

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/TA/1711/IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 19 December 2023

H. E. Mr Vishal V. Sharma
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate
Permanent Delegation of India to UNESCO
Maison de l'UNESCO
1, rue Miollis
75732 Paris Cedex 15

World Heritage List 2024

Moidams – the Mound-Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty (India) – Interim report and additional information request

Dear Ambassador,

As prescribed by the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies are requested to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2024. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation procedure.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to Moidams – the Mound-Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty was carried out by Mr. Lim Chen Sian (Singapore) in October 2023. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organisation and implementation of the mission.

On 4 October 2023, an additional information letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding the possibility of considering the nomination as a cultural landscape, the rationale for the nominated property boundary, protection and management, Heritage Impact Assessment provisions, implementation status of the Action Plan, and measures for managing a potential increase in tourism activities. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 6 November 2023 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2023, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2024. 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 2024.

We thank you and your Delegation for your availability and your participation in the meeting held on 24 November 2023 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 Moidams – the Mound-Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty 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:

Inventory of moidams

ICOMOS would like to develop a more detailed understanding of the relative significance of the group of moidams located within the wider regional context. It would be appreciated if the State Party could provide additional information about the inventory of all known moidams in the Upper Brahmaputra Valley (descriptions and mapping). How has the relative significance of the moidams in the nominated property been established in relation to all known moidams?

Attributes in the buffer zone

At this stage, based on the description of the values and features of the nominated property that has been presented in the nomination dossier and in the additional information provided in November 2023, ICOMOS considers that there are potential attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value that are located in the buffer zone. In addition to additional moidams, these include ancestral shrines, ceremonial pathways and water bodies.

There might also be yet-to-be-identified sites associated with the former Ahoms capital that are associated with the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. There are several specific questions that would assist ICOMOS in relation to these observations:

- Given that the nominated property is proposed on the basis of its ability to represent an ancient funerary system, how can the system be considered complete or intact without including these sites?
- Are these sites in the buffer zone now fully protected by the state legal frameworks? If these processes in progress, what is the timeframe for completion?
- Could the State Party consider adding these sites to the nominated property, for example by creating a serial property of a number of component parts?
- Is there a full inventory of Ahoms sites located within the buffer zone?

Buffer zone protection

ICOMOS has understood that there is a current process underway to protect the entire buffer zone through the state's heritage laws. Could the State Party confirm that this understanding is correct, and provide the timeframe for its completion?

Governance arrangements

ICOMOS appreciates the explanations and the additional information that have been provided concerning the ways in which the coordination of the two different governance arrangements between the Archaeological Survey of India and the Directorate of Archives Assam will be assured, including the three committees that have been established. ICOMOS considers that it is essential that the nominated property is managed as 'one', despite separate or overlapping administrative and/or legal responsibilities. It would be appreciated if additional information can be provided regarding the ways in which the allocation of staffing, capacity building and financial resources will be provided within this governance arrangement.

ICOMOS also appreciates the clarity of information provided about the central importance of local communities in the long-term care of the nominated property. Given this critical role, could the State Party provide information on the possibilities that are foreseen for further enhancing the participatory mechanisms within the management system?

Research plan

ICOMOS observes that the study of the larger area of the Tai-Ahom capital and necropolis is in some respects at an early stage and there is a lot to discover in the future. A longer-term research program seems necessary, including survey and non-invasive research methods to identify features of the Tai-Ahom capital and identification of moidams and other features relating to the funerary system. Could the State Party provide information on the possibilities for developing a research strategy and plan as part of the management system for the nominated property?

Intangible cultural heritage

Based on the nomination dossier and the additional information provided in November 2023, it is clear that the continuing Tai rituals are important to the heritage values of the nominated property and are treated as attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. In that light, ICOMOS is interested to learn more about the possibilities for future inventoring and safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage to be incorporated into the long-term approach to the conservation and management of the nominated property.

Landscape approach to management

ICOMOS notes the additional information that provided arguments about why the cultural landscape category has not been used for this nominated property. Nevertheless, ICOMOS notes that there is a strong landscape focus to the way in which this nominated property is described, including both its role as a symbolic landscape and a landscape-oriented historical funerary system. Based on the depiction of the attributes and values of the nominated property, ICOMOS suggests that in future development of the management plan, consideration be given to exploring and adopting a cultural landscape approach that adopts a holistic understanding of the ways in which the landscape has shaped and was shaped by the cultural traditions and practices. ICOMOS recognises that this would require a longer-term reflection and development, but at this stage would be grateful to receive additional advice about this possibility.

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

We would be grateful if you could provide **ICOMOS** and the **World Heritage Centre** with the above requested information by **28 February 2024 at the latest**, the deadline set out in paragraph 148 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* concerning additional information on nominations to be received. Please note that any information submitted after this statutory deadline 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 additional information submitted within the statutory deadline, it will not be possible to properly evaluate a completely revised nomination or a large amount of new information submitted at the last minute. ICOMOS would therefore be grateful if the State Party could keep its response concise and respond only to the above requests.

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

Yours faithfully,



Gwenaëlle Bourdin
Director
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to Directorate of Archaeology, Indigenous and Tribal Faith
 and Culture Department, Government of Assam
 UNESCO World Heritage Centre