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# Babylon (Iraq) No 278rev

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## Official name as proposed by the State Party

Babylon

## Location

Babil Governorate  
Iraq

## Brief description

Babylon is located 85 km south of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, within the territory of the Shatt Al-Hillah Municipality in the Babil Governorate. The nominated property includes the archaeological remains contained in both the inner and the outer city wall as well as selected agricultural areas surrounding the ancient city. At its centre are the excavated ruins of the ancient Neo-Babylonian city of Babylon. Subsequent layers within the property boundaries include the added administrative headquarters of the Babil Archaeology Department, the police headquarters of the site, the offices of Babil Governorate and others. Three artificial hills, conical with flat tops, were built during the former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's reign, with his palace constructed on one of them. In addition to the archaeological site and the 20th century additions, the villages of Annanah, Sinjar, al-Jimjimah, New Kweiresh and Bernoun are all located within the property.

## 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

29 October 2003

### Background

This property was first considered in 1983, when the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee in its decision CONF 009 VIII.30-31 decided to defer the property back to the State Party in order to prepare a safeguarding plan, provide more information on ongoing and envisaged restorations, and define better the boundaries of the property.

On 24 June 2005 UNESCO at its headquarters in Paris arranged for a special session aimed at assessing the condition of the site of Babylon, devising measures to mitigate damage which had occurred, coordinating activities and efforts, and assisting the Iraqi authorities to prepare an overall conservation and management plan for

the site. Three independent damage reports were requested and discussed at a second special session organized on 22 November 2005 in Berlin in cooperation with the German authorities. A third special session on 12 November 2007 analysed these reports and made recommendations for a three-phased approach which included establishing an ICC (International Coordination Committee for Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq) Sub-committee for the safeguarding of Babylon, to investigate further the condition of disturbed areas within the property and to collaborate towards a comprehensive management and conservation plan for the site. The ICC Plenary Session on 13-14 November 2007 in Paris confirmed the establishment of an ICC Sub-committee for the protection, conservation and management of the archaeological site of Babylon.

At the request of UNESCO, John Russell visited Babylon in July 2008 and John Curtis and Tamar Teneishvili visited the property in February 2009. The ICC Sub-committee prepared a draft report for damage assessment in Babylon based on these commissioned assessments and, on this basis, developed recommendations towards emergency interventions in view of a partial reopening of the site to the public. A final report on the damage assessment was issued by UNESCO in 2009. The report of John Russell was published in 2010.

### Consultations and Technical Evaluation Mission

Desk reviews have been provided by ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, members and independent experts.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 30 September to 6 October 2018.

### Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 9 October 2018 requesting further information about the proposed justification for Outstanding Universal Value, maps, and aerial as well as other photographs. The State Party responded on 7 November 2018, providing a response on the proposed justification of Outstanding Universal Value. It also submitted a management plan for the property, which had been officially adopted on 19 September 2018. This information has been incorporated in the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

An Interim Report was provided to the State Party on 9 January 2019 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel. Further information was requested in the Interim Report including: submission of a redefined boundary delimitation, elaboration on future strategies to protect the property from private development, a conservation plan including human and financial resources dedicated to conservation measures, and information on envisaged future archaeological research.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 25 February 2019 in response to the questions raised in the Interim Report. This includes a new boundary

delineation and further information on conservation, legal protection and research plans. The information has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

#### **Date of ICOMOS approval of this report**

13 March 2019

## **2 Description of the property**

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report only provides a short summary of the most relevant aspects.

### **Description and history**

Babylon is located 85 km south of Baghdad, within the territory of the Shatt Al-Hillah Municipality in the Babil Governorate. It contains the remains of the ancient Neo-Babylonian city of Babylon, its city walls and temples, as well as a number of architectural and landscaping additions constructed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the archaeological remains and the 20<sup>th</sup> century additions form distinctly separate layers at the property, these will be described consecutively.

Babylon was the centre of the Neo-Babylonian Empire between 626 BCE and 539 BCE. Only 18 percent of the archaeological city has been excavated up to today, but this has revealed much important evidence about this ancient city, shedding light on one of the most important kingdoms of the Ancient Near East. The excavations, which began in the mid-19th century, discovered strata of different occupations reaching back to the 3rd millennium BCE. The key period of Babylon, however, began in 626 BCE, when Nabopolassar rose to power (626–605 BCE) and especially under his successor, Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BCE), who created a vast empire, making Babylon a significant capital. This new role as regional capital was supported by a monumental construction programme and most of the presently-excavated remains date back to this period of intense construction. The comparatively brief fame of Babylon ended under King Nabonid (562-539 BCE), whose religious reforms in favour of the moon god Sin made him move the capital to Harran, west of Babylon.

Excavations in Babylon commenced as early as 1842, when Paul-Émile Botta, the French Consul at Mosul, started archaeological investigations. Hormuzd Rassam, on behalf of the British Museum, conducted excavations at Babylon from 1879 to 1882, focused mostly on recovering cuneiform tablets to supply the emerging field of Assyriology. Between 1899 and 1918, the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft (DOG) conducted the first systematic excavations at Babylon. The excavations' findings form the basis of our knowledge of ancient Babylon's topography.

The key buildings and structures, which today testify to Babylon as the Neo-Babylonian capital, are the Northern Palace, the Summer Palace, the Esagila Temple, the

Ninurta Temple, the Z-Temple, the Gula Temple and the remains of the Etemenanki or Ziggurat of Babylon. Visually more recognizable today are the Southern Palace, the Ishtar Temple, the Nabu sha khare Temple, the Processional Way and the Ishtar and Marduk Gates, which were all reconstructed, based on their archaeological remains, during the 1980s as part of the 'Revival of Babylon Project'. These elements are surrounded by the remains of the outer and inner city walls, which remain as visible markers in the landscape. Towards the outer areas of the property, one finds the villages of Annanah and Sinjar on the west bank of the Shatt al-Hillah, al-Jimjmah on the east bank, New Kweiresh (corresponding to the modern-day al-Intisar Village) to the northeast, and Bernoun Village to the northwest. Agricultural lands in and around the property remain in use for the grazing of livestock.

The alterations to the site in the 1980s went beyond the reconstructions of the 'Revival of Babylon Project', which in themselves were vast, and conducted in inappropriate materials. Structures added into the territory of the archaeological city include the administrative buildings of the Babel Archaeology Department, the police headquarters, and the Babel Governorate. These are extended by a complex of buildings of different purposes, including the Babylon Conference Centre, a park with kiosks for visitors, and a small docking facility for tourist boats. Three artificial, conical hills with flat tops, each 30 metres high and 300 metres in diameter, were created and arranged in a triangular shape at a distance of 2.5 km on three sides of the property. The former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein's palace was built on the westernmost of these hills, while the others were purportedly intended to be stations of a cable car transport system to carry his visitors over the site. However, this transport system was never implemented. Further landscaping features created at the same time include artificial canals and lakes in the northern and eastern part of the site.

The negative impacts of the 'Revival of Babylon Project', and the inappropriate architectural constructions from the 1980s onwards, were further exacerbated by the military use of the site, initially by Iraqi forces and from April 2003 by the Coalition Forces. Not only during the military usage but also during the period between the different military occupations of the site, damage to site structures and looting occurred. Camp Alpha, which was used by United States and Polish forces, covered more than 150 hectares of the inner archaeological site and provided barracks for around 2000 soldiers. The impacts of alterations and uses in the late 20th and early 21st century have been the subject of several damage assessment reports commissioned and published by UNESCO, which were submitted as annexes to the nomination dossier.

### **Boundaries**

The initially-nominated property had an area of 1054.3 hectares, and a buffer zone of 154.5 hectares. The property boundaries corresponded to the limits of the ancient outer city wall with its surrounding agricultural areas and also included 20<sup>th</sup> century constructions and reconstructions, such as the artificial landscape

alterations. The unexcavated archaeological evidence which was documented in a survey of 1914 lies fully within the property boundaries. The buffer zone surrounds the property, with a depth of 100 meters on all sides, which corresponds to the legal requirements of the Law of Antiquities no. 55 of 2002, requiring that all protected archaeological areas establish an additional protection zone of 100 meters around the boundary of the archaeological remains.

ICOMOS considered that the proposed outer boundaries of the initial boundary delineation were clearly and logically delineated and covered all known archaeological evidence of Neo-Babylonian Babylon. The area corresponded to the legal registration under national legislation. However, ICOMOS expressed regret to the State Party that within these boundaries several elements were located, which cannot be considered as potential attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. ICOMOS was concerned that if these elements, in particular the 20th century reconstructions, palace and office buildings, as well as landscape alterations, remain located within the property boundaries, they could be mistaken as part of the value-constituting attributes, thus it might be more desirable to limit and reduce their negative impacts.

ICOMOS therefore requested the State Party in its Interim Report to consider revising the proposed boundaries by developing a three-dimensional boundary delineation, which includes all remaining archaeological evidence above-ground and underground, and excludes the alterations in landscaping and added 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture from the property. The alterations would then be part of the buffer zone.

In response, the State Party submitted a new, three-dimensional boundary concept on 25 February 2019. In this revised delimitation, the outer boundaries remain identical while a number of 20<sup>th</sup> century constructions have been excluded above-ground – thereby becoming islands of buffer zone within the property – while potential or known archaeological resources below these remain explicitly within the property. Excluded are numerous areas including the three artificial hills with Saddam Hussein's palace located on the westernmost side, the contemporary village housing located within the property, individual government buildings such as the police headquarters and conference centre, as well as manifold others. Retained within the property, however, are the reconstructed walls on the archaeological remains, as well as the artificial landscaping interventions in the form of canals and an artificial lake, which were created in the 20th century. These have recently been drained of water and archaeological evidence is probable below their former ground-levels.

ICOMOS regrets that the notion of considering Babylon as a cultural landscape, which was presented in the tentative list entry, was not pursued in the present nomination and recommends that further studies should aim at investigating further the relationship of the Neo-Babylonian capital with its wider landscape, in particular in the western direction towards the Euphrates River. In this context,

ICOMOS notes that a buffer zone 100 meters wide does sufficiently provide an added layer of protection for the excavated and not yet excavated archaeological evidence. With its limited extent, however, it cannot contribute to the protection of the visual setting. ICOMOS recommends considering exploring whether a future extension of the buffer zone could assist in addressing actual and potential future challenges which can be identified in the wider setting of the archaeological city.

#### **State of conservation**

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations made by the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is concerning if not critical in many instances.

All archaeological monuments and excavations, including those partially or wholly reconstructed during the 20th century, suffer from a lack of maintenance and lack of a well-defined and programmed approach to conservation. The excavated and unrestored sections have turned into earth hills as a result of erosion processes; the reconstructed ones suffer from the additional load that incompatible materials have added and show signs of deterioration, in particular at the intersections between ancient foundations and added reconstructions. All areas suffer from uncontrolled growth of trees and other vegetation.

With regard to individual monuments, there are structural instabilities, such as at the Marduk Gate, which, despite its rebuilding in 1978 with modern fired bricks and cement mortar, presents large cracks resulting from the differential settlement of its structural elements. The Ninmakh Temple, Ishtar Gate, the Southern Palace and the Ishtar Temple also suffer from incompatible materials added during the 'Revival of Babylon Project'. In addition, these and other structures are affected by undercutting of their lower walls as a result of poor drainage during rain falls and water erosion and capillary action. Other damage phenomena observed include the peeling-off and loss of internal and external plaster layers, as well as bird droppings causing both physical damage and aesthetic issues. A couple of structures, such as sections of the inner city wall, have deteriorated to such an extent that they require improvised shoring systems to prevent collapses.

Due to the severe conservation challenges observed, ICOMOS requested the State Party in its Interim Report to communicate all conservation measures which were planned to address these multiple issues, as well as provide information on the human and financial resources available to undertake conservation activities. The State Party indicated in its response of 25 February 2019, that the responsibility for conservation of the Ishtar Gate had been given to the World Monuments Fund, with a budget of 750,000 USD.

Following a decision of the Prime Minister, the site administration had received an additional 600,000 USD from state resources for the budgetary year 2018/19. These have been used to clear military remains, start works on the

new visitor centre, and to undertake urgent conservation work on Ninmakh, Nabu-sha-Hare and Ishtar Temples. In addition, the Council of Ministers of Iraq is said to have decided to grant an additional 20 million USD to the archaeological site of Babylon. However, no concrete conservation activities envisaged in the short- or medium-term were elaborated and neither did the State Party provide plans of how conservation priorities will be defined and a programmed conservation approach prepared.

ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the property raises severe concerns and in most places must be described as a level of decay and deterioration which constitutes an obvious danger to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the property. ICOMOS recommends that the conservation plan which is planned to be prepared in cooperation with the World Monuments Fund should be elaborated and finalized and that the available funds are used to finance immediate conservation activities in the sections most critically affected, as well as the preparation of a thorough and comprehensive conservation plan for the property.

#### **Factors affecting the property**

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the property are several, most predominantly development pressures in the form of illegal and semi-legal constructions on private land, inappropriate human use such as for trash dumping or burning, meteorological risks, such as weathering, surface flooding and erosion, and hydrological risks, through ground water penetration and natural vegetation growth. All the above risks are very likely to occur and will continue to damage the property irreversibly. Other potential risks include damage from fire, animal disturbances and potential future reconstructions or developments in the archaeological sections.

The State Party has developed a comprehensive risk map which documents their full awareness of the different levels of actual and potential risk within the property. However, even though the risk factors are known and impacts have been assessed, little to no action has been undertaken to deter, reduce or prevent the impacts or sources of several of these risks or mitigate their adverse effects on the property. ICOMOS recommends that the management and conservation plan needs to comprehensively address all of these risks and propose concrete measures as to their effective reduction and mitigation.

### **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:

- The Neo-Babylonian capital of Babylon constitutes a unique testimony of one of the most influential empires of the ancient world, and its historic and

cultural value for humanity is on a par with that of the greatest archaeological sites and historic cities of the ancient world;

- 'Babylon' is a name which throughout the centuries has evoked an image of power, wealth, splendour and decadence. Thanks to Biblical sources and classical authors, the image of Babylon flourished long after the city itself had crumbled and Babylon's power to fascinate has not diminished to this day.

#### **Comparative analysis**

The comparative analysis is embedded within a regional framework of four historic empires which are related in one way or another to the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and cites the major historic cities within a similar time frame and within Babylon's geo-cultural context. These are Sumerian city states, the Akkadian kingdom, the kingdoms of Babylon, both the Old Babylon and New Babylon, as well as the Assyrian empires, including the Old, Middle and New Assyrian Empires. The comparative analysis indicates that the Babylonian Empires, and in particular the Neo-Babylonian Empire, are not currently included among those ancient Mesopotamian empires represented on the World Heritage List. It therefore indicates that this particular ancient empire provides a gap to be filled.

The comparative analysis then continues to compare early capitals outside the Mesopotamian region, including those of the ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians. ICOMOS considers that, while comparative analyses can always be broader and wider to also, in this case, compare ancient capitals at a global level, the essential comparators are within Mesopotamia and the comparative analysis has successfully illustrated that Babylon is without comparison as the Neo-Babylonian capital city and an important symbolic reference in monotheistic reference texts and classical literature.

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ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies 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 (iii) and (vi):

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 Babylon is one of the largest and oldest settlements in Mesopotamia, which provides testimony to the seat of successive powerful empires under such famous rulers as Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar. It is the most exceptional testimony of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, representing its cultural achievements at their height and showing the full flowering of the civilization's creativity.

ICOMOS considers that Babylon is indeed an exceptional testimony of both the Babylonian and, most particularly, the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which, although it witnessed

a comparatively brief time span as the capital, is testimony to a highly productive phase in architectural and urban creation. ICOMOS therefore considers that the application of criterion (iii) is justified in reference to the Babylonian and Neo-Babylonian Empires to which it provides testimony, but not necessarily to earlier or later civilizations that have also left occasional traces and evidence within the city.

Criterion (vi): *be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that Babylon figures in the religious texts and traditions of the three Abrahamic religions as well as innumerable other artistic and literary representations as a powerful symbol and multifaceted metaphor. Its association with one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Hanging Gardens, as well as the Tower of Babel, has inspired artists and created numerous associated images and tales. The State Party suggests that the heavy investment by Iraqi leaders in the 20th century, who strove to leave their mark by reconstructing the grandiose ancient monuments of Nebuchadnezzar, continued this tradition of the symbolic power of Babylon as a foundation of national pride.

ICOMOS considers that, while in principle the multiple historic and religious references and the symbolic importance of Babylon in the arts and literature merits the application of this criterion, the suggestion that the 20th century alterations could be recognized as contributing to this continuity and hence provide a contribution to the Outstanding Universal Value cannot be accepted. ICOMOS therefore notes that the reference to the fact that Babylon remained an icon of Iraqi national identity cannot be seen as an exceptional significance at a global scale. As a result, ICOMOS recognizes that this criterion is justified in reference to Babylon's function as a model, parable and symbol of ancient power for over two thousand years.

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ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (iii) and (vi).

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### **Integrity and authenticity**

#### **Integrity**

The State Party considers that the buildings and other urban features contained within the property include all archaeological remains since the time of Hammurabi until the Hellenistic period, and specifically urbanistic and architectural features from the Neo-Babylonian period, when the city was at the height of its power and glory. ICOMOS confirms that, in terms of completeness, all relevant archaeological remains are encompassed within the property boundaries.

However, ICOMOS considers that the nominated property suffers from the adverse effects of a variety of predominantly anthropogenic threats including illegal constructions, trash dumping and burning, small-scale industrial pollution, urban encroachments and other environmental factors. In terms of urban encroachments, aerial photos clearly show that houses have been constructed within the western Outer City wall since 2009. In the additional information provided on 25 February 2019, the State Party indicates that since 2018, the site administration has been initiating court proceedings aimed at prosecuting illegal constructions. As a result of this, 11 court orders have been issued demanding the removal of the illegal constructions. The so-called tourist village situated north of the Hellenistic Theatre was built with recreational objectives and the buildings were last used during the occupation of the site by the allied forces and then abandoned in 2009.

The general physical fabric of the site is in a critical condition as a result of neglect and lack of programmed efforts towards conservation. In ICOMOS' view the pace of deterioration is faster than the pace of the maintenance programme and intended conservation interventions. For this reason, ICOMOS, in its Interim Report, requested the State Party to explain in more detail its conservation and maintenance efforts. The State Party responded on 25 February 2019, stating that additional funds of 20 million USD had been made available for the next 5 years to address conservation concerns. However, no concrete plan of prioritization or programmed conservation approach exists at this stage. ICOMOS recommends that the State Party prioritizes the preparation of a conservation plan for the property, which should include quality indicators for the conservation desired as well as qualification profiles for those who will implement the parallel conservation efforts on site.

ICOMOS considers that both the reconstructions and structural alterations of the 'Revival of Babylon Project' and other constructions in the 1980s have affected the integrity of the property. It has continued until very recently to be jeopardized by illegal constructions. Whilst the State Party has given assurances that since 2018, court orders are being obtained for prosecution and removal of illegal constructions, ICOMOS remains concerned and concludes that, unless the legal protection is 'de facto' implemented and a programmed approach to conservation applied, the integrity of the property remains at stake.

#### **Authenticity**

The State Party considers that some physical elements of the site have been viewed as problematic in terms of authenticity, such as the reconstructions built on archaeological foundations, which aimed at making the scanty archaeological remains better visible to visitors. In most cases, however, these additions are discernible from the original remains and are said to have diligently followed the original plans exposed through archaeological excavations. The State Party argues that these did not affect the legibility of the spatial organization of the urban

core, and of the inner and outer city limits, which remain discernible today.

ICOMOS considers that the number of reconstructions is unusually high and that some of these were almost complete reconstructions based on very scanty archaeological evidence. The height and design of these reconstructions is thus based on conjecture rather than scientific or archaeological evidence. These volumetric aspects of the reconstructed monuments and the additions in successive restorations did affect the ability of parts of the property to convey authenticity in form and design with regard to these archaeological remains. Likewise, based on the introduction of new materials, these monuments illustrate limited authenticity in material and substance. ICOMOS considers that, whilst these reconstructions remain within the boundaries of the property, the State Party has indicated that within the context of developing an overall conservation plan, their condition will be evaluated and all possible options, including removal, will be considered to ensure the preservation in the best possible way of the remains of the ancient walls at their foundations. Authenticity in this context is nevertheless confirmed in view of the large majority of unexcavated and non-reconstructed archaeological evidence, which by far exceeds these problematic areas.

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In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the requirements of integrity and authenticity have been met for the large majority of the property but are highly vulnerable as a result of the clear danger which exists in the very worrying state of conservation.

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#### **Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription**

The comparative analysis justifies the consideration of Babylon for the World Heritage List and has highlighted that the Babylonian Kingdoms constitute a gap not yet adequately represented on the List. The proposed property fulfils the justification of criteria (iii) and (vi). However, due to the large-scale archaeological reconstruction programme which was implemented between the 1960s and 1980s and now causes conservation concerns, as well as severe threats including from illegal constructions on the site, the integrity of the property is highly vulnerable. The overall state of conservation constitutes a clear danger, which likely will affect the remaining integrity in the near future. Likewise, although the qualifying condition of authenticity is affected with regards to several information sources, it remains satisfactory for the considerable areas with unexcavated remains but is endangered as a result of the general state of dilapidation and decay.

#### **Attributes**

Attributes of the Outstanding Universal Value are all archaeological remains within the former outer city wall, as well as the testimonies of nearby agricultural lands cultivated during the Babylonian era. The attributes comprise the remains of ancient palaces, temples, gates and other urban features and explicitly include the foundations below the reconstructions of the 20th century and the layer of archaeological evidence below 20<sup>th</sup> century

alterations and reconstructions. With regards to this layer, it should be noted that only 18 percent of the site has been systematically excavated and a very important attribute relates to the future potential of the site for the gaining of further knowledge about the Babylonian and Neo-Babylonian civilizations. The 20th century landscaping additions, and constructions in the form of settlements, administrative housing, visitor facilities and a palace, have been explicitly excluded from the property and remain in an above-ground buffer zone. These explicitly do not feature as attributes and have no capacity to contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value.

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ICOMOS considers that, whilst the cultural criteria (iii) and (vi) are met, the conditions of authenticity and integrity are highly vulnerable. They are already affected in some areas of the property and might be further lost as a result of the ascertained dangers identified in regard to the overall state of conservation of the property.

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## **4 Conservation measures and monitoring**

### **Conservation measures**

Almost all monuments at Babylon suffer from lack of maintenance. The excavated and unrestored monuments are slowly transforming into mounds of rubble; the reconstructed ones suffer from the adverse effects resulting from the incompatible materials, in particular mortars introduced during the reconstructions; and from the growth of natural vegetation and trees. Those ruins which have been reconstructed upon are at times also affected by the additional loads of these reconstructions on top of the authentic archaeological foundations, causing differential settlement and damaging the remaining few authentic parts. The few monuments that are in better shape at present are the ones which have received preliminary cleaning and conservation under the 'Future of Babylon' project in collaboration with the WMF. These are the Ishtar Gate, the Inner City Wall, the Ninmakh Temple, the Nabu sha Khare Temple and the Ishtar Temple.

The only active conservation measures undertaken on site in recent years have been those under the 'Future of Babylon' cooperation with the World Monuments Fund. This partnership was established in 2005. In 2010, due to a grant from the United States Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, a condition survey was commenced and the development of a management and conservation plan commissioned. While the management plan has been officially approved, it only contains rather generic references to conservation priorities and strategies, so a comprehensive conservation plan is yet to be finalized and should be given priority.

### **Monitoring**

A set of twelve monitoring indicators has been submitted in the nomination, which includes monitoring of humidity in the form of rain water retention, ground water levels, humidity levels in archaeological remains and phenomena of salt crystallization, erosion phenomena, use of agricultural

lands, and urban encroachment. In addition, the Management Plan which was approved in September 2018 and submitted with the additional information on 7 November 2018, foresees as one of its strategic aims the wider involvement of different stakeholders within these monitoring processes and calls for the establishment of a World Heritage compliance monitoring system, aimed at ensuring the compatibility of each decision taken and measure implemented, with the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

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ICOMOS considers that baseline surveys available give a good indication of the state of conservation, and the monitoring and conservation plans which are planned to be established according to the management plan will be essential to develop a programmed approach to conservation. It is most important to develop a priority intervention scheme for conservation based on the critical condition of several monuments and parts of the site.

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## 5 Protection and management

### Documentation

Plans and photos of the excavated monuments and objects discovered on site have been taken and drafted since the beginning of systematic excavations in the early 20th century. The originals are being deposited at the Baghdad Museum archives while digitized copies are available to the management team in Babylon. Since 2012, the State Party has been collaborating with the World Monuments Fund on a project called 'Future of Babylon', which aims at assessing the site condition, developing a priority-based conservation plan, and stabilizing the archaeological ruins to prevent immediate losses.

A baseline survey was conducted to gather information towards this objective and set immediate priorities. In this context CyArc was requested to undertake a laser scanning survey for two monuments, namely the Ishtar Gate and the Nabu sha khare Temple. Recently, drone photographs of some areas of the site were taken and are available in the site's database and digital photograph storage. For the less central areas of the property, the management team is still dependent on maps which were drawn in the early 20th century, although the World Monuments Fund has drawn a new map of the site based on the systematic compilation and overlay of other available maps.

At the enquiry of ICOMOS in the dialogue process with the State Party, it was indicated that no archaeological surveys or excavations are envisaged in the near future and priority will be given to non-intrusive survey methods to preserve the maximum possible of future information potential. This approach was confirmed and reiterated in the additional information received on 25 February 2019. ICOMOS strongly commends this approach and recommends highlighting the urgent priority for conservation to any foreign requests for archaeological cooperation.

### Legal protection

The property is protected by the Law of Antiquities, no 55 of 2002, which is a specific national law with high priority over other general public laws. This law provides essential protection against unauthorized excavation or development on the property. The law imposes prosecution of up to 15 years of imprisonment for acts against archaeological heritage, which is a powerful tool when cited by the archaeological administration, which is designated as the enforcing authority of this law.

However, despite the solid 'de jure' protection, ICOMOS is concerned that the 'de facto' protection is less sound than is desirable, as its implementation is hindered by socio-political interference. The State Party indicated in the additional information provided on 25 February 2019 that since 2018, illegal constructions have been prosecuted more consistently and that 11 court orders for removal of illegal constructions had been issued. In ICOMOS' view, these will act as a warning sign and likely reduce the desire to invest in constructions that may need to be removed later. However, the real challenge lies in the implementation of these court orders to allow for long-term protection in the sections of the property which are privately-owned, and where ownership rights conflict with the antiquity legislation.

ICOMOS recommends continuing the strict approach of legal prosecution and to transform the entire property into a no-construction zone, which is enforced in the Iraqi context by means of expropriation. While ICOMOS notes that this is a long-term process consuming a considerable amount of financial resources, which may not be easily available and which should currently be directed towards the urgent conservation needs, it seems the only possible option to ensure, legally and on-the-ground, the long-term protection of the archaeological remains.

### Management system

The overall management authority for the property lies at the state level with the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) in Baghdad, which is responsible for the conservation and monitoring of the site and is the Iraqi partner within the 'Future for Babylon' collaboration. Within the SBAH a section for World Heritage sites exists, which was involved in the development of the management plan for the property. At the governorates level, Antiquity and Heritage Directorates (AHDs) are directly responsible for day-to-day conservation, monitoring and management concerns. The Babil AHD is located within the property and includes sections dedicated to restoration and conservation, investigation and museums. The AHD employs antiquity inspectors who are engaged in daily control and monitoring of the site.

Although there is no formally designated site management unit under the AHD, a management team was established by ministerial decision. In addition to the above institutions, the government of Iraq created an inter-ministerial Committee for World Heritage Sites in 2013. This Committee plays a crucial role in the vocalization of World Heritage concerns in high-level decision-making processes.

A management plan was approved on 18 September 2018 which was co-signed by the Minister of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities, the Deputy Minister of Culture, the Director General of the National Committee for the Babylon Project, and the National Focal Point for Culture with UNESCO. The management plan sets out a realistic and detailed identification of the risks, issues and conservation challenges on-site and formulates general aims and policies to address these. Unfortunately, these policies and aims remain abstract and the plan provides very limited guidance towards the concrete implementation of these general schemes and guiding principles, as it remains without structured actions, clear methodologies or resource references.

ICOMOS notes that the short-term actions indicated for the forthcoming 5-year period, do not include all the urgent actions needed to reduce the most important risks which currently threaten the preservation of the historic fabric and affect the integrity of the property. Priorities are not sufficiently identified within the needed time-frame and in ICOMOS' view a rearrangement of activities towards full prioritization conservation activities is needed. ICOMOS therefore recommends that the management plan is augmented by a comprehensive conservation plan, indicating needs for priority and emergency interventions and providing detailed implementation-oriented guidance as well as quality indicators for successful implementation.

#### **Visitor management**

The site has been reopened to visitors and has parking spaces and a ticketing office. A visitor centre, to be located in the former Hammurabi Museum, and the development of a visitor route, are planned and outlined in the management plan. Other facilities such as public bathrooms are also planned to be provided in different sections of the large-scale property. Two huge parking areas at the entrance of the site are another legacy of the 'Revival of Babylon Project', but are now planned to be used for different events, which in the past used to take place in the Hellenistic amphitheatre. Within the projected visitor plan, electric cars would take visitors from the parking space to the archaeological ruins. While some electric cars are already available, lack of regular maintenance leaves these non-functioning at present.

In terms of interpretation, the site contains two recently-installed interpretation panels in Arabic and English, providing a brief introduction to the site's history and key features. There is also one interpretation panel with a site plan, which remains from the 1980s. The museum provides visitors with a model of the inner historic city. ICOMOS considers that the interpretation of the property is rather scanty at present and does not pay due credit to its historic importance. The management plan indicates several strategies to address this lack of interpretation in the future. However, while this is extremely important, ICOMOS considers that immediate priority should be given to conservation rather than interpretation until the most critical conditions have been stabilized.

Based on the revised boundary concept submitted by the State Party in response to ICOMOS' Interim Report, it would be beneficial to communicate to visitors the fact that 20th century additions have been excluded from the property and that exclusion zones are located within the larger property boundaries.

#### **Community involvement**

The State Party indicates that the local communities were involved and consulted in both the preparation of the nomination and the management plan. Despite this intense consultation, they have not been attributed any active roles in the processes and policies outlined by the management plan. Other than by means of providing short-term jobs in cleaning, construction or gardening, the local communities do not seem to be given shares, benefits or even revenues in relation to the site. ICOMOS considers it would be desirable to establish closer collaboration between the Site Management Unit and the local, residential communities as well as civil society at large.

#### **Evaluation of the effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property**

Despite good intentions and coordinated efforts by the State Party as well as significant financial resources made available, the effectiveness of protection and management still remains limited. While the formal legal protection is adequate, its 'de facto' implementation faces challenges, with illicit urban encroachment continuing on site since 2009. Recent legal action and court orders to remove illegal constructions should be consistently implemented. The adopted management plan provides a good basis of agreed-upon principles and general policies for site management but does not provide any action-oriented guidance towards its implementation or resourcing. ICOMOS considers that short-term priorities of the management plan may have to be rearranged to focus all efforts and resources on the immediate conservation challenges the site is facing.

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ICOMOS considers that legal protection is present but requires strict implementation: conservation pressures are vast and constitute an obvious danger to the property. All resources should therefore be channelled towards addressing these as a priority.

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## **6 Conclusion**

The nominated property of Babylon is an exceptional testimony of the Babylonian and Neo-Babylonian Empires, which are not currently represented on the World Heritage List. Babylon has also been a powerful symbol and metaphor, not only in religious texts of the three monotheistic religions but also as a symbol and reference in the arts and literature at large. ICOMOS therefore considers that the property justifies the cultural criteria (iii) and (vi). However, ICOMOS considers that the 20<sup>th</sup> century additions to the property, which were driven by the aim of utilizing the site's symbolic power for political representation and nation-building, cannot be seen as



contributing to this Outstanding Universal Value. These rather had a detrimental effect to the property's authenticity and integrity. ICOMOS therefore appreciates the removal of the 20<sup>th</sup> century constructions and several landscaping interventions from the property boundaries by creating above-ground buffer zone islands within the property.

The conditions of integrity, which are largely satisfied in terms of wholeness, are challenged and vulnerable in terms of intactness. The preparation of a priority conservation plan and programmed approach to conservation is essential to divert the clear danger the site is facing at present. The consistent application of the legal protection, also through implementation of issued court orders for the removal of illegal constructions, remains essential. Authenticity will not be fully recovered for some areas, where irreversible changes have had an impact on the credibility of the archaeological remains. ICOMOS recommends, however, that when interpreting authenticity, it should be kept in mind that the large majority of the property remains unexcavated and retains a significant potential to provide knowledge based on the yet unaltered and unexcavated remains.

The state of conservation of Babylon raises serious concerns, with several structures in urgent need of conservation and several on the verge of collapse. ICOMOS considers that this critical state of conservation constitutes a clear threat to the integrity of the property, in accordance with paragraph 179 of the *Operational Guidelines*.

While the management plan, which was adopted in September 2018, addresses general aims and principles towards conservation, it does not guide active conservation measures nor does it provide a comprehensive conservation plan with identification of priority interventions. ICOMOS recommends that the development and finalization of such a conservation plan should be given the highest priority. ICOMOS commends the intention of the State Party to focus future research on non-intrusive technologies and give clear priority to conservation rather than excavation.

Whilst the legal protection of the site is adequate at a formal level, ICOMOS is concerned about the ongoing construction and urban encroachment activities on site. ICOMOS therefore considers that effective legal protection needs to be implemented, including by strict implementation of the recently obtained court orders for the removal of illegal constructions on site. ICOMOS further recommends declaring the property a no-construction zone and to prepare a plan for the expropriation of all privately-owned parcels within the property. While ICOMOS notes that this is a time- and resource-consuming process, it should be launched at the earliest possible opportunity to create further awareness of the property's needs at both governorate and national level.

ICOMOS considers that a clear threat exists to the integrity of the property, in accordance with paragraph 179 of the *Operational Guidelines*. Indeed, the property is faced with specific and proven imminent dangers in terms of its state of decay and dilapidation, with several structures on the verge of collapse, which could lead to significant loss of historical authenticity and of cultural significance.

In view of the vulnerabilities of and threats to the cultural attributes as well as the lack of priority conservation schemes and a comprehensive conservation approach, ICOMOS considers that the property should be inscribed under criteria (iii) and (vi) and at the same time be inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. This should be seen as a way forward to mobilise further international resources to address the conservation problems.

## 7 Recommendations

### Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that Babylon, Iraq, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (iii) and (vi)**, and be simultaneously inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

ICOMOS also recommends that the State Party invites a mission to the property as soon as possible to agree on a Desired State of Conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger, based on the cultural attributes of Outstanding Universal Value and to be reached through a detailed conservation strategy and corrective measures that can then be phased and costed. Efforts would then be made with the assistance of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS to find partners, technical support and donors to support this conservation project.

### Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

#### Brief synthesis

Babylon is an archaeological site which stands out as a unique testimony to one of the most influential empires of the ancient world. One of the largest, oldest settlements in Mesopotamia and the Middle East, it was the seat of successive powerful empires under such famous rulers as Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar. As the capital of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (626-539 BCE), it is the most exceptional testimony of this culture at its height and represents the expression of this civilization's creativity through its unusual urbanism, the architecture of its monuments (religious, palatial and defensive) and their decorative expressions of royal power. Babylon radiated not only political, technical and artistic influence over all regions of the ancient Near and Middle East, but it also left a considerable scientific legacy in the fields of mathematics and astronomy.

As an archaeological site, Babylon possesses exceptional cultural and symbolic associations of universal value. The property represents the tangible remains of a multifaceted myth that has functioned as a model, parable, scapegoat and symbol for over two thousand years. Babylon figures in the religious texts and traditions of the three Abrahamic faiths and has consistently been a source of inspiration for literary, philosophical and artistic works. The buildings and other urban features contained within the boundaries of the property (outer and inner-city walls, gates, palaces, temples including the ziggurat, the probable inspiration for the Tower of Babel, etc.), include all its attributes as a unique testimony to the neo-Babylonian civilization, in particular its contribution to architecture and urban design. Eighty-five percent of the property remains unexcavated and of primary importance to support the site's Outstanding Universal Value through further conservation and research.

**Criterion (iii):** Babylon dates back to the third millennium BCE and was the seat of successive powerful empires under such famous rulers as Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar. As the capital of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (626-539 BCE), it is the most exceptional testimony of this culture at its height and represents the expression of this civilization's creativity during this highly productive phase in architectural and urban creation.

Babylon's cultural legacy was enhanced by previous Akkadian and Sumerian cultural achievements, which included the cuneiform writing system, a significant tool for today's knowledge of the history and evolution of the region in general and Babylon in particular. In turn, Babylon exerted considerable political, scientific, technological, architectural and artistic influence upon other human settlements in the region, and on successive historic periods of Antiquity.

**Criterion (vi):** Babylon functioned as a model, parable and symbol of ancient power for over two thousand years and inspires artistic, popular and religious culture on a global scale. The tales of Babel find reference in the religious texts of the three Abrahamic religions. In the works of Greek historians, Babylon was distant, exotic and incredible. Classical texts attribute one of the seven wonders of the world to Babylon: the Hanging Gardens; and other texts speak of the wondrous Tower of Babel. Both are iconic but have their origins in real ancient structures of which archaeological traces are still preserved: the ziggurat Etemenanki and Nebuchadnezzar's palatial complex.

#### Integrity

The boundaries of the property encompass the outer walls of the neo-Babylonian capital on all sides. These limits are well marked by remnants of the fortifications in the form of mounds visible on the ground and they are also confirmed by archaeological surveys. The buildings and other urban features contained within the property include all archaeological remains since the time of Hammurabi until the Hellenistic period, and specifically urbanistic and architectural products of the Neo-Babylonian period when the city was at the height of its power and glory. These

represent the complete range of attributes of the property as a unique testimony to the Neo-Babylonian civilization, and the material basis for its cultural and symbolic associations.

The property suffers from a variety of threats including illegal constructions, trash dumping and burning, small-scale industrial pollution, urban encroachments and other environmental factors. At the time of inscription, the general physical fabric of the site is in a critical condition and lacks programmed efforts towards conservation. Both the reconstructions and structural alterations of the 'Revival of Babylon Project' and other constructions in the 1980s have negatively affected the integrity of the property. Whilst the constructions of the 20th century are excluded from the property and now function as above-ground buffer zones within the property area, the future management of these within the overall property will be critical to the preservation of the fragile condition of integrity.

#### Authenticity

Some physical elements of the site have been viewed as problematic in terms of authenticity, in particular the reconstructions built on archaeological foundations, which aimed at making the scanty archaeological remains better visible to visitors, and the 20th century interventions within the property. In most cases, however, these additions are discernible from the original remains. Whilst it is a matter of debate whether these did affect the legibility of the spatial organization of the urban core, the inner and outer city limits remain discernible today and approximately 85 percent of the property is unexcavated. Authenticity of these remains is very vulnerable based on the critical state of conservation of the property.

For the reconstructed sections, the authenticity of the property above-ground is problematic. While all other 20th century constructions were excluded from the property and covered by the above-ground buffer zones, the unusually high number of reconstructions and the fact that some of these were almost complete reconstructions based on very scanty archaeological evidence remains an unfortunate part of the history of the property. The height and design of these reconstructions is therefore based on conjecture rather than scientific or archaeological evidence. These volumetric aspects of the reconstructed monuments and the additions in successive restorations did affect the ability of parts of the property to convey authenticity in form and design with regard to these archaeological remains. Likewise, based on the introduction of new materials, these monuments illustrate limited authenticity in material and substance.

#### Management and protection requirements

The property falls under the jurisdiction of the Iraqi Antiquities and Heritage Law No. 55 of 2002, which aims to protect, conserve and manage all archaeological sites in Iraq. The law is also concerned with surveying, excavating and documenting all archaeological sites and presenting them to the public. The law is enforced by the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, a body under the authority of

the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities. At the provincial level, the Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage of Babil is directly responsible to ensure the conservation, management and monitoring of the property, and works in collaboration with the Antiquity and Heritage Police who maintain a station near the site.

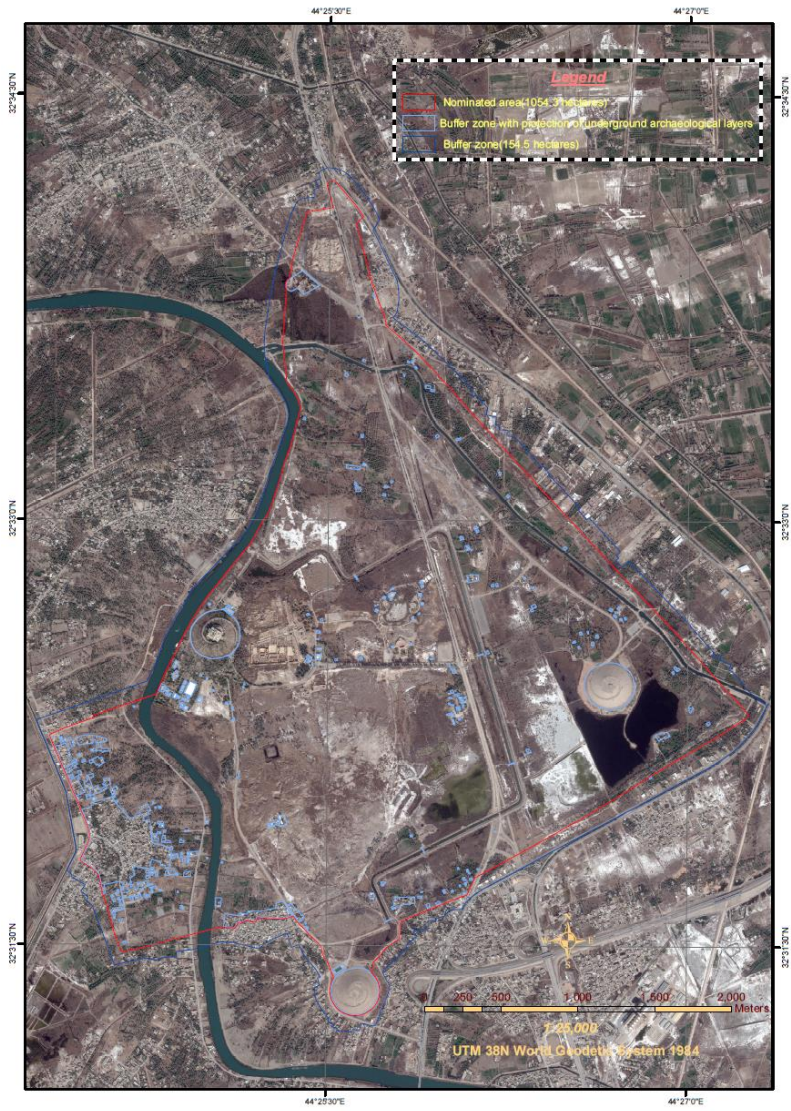
ICOMOS encourages international cooperation to support the protection and conservation of the property.

The state of conservation of the property is very concerning and constitutes an ascertained danger in the absence of a coordinated programmed conservation approach with urgent priority interventions. A management plan has been developed through an in-depth consultation process with local and national stakeholders since 2011. Both the federal and provincial governments have committed sufficient levels of funding to ensure that the property is conserved, studied and developed for visitors to international standards while protecting its Outstanding Universal Value. It is essential that the overall principles laid out in the plan are subsequently transferred to concrete actions on site, prioritizing conservation to prevent immediate losses which can occur at any time, in particular in case of rainfalls.

#### **Additional recommendations**

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

- a) Developing and finalizing the comprehensive conservation plan for the property and within this address the various risk factors identified in the risk map provided, including through proposing concrete measures towards their effective reduction and mitigation as well as the establishment of a priority intervention scheme for the most urgent conservation measures needed,
- b) Augmenting the management plan to include the above-described conservation plan, to allow the management team to focus on priority, emergency interventions and providing detailed implementation-oriented guidance as well as quality indicators for its successful implementation,
- c) Researching further the relationships between the Neo-Babylonian capital and its wider landscape, in particular towards the Euphrates River, which is located a few kilometres west of Babylon and, based on the outcomes of this research, consider further extending the buffer zone in order to address actual and potential future challenges which can be identified in the wider setting of the archaeological city,
- d) Communicating to visitors the revised boundary concept and the explicit exclusion of 20th century additions from the property,
- e) Submitting to the World Heritage Centre by 1st December 2019 a report on the implementation of the recommendations set out above for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 44<sup>th</sup> session in 2020;



Revised map showing the boundaries of the nominated property



Panoramic view of the Northern Palace



The remains of the Gula Temple



Etemenanki, the Ziggurat of Babylon



Esagila Temple