Historic Centre of Sheki (Azerbaijan) No 1549rev

Official name as proposed by the State Party
Historic centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace

Location
Sheki city
Azerbaijan

Brief description
The historic town of Sheki is situated in the central North of Azerbaijan along the southern edge of the Greater Caucasian mountain range. Its historic centre, built as a reconstruction of an earlier town after mud floods in 1772, is characterized by a traditional architectural ensemble of houses with high saddle roofs. Located along important historic trade routes, the architecture was influenced by the building traditions of Safavid, Qajar and Russian rule origin. The Khan's Palace in the north-east of the town as well as the various merchant's houses reflect the wealth generated by silkworm breeding and trading of cocoons in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

Category of property
In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

In terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (July 2015), Annex 3, this is also an *inhabited historic town*.

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List
24 October 2001

Background
This is an originally referred nomination (41 COM, Krakow, Poland). The World Heritage Committee adopted the following decision (41 COM 8B.20):

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Documents WHC/17/41.COM/8B and WHC/17/41.COM/INF.8B1,*

2. *Refer the nomination of the Historic Centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace, Azerbaijan, back to the State Party in order to further advance conservation and preservation mechanisms with a view for their better implementation;*

3. *Recommends the State Party to prepare the Action Plan for conservation and preservation of the nominated property in close consultation with the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS;*

4. *Invites the State Party to give consideration to the following:*

   a) *to strengthen the mandate and resources of the management team, and to revise and adopt the management plan for its further proper implementation,*

   b) *to strengthen protective measures for the buffer zone to ensure the long-term protection of the wider landscape setting,*

   c) *to prepare conservation guidelines to ensure future restorations are undertaken utilizing adequate materials and expertise,*

   d) *to consider the increase of the role of traditional governance structures such as the Council of Elders and the neighbourhood representatives in decision-making and management processes,*

   e) *to develop a monitoring system focused on both the state of conservation of the nominated property and the implementation of the management plan.*

Consultations and Technical Evaluation Mission
ICOMOS consulted its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages (CIVVIH) and several independent experts.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 4 to 8 July 2016.

Additional information received by ICOMOS
ICOMOS sent a letter to the State Party on 16 October 2016 requesting additional information with regard to the basis of Outstanding Universal Value, the approach towards the Comparative Analysis, the administrative arrangements for the management of the site and future prospects of development control. The State Party responded on 14 November 2016, addressing all issues that ICOMOS requested. These are integrated in the relevant sections below.

An Interim Report was sent by ICOMOS to the State Party on 23 January 2017.

In its evaluation, ICOMOS recommended that the Historic centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace, Azerbaijan, should not be inscribed on the World Heritage List.

Following decision 41 COM 8B.20 in 2017 to refer the nomination back to the State Party, additional Information was submitted by the State Party on 30 January 2019. This information is supplementary to the original nomination dossier and addresses some of the recommendations of the Committee. It includes:

- An Action Plan with Texts of Procedures for the "Conservation and Rehabilitation of Historical Centre of Sheki";
- Restoration Manual – part of the Action Plan.

As a revised nomination dossier has not been submitted, and no further mission has been undertaken. The sections in this evaluation report on Description, History and development, Justification of Outstanding Universal Value, Integrity and authenticity, Criteria under which inscription is proposed, Factors affecting the Property, Boundaries, and Ownership, remain unchanged from ICOMOS's first evaluation.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report
13 March 2019

2 Description of the property

Description and history
Sheki is located on the southern foot of the Greater Caucasus ridge and is divided into a northern and southern part by the Gurjana River. While its northern and earlier part is situated on higher land, the southern part lies within the river valley. The history of Sheki dates back at least two millennia but the current historic town of Sheki's oldest structures date to the year 1772. Almost thirty years after the establishment of the Sheki Khanate in 1743, the previous settlement was destroyed by flooding of the river Kish and the city was resettled and built at its new higher ground location at Gurjana River. It is for this reason that the city today appears homogenous in design and architectural style. The nominated area corresponds to the historic core of Sheki and covers an area of approximately 120 hectares. It is surrounded by a buffer zone of 146 hectares.

The historic centre of the relocated Sheki is its citadel in the upper north-east built in 1790 by Huseyn Khan. Within is gated garden areal accessible via two gates lies the Khan's Palace, which is singled out in the title and concept of this nomination. Built in 1797 during the reign of Mammad Hasan Khan, the palace complex is composed of the Khan's residence and seat of power, mosque, bath, pantries, stables, barns and other service buildings. The main architectural structure of the Khan's palace was designed by the Persian architect Haji Zainal Abdul as a two-storey structure with a dominant front of stained glass windows. It is further characterized by artistic decoration, including paintings, stalactite niche decorations and decorated ceilings with floral patterns.

The city surrounding the citadel is located on steep terrain with narrow and often dead-ended roads. One main road, the major trade route, passes through the centre alongside the citadel and creates the key reference point of trading activities. The main trading areas are located along this primary trade route in the vicinity of the Khan's Palace. The urban fabric is composed of traditional Sheki manor houses. Each of these is enclosed by a high abode wall and consists of a garden within the wall precinct and a brick and timber structured residential building, often placed in the centre of the garden. The houses all have deep verandas, so-called eyvans, facing in southern direction. The garden vegetation indicates the source of wealth of the city. Mulberry trees were the key nutrition for the silkworms bred in Sheki and their cocoons were sold and became source of the city's wealth. Sheki also became famous for embroidery products, very often silk embroidery.

Besides the manor houses, Sheki's public buildings encompass religious structures, identified in the urban fabric by the vertical lines of the mosque minarets, public baths and caravanserais. The city appears strikingly green from a distance while from a pedestrian viewpoint it is characterized by adobe brick walls and cobblestone plastered streets. Its overall impression is influenced by architectural language of Safavid and Qajar origin with later features relating to traditions from territories under Russian rule.

The founding date of a settlement under the name of Sheki is unknown but archaeological records date it to approximately 2,700 years of age. At its present location Sheki was constructed in 1772 following the destruction of the earlier Sheki by floods of the river Kish. This occurred approximately 30 years after establishment of the Sheki Khanate in 1743, which is said one of the most influential Khanates in the region. In its new location, the city soon prospered again through the wealth obtained along the trade routes, in particular through sericulture and the trading of cocoons. The Khan's palace built in 1797 and many manor houses are a direct expression of this wealthy environment.

However, the reign in the palace was short-lived as merely 18 years after its construction the Khanate was abolished by the Russian empire. Throughout the 19th century Sheki remained a feudal trade town with its management transferred by the Russian government to a military commandant. In 1834 a devastating fire destroyed 369 shops and one caravanserai in the central market area. Per historic records of 1836, Sheki was composed of 2,791 houses at the time with a population of 12,586 inhabitants. Sericulture blossomed during this century, especially after Sheki was designated as a centre to strengthen sericulture in Russia. In addition to silk production craftsmanship and trade were further expanded. In the second half of the century Sheki expanded further based on population growth with 17,945 inhabitants recorded in 1852 and 26,286 inhabitants in 1887.

On 5 May 1920 Soviet Power was established in Sheki. All major residential and public buildings as well as facilities for silkworm breeding and silk production were nationalized. In 1928 an additional silk production factory was built, which then allowed for silk production with spinning machines. This draw an influx of labour from the surrounding regions and Sheki expanded yet another time. Multi-storey residential and public houses were built. In the 1980s the traditional bazaar was moved into a new complex for commercial activities.

The historic city was declared an architectural reserve in 1968. Unfortunately, in the late 20th century renovations, which did not comply with adequate international conservation standards, were undertaken, which

negatively impacted the historic urban environment and partially changed its character as a traditional settlement.

Boundaries

The nominated property covers approximately 120 hectares of the core of historic Sheki and includes 15 traditional neighbourhoods. In terms of legal protection, this area is smaller than the "Yukhari Bash" State Historical and Architectural Reserve, established in 1967, which *de jure* protects the property. However, the smaller boundaries cover the relevant elements that express the significance of historic Sheki and appear the best-preserved area of the larger reserve.

The property is surrounded by a buffer zone of 146 hectares. Like the property area, the buffer zone is also part of the "Yukhari Bash" State Historical and Architectural Reserve and enjoys the same level of legal protection. Towards the west, the buffer zone covers the historic neighbourhoods adjacent to the historic core. Upon ICOMOS inquiry whether its extension was sufficient in case of large scale future developments beyond the buffer zone, the State Party assured that high-rise developments could not be permitted due to the seismic activity in the area. ICOMOS notes that in case this regulation would change in view of technological advances, protection of the historic skyline would need to be considered in any future approval procedures.

On the other three sides the buffer zone ends at the foot of the mountain. The nomination dossier indicated that landscape regulations were developed reaching beyond the buffer zone for an area of 72 square kilometres. However, ICOMOS noted that these recommendations were not formalized in any legislative process and accordingly do not constitute a protective mechanism. ICOMOS considers that the forested mountain slope setting is an important feature of the cityscape and, as indicated in the nomination dossier, reflects on the significance of Sheki. It should therefore be formally protected from future development.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property are adequate in reflecting its significance but that the buffer zone would need to be expanded to protect the wider landscape setting of the property.

State of conservation

The Restoration Manual submitted on 30 January 2019 shows that only 4.2% of public and residential buildings survive from the Khan's period (1748-1819), while 60.3% were constructed during the Russian administration (1819-1920) and 33.4 % belong to the USSR period (1920-1990).

The state of conservation of the historic architectural and urban fabric is diverse. According to the nomination dossier out of 2,775 residential houses located in the "Yukhari Bash" State Historical and Architectural Reserve, less than half retain their historical integrity. About a quarter of the remaining architectural structures are either newly built or modified to the extent that their historical basis can no longer be recognized. The Manual reveals that 361 houses (13%) on the site are newly built houses, using new, modern materials and without taking into consideration historical traditions; 315 (11.35%) are fully modified with extensions, while 84 houses (3%) are in a critical condition and mostly abandoned.

Sheki Fortress is well maintained and Sheki Khan's Palace receives special care as it deserves, but some buildings of Russian period are neglected and need rehabilitation.

In principle, the scale of restoration and rehabilitation efforts undertaken within the nominated property in the last five years is impressive. However, restoration works are not always satisfactory as some structures are simply "over-restored".

Factors affecting the property

Rapid economic development of the Republic of Azerbaijan following its independence led to significant development pressures. These are visible mostly in the effects of urban growth and tourism facilitation, which have also affected the historic centre of Sheki. Several hotels built within the historical and architectural reserve do not respect the surrounding architectural volumes and designs. Some of these inappropriate developments or refurbishments are in prominent locations in the very heart of the historic centre, including near the central mosque and palace compound, which exacerbates the situation. Likewise, the setting of the town is disturbed by a few development projects. While the responsible management authority has prepared recommendations for the issuance of decisions on developments in the property and buffer zone, which were signed by the Minister of Tourism and Culture, the elaboration of a master plan for its future conservation and development control remains a crucial need.

Sheki is already a prime destination for domestic tourism and international tourism is on the rise. The above described hotel developments are results of negative tourism impacts which should by no means be repeated in the future. Sheki is also famous for its festivals. Two years ago, an amphitheatre, for the annual music festival and other city events, was constructed to the south-east of the citadel wall, clearly visible as it is located immediately next to the gate accessed from the main street. Although the structure was meant to be portable, it seems to have lasted ever since its first construction and its tarpaulin structures, subsidiary buildings painted in white and poorly designed white fences constitute negative visual impacts to the historic surroundings.

Sheki lies in a seismically active zone and regulations for new construction works require structures that withstand shocks of 8-9 on the Richter scale. Traditional buildings which combine timber and adobe brick structures are well equipped to withstand earthquakes, however, this ability is at times reduced by inappropriate restorations with concrete and other modern materials. Flooding is also a serious risk to the lower sections of the historic centre. When ICOMOS conducted its technical evaluation mission, recent floods had just destroyed a bridge over the Kish

River which disconnected a nearby village. While the historic centre is located on higher grounds and relatively safe from sudden floods, the outer areas of Sheki could face serious destructions. Emergency response plans are in place at a general level only, as floods are always anticipated but would benefit from stronger emphasis for heritage concerns. Although there are no reports of previous fires, the forested mountain slopes might be susceptible to wildfires which could threaten the town.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are urban and tourist developments as well as earthquakes and floods.

3 Proposed justification for inscription

Proposed justification
The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- Sheki, an important historic trade city was influenced by different rulers including Safavids, Qajars and the Russians Empire, which all influenced the features of architecture reflecting wealth of the trade activities;
- The city was the centre of the first and most powerful of a series of Khanates in Caucasus representing a new administrative system in the region;
- The principal economy of Sheki has been based on sericulture and silk production for which the city is a unique example favoured by its climatic condition and morphology.

Comparative analysis
The comparative analysis is drafted to compare the city within (1) its landscape setting, (2) its function as a khanate capital, (3) its architectural representation as a khanate capital and as (4) a settlement characteristic of sericulture. The additional information received at the request of ICOMOS during the first evaluation process added further material on Sheki's function and role as a major trade centre in its wider regional context.

In terms of the landscape setting it is said comparable to European highland towns such as Sarajevo (Tentative List), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Plovdiv (Tentative List), Bulgaria, or the City of Safranbolu, Turkey, inscribed on the World Heritage List (1994, criteria (ii), (iv) and (v)) without further qualification as to the specificities or differences of these cities and their respective landscape settings. To compare the function of Sheki as a khanate capital, the authors draw on other khanate capital cities including Shusha, Baku (inscribed on the World Heritage List as the Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshah's Palace and Maiden Tower, Azerbaijan, 2000 under criterion (iv)), Lankaran, Guba and Ganja, all in Azerbaijan. It is argued that Sheki was special among the khanate capitals for its urban arrangement since it was not surrounded by fortified walls and its city centre did not consist of a square but was rather oriented along the main trade access. ICOMOS considers that these two features do not seem key attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value and while these two aspects might differentiate Sheki, it remains unclear how these are functionally linked to its khanate capital function. ICOMOS further considers that while the comparative analysis was only undertaken at a national level, even an in-depth international comparison would not have strengthened the functional attributes of Sheki as a reference khanate capital.

In terms of its architectural representation as a khanate capital, Sheki is said to stand out among others in terms of the Khan's Palace. The comparative analysis reviews other khanate palace architecture including Shusha, Shamakhi, Ganja, Guba, Lankaran, all in Azerbaijan, and Tbilisi (on Tentative List of Georgia). It is concluded by the authors that the palace of the Sheki khanate stands out for its simple ground plan, its rich decoration and wall paintings. ICOMOS considers that in comparing the Qajar elements of the palace architecture, several similar palaces in Iran should have been analysed and discussed. ICOMOS considers that it is not evident how the Sheki Khan's Palace can be said outstanding within a regional or even global comparison.

Sheki is finally compared in terms of its role as a centre of sericulture for which comparison in the initial nomination is drawn to the Tomioka Silk Mill and related sites, Japan, inscribed in 2014 under criteria (ii) and (iv). ICOMOS noted that the comparison of sericulture was limited solely to the industrial silk production facilities introduced under Russian rule but did not consider the impact of silkworm breeding on the urban typology and architecture of the city. Accordingly, ICOMOS in its request for additional information sought further explanation as to how the urban typology of Sheki could compare to other centres of sericulture.

In the additional information received on 14 November 2016, the State Party elaborated that sericulture in Sheki was more relevant in terms of trade and source of wealth but did not have a distinct impact on the urban and architectural typology. As the sericulture activities were limited to cocoon breeding and raw silk trade, these according to the State Party's response did not require fundamental structures, which affected the planning structure of the city. ICOMOS therefore considers that Sheki cannot be considered an exceptional architectural or urban testimony in relation to sericulture.

The additional information received at the request of ICOMOS rather suggested that Sheki should be considered an exceptional centre of trade along the north Eastern Silk Road sections. In considering this, ICOMOS noted that according to its thematic study on the Silk Road, Sheki does not seem located along the key branches identified as the likely sections to be considered for World Heritage nomination. In addition, ICOMOS considers that Sheki's architectural and urban testimony is quite homogenous following its construction in 1772 and hence when compared to much older settlements along the trade routes of the wider region, it shows

comparatively few architectural references to cultural and trade exchanges along these trade routes.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis does not justify consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed
The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (ii), (iii), (iv) and (v).

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 is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the historic centre of Sheki exhibits an important interchange of cultural influences over two millennia. Its location on the Great Silk Road and the trade relations Sheki established promoted an exchange of goods and traditions, which had impacts on the architectural design of the town. In particular, its renewal with Qajar influences in the early 19th century and its expansion influenced by Russian architecture in the late 20th century.

ICOMOS considers that while the city was exposed to various cultural influences through the presence of traders, this would apply to any city located along the Great Silk Road or other important trade routes. ICOMOS considers that the architectural features reflect regional influences in line with the political regimes exerting power over the region at the time of construction. Very limited architectural references to an exchange of cultural traditions can be seen beyond these.

ICOMOS further considers that Sheki's architectural and urban testimony is very homogenous in result of its construction within a few years following the earlier destruction in 1772. This implies that compared to older settlements along the trade routes of the wider region, it has less capacity to illustrate architectural references to cultural exchanges than cities which look back at millennia of trade exchanges along these very trade routes. ICOMOS considers that it has not been demonstrated how the interchange of cultural influences can be seen as outstanding when compared to other cities along important trade routes in the wider region.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not 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 urban layout of Sheki provides a testimony to the Sheki Khanate which is said the most powerful khanate in the Caucasus. This is illustrated by the division of the town into neighbourhoods, so-called mahallah, and the architecture of the Khan's palace and merchant houses. The nomination also indicates that the architectural testimony of the city illustrates the cultural traditional of silkworm breeding, cocoon trade and the production of embroideries.

ICOMOS considers that the urban typology illustrates clear influences of Islamic city design with clear division into neighbourhoods which have increasingly private character and often dead-end streets. However, ICOMOS reminds that this urban typology is not unique to khanates and has been recognized in exceptional ways in other cities already inscribed on the World Heritage List. ICOMOS considers that it is not demonstrated that the Sheki khanate produced architectural features or urban layouts which differ distinctively from other cities in the region and therefore could act as an outstanding testimony of khanates as such. ICOMOS further considers that Sheki's function as a Caucasus khanate capital was rather short-lived and ended after merely 18 years.

With regard to the ongoing tradition of sericulture, ICOMOS considers that it has not been demonstrated how the urban or architectural form can be said a unique testimony to sericultural traditions. ICOMOS in its request for additional information during the first evaluation, asked the State Party to further elaborate how Sheki's urban or architectural expressions could be considered a unique testimony of the tradition of silkworm breeding. In its response of 14 November 2016, the State Party indicated that the silk production was more essential as a basis of trade in the interlink of historic trade routes than for the urban or architectural testimony. Silk production at Sheki was limited to cocoon rising and sale of raw silk which both did not require special constructions for this purpose.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not 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 historic centre of Sheki is an outstanding architectural ensemble which had maintained its urban form since its construction in the late 18th century. The nomination further highlights that the urban and architectural typology is specific to the local building materials and local climatic conditions.

ICOMOS considers that both urban and architectural typology as well as building materials are typical for the wider region and cannot be judged as exceptional examples in Historic Sheki with its Khan's Palace. While the urban centre is unusual in its homogeneity as a result of the city's construction in a short span of time, it is by no means an exceptional type of architectural ensemble by typological means as defined under this criterion.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not 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 from ancient times the economy of Sheki was based on sericulture, trade of cocoons and development of related types of handicrafts. This is said to be indicated by the predominance of mulberry trees in the orchards, high house attics and unique architectural adaptations to the local climatic conditions.

ICOMOS considers that silkworm breeding occurred in a number of cities along the Great Silk Road and mulberry trees therefore equally shape other cityscape. It is not demonstrated that functional relations of sericulture are evident in the urban or architectural characteristics of Sheki and ICOMOS considers that these are not demonstrated to be exceptional or outstanding in comparison with the wider region. Therefore, ICOMOS inquired in its request for additional information in which way the urban and architectural fabric can be said a unique response to the local climatic conditions and the functional needs of sericulture.

In its response of 14 November 2016, the State Party added that Sheki lies in a sub humid climate with minute amounts of rainfall in winter and moderate temperatures in summer. These climatic conditions are said ideal for the intensive planting of mulberry trees in the city, and broadleaved forests surrounding the city that feed silkworms and support their relatively short reproduction cycle of cocoons, lasting only 40-60 days. ICOMOS considers that the key response to the climate indicated here, although fully relevant to the processes of silk production, relates to the growth of specific vegetation and not to an architectural response to climatic conditions. ICOMOS therefore considers that the city cannot be considered to meet this criterion.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

In conclusion, ICOMOS does not consider that any of the criteria or the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been justified.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The property area proposed for the Historic Centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace is inclusive of all elements reflecting its historic significance. The urban fabric has retained its traditional typology of neighbourhoods and much of the surrounding landscape. However, the landscape setting is affected by a few hotel complexes which have been developed and remains subject to further urban development pressures given that Sheki is surrounded by mountains in three directions and has limited opportunity to expand. Several hotels were also built within the historical and architectural reserve without respecting the surrounding architectural volumes and styles. In addition, these structures were inserted in key urban historic neighbourhoods and, at times, interrupt the functional and visual relations between the historic monuments. In the same manner, several new residential structures do not correspond to the surrounding architectural proportions, materials or designs.

ICOMOS notes that the percentage of historic structures within the property has been significantly reduced over time. A small percentage of architectural structures is in a very vulnerable condition, the majority of which is in a state of being abandoned or out of appropriate use. These structures are faced with challenges of decay, which might further reduce the integrity of the property in the future.

Authenticity

ICOMOS notes that while authenticity of design, structure and to some extent setting has been affected negatively, the city largely retains its urban typology and environment. It is noteworthy that Sheki has retained its traditional mechanisms for property maintenance and community involvement through neighbourhood representatives and a council of elders. A majority of private residences and some public buildings have kept their traditional use and function.

However, several other important information sources of authenticity are lost. ICOMOS observed that past and on-going structural and surface repairs and restorations do not pay respect to authenticity of material, substance or workmanship and, in several cases, design. These repairs are carried out with inappropriate materials including concrete and cement mixtures instead of traditional brick and adobe materials as well as plaster surfaces. These measures unfortunately change the visual appearance of the town's streetscape, in particular the repairs of the outer townhouse walls, which are so visually determining the appearance of Sheki to a visitor. In addition, these repairs are likely to reduce the traditional earthquake resilience of the original construction methods. ICOMOS therefore considers that the Historic Centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace does not demonstrate the qualifying condition of authenticity as required by the Operational Guidelines.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been negatively affected by past and recent developments and restorations and are therefore not met.

Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription

ICOMOS considers that while Sheki was without doubt an important regional centre of trade, value interchange and sericulture, it has not been demonstrated that it surpassed in these aspects other centres along the historic trade

routes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Functional and architectural features of khanate capitals are preserved in other historic centres and so are exceptional architectural expressions of Safavid and Qajar origin or influence in historic palaces. ICOMOS could not see potential for the Historic Centre of Sheki and the Khan's Palace to demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value at a global level or within the wider geo-cultural region.

Features
The features that convey the value of the property consist of both the overall urban landscape of the nominated area, with its traditional houses and key individual buildings such as the Khan's Palace, structures associated with silk breeding, and merchants' houses.

ICOMOS considers that the ability of the features that convey the value of the town has been compromised by past and recent developments and restorations.

4 Conservation measures and monitoring

Conservation measures
In its first evaluation, ICOMOS observed a clear lack of conservation policies and standards for historic Sheki. Several ongoing projects, including the rehabilitation of important merchant houses were not seen as adequate in terms of international conservation standards. For example, in the Dadanoves house, all windows and doors have been replaced without obvious reason, the property has beenextended to add new functions, the floor levels were raised, the ceilings were changed and cement mortar and rendering was used in various places. Likewise, restoration of the citadel walls, which due to building material character and seismic zone location need constant repair, is conducted based on extensive use of cement and at times unjustifiable reconstruction of details.

ICOMOS recommended in its previous evaluation that conservation guidelines need to be prepared for each type of historic building and that while this preparation is ongoing, conservation projects need to be consulted by trained specialists to ensure that international conservation standards are being observed. ICOMOS further recommended that such guidelines should be integrated in a conservation master plan into which some of the policies and actions which are highlighted in the nomination dossier can be integrated as preconditions.

The additional information provided by the State Party in January 2019, includes an Action Plan for the Conservation and Rehabilitation of the Historical Centre of Sheki and a Restoration Manual.

The 'Action Plan' provides an assessment of the conservation challenges that face the historic town of Sheki and its landscape setting. It is an aspirational document that analyses the conservation threats and challenges but does not provide more than general approaches as to how these might be addressed.

The Restoration Manual is seen as a code of practice for operators involved in the management and recovery of the historic city of Sheki. It analyses architectural, construction and urban typologies, including materials and gardens, and the natural morphology of the city's mountain setting, and sets out for each the historical forms and structures, what makes them distinctive, degradation factors, and general prescriptions for interventions.

The Action Plan and the Restoration Manual are both very useful resource and guidance documents that could form the basis for the development of planning guidelines and perhaps stronger protection for individual buildings. Currently they have no status nor are formal means of implementation in place.

The historic centre of Sheki and the Khan's Palace belong to a diverse group of public and private owners. City walls, schools, kindergartens, factories and public offices within the property are registered as state property. The streets, squares, parks, graveyards, river outlets and 6 plots of lands with residential houses are property of the municipality. 5 public buildings are owned by private associations while 4 mosques and 1 madrasa belong to the religious property authority. About 75% of the area of the historical and architectural reserve are privately owned, which includes a factory, newly built hotels, stores and shops and well as residential houses. Given the high percentage of buildings in private ownership, unless some sort of incentives and constraints can be put in place, it is difficult to see how progress will be made. Although the Action Plan states that the 'participation of private owners [...] must be incentivized by economic rules, guided by plan instruments and controlled by a management System', how this is done remains to be defined.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of historic Sheki has been affected by new buildings, rehabilitations and extensive restoration works. Although outline conservation guidance has now been prepared, it will be essential that this is translated into formal guidelines and incorporated into the management system, if progress is to be made in transforming the approach to restoration and conservation.

Monitoring
The monitoring arrangements of the property are overseen and implemented by the "Yukhari Bash" State Historical and Architectural Reserve Management Team. Prior to the first proposed nomination dossier, no monitoring exercises had been documented. The present monitoring system is documented in the nomination dossier by means of a monitoring table of so-called indicators, periodicity and the location of records. In its previous evaluation, ICOMOS noted that the so-called indicators were rather areas of activity, many of which had no obvious relation to monitoring and that the general purpose and content of a monitoring system had not been well understood and was not addressed.

ICOMOS recommended that based on capacity building a monitoring system focused on both the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the management plan should be developed.

In its additional information provided in January 2019, the State Party emphasises that the creation of the Center of the Management of Heritage Sites, by the State Tourism Agency, and the involvement of the Ministry of Culture should be seen as reassuring evidence for the proper implementation of the monitoring system.

It is further stated that the modalities for taking forward a monitoring system are set out in the Action Plan. What is set out there is a system for monitoring projects and actions rather than a system for monitoring the property to ensure it maintains its value, which will need to be developed.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that in response to the World Heritage Committee's requests, conservation guidance has now been prepared but it has yet to be translated into formal guidelines and incorporated into the management system, and although modalities have been set out for a monitoring system, these have yet to be implemented and related to the value of the property.

5 Protection and management

Documentation

Since 1967, several heritage inventories were undertaken to cover the historic centre of Sheki. According to the register approved by resolution No. 132 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan Republic on 2 August 2001, 26 single monuments in the historic reserve are also under individual protection. Following the state program adopted in 2013, a new inventory was conducted in the reserve territory. In this, 202 historic buildings were recorded and a proposal for inclusion of these buildings on the register of architectural monuments has been submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Legal protection

The historic centre of Sheki and its Khan's Palace are protected as the "Yukhari Bash" State Historical and Architectural Reserve under national legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan entitled Law on the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments. The reserve was designated on 10 April 1998 and is listed under number 470-IQ. Per this legislation, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is mandated as the executive authority for protection and site management.

ICOMOS noted in its first evaluation that on 19 January 2016, the reserve was further promised a National Reserve Status by presidential decree which aimed at increasing management capacity and public investments. The process of approval of this status and the associated "Plan of activities related to the development and protection of historical part of Sheki city", as a means of implementation of this Presidential Decree by all relevant Ministries was still being finalized. It was supposed to contain a comprehensive list of actions to be implemented between 2016 and 2025. No information has been provided in the additional information received in January 2019 on a Presidential Decree that could confirm National Reserve status.

In the additional information submitted by the State Party on 14 November 2016 at the request of ICOMOS, it was explained that by decision number 382 of 5 October 2016, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan approved the general rules on assigning special status to cultural institutions. Based upon the above described decision, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has referred again to the Cabinet of Ministers and it is envisaged to receive the status of national reserve and increase the number of staff and wages accordingly starting from the beginning of 2017.

According to the legislation, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is required to authorize any restoration, reconstruction or development project within the national reserve. The buffer zone is established in two protection levels, the so-called buffer zone surrounding the property at a distance of up to 200 meters and the much larger zone for terrain control. The buffer zone is legally part of the "Yukhari Bash" architectural reserve, while the zone for terrain control remains without formal legal designation.

In the additional information submitted by the State Party in January 2019, it was confirmed that the buffer zone will get 'similar advanced level of protection and management' as the property by the State Tourism Authority. This implies that 'all protective measures regarding the property are also automatically applied to its buffer zone'. This approach applies to the buffer zone that is part of the Reserve and not the wider zone for terrain control.

The urban development of Sheki is regulated by the Urban Master Plan adopted in 2010. This Master Plan designates the historic part of Sheki as the "Yukhari Bash" State Historical and Architectural Reserve.

The nomination dossier justly refers to the importance of the natural setting of the nominated property and that the forested mountains play important role in perception of the site. This is confirmed in the Restoration Manual which states that the 'natural morphology of the Sheki is a landscape of great visual impact and ecological support for the city'. For its protection, cooperation has been established with the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources as well as the Sheki Executive Power and the Sheki City Municipality. However, the recommendations issued towards the protection of the landscape do not yet enjoy binding character. The concerned mountain slopes are merely protected by the law on forest, which is very strict and does not allow cutting of the forest and building activity in the forest in general. However, it could be changed or exemptions could be approved by authorities which may not take heritage concerns into consideration. To ensure the protection of authenticity of setting, ICOMOS

recommends putting in place heritage significance guided landscape protection tools.

Management system

The overall mandate for management processes lies with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Within the ministry responsibility has been delegated to the administration of the Sheki City "Yukhari Bash" State Historical and Architectural Reserve.

The additional information submitted by the State Party in January 2019 stated that according to a Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Ref.N 255, 07 June 2018), the Yukhari Bash Historical-Architectural Reserve was subordinated to the State Tourism Agency (STA). Furthermore, according to Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Ref. No. 633, 31 October 2018), STA was tasked to manage long-term preservation, conservation, restoration and meaningful use of historical and cultural monuments located in this Heritage Site. Following this decision, in order to strengthen the management of this Reserve, the STA created a new sub-organisation "the Center of the Management of Heritage Sites on 20December 2018". This organisation has the authority to preserve and safeguard the tangible and intangible heritage of the Reserve along with promoting the tourism which it perceives as a means to better conservation.

The nomination dossier highlights several challenges which are currently encountered in the management of the reserve. The management team has too limited decision-making powers to ensure that all processes are in line with heritage concerns and, based on its double subordination under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Sheki City Executive Power, it also faces difficulties in the smooth implementation of its managerial mandate. Lack of coordination of the two supervising bodies at times leads to contradictory policies for management processes. In addition, the reserve management team lacks shared premises in form of an administration building and is short of skilled staff which could guide good practice in reserve management.

As result of this situation, the management team was focused on the management of the citadel territory and the Khan's Palace. However, even with this context, there were unclear subordinations between the reserve management and museums functioning within the citadel territory. The financial resources of the team were very limited and capacity-building activities were not offered. In its evaluation, ICOMOS considered that while the management team was highly dedicated to its tasks, it should be an urgent priority to strengthen its financial, professional and technical resources, to improve the quality of conservation and management practice. The additional information submitted in January 2019 states the measures for strengthening the management team are 'duly reflected in the Action Plan'.

Despite the location of Sheki in a zone of high seismic activity and dangers of serious floods, no comprehensive approach to risk management is at present available. The Management Plan for the property aims to integrate risk preparedness and mitigation measures for development in an emergency plan to strengthen preventive measures against possible disasters, especially earthquake and flooding.

The Action Plan submitted as part of the additional information in January 2019 includes brief details of a two year programme of 'quick win' actions to strengthen the management and conservation of the property. These include the creation of the management system, the adoption of the Restoration Manual, Approval of regulations and procedures and Evaluation and approval of a list of projects. Mention is also made of all of this contributing to a Conservation and Regeneration Urban Plan.

A comprehensive management plan was elaborated in the process of preparing the nomination dossier. This plan addresses the main problems and challenges the nominated site faces and offers concise information on general guidelines for its management and integrated conservation referring to relevant international legal and doctrinal documents. The management plan written in English by an international expert in consultation with the local authorities was not yet fully available in Azerbaijani at the time of the ICOMOS technical evaluation visit. ICOMOS observed active processes aimed at its due implementation.

In the additional information submitted in January 2019, it is stated that the Action Plan will contribute towards the implementation of the Management Plan, but it also states that measures for strengthening the management team are reflected in the Action Plan and that those measures will contribute to the completion of the management plan, following which it will be adopted.

Completion of the management plan and its adoption thus still needs to be addressed.

In the additional information presented at the request of ICOMOS, in October 2017, the State Party reported that the Management Committee of the reserve was established under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and its composition is approved at the level of 19 members representing various institutions. Although in its first evaluation ICOMOS stated that the Committee was considered to operate on a voluntary or honorary basis and no budget has been attributed to its work, in the additional information submitted in January 2019 it is said that the STA as the main agency responsible for the management of the property will have proper financial resources.

Visitor management

Sheki is a well-known tourism destination within Azerbaijan and is famous for its festivals. There are five different festivals every year. The amphitheatre stage integrated in the citadel for the facilitation of these festivals is not compatible with the historic environment. Its design is

unacceptable as it diminishes the importance of the citadel and indeed hinders due perception of the site. It is necessary to remove the structure and prepare a more compatible proposal, which will be modest in design and at the same time easily portable to reassemble on an annual basis. While basic information leaflets and city guidebooks are available for visitors at the Sheki Khans Palace ticket office, their content is limited in terms of coverage of site values and differs from the emphasis of the nomination dossier. The historic centre lacks signage and interpretation or information boards.

Community involvement
An opportunity for the management of the property is a variety of traditional stakeholders, who are very committed. These include the religious authorities, Council of Elders, Artisans' Association, Representatives of traditional neighbourhoods (mehelles), representatives of the research institute "Azerbarpa", the Sheki Public Union, the Association of Family Recreation etc. These institutions have a very strong potential to play positive role in the management. The exceptional system of self-governance has been preserved through the traditional neighbourhoods (mehelles) and their representatives, as well as the Council of Elders, who are very active in city management and organization of its life.,

In its first evaluation, ICOMOS recommended building decision-making and management processes on the traditional governance structures, in particular the Council of Elders and the neighbourhood representatives. The State Party responded in its additional information submitted in January 2019 and stated that the Reserve Administration already involves the Mahalla Elders in elaboration of the new Business and Development Model for Sheki. Furthermore, a unified database will be developed in close consultation and participation with the Council of Elders, community representatives and the traditional bearers of handicrafts.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property
ICOMOS considered in its first evaluation that the legal protection of the property and buffer zone was adequate and that this remains the case after the submission of the additional information in January 2019.

In relation to the request by the World Heritage Committee to strengthen protective measures for the buffer zone to ensure the long-term protection of the wider landscape setting, no additional protection has been put in place for the wider zone for terrain control which still remains without formal legal designation.

In response to the request to revise and adopt the management plan for its further proper implementation, completion of the management plan and its adoption still needs to be addressed.

In response to the request to strengthen the mandate and resources of the management team, it is said that commitments have been made, although no details have been provided.

In response to the request to consider the increase of the role of traditional governance structures such as the Council of Elders and the neighbourhood, it is clear that the Mahalla Elders are already involved and further measures will be taken to extend involvement to other groups.

ICOMOS considers that the protective measures for the wider landscape setting still need to be put in place, that the management plan still needs to be officially adopted and implemented, and that measures proposed to strengthen the mandate and resources of the management team need to be implemented.

6 Conclusion

In its first evaluation, ICOMOS considered that while Sheki was without doubt an important regional centre of trade, value interchange and sericulture, it was not exceptional among other historic centres along the historic trade routes in the Caucasus. Likewise, functional and architectural features of khanate capitals are preserved in other historic centres as are exceptional architectural expressions of Safavid and Qajar origin or influence in historic palaces. Moreover, ICOMOS considered that past and on-going structural and surface repairs and restorations had not paid respect to authenticity of material, substance or workmanship and, in several cases, design. In some repairs, inappropriate materials including concrete and cement mixtures had been used, while new architectural developments, predominantly for hotel functions, had not respected the volumes and proportions of the historic architectural fabric. All of this led to the conclusion that integrity and authenticity had been affected by past and recent developments and restorations to such a degree that they could not meet the necessary levels. Thus in its first evaluation ICOMOS concluded that it could not see potential for the Historic Centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace to demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value at a global or wider regional scale.

Such an assessment is largely shared in the new Action Plan which was submitted as part of the additional information by the State Party in January 2019. This states that 'New buildings have been built on the territory of core and buffer zone over the last years and they cause damage to the original historical appearance of the historical town since they do not correspond to traditional buildings on a scale and style or fundamentally wrong located' and 'the scale and shape of the buildings has changed the traditional landscape'.

And in respect of historic buildings, the Action Plan further states that 'Some historic buildings are adapted and used without compliance with initial designation and the laws of monuments conservation' and this issue is especially critical in respect of houses which are privately owned, and therefore their owners have to restore or repair them. The owners of these houses either often use modern materials which do not correspond to the materials used in the historical building, or do not have funds for repair'. And in terms of use "the neighbourhoods have lost their historical function, their subdivision into craft, ethnic and morphological districts". Moreover, the introduction of new buildings and the lack of development control has had equally problematic impacts: 'Construction is chaotic on the right side of the Gurjana River. Piedmont landscape reveals all the shortcomings of the non-scheduled construction of the new and non-traditional additions to existing traditional houses. Built-up density violates the centuries, old structure of the house garden'.

As ICOMOS always aims to recommend what is in the best interests of conservation, in its first evaluation it added recommendations on conservation, management, capacity building and the protection of setting. These were not pre-conditions for inscription, but rather what was needed to allow the town of Sheki to be better conserved as a place of national and local interest.

The work undertaken by the State Party since the last World Heritage Committee session to address these recommendations (which were adopted by the Committee) in preparing the Action Plan and Restoration Manual is to be commended as a start to halting the current inappropriate restoration practices, to putting in place appropriate planning and other policies to encourage owner participation in the sympathetic regeneration of the town, and to control development. The Action Plan and the Restoration Manual are useful resource and guidance documents that could form the basis for the development of planning guidelines and perhaps stronger protection for individual buildings, if they are given status, and if formal means of implementation are put in place.

Future work on restoration and conservation cannot reverse or mitigate the damage that has already taken place to the historic fabric and urban layout. What can be done is to try and ensure that what remains of the historic fabric is restored in ways that are sensitive, and also provide usable and harmonious buildings. Similarly, if stronger development control measures are put in place, these could limit further damage to what remains of the historic urban layout. However, such measures would probably not be sufficient to alter ICOMOS's overall assessment of the value of the historic town and its potential to justify Outstanding Universal Value.

In this regard, ICOMOS notes that Decision 41 COM 8B.20 (2017), which referred back this nomination to the State Party, focused exclusively on "*further advance conservation and preservation mechanisms with a view for their better implementation."*

Accordingly, as described above, the additional information submitted by the State Party in January 2019 concerns only the management and protection of the property. No new information related to the potential significance of the property has thus been provided.

To be noted is that between 2017, where Decision 41 COM 8.20 to refer back the nomination was adopted, and 2019, where the additional information on the management and protection was submitted by the State Party, there was Decision 42 COM 8, adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2018. This decision, regarding the referral procedure, considered that: "in compliance with the Convention and the Operational Guidelines, Outstanding Universal Value is recognised at the time of inscription of a property on the World Heritage List and that no recognition of Outstanding Universal Value is foreseen prior to this stage".

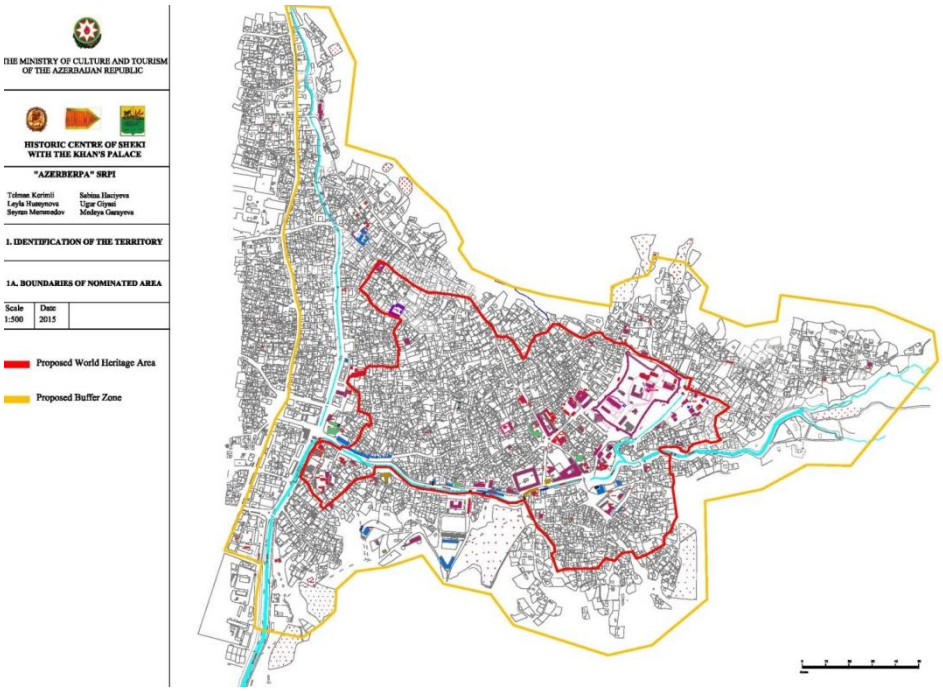
ICOMOS thus has not been in a position to reassess the potential significance of the property nor to reconsider the recommendation of its first evaluation, as no additional information on this aspect of the property had been requested nor received.

ICOMOS considers that this referred back nomination demonstrates the need to further review and clarify the referral back procedure and its application as decided by the World Heritage Committee at its last session.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

Noting that no new information related to the potential significance of the property has been submitted which would have allowed ICOMOS to reassess this aspect of the property, ICOMOS reiterates its first recommendation and recommends that the Historic centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace, Azerbaijan, should **not be inscribed** on the World Heritage List.



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property

View of the city

South façade of the Khan’s palace

Upper caravanserail. View on the yard

Residential houses