
The Caliphate City of Medina Azahara (Spain)

No 1560

Official name as proposed by the State Party

The Caliphate City of Medina Azahara

Location

Autonomous Community of Andalusia

Province of Cordoba

Spain

Brief description

The Caliphate City of Medina Azahara is an archaeological site of a city built in the mid-10th century CE by the western Umayyad dynasty as the seat of the Caliphate of Cordoba. The city flourished for a short while but was then destroyed, and the archaeological remains lay hidden for nearly 1,000 years until rediscovered in the early 20th century CE. The site is considered to be the only surviving example of this kind of city in Europe and, from that historical period, in the whole of Islamic Mediterranean culture.

The site is a complete urban complex including infrastructure, buildings, decoration and objects of daily use, and provides in-depth knowledge about the material culture of the Islamic civilization of Al-Andalus at the zenith of its splendour but which has now disappeared. In addition, the landscape features which influenced the city's location are conserved.

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

27 January 2015

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre

26 January 2017

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations

ICOMOS has consulted several independent experts.

Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS Technical Evaluation mission visited the property from 25 to 29 September 2017.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS Interim Report was provided to the State Party on 22 December 2017 requesting further information regarding the name of the property, the history of the Caliphate City, the buffer zone, protection, conservation, management and involvement of local communities.

The State Party provided ICOMOS with the additional information on 14 February 2018 and this information has been considered in the relevant sections below.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

14 March 2018

2 The property

Description

The ruined city of Medina Azahara is located in the Province of Cordoba, in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia. It was built in two stages. In the first period, during the decade 940-950 CE, a *Qasr* (fortified palace) was built as a palatial residence on a series of terraces sloping down over the contours of the mountain. Next to this, lower down on the plain of the Guadalquivir valley, the Great Mosque was built to serve as a focal point for the growing local population along the road to Cordoba. In the second stage, a decade later, the complex was radically redesigned. In this stage, the aim was to integrate the fortified palace and the city itself into the plan of a single geometric unit surrounded by a city wall with towers. This wall formed a rectangle with its longer sides running east-west (1500 metres) and the shorter sides north-south (750 metres), with the Caliph's throne room right in the geometric centre.

To date about 12 hectares, only 10% of the urban area, have been excavated, and this is mainly limited to the central area of the fortified palace and the Great Mosque. In 2007-2008, the excavations were extended to include a section of the southern wall, where another, smaller mosque was unearthed. The detailed knowledge is therefore limited to a comparatively small excavated area, while in the remaining area, mere traces of the buildings remain, seen in the irregularities of the land and only easily detectable on aerial photographs.

The knowledge of the urban structure of Medina Azahara is therefore very schematic but within the walled enclosure the organization of the city into three parallel strips running from north to south can clearly be seen.

The central strip corresponds to the fortified palace, situated on one of the highest levels, with its buildings arranged in terraces down the mountainside. In front of this, to the south, there is a large area without traces of any building work, which seems to have been an open area intended to give access from the medina (old town

centre) to the countryside of the Guadalquivir valley. In this area free of buildings, literary sources indicate the presence of amenities such as a zoo.

The eastern fringe constituted the medina itself, with two urbanized areas built on different designs, and separated by a stream.

The smaller western fringe seems to have been occupied mainly by buildings belonging to the Caliphate state, along with a small area of workers' houses.

Little is known about these two rows of buildings, to the east and west of the fortified palace, as no excavation work has yet been undertaken. The only buildings which can easily be identified are the mosques, due to their characteristic orientation. In addition to the Great Mosque, excavated in the 1960s, there are two others on the western flank and another on the eastern fringe which has been recently excavated. In addition, there is an interesting series of structures located in the southwest corner of the walled enclosure, which were probably manufacturing or military installations belonging to the state.

The fortified palace extends over different levels of terraces and is the best understood structure on the site. The buildings are concentrated on the first three levels, on the next two levels are the gardens, while on the lower level there is a series of open spaces which allow the upper levels to have a view and for them to be seen easily from below. Connection of the different levels is achieved by a network of streets built at the end of each terrace, with vaulted paths which served a double function, as both dividing and containment walls between the different levels. A complex infrastructure of water supply and sewers was also built to serve the buildings.

After the rebuilding work which took place in the decade of the 950s CE, the area of the fortified palace was organized into two main functional areas: the eastern area, containing the reception halls and state representation rooms, and the western area, which was more private, with working areas and living quarters.

However, the buildings were not divided rigidly into these two functions, as there are some residential buildings situated in the eastern representative area, as well as some buildings for official use in the private western area.

What is most impressive about the representative area is the presence of large open spaces, presided over by large state buildings on their northern side. The entire complex is divided into two levels: the upper one contains the administrative and reception areas and the lower level contains the throne room with its garden.

As for the palace's residential area, only the eastern sector has been excavated. It is also built on terraces of different levels. The upper level was where the Caliph's house stood, dominating a wide panorama.

The other buildings were distributed at various levels, with large gardens on the lowest level, which was known as the Lower Gardens. The different buildings in this area were arranged around courtyards with two very different types of building: on the one hand, the palace residence of the Caliph and his important dignitaries, built on a monumental scale, and on the other, the buildings intended for their servants, which were of a lowly style.

The site of Medina Azahara forms an entire city which preserves evidence of a rich variety of buildings. They bear witness to a complex urban life from the short historical period in which it flourished, the 10th century CE. Buildings excavated so far correspond to the area of the palace.

To construct the buildings on different terraces, the mountainside had to be specially prepared. The bare rock was cut and the foundations filled in with the resulting stone blocks to create a wall, and then on the outside, the foundations were filled in and supported by thick retaining walls.

All the buildings were built with the calcarenite limestone blocks, or ashlar, arranged in the system of lengthways and side-on binding, both in the thicker perimeter walls and in the internal dividing walls. The basic system was to alternate one lengthways block with two or three blocks side-on, while ensuring that as each successive row was laid, a lengthways block covered the side-on blocks, and vice versa. This, together with their relative thickness gave the walls great strength – the blocks used in the internal dividing walls usually have a minimum thickness of 0.94 metres. This construction system was also used in the large retaining walls of the terraces.

Paradoxically, the strength of this building system, which reflected the imperial might of the Umayyad Caliphate, was not visible to the eye, since the vast majority of the walls of the buildings, both exterior and interior, were rendered with a layer of plaster made from mortar of lime and sand, and painted white with a red ochre band below. This served as an effective way of protecting the walls against the elements. Some traces of these renderings survive.

In addition, the most important buildings, mainly those public and private buildings used by the Caliph and the crown prince, were covered wholly or partly by another layer of decorative stone, which was richly carved in relief. The best example of these exceptional buildings is the Hall of Abd-al-Rahman III (*Salón Rico*).

One of the reasons that may have led to the founding of the city of Medina Azahara in this particular location was the place's exceptionally scenic qualities, where the fertile plain of the Guadalquivir valley meets the Mediterranean forest on the foothills of the Sierra Morena mountain range. This particular outcrop of the mountain range gives an outstanding panoramic view of the surrounding countryside, and the city is clearly visible from the plain.

In addition to these landscape qualities, the city was surrounded by a complex network of infrastructure which provided key services: there were roads, bridges and aqueducts, as well as different *munya* (country villas belonging to the nobility) which were built around the same period.

The boundaries of the buffer zone are based on the officially declared Site of Cultural Interest (BIC) and the Special Protection Plan, which are clearly visible from the city, and the location of a number of culturally significant landmarks have also been taken into account along with private properties boundaries.

The buffer zone starts with the remains of two well-known country villas: that of Al-Rummaniyya, situated about 2 kms west of Medina Azahara, and Turruñuelos, a country villa or state building located about 4 kms to the east, close by the main quarries which supplied the stone for buildings during the Caliphate period. The northern boundary has been set at the line of mountain peaks at the top of the valley, while the southern edge is marked by an old road that runs parallel to the river 1.5 kms below the city wall. A series of 18th century perimeter fences mark the former royal stud farm which stood here between the 16th and the 19th centuries CE, occupying the area of the Caliphate city and its surroundings.

This road, called the *Cañada Real* (Royal Cattle Track) in the late Middle Ages, occupies a wide swath of public land with a minimum width of 73 metres. Currently the main road leading to Cordoba takes up most of this, and the land to the sides of the road still affords splendid views of Medina Azahara. Some of this public land has been recently encroached by uncontrolled urban development.

History and development

Medina Azahara was a new city built in open country from 940 CE to become the seat of the Umayyad caliphate of Al-Andalus. This new development about 10 kms west of Cordoba was undertaken by Abd-al-Rahman III, the first sovereign to take the title of caliph in Al-Andalus. Until that time, Cordoba has been the capital of the Umayyad emirs.

The city was called Madīnat al-Zahrā' when it was established. The current name is Medina Azahara.

In a highly symbolic way, the building of Medina Azahara was part of a political, economic and ideological program to assert the new status of Abd-al-Rahman III, set against a backdrop of rival Mediterranean powers. The new city was named 'the bright one' and incorporated a complex palatial protocol designed to assert the power of the Umayyad state.

The relationship between the Caliphate City of Medina Azahara and the Caliphate of Cordoba is important to understand. The Medina Azahara was founded by Abd-al-Rahman III who announced himself as caliph and marked his power by establishing a new capital a short distance west of the Caliphate city of Cordoba. The role

of Medina Azahara was not the result of moving from the former seat of Cordoba that was therefore abandoned. Rather, it was designed as a compliment to Cordoba, and to increase the splendour of this new setting, which was intended to manifest the greatness of the new caliph.

All available means were mobilized to create a worthy capital. Its 112 hectares was set within a rectangular enclosure in the foothills of Sierra Morena. The city was divided into three large terraces occupied by gardens, private homes, public buildings and military and domestic quarters. The design was carefully crafted including use of the topography and the implementation of a subtle hierarchy between buildings.

The establishment of the city in a previously undeveloped area necessitated the creation of a network of infrastructure. Important elements survive such as roads, bridges, hydraulic systems (masonry pipes and aqueducts with horseshoe bows) and quarries for the supply of raw materials for construction.

A few years after its founding, the accelerated pace of work made possible the transfer of personnel and infrastructure of the private house of the Caliph and all organs and services of the Caliphate administration. In addition to residential and public buildings, of which the *Salón Rico* is emblematic, the city housed a monetary strike center and also workshops for the production of sumptuary objects, under restrictive state control. Constructive activity, however, lasted for several decades, and reworkings were made to magnify the prestige of the Caliph.

The city reached its climax during the reigns of Abd-al-Rahman III and his successor Al-Hakam II, establishing it at the heart of the caliphate, but also making the city a center of artistic avant-garde and a place of diplomatic representation. Its period of occupation was however very brief. It entered a phase of decline as early as 974 CE, accentuated by the coming to power of Al-Mansur in 978 CE, and it was finally sacked during the civil war that ended the caliphate between in 1009-1010 CE.

Abandoned and partially despoiled, the place was then known after the Christian conquest under the toponym "*Cordoba la Vieja*" (Old Cordoba). Its spectacular vestiges emerged as ruins only as a result of archaeological excavations initiated at the dawn of the 20th century.

Since then, and despite some administrative and economic vagaries that have punctuated the recent history, the various interventions conducted at the site aimed to recover and interpret this historical and archaeological heritage.

3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity

Comparative analysis

The State Party has defined the significance of the nominated property in its national and international context: a range of sites have been subject to comparative analysis with Medina Azahara, some being already listed on the World Heritage List and some being listed in Tentative Lists. The analysis is based on three additional reference frameworks, which are the type of property, the time period-region and the theme of the property. The comparisons are centred on archaeological sites and abandoned cities located within the Middle East, North Africa and Iberian Peninsula of the Medieval Islamic Period.

Parallels with similar caliphal cities are provided in the comparative analysis, including those founded during the Umayyads, Abbasids and Fatimids periods. All are either completely lost (e.g. the city of Bagdad in Iraq from the Abbasid period), in a bad state of preservation (e.g. Raqqa-Râfiqa in Syria and Sabra al-Mansuriyya in Tunisia) or completely built over by later development (al-Mahdiya in Tunisia and Fatimid Cairo in Egypt). Only Samarra in Iraq and Medina Azahara in Spain represent well-preserved examples of caliphal cities.

Among all caliphal cities, the State Party presents Medina Azahara as the only city that provides testimony of the culture and knowledge from the Islamic civilization, which came to Europe.

Parallels with similar 'Andalusian' sites are provided showing Al-Andalus' (Islamic Iberia's) important role as a link between the Islamic civilization and European culture. Among these are the World Heritage sites of the historic center of Cordoba, the Alhambra, Generalife and Albayzín in Granada, the Historic Center of Toledo and the Cathedral, Alcázar and Archivo de Indias of Seville, as well as other archaeological sites like Siyasa. Among these sites, the archaeological site of Medina Azahara is the only example of a large city of which the archaeological remains are preserved. The site remained hidden and unchanged for a millennium and it is the oldest among the sites noted, thus representing the entire form of the Islamic civilization, and its early phases and cultural influence on the Iberian Peninsula.

The State Party concludes that the nominated property is exceptional as it is the only city built *ex nihilo* in Europe bearing testimony of the Islamic civilisation.

ICOMOS considers that there are two types of new Islamic cities established in this period: those that have survived until today, and those that existed for a short time and were then destroyed or abandoned. In the first instance, later development has removed all remains of the original culture. By contrast, the fragility of the original materials in the abandoned cities resulted in their complete loss, given also that they suffered from frequent damage in later phases.

ICOMOS notes that Islamic civilization was distinguished by the frequency of establishing cities closely associated with dynasties recently coming to power or wishing to assert a new status, whether it was at the level of the caliphate itself or as an emirate. It was always, but to varying degrees, to provide the ruling class with a secure environment. It was also a question of marking the collective imagination of the populations by ambitious achievements where architecture and urbanism would be carrying a message of identity and legitimacy, intelligible to all, and where these constructions would provide the framework essential to a full display of power. In most cases, these cities were not limited to housing the princely residences and the state administration; they also grouped together economic (trade and craft production), religious or military functions. Substantial political effectiveness was achieved by establishing these new cities within a short distance of the old centers that preceded them, following a Near Eastern tradition which was largely pre-Islamic.

The examples of such twinned cities are multiple, on scales that are very diverse: besides the conurbation of Medina Azahara and Cordoba, others to note include Samarra and Bagdad in Iraq, both successive Idrisid foundations of Fez followed by that of the Merinids Fez Jedid (new town) in Morocco, al-Abbassia, Raqqa-Râfiqa then Sabra al-Mansuriyya facing Kairouan in Tunisia, or Cairo facing in Fustat, Egypt. Their fate being closely linked to that of the dynasties that had founded them, these cities sometimes had only a short life span: Raqqa lasted less than fifty years, Sabra al-Mansuriyya barely a century. Others have survived for many centuries until today, like Cairo.

ICOMOS considers that the only example of surviving buildings in North Africa that is roughly comparable to Medina Azahara is the site of Qal'a of Beni-Hammad. The difference is that this building is 100 years younger than Medina Azahara, it was constructed on rugged terrain in an arid landscape, it was not a Caliphate capital, and its cultural and environmental contexts are different.

Despite the evocation of these potential parallels, Medina Azahara remains an exception, reinforced by its authenticity and integrity. Indeed, as the only caliphal capital founded by the Umayyad dynasty, ICOMOS considers that Medina Azahara is distinguished as a city that provides testimony of the culture and knowledge from the Islamic civilization, which came to Europe.

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:

- The nominated property contains the urban layout of a complete city giving an overview of the culture of a vanished civilisation at the peak of its glory, thanks to the exceptional state of conservation of the surrounding areas and its remains.
- It is the only surviving example in Europe of a city of these characteristics and the only one from this historical period of the Islamic culture.
- The nominated property has been hidden for nearly a millennium, meaning that no further building work was carried out in that period, allowing a recovery process led by public institutions that has continued for a century.

The State Party states that Medina Azahara is the only caliphate capital founded anew on the Iberian Peninsula. This character finds an echo in its urban fabric as well as in the constructions excavated to date: these provide a peerless vision of an official architectural program where all the components (order, decor, epigraphy, etc) were intended to magnify the power of the creation and its creator. Medina Azahara was the ultimate representation of a civilization at its peak from the time of its construction towards the middle of the 10th century CE. An aspect of originality was the creation of a composition, which portrayed this power, through the landscape, the hierarchy of buildings and the use of an ornamental language with echoes paradisiacal.

ICOMOS considers that Medina Azahara is an outstanding testimony of a complete urban complex of city in Europe and, from that historical period, in the whole of western Islamic culture. ICOMOS also considers that the name of the property be modified in order to keep the historical name of the city, that is to say: "The Caliphate City of Madīnat al-Zahrā".

The hidden character of the site over a long period has contributed to its preservation and it has not been rebuilt or altered in that time. The rediscovery has led to excavation, protection and conservation, which has continued for a century, promoted by public institutions. Official promotion, first by the state and later by the regional autonomous community, has guaranteed the ownership of the site, ensured the highest level of protection, and has led to the creation of a specific institution with facilities and personnel to manage the site, the Archaeological Complex of Medina Azahara.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

ICOMOS concurs with the State Party's views that the nominated property satisfies the conditions of integrity as it includes all elements necessary to express its Outstanding Universal Value, and has an adequate

size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes which convey the property's significance. Moreover, the physical fabric of the property and its significant features are in good condition, and the impact of deteriorating processes is controlled by the collaborative efforts being made by the different public authorities and local people.

ICOMOS notes that the extensive buffer zone preserves the context and close relations of the city landscape with its natural environment, as well as the ruins of the main infrastructure of roads, canals, aqueducts and bridges that emerge from the city, the original quarries of Albaida where stone was extracted as a building material for the city, and the remarkable rural buildings, known as *munya* (the country houses/villas of Al-Rummaniyya to the west and Turruñuelos to the east).

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity have been met.

Authenticity

ICOMOS notes that since its abandonment, the city of Medina Azahara and its surroundings have not been reoccupied or resettled, and it has not been subjected to major infrastructural works of any kind. In fact, the only damages suffered by the property have stemmed from natural erosion and from agricultural activities (both of which have been shown to be negligible). There has also been localized digging up and reutilization of masonry and ashlar stones. This latter aspect has a potentially more serious impact, as several walls in the property have been dismantled and used for neighboring construction, especially the 15th century CE Monastery of San Jeronimo.

ICOMOS considers that these stone extraction activities may possibly raise some issues during the archaeological excavation of the property and its architectural interpretation and reconstruction, but they do not diminish its authenticity.

As for the authenticity of design, the conservation work has been respectful of the original, such as conserving the marks left behind by missing elements, for example the walls which were removed down to their foundations or the missing pavements or floor tiles which have left their imprint on the layer beneath them. However, one issue which is specific to Medina Azahara is the huge number of decorative stone fragments which were left scattered as a result of damage to the masonry walls in ancient times. The reconstruction of this mosaic is of importance because it is one of the masterpieces of Islamic art. This requires the missing walls to be replaced to provide the necessary support for the decorative patterns to be put back together, a task which can only be done in situ, due to the dimensional problems posed.

Due to the fact that the city remained hidden after it was abandoned at the beginning of the 11th century CE until its rediscovery in the early 20th century CE, and since the area was used for grazing cattle, its ancient ruins are well preserved. In addition, 90% of site has not yet been excavated, which provides an opportunity for future research to enhance the understanding of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. Moreover, continued excavation and conservation work, mainly in the excavated part of the *Qasr*, has yielded a group of well-preserved buildings with original walls still standing to a height of several meters.

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of authenticity have been met.

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iii) and (iv).

Criterion (iii): *To bear unique, or at least exceptional, testimony to a cultural tradition or to a living or extinct civilization;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property bears unique testimony to the Islamic Andalusí civilisation which occurred over a millennium ago. As only 10% of the city has been excavated so far, the Caliphate City of Medina Azahara show in its entirety the remains of a 10th century city.

ICOMOS considers that the Caliphate City of Medina Azahara, being a new city planned and built as a state initiative, attests in an exceptional way to the Umayyad cultural and architectural civilization, and more generally to the development of the western Islamic civilization of al-Andalus.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

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;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property represents an outstanding example of urban infrastructure, planning, adaptation of the landscape and decoration of the 10th century of the western Islamic empire.

ICOMOS considers that the Caliphate City of Medina Azahara is a representative example of a combined architectural and landscape approach to urban planning and construction, illustrative of the early Islamic, and specifically, Umayyad civilization.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (iii) and (iv) and conditions of authenticity and integrity.

Description of the attributes

The attributes are the archaeological remains of the complete urban complex of the city, including the remains of infrastructure (roads, bridges, water supply, sewers), buildings, decoration and objects of daily use, terraces, walls, towers, garden areas, the landscape features which influenced the city's location, and views to and from the site.

4 Factors affecting the property

ICOMOS notes that factors affecting the site include illegal settlements, all located at a certain distance from the perimeter of the city walls, but which are inside the buffer zone. The distances from the property are respectively: *Las Pintas* North 1,000 metres; *Cordoba la Vieja* 330 metres and *La Gorgoja II* 360 metres. They consist of cottages of one or two floors with a private pool. Originally conceived as vacation houses, they have been later converted into residences as urban pressure for facilities and services has increased. Along the road A-431 some service building and industrial activities have been erected. Although the development now appears to have stopped, because of the extension of the buffer zone to include the strip between the channel and the road A-431, the situation is still controversial: the settlers have legally opposed the inclusion of their plots into the buffer zone, but their requests have been rejected.

In recent years, the staff of the CAMA (Archaeological Ensemble Medina Azahara) have been active in highlighting to authorities all illegal activities in the buffer zone. In the additional information submitted in February 2018, the State Party assures that sufficient legal measures are in force to prevent new illegal construction. ICOMOS acknowledges this information and encourages that special monitoring be carried out on the portion of *Las Pintas* beyond the Guadalquivir River Canal, where urban plots are still empty.

The three settlements of *Las Pintas*, *La Gorgoja II* and *Cordoba la Vieja* affect the view of the *Qasr* from the A-431 road. None the less, on the opposite side the prominent position of the Caliphate city has safeguarded the stunning scenic views of the Guadalquivir valley despite any possible interference from buildings in the distant surroundings.

From an environmental point of view, no sources of major pollution have been identified in the area. The geology of the sierra is not prone to landslides. The risk of wildfires is prevented by a large firebreak cut north of the city that is well maintained.

The quality of the limestone employed in the masonry of Medina Azahara is very poor. The action of water on the walls, both from rainwater and rising damp from the

ground, saturates the stone that tend to disintegrate if subjected to a sudden change of temperature. Corrective measures are in place. This is a factor that has undoubtedly affected the monuments within the proposed property as each phase of excavation conducted before 1985 has not been able to draw upon the experience and records of the previous investigations. In this period, in fact, documentation was either never produced or was later lost. Although it is clear that no damage has occurred because of this lack of records, there is a significant information deficit. A research project has been devised to study the records of former investigations. After 1985, the documentation process was completely reconsidered and documentary, planimetric and photographic files of good quality have been produced.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are illegal settlement activity in the buffer zone and water damage to the limestone masonry.

5 Protection, conservation and management

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The nominated property boundaries cover an area of 111 ha with a buffer zone of 2,186 ha, for a total area of 2,297 ha.

The boundaries of the nominated property coincide with the boundaries of the city wall so the nominated are clearly delineated. In some parts, the wall has barely been excavated but its extension is known because of several studies of microtopography, orthophotography and geophysical surveys. In order to show the delineation of the wall, and of the nominated area where the wall is missing, a metallic fence has been installed.

The buffer zone has been delineated by taking into consideration the components of the specific landscape surrounding the nominated property, that is to say the whole historical territorial system with roads, aqueduct and hydraulic devices, satellite rural Arab villas and quarries around the Caliphate city. The boundaries are clearly identifiable on site because they are defined by precise geographical entities, such as the ridge of the sierra, streams, channels, and the main A-431 road.

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

Ownership

The nominated property is 97.5% owned by the Government of Andalusia. Only 2.5% belongs to private owners: separated from the rest of the nominated area by a road crossing the site. This latter part, which is not excavated, is currently used for agricultural purposes such as grazing cattle.

Protection

The Caliphate city was protected as a monument from 1923 by the Spanish State prior to a review of the legislation in 1985 that declared Medina Azahara as a Property of Cultural Interest and guaranteed the highest degree of protection. In 2003, the protection was extended to a large area around the city and its buffer zone, and included the site of Turruñuelos to the east. With this protective status as the Archaeological Complex of Medina Azahara, all excavation work, research and protection of the property are conducted under the authority of the State, which ensures control of the property with all its surviving remains to be maintained.

The buffer zone is protected by a combination of two instruments: a Special Protection Plan, approved in 1998, and as a Property of Cultural Interest. ICOMOS notes that because of minimal variations due to the use of different basic cartography, the two instruments do not overlap perfectly in the south. The Special Protection Plan, in fact, includes the road A-431 which is not significant for protection of the property.

The Special Protection Plan establishes the boundaries of the area to be protected and the land uses for each spatial category. In order to follow the implementation of this law, the Office of the Public Prosecutor to the Environment is responsible for prosecuting urban planning offences.

The State Party also provided additional information regarding the buffer zone and mitigating the impact of illegal settlements.

The protection of the buffer zone is more complex than the property because it is mostly privately owned, except for the headquarters of Junta de Andalusia. The east sector is protected only by the Special Protection Plan, and includes small and large agricultural farms, the ruins of a former slaughterhouse built on the archaeological traces of Turruñuelos, and a small urban cluster of about 30 houses. The site of Turruñuelos is expected to become public property soon.

On the opposite site, located between the *munya* of Romaniyya and the canal, is the urban area of Las Pitas north. While largely now clear, it is under great development pressure from several owners. The strip of land included between the A-431 Palma del Río road and the channel is the most sensitive area. It faces the north-south axis of the *Qasr* and new constructions could affect the spectacular view of the plains, which was originally the reason for the location of Medina Azahara. Besides the three urban areas of *Las Pitas* south, *Cordoba la Vieja* and *La Gorgoja II*, there are industrial and service activities along the road. The Special Plan for the Palma del Río Main Road, drafted by the Municipality, includes this area where the land in front of the property is still mainly devoted to agriculture.

The national road A-431 has a high strategic and economic value and is a potential development focus for

the urban periphery of Cordoba that has already reached the eastern side of the buffer zone. Special monitoring of this situation will be required. Although the situation is currently under control, in the future economic pressure will be accentuated and continuous monitoring by the CAMA, and active engagement by the municipal authority and community will be necessary in order to protect the area.

There are measures proposed to prevent new illegal constructions in the buffer zone. The area within and around these earlier illegal settlements was allocated within the protection system of the State Historic Heritage Law of 1985 and the Andalusian Historic Heritage Law of 2007, as well as under the General Cordova Development Plan of 2001. Moreover, there are existing control mechanisms in place to prevent any offensive actions. These include the establishment of the Environment and Heritage Prosecutor's Office that is jointly working with the autonomous police.

With regard to monitoring of sensitive areas, there is the territorial monitoring department as part of the administrative organisation of Medina Azahara as well as the municipality of Cordoba that jointly conduct periodic investigation visits to these areas. There is a proposal for creating linear tree screens covering pedestrian, cyclist and horse-riding routes that connect with Cordoba in order to mitigate the edges of the illegal settlements with hard and soft landscaping. Therefore, the buffer zone of the nominated property can be effective if these measures are carefully followed and implemented.

In the past the site and the buffer zone have been traditionally protected by the productive activities of the Crown and the landlords devoted to animal breeding and extensive agriculture. Most of the private properties are still owned by the old families that continue the same traditions.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place is adequate but development pressure in the buffer zone requires careful monitoring, and mitigation measures regarding illegal settlements must be implemented.

Conservation

The nomination dossier provides in depth the long conservation history of the site, with the description of all excavations, restorations, conservations, consolidation and reconstruction works carried out from 1911 until the present.

The site, landscape and especially their chronological, cultural context regionally, in Southern Iberia, and further afield have been intensively researched in recent decades, and the site is comprehensively inventoried. It is clear that the property presents a significant opportunity for on-going and future research of global importance, and that such research is supported from a range of funding sources.

In addition, studies in recent decades have resulted in a very impressive range of dedicated publications. Further development of research and its dissemination is planned.

As noted above, the excavated archaeological area is huge, covering 12 hectares, and the state of conservation, while generally good, varies from complex to complex. The component parts of the proposed property are now all well conserved, to a high standard conceptually and technically. Some early interventions on the monuments required remediation in recent years. Some still require further work, for example: the Outer Covered Walkway and the House of the Pool.

Some excavated areas in the west, at the edges of the quarter of the domestic spaces, are affected by degradation and erosion. The Hall of the double columns, two areas to the west and south of the House of the Pool are in need of particular attention. These areas have suffered major destruction and sometimes only traces of the walls remain, and their exact shape or function is difficult to interpret.

The staff of CAMA are aware of the danger and remedies have been studied. The existing walls in danger of collapsing will be consolidated. The slopes will be contained by walls with a different texture and arranged in such way that their layout does not impair the legibility of the surrounding areas. Potholes in the ground could probably be covered with a soft pavement of lime and sand, similar to that already in place at the rear of the *Salón Rico*.

A similar case was noted at the south-west corner of the Upper Garden where the discontinuity of the wall could encourage erosion of the garden above. The completion of the few meters of missing wall would not affect the authenticity of the whole and would allow visitors to safely move in the garden.

The main problem affecting the calcarenite limestone pavements is that the main part of the visitors' route runs along these original floors preserved in situ. The adopted solution to correct the problem is to cover these pavements with a protective layer of lime and sand mortar in those areas where visitors will be likely to walk. Because of high maintenance costs, raised wooden floors (of the kind now in the Basilica) may not be an advisable solution.

Protection is currently active but a timeframe for the above works should be established together with the necessary funds for their implementation.

Extensive surfaces of ataurique decorative pieces are lying on the floor of the Outer Walkway, the north-eastern quadrant of the Upper Garden and the Lower Garden. In order to prevent pilfering the areas are closed to the public. It is urgent that the CAMA decides which decorations to restore in situ by anastylosis (as already done in the Rich Hall) and which to store safely in the museum.

The inscription of the property in the World Heritage List may attract national and international financial grants, as in the case of the Rich Hall, and accelerate the solution of these problems.

Where repairs and reconstruction has been taking place, these interventions have not diminished the authenticity and integrity of the monuments (the *Salón Rico*, the Basilica and the Portico of the Parade Ground).

The State Party provided additional information regarding changes in conservation doctrine, the differing criteria that were adopted, how they logically evolved over time, and how the site shows this evolution. None the less, the evidence of the evolution should be elaborated in detail in the baseline documentation about the site.

ICOMOS notes that it is regrettable that the approach to conservation appears to have been somewhat disaggregated before 1985, lacking a truly integrated interdisciplinary engagement and input to some conservation planning and thinking. After 1985, both conservation and management has been conducted in a manner that has preserved the essential attributes and values of the monuments.

ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the attributes of this nominated property while generally good, varies from fair to complex. Some early interventions on the monuments still require remediation work, and other conservation works are necessary.

Management

The nomination dossier does not present a Management Plan for the property, although from 1985 the site has benefitted from a mature management system, which is described in all its aspects: Legal framework, Special Protection Plan, Institutional framework, Framework infrastructure and resources.

Special mention should be made of the headquarters complex inaugurated in 2009 that combines a museum with a visitor's centre. This includes exhibition spaces, reception area, administration, conservation and research infrastructure. Taking advantage of an original access road, it does not hamper future excavations and does not spoil the view of the *Qasr* because it is built mainly underground. The complex won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2012 and was named European museum of the year in 2013.

The old headquarters built close to the Northern entrance of the site 100 years ago will be transformed into a hostel for visiting scholars. The highly qualified staff meets the needs of the institution in terms of protection, conservation, documentation and research.

The bulk of the Special Protection Plan is included in two-year programs, organized in two sections – programs for specific areas and programs of itineraries – distributed over 3 geographical areas (*Qasr*, Medina and surrounding

area). This planning has allowed the conservation project to be organised over time and according to priority.

The plan is rational and well organized, but unfortunately the conservation of some buildings of the *Qasr* have been delayed by financial restrictions. The main financial resources come from the Junta de Andalusia that covers the current expenses and minor conservation works. The large projects of building conservation cannot be carried out solely with the current budget. Special financial support by external institutions is required.

The local business and tourism management communities within the city have enthusiastically embraced the branding exercise promoted by the local authority, but they were not involved in the preparation of the nomination and are not involved in any meaningful way in the management of the property. The State Party has provided additional information regarding the future establishment of a Coordination Board for the property which will increase local community participation.

A range of highly qualified architects, planners, archaeologists, technical scientists, administrators, and conservators continue to be involved with research work at the site and practical day-to-day management. All of them are highly motivated.

The quality of the documentation work, cartography and architectural survey is good as well as the quality and the quantity of scientific reconstitution of the movable assets and the quality of photographic documentation.

ICOMOS considers that the management system is generally adequate, however appropriate and timely funding must be secured for the property. In addition, better ongoing engagement with the local business and tourism management communities should be undertaken.

6 Monitoring

Because of its size, its variety of features, its relationship with the natural environment and its proximity to the large urban area of Cordoba, it is a difficult task to bring together all the necessary data to analyse and monitor the evolution of the state conservation of Medina Azahara using objective and measurable indicators.

However, taking into account the long history of managing the property, the State Party has attempted to compile a series of indicators, grouped according to the different areas and perspectives, which can be used to get an idea of the state of its conservation. As a result, this measures the commitment of the government and community to the different aspects of preservation and improvement.

ICOMOS considers that the list of indicators does not in itself give accurate information about the state of conservation. However, recording their evolution over a number of years, together with textual and graphic information to help with interpretation, this does give some

overview of the state of conservation of the property and an idea of how far the commitments made to the site's management are being accomplished.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring is adequate, although it may be improved by developing indicators which directly measure the state of conservation.

7 Conclusions

The Medina Azahara is outstanding testimony of a complete urban complex of a city in Europe and, from that historical period, in the whole of western Islamic culture.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List. The requirements for demonstrating the Outstanding Universal Value of this property have been met by the State Party. The nominated property satisfies criteria (iii) and (iv), and the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met. ICOMOS also considers that the name of the property be modified in order to keep the historical name of the city, that is to say: "The Caliphate City of Madīnat al-Zahrā".

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are illegal settlement activity in the buffer zone and water damage to the limestone masonry.

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

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place is adequate but development pressure in the buffer zone requires careful monitoring, and mitigation measures regarding illegal settlements must be implemented.

ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the attributes of this nominated property while generally good, varies from fair to complex. Some early interventions on the monuments still require remediation work, and other conservation works are necessary.

ICOMOS considers that the management system is generally adequate however appropriate and timely funding must be secured for the property. In addition, better ongoing engagement with the local business and tourism management communities should be undertaken.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring is adequate, though it may be improved by developing indicators which directly measure the state of conservation.

8 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that The Caliphate City of Medina Azahara, Spain, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (iii) and (iv)**.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

The Caliphate City of Medina Azahara is an archaeological site of a newly-founded city built in the mid-10th century CE by the western Umayyad dynasty as the seat of the Caliphate of Cordoba. The city was destroyed shortly afterwards, and from that time remained hidden until its rediscovery in the early 20th century CE.

The site is a complete urban complex including infrastructure, buildings, decoration and objects of daily use, and provides in-depth knowledge about the material culture of the Islamic civilization of Al-Andalus at the zenith of its splendour but which has now disappeared. In addition, the landscape features which influenced the city's location are conserved.

The hidden character of the site over a long period has contributed to its preservation and it has not been rebuilt or altered in that time. The rediscovery has led to excavation, protection and conservation which has continued for a century, promoted by public institutions.

Criterion (iii): The abandoned Caliphate City of Medina Azahara, being a new city planned and built as a state initiative, attests in an exceptional way to the Umayyad cultural and architectural civilization, and more generally to the development of the western Islamic civilization of Al-Andalus.

Criterion (iv): The Caliphate City of Medina Azahara is an outstanding example of urban planning combining architectural and landscape approaches, the technology of urban infrastructure, architecture, decoration and landscape adaptation, illustrating the significant period of the 10th century CE when the Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba was proclaimed in the Islamic West.

Integrity

The site includes the entire Caliphate city, and its buffer zone preserves the context of the city in its natural environment, as well as the remains of the main infrastructure of roads and canals that radiated from it. The quarries where the building material for the city was extracted and the major country villas (*munya*) have also survived in the buffer zone.

Because the city remained hidden from the time of its destruction in the early 11th century CE to its rediscovery in the early 20th century CE, and since the area was used for grazing livestock, the remains are very well preserved.

Only 10% of the site has been excavated and the remainder offers an exceptional opportunity for future research. As for the excavated part of the Qasr or fortified palace, continued excavation and conservation work has brought to light a set of well conserved buildings whose original walls reach a height of several meters.

Authenticity

The site meets the conditions of authenticity in relation to materials, design and location. As regards the authenticity of the materials, as noted most of the site has remained unchanged and hidden below ground. As for the excavated areas, the work of consolidation, made necessary by the fragility of the materials, has been progressing under the philosophy of minimal intervention, in order to ensure the stability of structures, protect them against the elements and conserve the information produced during the excavation process.

This policy of minimal intervention has ensured that any new additions clearly differ from, but also blend in with, the original. Identifying the original position of the different materials used in building the city has made this work possible.

The authenticity of the site is also guaranteed by the conservation of its natural environment, where little has changed since the destruction of the city, except for a few small recent alterations. In addition, the descriptions of the buildings in a wide range of historical sources, the epigraphic evidence and the quality of research work carried out for over a century reinforce the authenticity of the site.

Management and protection requirements

The Caliphate City of Medina Azahara and its buffer zone have been protected almost continuously by the Administration since 1911, and the site has had its own management body since 1985. Accordingly, the site has a general framework of protection and management that guarantees the future maintenance of its Outstanding Universal Value.

Protection is assisted by the site being mostly in public ownership. The legal protection of Medina Azahara and its surroundings is also at the maximum level afforded by the Law of Spanish Historical Heritage, as a Property of Cultural Interest, under the category Archaeological Site.

The Special Plan for the Protection of Medina Azahara was approved in 1998, providing an urban planning law that regulated the boundaries of the protected area and established possible land uses for each defined category.

Various government and legal departments ensure strict compliance with this law, and thus avoid any potential threats.

The institutional framework for management is provided, since 1985, by a specific institution that manages the

property and the buffer zone: the Archaeological Ensemble of Medina Azahara (CAMA). This institution has an organizational structure including areas of Administration, Conservation and Research/Publicity.

There are two planning instruments which have been developed and implemented to different degrees (the programmes of the Special Protection Plan and the Master Plan), which provide a solid basis for strategic guidelines to guarantee that Medina Azahara continues to be protected and appreciated.

The expected long-term results for management are to consolidate and increase human and budgetary resources for management, consolidating the public institution with its technical expertise as the main instrument for managing the site, providing it with greater functional autonomy and encouraging greater participation and coordination with other agencies and interested parties.

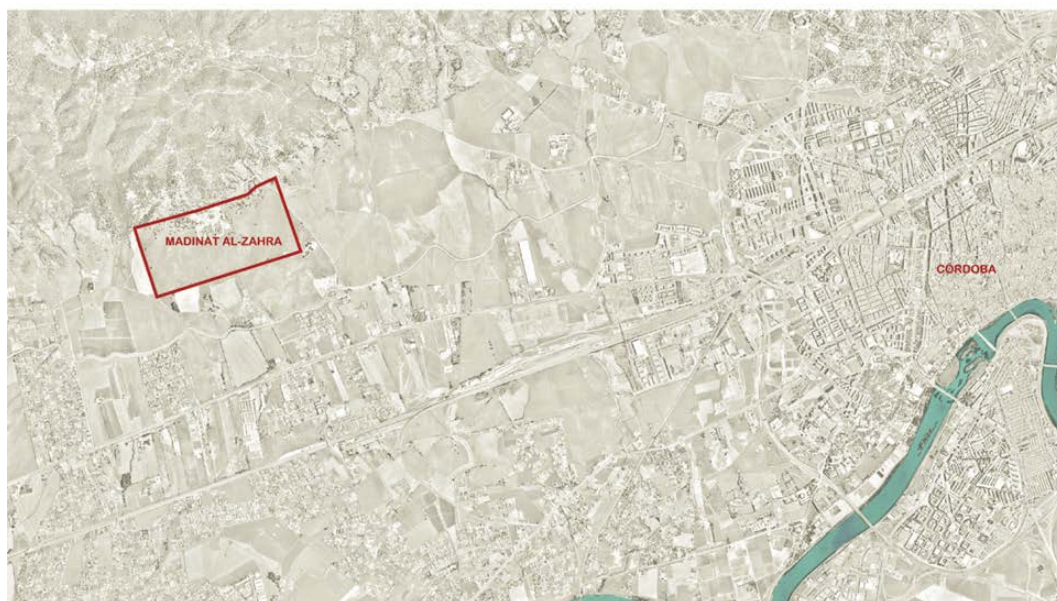
Another essential aim to ensure the preservation of the site is to update and have approved the Operational Plan for Medina Azahara.

Additional recommendations

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

- a) Securing the appropriate and timely funding for the property,
- b) Clarifying of the timeframe for the implementation of the mitigation of the edges of the illegal settlements with hard and soft landscaping,
- c) Carrying out special monitoring on the portion of Las Pintas beyond the Guadalquivir River Canal, where urban plots are still empty, with a view to avoiding development or at least ensuring development has minimal impact,
- d) Improving the monitoring by developing indicators which directly measure the state of conservation,
- e) Elaborating in detail the evidence of the evolution of conservation doctrine and criteria in the baseline documentation about the site,
- f) Updating and approving the Operational Plan for Medina Azahara in order to ensure the preservation of the site;

Moreover, ICOMOS recommends that the name of the property be modified in order to keep the historical name to become "The Caliphate City of Madīnat al-Zahrā".



Map showing the location of the nominated property



Hall of Abd al-Rahman III



Upper Gardens