
Cultural Rock Arts in Ḥimā Najrān (Saudi Arabia) No 1619

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Cultural Rock Arts in Ḥimā Najrān

Location

Ḥimā Area
Najrān Region
Saudi Arabia

Brief description

Located in an arid, mountainous area of southwest Saudi Arabia, Cultural Rock Arts in Ḥimā Najrān contains a substantial collection of rock art images depicting hunting, fauna, flora and lifestyles in a cultural continuity from prehistoric through mediaeval times and almost to the present, a period of 7000 years. The property and its large buffer zone are also rich in unexcavated archaeological resources in the form of cairns, stone structures, interments, stone tool scatters and ancient wells.

This location is at the oldest known toll station on an important ancient desert caravan route, where the wells of Bi'r Ḥimā date back at least 3000 years and still produce fresh water. Travellers in caravans and military campaigns crossing the desert at various times left marks of their beliefs and traditions in the form of inscriptions and writings on the nearby rocks.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a serial nomination of 6 *sites*.

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

8 April 2015

Background

This is a new nomination.

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 21 to 29 September 2019.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 24 September 2019 requesting further information about the justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity, factors affecting the property, boundaries, conservation, protection and management, interpretation, presentation and visitor management.

An Interim Report was provided to the State Party on 20 December 2019 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel. Further information was requested in the Interim Report, including: justification for nomination, boundaries, conservation and protection.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 10 October 2019 and 27 February 2020 and has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

12 March 2020

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

Cultural Rock Arts in Ḥimā Najrān is located in southwest Saudi Arabia on one of the ancient caravan routes of the Arabian Peninsula. The wells at Bi'r Ḥimā were the last source of water before crossing the desert on the way to the north. Travellers among the intensive caravan traffic as well as armies camping here left a wealth of rock inscriptions and petroglyphs. These and earlier examples cover a period of 7000 years, continuing up to the last 30 years, most preserved in pristine condition. Inscriptions are in different scripts, including Musnad, Aramaic-Nabatean, South-Arabian, Thamudic, Greek and Arabic.

No archaeological excavations have been carried out in the nominated property. Nevertheless, a large number of surface archaeological resources are found in the nominated property and its buffer zone, including stone cairns, dry-laid stone tombs, extensive stone arrangements, stone tool scatters and ceramic shards.

The nominated property is a serial nomination consisting of six component parts:

Saidah (HIM01) is a rock outcrop about 20 metres high and 90 metres in diameter. There is a large inscription on a high part of the cliff face as well as 43 smaller inscriptions. Many petroglyphs are located on boulders around the base of the hill.

Ḥimā Wells (HIM02) consists of two sites of rock inscriptions located close to the five ancient wells of Bi'r Ḥimā. They have been in use for at least 3000 years and continue to provide water. Caravans and armies camped here over a long span of time and in different periods. Inscribed rock panels are located 150 metres from the wells. Inscriptions covering more than 45 metres in length extend along the foot of the cliff. Seven stone tombs are located at the bottom of the slope below the cliff.

ʿĀn Jamal (JML01) is a low, rocky ridge marked by very large angular boulders and a vertical cliff. All are densely covered with 245 petroglyphs and 438 inscriptions. One of the inscriptions is thought to be between 1300 and 1350 years old, on the basis of the micro-erosion calibration at southern Saudi Arabia. The most recent presence of surface water was established according to scientific evidence gained from ʿĀn Jamal. This gives an estimate of the time of the gradual lowering of the aquifer leading to the region's final phase of desertification. A toll station for caravans once existed at ʿĀn Jamal.

Dhibāh 1 (DBA01) is a series of large boulders at the foot of a mountain stretching for 2.5 kilometres from east to west. It consists of a number of rock art panels, one of the ten sites of the Dhibāh complex. It includes the presumed depictions of three or four elephants. As the animal did not exist in the Arabian Peninsula, a number of interpretations by researchers have been considered for these depictions.

Minshaf 2 (IBD02) is a site complex 3.5 kilometres east of Dhibāh 1. Its dominant features are large bovid depictions with elaborately decorated internal bodies. The markings are usually associated with Neolithic cattle depictions in northern Saudi Arabia.

Najd Khayrān (SAD07) is immediately north and along wadi Saad. It is located at the base of a meandering cliff, with thousands of petroglyphs on it and on large blocks of sandstone at its base. Four polished "slides" occur on a steeply sloping panel on a huge block in front of the "waterfall," opening the door for different interpretations. Among big boulders east of the "waterfall" are panels of petroglyphs, some of which depict bovids and human figures, and in some cases interactions between them.

In addition to the six component parts of the nominated property, additional 545 sites have been inventoried, including thousands of rock art and rock inscriptions in the wider Ḥimā area.

The nominated property's history begins with the Lower Palaeolithic hominin presence at ʿĀn Jamal and Sha'ib Hinmat, with occupation sites of the Acheulian and perhaps earlier. Stone structures are the testimony of human occupation during the Neolithic. Continuous occupation of the nominated property since the Neolithic is thought most probable, though not yet confirmed by archaeological excavations.

The rock art of the property was first brought to outside attention following a 1951-52 Belgian expedition under the auspices of King Ibn Saud. Since then it had been photographed and studied, though the nominated property and the buffer zone remain incompletely explored. Attempts have been made, to establish the chronology of Arabian rock art up to the present, with many expeditions to Ḥimā by Saudi and foreign specialists.

Boundaries

The area of the six component parts of the serial nomination totals 242.17 ha, with a single buffer zone of 31,575.83 ha.

The six component parts that comprise the nominated property – possibly containing more than 100,000 petroglyphs – encompass the region's largest and most significant concentrations of rock art and rock inscription sites.

The 2018 Tourism Management Plan subdivides the buffer zone into a "developed" zone containing the Ḥimā Wells and Saidah component parts in the south, and a larger "undeveloped" zone containing the other four component parts in the north.

In response to a request for additional information sent by ICOMOS in September 2019, the State Party clarified that the rationale for delineating the boundaries of the nominated property is based in part on adopting fenced-in "exclusion area" boundaries established many years ago. The rationale for delineating the boundaries of the buffer zone is based on "annexing" the largest possible number of rock art, inscription and archaeological clusters within the overall extent of the greater cultural heritage zone.

The State Party advises that the western part of the proposed buffer zone is limited because of sensitivities among the Bedouins. It hopes the buffer zone may be extended in the future, particularly to include the site of Jabal al-Kawbab.

ICOMOS considers that the buffer zone should be extended to include Jabal al-Kawbab and part of Jabal al-Qāra, which are adjacent to the proposed buffer zone, thereby adding a hill area that contains many important sites. This request was presented in the ICOMOS Interim Report and the State Party accepted this proposal. It indicated that the timeframe for inclusion of these sites would be between 3 and 5 years, as they required detailed documentation and studies.

ICOMOS considers that the rationale for the boundaries of the nominated property and the buffer zone was difficult to confirm without the records documenting all known sites. The list of 551 rock art and rock inscription sites located within the nominated area, the buffer zone and in the wider Ḥimā area have been provided as part of the additional information in February 2020. However,

little information was provided on the sites located in the buffer zone and wider area.

ICOMOS recommends that a map showing the precise location of the inventoried heritage sites reported from the nominated area and the buffer zone be provided.

ICOMOS recommends as well that further research, including mapping, documenting and inventorying sites in the buffer zone be carried out.

ICOMOS concludes that boundaries of the nominated property are adequate. ICOMOS also encourages the State Party to advance archaeological research in the buffer zone, and to consider the option of extending the property in the future, in case information comes to light that contribute to the understanding of the property.

ICOMOS considers that dividing the buffer zone into “developed” and “undeveloped” zones is not coherent, particularly in relation to the township of Ḥimā and the potential development there in proximity to the Ḥimā wells, petroglyphs and inscriptions (component parts HIM01 and HIM02 of the nominated property). In the additional information provided in February 2020, the State Party explained that any development within the “developed zone” will be subject to approval and will need *‘to comply with traditional architectural practices, without impinging on the visual ambience of the two core sites’*. As regards the development within the “undeveloped zone”, it will be limited to fencing, visitor paths, platforms and barriers. There are traditional Bedouin tent settlements in a few locations, but no permanent structures will be allowed.

In addition, the suggestion of the State Party that Najd Khayrān (component SAD07) be developed as a tourism destination appears contradictory to the developed/undeveloped division within the buffer zone, as it is located in the “undeveloped” zone. The State Party provided clarification in February 2020: this will involve the installation of minimal tourist facilities, including concrete paths from the entrance gate to the rock art concentrations and potentially a sun-shade at the gate. Consideration is being given to the installation of a Bedouin tent nearby with toilet, coffee shop facilities and a monitoring centre.

ICOMOS considers that more information on the rationale for the division of the buffer zone into two zones remain necessary. It appears that part of the rationale for the developed zone focused on Ḥimā village as it is the settlement area with access to the regional road network. However, it is not clear from where the access to Njad Khayran will be, and it would appear that road facilities will be required. ICOMOS recommends also that the State Party carries out Heritage Impact Assessment studies of the impact of these proposed developments before they are implemented.

State of conservation

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is good.

The six component parts are individually fenced with restricted access to vehicles, except for Ḥimā Wells (HIM02), as the wells are still used as a source of water for the local community.

Several sites have suffered from damage from bullets, as large blocks were used for target shooting. ICOMOS inquired the State Party about the measure in place to prevent such practices. The State Party clarified that this practice has been stopped and is now prevented by the fencing around each of the six component parts.

The state of conservation is affected in a limited way by natural deterioration such as erosion by air-borne quartz sand and slow granular exfoliation caused by the natural removal of interstitial colloid silica by solution.

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 human threats such as vandalism and the impact of foot traffic at the base of the cliffs. Three issues in particular should also be carefully monitored: graffiti, bullet damage and garbage.

Development pressures are limited to the expected future increase in tourism, as well as the infrastructure and services visitors will need, and the potential future expansion of Ḥimā township.

Other factors include natural threats such as wind and rainwater erosion and diurnal differences in temperature. Natural disasters may include seismic activity along the axis of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

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 artistic skills demonstrated in the rock art are exceptional, with many of the petroglyphs representing masterpieces of human creative genius.
- Invested with the beliefs, concerns, desires and priorities of its creators, the rock art represents the surviving cultural precipitate of 300 to 400 generations.
- The rock art and rock inscriptions exhibit an important interchange of values by many ethnic groups from all over the Middle East. The inscriptions represent a long span of time in the

developments in monumental arts and writing, and document systems of writing which eventually bestowed alphabetic scripts on the world.

- The property bears a unique testimony to a number of ancient traditions over many millennia, culminating in a civilization that is still living today. It represents a massive outdoor library.
- The massive corpora of petroglyphs and rock inscriptions present an outstanding record of human interaction with a volatile environment. This interaction provides a salutary lesson to modern society globally.

In its Interim Report, ICOMOS raised that the name of the nominated property “Cultural Rock arts in Ḥimā Najran” could be seen as restrictive due to the different types of identified attributes and archaeological potential. The State Party replied by changing the name of the property to be “Ḥimā Cultural Precinct”. ICOMOS thanks the State Party for having considered changing the name of the property. However, the suggested term of “precinct” does not appear appropriate to reflect all values of the nominated property. Therefore, ICOMOS recommends that the name of the nominated property be changed for “Ḥimā Cultural area”.

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis is presented in three parts: comparisons with sites in Saudi Arabia; comparisons with sites in the Middle East; and comparisons with other sites throughout the world, including World Heritage and Tentative List properties, all having a comparable combination of values and attributes.

First comparisons mention the numerous regions of Saudi Arabia that have known concentrations of rock art. A brief analysis emphasizes the qualities of the nominated property that are different from those found in Rock Art in the Hail Region of Saudi Arabia (2015, criteria (i) and (iii)). A short outline summarises the existence of rock art and/or rock inscriptions in the Levant, Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Egypt. Only a few specific sites – Belidibi, Kara’In and Öküzlü’In (Turkey), and Jabal Akhdar and Dhofar (Oman) – are mentioned.

General comments are provided about the nature of rock art and rock inscription sites in China, India, Australia and Europe. Brief but more focused global comparative analyses are then made with nine properties on the World Heritage List and one site on a Tentative List. Among these are Rock Paintings of the Sierra de San Francisco (Mexico, 1993, criteria (i) and (iii)), Zuojiang Huashan Rock Art Cultural Landscape (China, 2016, criteria (iii) and (vi)), Wadi Rum Protected Area (Jordan, 2011, criteria (iii), (v) and (vii)), Twyfelfontein or /Ui-//aes (Namibia, 2007, criteria (iii) and (v)) and the Dampier Cultural Area (Murujuga Cultural Landscape, Australia, Tentative List).

The comparative analysis contends that the nominated property stands out for its exceptional continuity, linking many periods and traditions from the prehistoric and Neolithic periods up to very recent times; for its exceptional quality, density and state of conservation; as a source of written rock art ethnography; and as one of the largest rock art sites in the world.

As regards the choice of components that comprise this serial nomination, the State Party states that the six selected component parts represent the largest and most significant concentrations of the approximately 550 rock art and rock inscription sites known in the region. The great majority of the remaining rock engraving sites are included in the buffer zone.

The Interim Report requested from the State Party further analysis and amplification regarding sites within Saudi Arabia, particularly with Rock Art in the Hail Region of Saudi Arabia, to determine whether and how the nominated property stands out or can be seen as the best example or representative. The State Party submitted additional information consolidating the comparative analysis. The State Party’s concluded that Jubbah and Shuwaymis (2015) include the finest examples of Neolithic rock art known in the world, while the nominated property is a cultural area linking a massive corpus of prehistoric and historic rock art, rock inscriptions and archaeological remains. It links long past with the present and places the Bedouin identity within its historical context. The Hail site complexes already inscribed on the List are large by international standards, but they are certainly not the largest known in the country, which the Cultural Rock Arts in Ḥimā Najrān is.

ICOMOS notes that the rock engravings within the nominated property differ from those at al-Jubba because they date from both the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods. For the pre-Islamic period, they can be divided into three categories: engravings made by the local population consisting of itinerant shepherds; those left by the inhabitants of the neighboring oases; and a significant number of texts left by the caravanners and armies passing through Ḥimā. It includes considerable accumulation of historical texts that makes it possible to hypothesize that Ḥimā was the great market of the south where caravans were formed. It should be added that, in comparison with al-Jubba, Ḥimā is situated in a different cultural sphere, that of the civilizations of the southwest of the peninsula, known as the “sudarabic” ones, whose best known representatives are the kingdoms of Saba’ and Himyar.

As for the internal selection of sites, the component parts that are selected were chosen on the basis of historical significance and of being relatively accessible and representative examples of the overall corpus. The buffer zone areas are of low accessibility. Jabal Qara and Jabal al-Kawbab remain not well explored.

ICOMOS is satisfied with the additional information and comparisons provided, and considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

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 (i), (ii), (iii) and (v).

Criterion (i): *represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the visually stunning rock art, which was created by simple stone hammers, includes masterpieces of human creative genius that express the beliefs, concerns, desires and priorities of more than 300 generations.

ICOMOS considers that the rock arts at the nominated property, despite their importance and quality of execution, are not outstanding either in terms of visual settings, techniques employed or of the subject matter.

ICOMOS considers that criterion (i) has not been justified.

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 rock art and inscriptions reflect an important interchange of values by numerous ethno-cultural groups from many parts of the Middle East who were travelling by caravans and stopping at the wells of Ḥimā. The inscriptions they left represent a long span of time in the development of monumental arts and writing.

ICOMOS considers that to satisfy this consideration it is necessary to demonstrate how the property has either absorbed ideas from elsewhere or has influenced other areas. It is not easy to justify this criterion unless sufficient information is available on the cultural/ethnological context that is available or when stylistic (or thematic) comparisons can be made with other rock-art sites in areas that are more or less remote.

ICOMOS considers that not enough information could document the way the property express important interchanges of ideas in the marks of beliefs and traditions recorded by people from different parts of this region or travelling through it.

ICOMOS considers that criterion (ii) 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 property bears a unique testimony to a number of ancient traditions over the span of many millennia from the Neolithic to the present, chronicling the history of the Arab people more effectively than any other place and thus representing a massive outdoor library of that history.

ICOMOS considers that the property does bear an exceptional testimony to a long series of cultural traditions, arguably to the Palaeolithic and at the very least to the Neolithic and stretching from then until the present day. People passed through, left a pristine record of their presence and passage in the form of rock inscriptions and rock art, the former in some cases describing their lived context and environment, the themes in the rock art reflecting the changing character of the environment and how they adapted to it.

ICOMOS considers that criterion (iii) is 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 the massive collection of petroglyphs and rock inscriptions present an outstanding record of human interaction with a volatile environment that underwent irreversible fluctuations in climate and aquifer levels. This interaction provides a useful lesson to modern society.

ICOMOS considers that the State Party's interpretation of this criterion is not how traditionally it is used. In addition, part of the arguments which are put forward to justify it are similar to those acknowledged for criterion (iii).

ICOMOS considers that criterion (v) has not been justified.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criterion (iii) and that criteria (i), (ii) and (v) have not been justified.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The six component parts that comprise the nominated property – possibly containing more than 100,000 petroglyphs – encompass the region's largest and most significant concentrations of rock art and rock inscription sites, and is thus of adequate size to demonstrate the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. The great

majority of the remaining rock engraving sites are included in the buffer zone.

The nominated property is free from development except for site protection works and the small township of Ḥimā (which occupies approximately 1.1 percent of the property's total area), with an access road leading to it and a communications pylon on a nearby hill. The archaeological resources within the nominated property remain almost totally intact.

ICOMOS considers that the integrity of the whole series has been demonstrated; and that the integrity of the individual component parts that comprise the series has been demonstrated.

Authenticity

All rock art and rock inscriptions within the nominated property have retained their original locations, settings and substance, as well as their form and design for the vast majority of them. Their function has also been kept to a certain extent: they have social and communal value to the local Bedouin people who live and graze their livestock in the region and who consider the rock art to be part of their own heritage.

The authenticity of the petroglyphs is clear from their patinated condition, state of weathering and fractures in rock panels that have been determined to postdate the images. Other scientific work as well as stylistic similarities with direct-dated rock art elsewhere in Saudi Arabia also confirm their authenticity.

Some engravings have been "refreshed," as certain sections have been re-pecked. However, most of these were done in ancient times and could be considered part of their authenticity, as they manifest the active role these images played in the lives of people. In a few cases the refreshing is less clearly linked to ritual usage and could perhaps be attributed to more recent vandalism. However, such damage has minimal impact on the overall ancient and authentic nature of the rock art.

The rock inscriptions are fresher and brighter than most of the rock art. There are several different recognizable types of script, the older ones being more patinated. Some of the inscriptions describe events that occurred at known dates.

The location, width and depth of the wells at Bi'r Ḥimā are original, but the above-ground walling is recent, built to ensure safety. The network of channels linking the five ancient wells is a recent restoration. The State Party advises that the walling additions and channel restorations are reversible.

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of authenticity of the whole series have been met; and that the conditions of authenticity of the individual component parts that comprise the series have been met.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity of the whole series have been met, and that the conditions of integrity of the individual components that comprise the series have been met; and that the conditions of authenticity of the whole series and of the individual components have been met.

Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription

The comparative analysis justifies consideration of the property for the World Heritage List.

The nominated property meets criterion (iii). Criteria (i), (ii) and (v) have not been justified.

The nominated property meets the conditions of integrity and authenticity for the individual components that comprise the series, and for the series as a whole.

Attributes

The nomination dossier does not present in a clear and detailed way the full range of attributes relevant to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. ICOMOS considers that the key attributes of Cultural Rock Arts in Ḥimā Najrān include the rock art, the rock inscriptions, the five wells at Bi'r Ḥimā and their associated environment, the surface and subsurface archaeological resources, the natural environment including rock panels, rock outcrops, cliff faces, ridges and large boulders, and the landscape setting that is essentially free of development.

ICOMOS considers that the identification of the attributes should be further detailed to be used as a robust basis for the management of the property.

4 Conservation measures and monitoring

Conservation measures

In the Ḥimā Wells component of the serial nomination (HIM02), the above-ground parts of the wells at Bi'r Ḥimā were built up with a heavy use of cement mortar. There are also built-up walkways between the wells that do not appear necessary. A shed and a modern water pump are also in the vicinity. Careful removal of the walkways and the cement mortar have been identified as urgent actions in the Management Plan's Action Plan.

ICOMOS requested in its Interim Report further information on how the State Party will address in the future the above ground walling for the wells and water channels. The State Party replied that the new concrete structure around the wells and water channels will be removed if ICOMOS advise so. ICOMOS considers that a careful and informed reconstruction based on historic research is required rather than removal and to 're-instate the previous conditions. A specialist study should be commissioned to make recommendations on whether and how to restore the original fabric of the tops of the wells and water channels.

In its Interim Report, ICOMOS requested further information on the conservation measures in place for the sites located within the buffer zone, as the component parts of the nominated property are protected by fences. The State Party replied that guards from the local residents are based at the information center to ensure the protection of the sites and that more guards will be employed to be based in a proposed Bedouin tent close to Najd al-Khayran site.

ICOMOS notes that there is no conservation strategy for the overall property and its buffer zone, and considers that a conservation strategy should be established and implemented, as being part of the management plan.

Monitoring

There is no monitoring or reporting of the detailed conditions of the nominated property. The State Party indicates that inscription of the nominated property on the World Heritage List would provide a strong impetus for the introduction of such practices in Saudi Arabia.

Only a notional example of a monitoring program has been provided in the nomination dossier. It is intended that a future monitoring program will address the main features of the nominated property's six component parts. It will aim to monitor their state of conservation, particularly with regard to natural deterioration and the anticipated increase in visitation.

Representative monitoring stations will be established in the six component parts, according to the State Party, as it is not possible to monitor each of the tens of thousands of petroglyphs and inscriptions throughout the property. The Management Plan's action plan includes the future use of a GIS platform to regularly monitor the condition of the sites.

ICOMOS considers that an operational monitoring program is essential, with a complete set of measurable key indicators that address the state of conservation of the full range of identified attributes that support the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, as well as the identified threats. It must also indicate the periodicity of examination and the identity of the responsible authorities.

ICOMOS requested further information in its Interim Report in relation to the timeframe for the establishment of the monitoring stations and the initiation of the monitoring program. The State Party replied that there is already a functioning monitoring station at the information centre and that a second monitoring center is planned to be established in a large Bedouin tent near and out of site from Najd al-Khayran site, and will include a coffee shop, toilets and resting area. The State Party specifies that this can be realized in a few months, once a decision is made.

ICOMOS notes that the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage's Najrān office has no access to site record files. These files could inform the baseline for the monitoring program. In addition, ICOMOS notes that monitoring should be carried out by staff with training in archaeology, rock art conservation and heritage management, and requested in its Interim report information on the timeframe for their recruitment. The State Party replied that all data are filed and available in Riyadh and in Najran Offices of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage.

ICOMOS considers that it remains unclear what the timescale is for the appointment of appropriate specialized staff in archaeology, heritage management and conservation. This is a critical issue for the establishment of a management system and monitoring programme and requires clarification and commitment of resources (as does the completion and operationalization of the digital database).

ICOMOS considers that a conservation program should be created and implemented, together with the recruitment of specialised staff. ICOMOS also considers that a monitoring program needs to be established with measurable key indicators, periodicity and responsible authorities identified.

5 Protection and management

Documentation

According to the nomination dossier, many of the rock art and rock inscriptions within the nominated property are documented. The State Party advises that all records, with original photographs, maps and other forms of data, are kept at the Survey and Excavation Centre, and a digital version of the records is available on the websites of the National Museum and the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Heritage.

ICOMOS considers that it is of utmost importance for the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage's Najrān Office to keep and to make internally accessible to staff a database of consistent site record files for all sites inventoried within the nominated property and the buffer zone, including site record sheets (panel by panel), past condition reports, past conservation interventions and all photographs taken of the site since it was first recorded.

ICOMOS requested further information in its Interim Report on that issue, especially on the structure of the database to be developed and a detailed calendar for its completion. The State Party replied with the template of the data sheets for the site and a few filled examples. However, the structure of the database was not submitted with the additional information.

Legal protection

The nominated property and the buffer zone are the property of the Government of Saudi Arabia. They are managed and protected by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage.

The rock art and inscriptions within the nominated property are protected as an archaeological monument by Royal Decree No. M/26 dated 23/06/1392H (1972); by the Law for Antiquities, revised and amended by Royal Decree No. M/3 as the Law for Antiquities, Museums and Urban Heritage (2015), which formed the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage; and by the Resolution by the Council of Ministers No. 78 dated 16/3/1429H (2008), which integrated the Antiquities and Museums department into the Supreme Commission for Tourism and eventually the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, where it now resides.

The nominated property is protected at the highest level within its jurisdiction.

In terms of physical protection, ICOMOS noted that three of the component parts are fenced, equipped with signage and that the fencing of the three others is planned. In its first letter for additional information, ICOMOS requested information on the status of the fencing of the remaining components. The State Party replied that all fencing has been put in place with accessibility control.

In its Interim Report, ICOMOS requested further clarifications on the strategy for protection of the sites that are located within the buffer zone, especially in relation to the tourism accessibility plans that are expressed in the tourism management plan. The State Party replied that guards are from the local residents and are based at the information center. And that more guards will be employed to be based in the proposed Bedouin tent.

Management system

The nominated property is managed by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage through its office in Najrān. The Najrān office works under the direction of the Commission's headquarters in Riyadh.

The 2018 Management Plan for the nominated property has four management objectives: 1) Protect the rock art and inscription sites; 2) Engender wider understanding and appreciation of the sites; 3) Enhance the experience of visitors; and 4) Realize the potential of the sites to serve tourism and the social development of the region.

The Management Plan also includes an Action Plan, prioritized in four categories: urgent and priority actions (2019); essential actions (2020-2022); necessary but not urgent actions (2020-2024); and desirable actions (2021-2028). Actions include strengthening the Najrān office's resources and capacity, and fully protecting the "core zones" of the nominated property (priority action);

preparing a risk preparedness plan, implementing a World Heritage monitoring plan and adopting an integrated interpretation plan (essential); establishing a Centre for Rock Art Research (necessary); and re-evaluating the nominated property and the boundaries of the buffer zone (desirable).

ICOMOS in its first letter requested information to the State Party on the status of the implementation of the management plan, but no information was provided.

ICOMOS also noted that the term "hima" refers to a traditional system of protection and management, and asked the State Party in its first letter on whether the use of this term in the name of the property refers to this tradition, and if yes, how it works for the nominated property. The State Party replied in October 2019 that through the hima system, local people are involved in the visitor management of the nominated property which enhances the local economy. No information was provided in relation to the use of this term in the name of the property.

ICOMOS further requested in its Interim Report information on whether the local Bedouin tribes practiced the *hima* traditional system and if there is a possibility to include it within the management plan of the property and the buffer zone. The State Party replied that the local Bedouins are fully aware of the importance of the sites and they look after them, in this way the traditional system of custodianship has been integrated within the management plan.

The government has allocated funds for the current (2018) three-year period of about one billion Saudi Riyals. Whenever needed, external technical support is contracted. Collaboration with foreign missions provides scientific and technical collaboration and support for Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage staff.

ICOMOS notes that the management plan adopts a limited access to some important sites, but that the tourism management plan proposes potential routes for guided tour using 4x4 vehicles. This contradiction was raised in ICOMOS Interim Report, and the State Party replied that the access of tourists beyond the main sites, mentioned in the Tourism Management Plan is a tentative proposal and not a firm plan. In addition, the Nomination Dossier and the Management Plan have precedence over tourism considerations. The State Party suggested that if that tentative proposal would impede the potential listing, then it would be withdrawn.

ICOMOS notes that the staff of the Commission's Najrān Office is well trained for certain management aspects of the nominated property, though there is a need for more capacity with specializations in archaeology, heritage management, rock art and rock art conservation. The State Party submitted additional information stating that Najran University Department of Archaeology will establish the Center for Rock Art and that there are

Saudi researchers in rock art in Riyadh who may be employed. At present, a French team from CNRS and the University of Paris is surveying and documenting sites within the nominated property and its buffer zone.

ICOMOS also considers that a conservation management strategy should be created, implemented and integrated into the management plan of the nominated property.

Visitor management

Najrān, about 120 kilometres south by automobile, is the nearest city to the nominated property and is the access point for visitors from outside the region. It is connected to Riyadh by a highway and has an airport and various facilities for visitors. A large new regional museum is nearing completion in Najrān. It will include displays on the rock art and rock inscription sites of Ḥimā and act as a gateway to the nominated property. ICOMOS in its first letter requested information on the status of this museum. The State Party replied in October 2019 that the museum was almost completed and will open in few months.

A local visitor centre for the property was established in the small township of Ḥimā in 2017. It has been functioning as a base for researchers, and will be adapted to include ticketing facilities, restrooms, first aid equipment and rescue equipment. It will also be the base for guards and guides to take visitors through the accessible parts of the property.

A Tourism Management Plan (2018) was submitted with the nomination dossier, outlining the tourism vision for the Najrān Region, the proposed tourism development areas and a strategic master plan for tourism. There are, however, contradictions between the Tourism Plan and the Management Plan, such as the suggestion to develop a tourism destination at Najd Khayrān (component SAD07) described in the Tourism Plan, which is in the “undeveloped” zone according to the Nomination Dossier. The State Party submitted additional information stating that the proposed development will be a large traditional Bedouin tent near and out of site from Najd al-Khayran site, and will include a coffee shop, toilets and resting area. The State Party also stated that the access of tourists beyond the four nominated sites, mentioned in the Tourism Management Plan is a tentative proposal and not a firm plan. The Nomination Dossier and the Management Plan have precedence over tourism considerations.

Community involvement

The local community is fully aware of the nomination and has been consulted throughout the process. It strongly supports the nomination, as expressed by the heads of families.

Three members of the Ḥimā community are employed by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage to run its Ḥimā compound, which includes a research house and two separate reception rooms. They receive visitors and act as custodians for the entire nominated

property, ensuring that no unauthorized visits are made. This approach engages the local community positively in the management of the property and warrants the community's support. It is expected that, as the number of visitors increases, more custodians from the local community will be employed.

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

For the effective monitoring, conservation, protection and management of the property, it is essential that a database of consistent site record files for all sites inventoried within the nominated property and the buffer zone be kept and made internally accessible to staff.

The legal protection for the nominated property is adequate.

The Management Plan (2018) appears to be adequate, with clear sets of objectives and responsibilities identified, though there is a need for certain specialized staff. The Tourism Management Plan (2018) addresses the potential growth in tourism in a sensible and practical way. However, there are some contradictions between the Management Plan and the Tourism Management Plan that require attention, in particular the suggestion of developing a tourism destination in the “undeveloped” zone.

ICOMOS also considers that a conservation management strategy should be created, implemented and integrated into the management plan of the nominated property.

Capacity building is required in the fields of archaeology, heritage management and rock art conservation in order to implement the monitoring, conservation and management plans and programs.

ICOMOS considers that a complete internally accessible database of site records is required, that the Management Plan and the Tourism Management Plan need to be fully aligned, that a conservation management strategy should be established, and that capacity needs to be built in the fields of archaeology, heritage management and rock art conservation.

6 Conclusion

ICOMOS considers that the six component parts that comprise Cultural Rock Arts in Ḥimā Najrān – an area known for the quality and density of its rock art and rock inscriptions – include outstanding images made over a period of 7000 years and inscriptions expressing human interactions, beliefs, traditions and relationships with the challenging environment.

The comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated serial property meets criterion (iii). Criteria (i), (ii) and (v) have not been justified. The serial approach is justified, and the selection of the component parts forming the series is appropriate. The integrity and the authenticity of the whole series have been demonstrated; the integrity and the authenticity of the individual components that comprise the series have also been demonstrated.

The database of site records for all components of the nominated serial property and the buffer zone needs to be updated, completed and made accessible. Such a database is essential for the effective monitoring, conservation, protection and management of the property.

Based on the information provided, the boundaries of the buffer zone should be enlarged to include Jabal al-Kawbab and parts of Jabal al-Qāra, which contain many known important sites.

An overall conservation program is needed, and a professional rock art conservator should be engaged on site. Moreover, a monitoring program identifying measurable key indicators, periodicity and responsible authorities needs to be created and implemented.

Legal protection of the nominated property is adequate. The management system was only recently implemented but also appears adequate, though there is a need for staff with expertise in specializations such as heritage management and rock art conservation. The Management Plan and the Tourism Management Plan should be fully aligned. The involvement of the local community has thus far been strongly supportive and will play a crucial role in the protection and management of the property and the buffer zone.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the nomination of Cultural Rock Arts in Ḥimā Najrān, Saudi Arabia, be **referred back** to the State Party to allow it to:

- Provide a map showing the precise location of the inventoried heritage sites reported from the nominated areas and buffer zone;
- Complete and make internally accessible to staff a database of site records for every known rock art and rock inscription site inventoried in the nominated property and the buffer zone with clear maps, within a GIS;
- Carrying out Heritage Impact Assessments for any projects related to tourism activities at Najd Khayrān before they are implemented;
- Enlarge the buffer zone to include Jabal al-Kawbab and parts of Jabal al-Qāra;

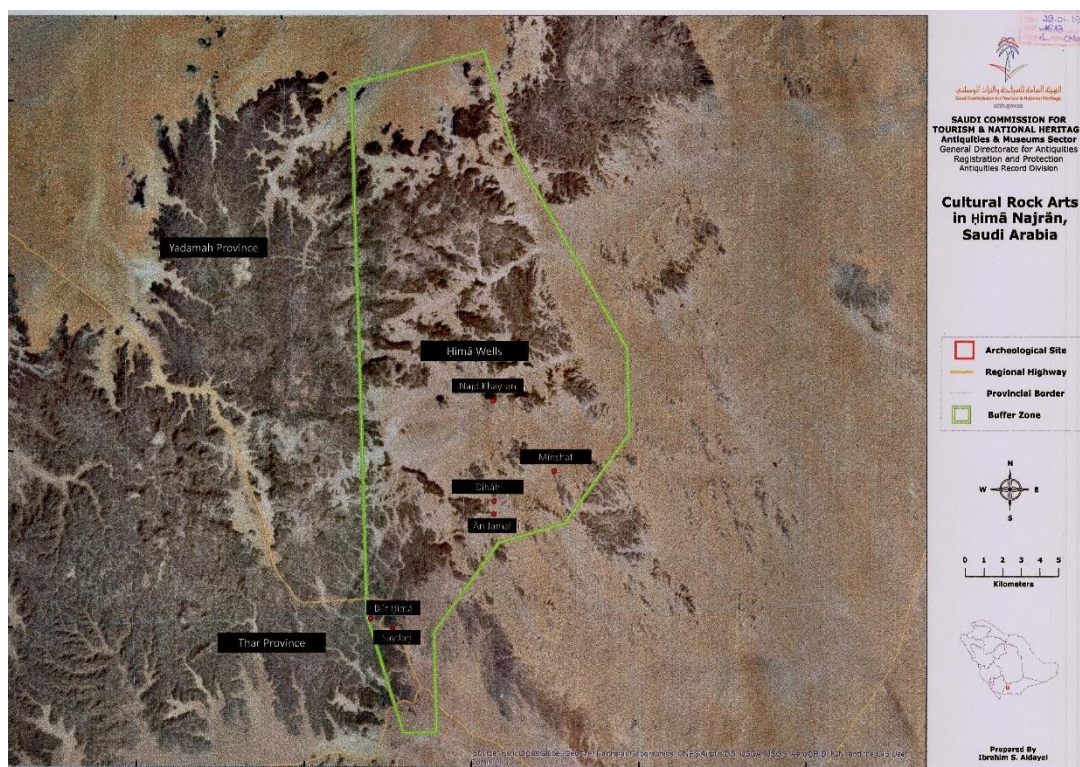
- Create and implement a conservation program and engaging additional staff with specialist training in heritage management, archaeology and rock art conservation;
- Create and implement a monitoring program that identifies measurable key indicators, periodicity and responsible authorities.

Additional recommendations

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

- a) Undertaking restoration of the above-ground walling for the wells and water channels at Ḥimā, based on comprehensive archival and archaeological research;

ICOMOS also recommends that the name of the property be changed to become “Ḥimā Cultural area”.



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property