

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

Our Ref. GB/AS/EG/1668/IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 20 December 2021

H. E. Mr. Ahmad Pakatchi
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate
Permanent Delegation of the Islamic
Republic of Iran to UNESCO
Maison de l'UNESCO
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World Heritage List 2022

The Persian Caravanserai (Islamic Republic of Iran) – Interim report and additional information request

Dear Ambassador,

As prescribed by the revised *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies have been requested to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2022. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation process.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to “The Persian Caravanserai” was carried out by Mr. Can Sakir Binan (Turkey) and Mr. Hossam Mahdy (Egypt/UK) from 1 to 23 October 2021. The mission experts highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organization and implementation of the mission.

On 24 September 2021, a letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding the serial approach, justification for criterion (ii), justification for criterion (iii), integrity, governance arrangements, human capacity and financial resources, planning framework, conservation guidelines, and monitoring. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 10 November 2021 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2021, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2022. The additional information provided by the State Party, together with mission and desk review reports were carefully examined by the Panel members. This process will conclude in March 2022.

We thank you for the availability of your Delegation to the meeting held on 25 November 2021 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. The exchanges during this meeting were of great help for the third part of the ICOMOS Panel meeting.

While the ICOMOS Panel considered that “The Persian Caravanserai” might have the potential to meet the requirements for Outstanding Universal Value, this has not yet been demonstrated.

Therefore, we would be pleased if the State Party could consider the following points:

Links between the component parts

ICOMOS appreciates the commitment and effort to bring forward this complex serial nomination. The ICOMOS Panel considered that the function of the caravanserais as roadside inns, and the role that they played in providing shelter, security and water for caravans and travelers in general is essential to the understanding of the potential Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property.

ICOMOS, in its technical evaluation, is bound by the provisions included in the *Operational Guidelines* and other decisions adopted by the World Heritage Committee. Paragraph 137 of the *Operational Guidelines* requires that serial properties include component parts related by clearly defined links, and that each component part contributes “to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property as a whole in a substantial, scientific, readily defined and discernible way....” ICOMOS also recalls that the recommendations of the expert meeting held in Ittingen (Switzerland) in 2010, and those adopted by the World Heritage Committee at its 34th session (2010), which state that the definition of the functional links between the component parts is fundamental to avoid reducing the serial property to a mere catalogue of sites. In its request for supplementary information sent on 24 September 2021, ICOMOS had already enquired about the links between the caravanserais. However, the ICOMOS Panel considered that the supplementary information provided does not sufficiently explain, at this stage, what functional links connect the component parts and would appreciate if the State Party could provide further information in this regard. ICOMOS wishes to clarify that by “functional links” it refers to the way(s) the caravanserais, which are part of the nominated property, are connected. ICOMOS considers that the fact that all component parts had (and some still have) the same function does not explain in itself how they are linked all together.

Serial approach

ICOMOS would also appreciate if the State Party could clarify the rationale for choosing a typological focus to justify the serial approach; that is, the prominent dimension relating the component parts is the nature of their typology: the caravanserai.

Indeed, the ICOMOS Panel noted with interest the explanations included in the nomination dossier that “[t]he spacing of way stations on level terrain was 30-40 km (average 35 km), which represented a day’s caravan journey. In mountainous regions, where the distance between two caravanserais was determined by the steepness of the road, the interval could be as small as 10-20 km” (page 102).

As the route was such a critical element to the location and identity of the caravanserais, ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could also explain if a cultural route approach was considered at some point in the development of the nomination. More precisely, did the State Party considered the option of nominating only a group of caravanserais that would have reflected their connection along one main travel route, reflecting the spacing between the way stations as described above? If such approach was considered, ICOMOS would be interested in knowing the reasons why it was not pursued.

The distinctiveness of the Persian Caravanserai

The ICOMOS Panel noted that while there are several references to the word ‘caravan’ having origins in the Persian language and that the caravanserai is one of the most known architectural structures in the history of the Persian architecture, there is little information as to what is the specificity of the Persian Caravanserai, in relation to caravanserais in the wider region. What characteristics or features would be distinctive about the caravanserais in Iran, that would make them recognizable as a different type of building when compared to other caravanserais? ICOMOS considers that the understanding of such distinctiveness must be mainly justified through architectural, artistic or construction specificities rather

than by the sheer number of caravanserais (e.g. 1000 known caravanserais scattered throughout the country) or their temporal scale (e.g. their construction overall almost two millennia). Hence, ICOMOS would welcome a short and clear description of what characterizes the Persian Caravanserai as a distinct building typology. In particular, ICOMOS would like to know if such distinctiveness, if clearly demonstrated, would be best illustrated by a particular historical period or dynasty era.

Selection of the component parts

As pointed out in ICOMOS' request for supplementary information sent on 24 September 2021, the description of the nominated property included in the nomination dossier, refers to caravanserais that are not included in the nominated series. In its reply, the State Party explained that the reason for their exclusion was that they did not meet one or more criteria identified to structure the selection process, namely that their condition was not stable. However, ICOMOS notes that some of the component parts included in the nominated property are presented as archaeological sites and some need conservation works.

ICOMOS understands the criteria that were used to select the 56 component parts, and is not seeking further explanations in this regard. What ICOMOS would appreciate is to receive detailed clarifications on how those criteria were applied and the concrete reasons why other caravanserais were excluded. For example, ICOMOS would like to know why the Shebeli caravanserai, referred to on pages 105, 106 and 563, is not included in the nominated property. The ICOMOS Panel noted that this caravanserai seems to be the one described in the Maxime Siroux's study (published in 1949 under the original title *Caravansérails d'Iran et petites constructions routières*) under the name 'Chebli', as one of the best conceived mountain caravanserais. The same study makes references to other caravanserais that are not included in the nominated property. ICOMOS would therefore appreciate a detailed description of the specific process and steps followed to exclude other caravanserais before the final number of 56 component parts was reached.

Setting

In the brief synthesis of the proposed Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, it is stated that the location and setting of the caravanserais was of paramount importance. Yet, the ICOMOS Panel noted that this is not reflected in the boundaries of the component parts, which are drawn strictly around the caravanserai buildings. ICOMOS had already enquired about this issue in the request for supplementary information, sent on 24 September 2021, but this was not addressed in the State Party's reply.

Based on conservation doctrines adopted over the past decades, ICOMOS considers that monuments are inseparable from their setting and that, in the specific case of the caravanserais, their location and setting are essential to their identity, as roadside inns. Moreover, ICOMOS highlights that paragraph 107 of the *Operational Guidelines* determines that the buffer zone is not considered as part of the nominated property. Therefore, ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the component parts must include the immediate setting of the caravanserais which reflect the functional, spatial and environmental connections of the caravanserais with their rural or urban surroundings. Similarly, ancillary buildings that were determinant for the location and functioning of the caravanserais should also be included within the boundaries of the component parts, namely structures associated with the water supply, watch towers (that contributed to security) or bridges (constructed to connect the road to the caravanserais, as in the case of the ĪzadKhāst Caravanserai).

Reconstruction

The ICOMOS Panel recalls that paragraph 86 of the *Operational Guidelines* states that "[i]n relation to authenticity, the reconstruction of archaeological remains or historic buildings or districts is justifiable only in exceptional circumstances. Reconstruction is acceptable only on the basis of complete and

detailed documentation and to no extent on conjecture.” However, the ICOMOS Panel noted that a number of photographs included in the nomination dossier point to past (and in a few cases recent) reconstructions. Therefore, ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could clarify how much this aspect influenced the selection of the component parts. It would also appreciate more information on how reconstruction is approached in the conservation guidelines prepared and used presently by the State Party.

Composition of the Persian Caravanserai Base

The ICOMOS Panel appreciated the additional information on the governance arrangements and the composition of the Steering and Technical Committees but would appreciate to receive further clarifications on the staff composition of the Persian Caravanserai Base and their competences.

We look forward to your responses to these points, which will be of great help in our evaluation process.

We would be grateful if you could provide **ICOMOS** and the **World Heritage Centre** with the above information by **28 February 2022 at the latest**, the deadline set out in paragraph 148 of the *Operational Guidelines* for supplementary information on nominations to be received. Please note that any information submitted after this date will not be considered by ICOMOS in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee. It should be noted, however, that while ICOMOS will carefully consider any supplementary information submitted, it cannot properly evaluate a completely revised nomination or large amounts of new information submitted at the last minute. So we kindly ask to keep your response concise and respond only to the above requests.

We thank you for your support of the World Heritage Convention and the evaluation process.

Yours faithfully,



Gwenaëlle Bourdin
Director
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to The Iranian Cultural Heritage, Tourism & Handicrafts (IMCHTH)
 UNESCO World Heritage Centre