of Ras Al-Khaimah). Also Al Zubarah Archaeological Site, Qatar [2013, criteria (iii), (iv) and (v)] is compared although its era of significance is considerably later. The comparative analysis then continues to discuss port cities which had trade relations with Qalhat, which included amongst others the port city of Banbhore in Pakistan and Kilwa Kisiwani in Tanzania, part of the World Heritage Property Ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani and Ruins of Songo Mnara [1981, criterion (iii)].

In ICOMOS' view, the most relevant comparison is the one between the two original cities of Old and New Hormuz. It appears that the two former capitals share with Qalhat the fact that very little excavation and research has been undertaken and hence the full potential of these two sites cannot be estimated and is probably even less explored than that of Qalhat. In the additional information submitted, the State Party has provided a tabular comparison of key elements, which appear very comparable. However, ICOMOS considers that rather than considering Hormuz and Qalhat as archaeological sites competing as being representative of the Kingdom of Hormuz, they need to be considered

as complementary, with Qalhat representing the trade port connecting Hormuz across the Indian Ocean and to East Africa, and especially the trade in Arab horses.

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

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 the location of the mythical first capital of Oman founded by Malik ibn Faham of the 'Azd tribe, which dominated the region from the second century BCE;
- Qalhat is a twin city to Hormuz and the second capital of the Kingdom of Hormuz, which acted as a refuge during periods of disorder and conflict;
- Qalhat was the centre of trade on the East Arabian coast controlling the Indian Ocean and East Africa trade of Hormuz. It is known as a harbour of origin for dates, incense, pearls and especially Arab horses, which were traded as far as China and South-East Asia.
- The site bears outstanding archaeological potential for understanding medieval urban topology due to its abandonment in the late 16th century and complete lack of subsequent interventions.

ICOMOS considers that the Ancient City of Qalhat represents a testimony to the Kingdom of Hormuz which flourished in the region of the Strait of Hormuz from the 11th to the 16th centuries CE. The city of Qalhat was one of a few major trade hubs which came under the rule of the Princes of Hormuz and tremendously profited from its geo-political position in the region. Furthermore, the city was not only visited and seasonally resided in by various rulers, but also served as a refuge during times of conflict and a place of exile for ousted princes. It hence had a strategic trade and defence importance but also political relevance for the Kingdom of Hormuz.

ICOMOS further considers that Qalhat provides exceptional archaeological evidence for the trade exchanges between the East Arabian Coast, India, and reaching as far and China and South East Asia. As such, the property provides evidence of the Indian Ocean trade networks, which pre-dated the arrival of European colonial powers.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The State Party highlights correctly that the full extent of the archaeological city lies within the property boundaries. Recent geophysical surveys have indicated more than 2 800 structures buried under the rubble, which covers a city that has remained undisturbed since the late 16th century. ICOMOS confirms that in terms of integrity of the archaeological evidence, the lack of use and

interventions or even studies between the 17th and the 21st centuries is a strength, which has ensured the huge archaeological potential the property holds today.

ICOMOS considers that the property represents the entirety of the intra-muros city and the structures immediately outside the city walls. The remains of the walls and street fabric are sufficient to provide a representative testimony to its significance, with the archaeological finds adding to our understanding of how it functioned as a city.

In the additional information submitted by the State Party in February 2018, the nominated property boundaries have been revised, excluding parts in the North and South of the property which do not contain archaeological remains, and including them into the buffer zone. ICOMOS considers that it would be desirable to include the shoreline along the sea as an important area of trade interactions and transitions between the ancient city and the ocean. The nomination dossier highlights that underwater archaeological investigations discovered 25 stone anchors, rectangular and ring-shaped, near Qalhat harbour. In the additional information provided at the request of ICOMOS, the State Party explained that the extension of the buffer zone in the sea was measured at 120 to 300 metres distance following a sea depth of 10 metres and it includes all these stone anchors.

The ancient city of Qalhat is free of major threats, with the highway along the western side of the property being an unfortunate past intervention which has negatively affected the visual integrity and atmosphere of the property. ICOMOS further considers that following envisaged increased visitor numbers as a result of the new visitation concepts and its potential future World Heritage status, Qalhat will potentially face added risks of inappropriate visitor behaviour.

Authenticity

The State Party confirms authenticity of the property on the grounds that the property was abandoned in the late 16th century and has not experienced human interference since then. In addition, the authenticity of the property is supported by societal traditions, including visits made to Bibi Maryam mausoleum by the local population for blessings and offerings.

ICOMOS confirms that the ancient city of Qalhat is an abandoned archaeological site. Its architectural and urban fabric and form remain authentic, almost untouched, as does its setting. Conservation, visitor management and site presentation plans aim at preserving this state to the largest extent possible. Likewise, archaeological excavations so far have been well planned, thorough and minimal, an approach that should be continued in the future. Authenticity in meaning is related both to the authenticated history of the site and to stories and myths associated with it. Although not all of these should be considered as attributes of Outstanding Universal Value,

they should nevertheless be respected within the overall management approach of the property.

However, ICOMOS is concerned about the conservation works undertaken post-excavation. In particular, reconstructions carried out on some uncovered walls and a small mausoleum as well as the reconstruction of another small mausoleum are not in line with international best practice and the minimum intervention approach required by this property.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity will be met once the shoreline is included in the nominated area and that the conditions of authenticity are largely demonstrated, although ICOMOS is concerned about a few past reconstruction activities, which should not be repeated.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iii), (v) and (vi).

Criterion (ii): *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 not been proposed by the State Party but is justified by the property. For this reason, ICOMOS has opted to include its consideration in the evaluation process.

ICOMOS considers that Qalhat exhibits the cultural and commercial interchange of values within the trading range of the Kingdom of Hormuz, which extended to East Africa, India and as far as China and South East Asia. The archaeological site of Qalhat provides physical evidence of these interchanges, documenting the architectural features, which indicate its own produce, dates, Arabian horses as well as spices and pearls, but also integrating the multi-cultural features of a medieval cosmopolitan city, with houses influenced by the needs of their various owners and inhabitants of foreign cultural origins.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

Criterion (iii): *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 justified by the State Party on the grounds that the ancient city of Qalhat presents a unique testimony to the Kingdom of Hormuz, as it prospered from the 11th to 16th centuries CE. It is argued that the planning of Qalhat and the excavated buildings show great similarities with the New City of Hormuz in Iran. Moreover, the archaeological site has a great potential to provide a more detailed understanding of the ways of life in medieval East Arabia and its international exchanges.

ICOMOS considers that the State Party's arguments are correct in that the ancient city of Qalhat played an important role in the trade network which was controlled by the Kingdom of Hormuz and that its archaeological remains include a number of highly representative buildings that were also noted in several narratives written by historic travellers. Ancient Qalhat can therefore be considered an exceptional testimony of a major trade hub, which came under the rule of the Princes of Hormuz and profited from its geo-political position in the region. It was also a seasonal residence and refuge to the Princes of Hormuz, which has given it the status of a secondary capital of the larger kingdom.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

Criterion (v): be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that Qalhat represents an exceptional traditional town and includes examples of building techniques within the constraints of the local environment due to Qalhat's positioning between the mountains, the wadis and the sea. The State Party highlights also Qalhat's extraordinary urban planning which corresponds to what is known of the city of Hormuz.

ICOMOS considers that the arguments provided for the application of this criterion are based on rather generic characteristics, which have not been demonstrated as being exceptional for the property. Constraints posed by the local environment, particularly the spatial conditions, the displayed characteristics of a mediaeval Islamic port city as shaped by the layout of its different quarters and their differentiation according to function, or the use of coral stone as the main building material, can all be easily found at other sites, especially along the East Arabian Coast. Globally, the shape of many port towns responded to topographical specificities in one way or another, also in terms of limited space available.

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 of several historic events and literary mentions. The first concerns the legends of the Azd tribal migrations from South-western Arabia to Oman and, later, to Iran through Qalhat. The second group of oral and literary traditions centre around the rise and fall of the Hormuz Kingdom in Persia and the strong links between Qalhat and Hormuz. Lastly, the criterion is

further proposed on the basis of Qalhat's regular mention as a mercantile centre in the reports of famous medieval historians, geographers and travel writers of different cultural and geographical origins.

ICOMOS considers that the mention of artistic features related to the architecture of specific monuments, such as the Bibi Maryam Mausoleum, would be better discussed in the context of criterion (iv) but does not appear of exceptional significance to merit application of this criterion.

As regards the oral and literary traditions informing about the historic 'Azd migration, the transmitted narratives on the formation and development of the Kingdom of Hormuz, ICOMOS considers that these do not represent historic events of literary traditions of outstanding cultural significance as required by this criterion. Therefore, they may well illustrate the close relationship of the rulers of Hormuz with the Arabian Peninsula and the historic region of Oman and thus support the application of criterion (iii) discussed above; however, they do not justify the application of criterion (vi). In terms of the historic reports of famous historians, geographers and travellers, ICOMOS notes that these individuals often visited multiple cities if not countries, which would not usually justify a World Heritage consideration of each and every settlement they decided to include within their accounts.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (ii) and (iii), while the proposed criteria (v) and (vi) cannot be considered justified. ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity will be met once the shoreline is included in the nominated area and that the conditions of authenticity are demonstrated.

Description of the attributes

The attributes which express the Outstanding Universal Value of the property include the complete excavated and unexcavated archaeological remains of the city, its public and private structures as well as the city walls and funerary evidence. The city needs to be considered within its topographical setting and hence attributes are also the cliffs facing the sea and the seashore, serving as both defence and port basin, as well as the underwater archaeological remains which document anchorage in Qalhat harbour. The wadis and mountain ranges which gave Qalhat its strategic location support further the attributes and should remain in close sight relation to the property.

4 Factors affecting the property

The property within its boundaries is owned by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and accordingly, developmental pressures on the site are mainly limited to impacts from outside its boundaries and the potential increased interest for touristic use. The highway which was constructed on a slightly higher elevation along its western border remains problematic as it impacts negatively on the property's setting. A large liquefied natural gas plant is located 4 kilometres south of the site along the seashore across the bay, but there are no plans for an expansion northward. Its present negative visual impact on the setting is moderate.

As has been the case in the past, the property remains vulnerable to natural pressures such as cyclones, torrential or strong seasonal rains as well as earthquakes. These natural forces have over time led to the erosion of the cliffs as well as the abandoned remains of Qalhat. These will most likely be left uncovered to present them to visitors once the site is opened again to the public.

The potential impact by touristic developments cannot be properly assessed at the moment, as the site is closed and no plans for future visitor infrastructure were submitted as part of the nomination. In fact, the visitor management plan is still in preparation. However, the State Party clearly states that the property will be developed as an Archaeological Park and that the necessary infrastructure will need to be integrated at least within the immediate environment of the property and partially within it, such as in the form of boardwalks and structures providing shade.

ICOMOS considers that the potential pressure from tourism development at the site is likely to be minimal due to the expected low number of visitors attracted to the site. Potential risks are more likely to be related to the infrastructure developments envisaged to facilitate this visitation. It is therefore essential that Heritage Impact Assessments are conducted according to ICOMOS' *Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties*, for any site infrastructure developed within and around the property, and are communicated to the World Heritage Centre in line with paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are natural disasters, earthquakes and, potentially, inappropriate site infrastructure development.

5 Protection, conservation and management

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The boundaries of the nominated property and the buffer zone have been revised following the ICOMOS' Interim report. The property was reduced from approximately 101 ha to 69 ha, and the buffer zone extended from 109 ha to 175 ha. The former extent of the property boundaries corresponded to the borders of a parcel for which the Ministry of Heritage and Culture holds ownership, extending beyond the limits of the ancient city of Qalhat and its funerary structures, in particular in their northern and southern extension. In its interim report, ICOMOS requested the State Party to consider reducing the extent of the nominated area, in order to exclude the southern part of the property, beyond the city gate as this area does not contain archaeological remains, in order to put it into the buffer zone, as well as for the east west strip at Wadi Hilm. The State Party revised the nominated area delineation according to the ICOMOS considerations.

ICOMOS further requested in its interim report that the former harbour of Qalhat should be included into the property boundaries. The State Party explained in the additional information provided in February 2018 that the harbour needs to be considered a natural harbour with nobuilt infrastructures, as it is the case for the Mediterranean archaeological sites. It therefore proposed to merely extend the buffer zone into the sea as also requested by ICOMOS.

However, ICOMOS considers that it would be desirable that the nominated property delineation include at least the shoreline of the property, which bears significance as a location facilitating the trade interaction as a transitional space between the ancient city and the ocean.

Moreover, the highway which borders the western side of Qalhat is partially included in the property, in the southern/south-western area. It is not clear why this choice was made and it would be preferable, in ICOMOS' view, to exclude totally the highway, which is more a threat and source of negative visual impacts than an attribute of the property

The buffer zone has been revised and divided into two parts, A and B, which distinguishes the parts belonging to the Ministry of Heritage and Culture (parts of the previous proposal of property boundaries) and the rest of the buffer zone. Regarding the modifications of the buffer zone, it has been extended into the sea as suggested by ICOMOS. However, the extension has been made between 120 to 300 m following the depth of the sea at 10 m, and not until 600 m offshore in depth of 50m as proposed by ICOMOS. The State Party justifies its position based on the water surveys, which concluded that no archaeological elements could be found beyond 300m. ICOMOS considers that this justification is relevant and the buffer zone extension is adequate.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property should be modified in order to exclude totally the highway in the south-western part of the property boundary, and to include the shoreline along the sea. ICOMOS considers that the revised buffer zone is adequate.

Ownership

The property is entirely owned by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture. As for the buffer zone, it is also partly owned by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and partly by the Sultanate of Oman, without attribution of ministerial responsibility.

Protection

The Ancient City of Qalhat is designated as a national cultural heritage site of Oman and is therefore under the highest legal level of protection of national heritage according to Royal Decree No. 6/80. The same Royal Decree also assures the protection of a buffer zone around the heritage sites concerned. The legal protection is effectively implemented by means of fencing and human guards patrolling the archaeological site.

Before the property was closed to the public for conservation, the section of the site around Bibi Maryam was looked after by the residents of the neighbouring village of Qalhat for whom it is a shrine with healing powers. This traditional protection mechanism was disrupted when the site was closed and visitation was discontinued. ICOMOS considers that it is important to re-activate this mechanism as part of the future visitor concept.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place is adequate.

Conservation

The property was systematically inventoried by means of digital photogrammetry, GIS and documentation of the visible structures in situ as part of the archaeological research and conservation activities. A site-specific documentation centre has been established which provides a central archive of site-related information. Before the publication of archaeological excavation results, reports on each excavation season are submitted and archived.

The condition of the unexcavated archaeological remains is assumed to be stable. Some sections were excavated and refilled after the season as a form of temporary protection. Conservation works are presently underway and aim to be completed by 2019. These are undertaken in coordination with the World Monuments Fund. ICOMOS considers that some of the conservation efforts undertaken seem rather extensive and lean towards restoration or even reconstruction. ICOMOS therefore recommends that a minimum intervention approach is applied to all future conservation projects, which is in line with the largely untouched condition of this property. ICOMOS further notes that continued extensive

conservation could have a considerable negative impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

The condition of the standing remains varies accordingly from over-restored, such as the mausoleum, to fairly good, like the Bibi Maryam mausoleum, or less good, such as the southern extra-muros cistern. ICOMOS considers that the immediate conservation following excavations needs to be adequately addressed and that a joint excavation-conservation programme needs to be established to guide a coordinated approach, as has already been started within the CNRS-WMF partnership. The greatest challenge in this is to maintain the structural stability of the excavated structures without compromising their visual readability and material authenticity.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that inventories, documentation, archiving and latest conservation measures follow international standards but that conservation of the excavated structures needs to be guided by a minimum intervention approach.

Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

Management processes and strategies are guided by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and will be implemented on a day-to-day basis by the Ministry's regional office. This regional office is intended to be restructured once the site is reopened to the public. ICOMOS notes that the current personnel capacities of both conservation and interpretation staff, but also security guards, is not sufficient for the site once it's reopened to the public and needs to be strengthened. ICOMOS considers that in light of the possible risks by earthquakes or other natural disasters, the management plan in preparation (see below) should contain risk preparedness and disaster-management strategies.

ICOMOS recommends that the current practice of contracting out conservation tasks to international firms or institutions should be used as a means of local capacity-building in order to train a site-specific team qualified to undertake ongoing conservation and maintenance works.

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

The Ministry of Heritage and Culture is preparing a Management Plan for the Ancient City of Qalhat in anticipation of its reopening to the public in 2018/19. Not yet included in the nomination dossier and unavailable during the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, the management plan was announced in the additional information submitted by the State Party on 10 October 2017, to be completed within a month and sent to the World Heritage Centre upon its completion. However, the management plan was not submitted with the two later packages of additional information provided

by the State Party. ICOMOS recommends that the management plan is finalized, officially adopted and submitted to the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS.

The property is currently closed to visitors for the purpose of continued excavation and conservation measures and no visitor infrastructure exists. Whilst reopening and with it a need for visitor infrastructure is envisaged by the State Party, no concrete plans for this have been presented. ICOMOS recommends that Heritage Impact Assessments are undertaken according to ICOMOS' *Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties* before any visitor infrastructure is approved within or around the property, to prevent potential negative impacts to the Outstanding Universal Value.

Involvement of the local communities

While stakeholder meetings have been held with the local resident community, there is no clear indication that community members will play an effective role in decision-making or future management of the property.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that whilst the institutional management system for the property is adequate at present, human resources need to be strengthened before the site is reopened to the public. The management plan, including a section on visitor management, risk preparedness and disaster-response, is an essential management requirement and needs to be finalized and officially adopted.

6 Monitoring

The State Party indicates that the Management Plan will incorporate specific actions and protocols for monitoring and periodic review based on precise indicators. The baseline for these is provided by GIS documentation which has surveyed the entire ancient city of Qalhat since 2008, including through photogrammetry executed by Iconem for the Qalhat Development Project, and the photographic and graphic archives.

The monitoring protocols will be executed by the Sur office of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, which will also provide the basis for the documentation centre as an archive of monitoring processes. The nomination dossier anticipates a number of indicators for future monitoring exercises including annual wall stability and damage surveys as well as climatic conditions. ICOMOS notes that while the general concepts proposed seem adequate, the monitoring system needs to be established and designed in detail and be tested in its first implementation.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that while the general aspects presented of the envisaged monitoring system seem adequate, the system needs to be defined more precisely and put into practice.

7 Conclusions

The Ancient City of Qalhat provides an exceptional testimony of a southern port and trade of the Kingdom of Hormuz, between the 11th and the 16th centuries CE. It was one of a few major trade hubs which came under the rule of the Princes of Hormuz and prospered on the basis of its trade exchanges to the east and south. Qalhat even became a secondary capitol of Hormuz as it was seasonally resided in by various rulers and served as a refuge during times of conflict and crisis. The Ancient City of Qalhat provides unique archaeological evidence for the trade exchanges between the East Arabian Coast, East Africa, India, and as far as China and South East Asia. As such, the property provides evidence of the East Arabian side of the Indian Ocean trade networks, which predated the arrival of European colonial powers. ICOMOS considers that these characteristics give justification to criterion (ii) in relation to the interchanges of trade networks and the cosmopolitan nature of Qalhat which illustrates the intercultural composition of its inhabitants, as well as criterion (iii) as an exceptional trade and maritime centre of the Kingdom of Hormuz.

ICOMOS considers that the property fulfils the conditions of authenticity, despite concerns regarding the extensive nature of some previous restorations and recommends the adoption of a minimum intervention approach to future conservation in line with the largely untouched nature of an abandoned archaeological site. In terms of integrity, ICOMOS considers that the site is free of major threats but requires careful consideration of site infrastructure envisaged by the responsible authorities. While all structures of the city of Qalhat are within the site boundaries, ICOMOS therefore recommends that the nominated area be extended to include the shoreline which bears significance as a location facilitating the trade interaction as a transitional space between the ancient city and the ocean.

The property enjoys adequate legal protection and its management responsibility lies with the Ministry of Heritage and Culture. The team at the regional Sur office is responsible for the day-to-day management of the property. ICOMOS considers that the human resources of the management team need to be considerably strengthened before the property is reopened to the public. ICOMOS considers that, in particular, interpretation and conservation expertise is required and that the current practice of contracting out conservation work to foreign firms and institutions should be used for local capacity-building.

The State Party indicated that a site management plan is under preparation and it was supposed to be completed in November 2017. Unfortunately, this management plan has not yet been made available. ICOMOS considers that this management plan will play a crucial role in terms of tourism management strategies, risk preparedness and disaster-response measures, as well as the strategic interlinking of excavation and

conservation activities which need to go hand-in-hand. According to ICOMOS, it is therefore essential that the Management Plan is finalized and adopted at the earliest opportunity.

8 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

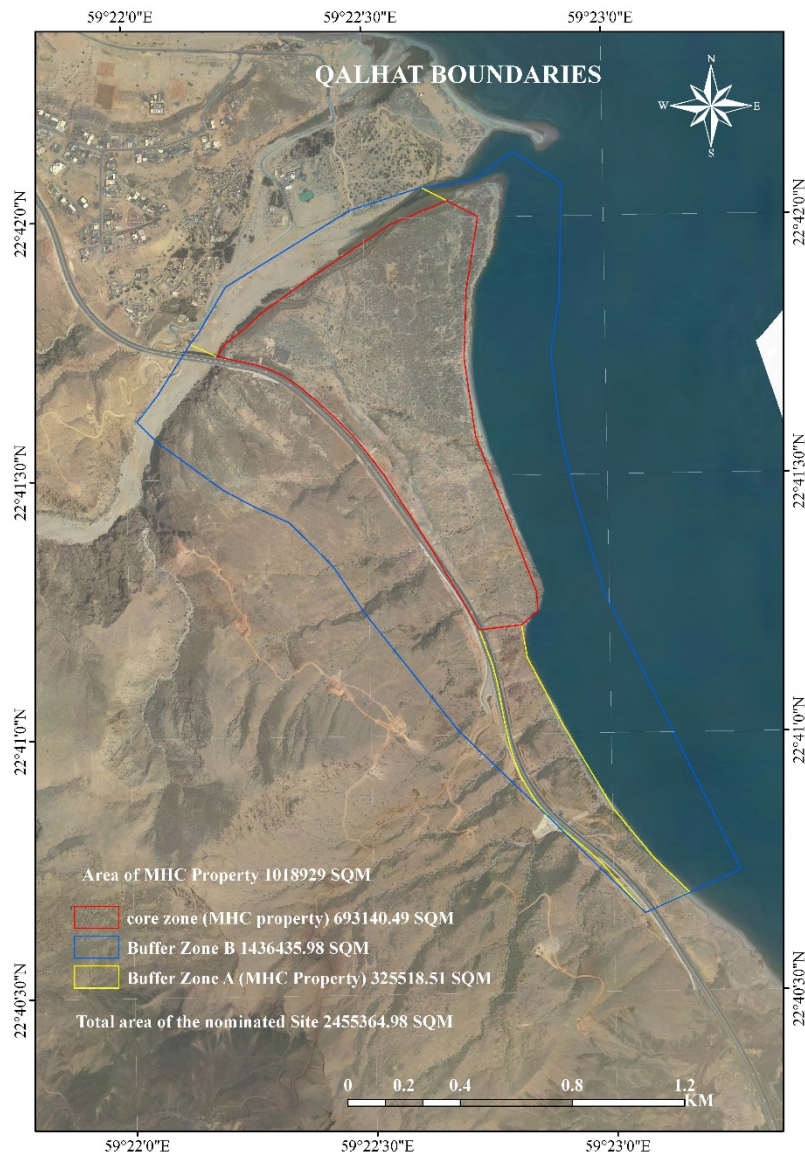
ICOMOS recommends that the nomination of the Ancient City of Qalhat, Oman, be **referred back** to the State Party in order to:

- a) Modify the property boundaries to include the shoreline along the sea, which bears significance as a location facilitating the trade interaction as a transitional space between the ancient city and the ocean and to exclude the section of the highway from the south-western borders of the property,
- b) Finalize and officially adopt the Management Plan, including tourism management, risk preparedness and disaster-response strategies, and a joint excavation-conservation programme,
- c) Strengthen the human resources capacities of the regional office responsible for the day-to-day management activities, in particular in terms of conservation and interpretation specialists as well as security guards, once the property is reopened to the public;

Additional recommendations

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

- d) Utilizing the current commissioning of conservation tasks to foreign firms or institutions as a means of local capacity-building in order to train a site-specific team qualified to undertake ongoing conservation and maintenance tasks,
- e) Undertaking Heritage Impact Assessments according to ICOMOS' *Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties* for any site infrastructure envisaged within or outside the property boundaries before such is given official approval, and communicating these to the World Heritage Centre in line with paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*,
- f) Applying a minimum intervention approach, in line with the largely untouched nature of this property, to all future conservation projects in view of the negative impacts that extensive restoration could have on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property,
- g) Detailing further the indicators and mechanisms of the monitoring system and start its implementation at regular intervals;



Map showing the revised boundaries of the nominated property



Bibi Maryam Mausoleum



Cistern