



NOTE VERBALE

The Permanent Delegation of the State of Palestine to UNESCO, presents its compliment to the World Heritage Centre, and kindly asks them to find herewith two copies of the nomination file of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer, submitted by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, to be proceeded on an emergency basis, for simultaneous inscription on the World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger.

The Permanent Delegation of the State of Palestine to UNESCO avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the World Heritage Centre to UNESCO the assurances of its highest consideration.

Paris, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024,



Permanent Delegation of the  
State of Palestine to UNESCO

Mr. Lazare Eloundou Assomo  
Director, UNESCO World Heritage Centre  
CLT/WHC  
Office 4.23



Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer

Emergency Nomination File

JUNE 2024

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**State of Palestine**  
**Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities**  
**World Heritage General Directorate**

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer

**Emergency**  
**Nomination File**

June 2024

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## Justification for Submitting the Nomination of Saint Hilarion/ Tell Umm Amer, Palestine, on an Emergency Basis

The State of Palestine is proposing an Emergency Nomination Dossier for Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer due to the current conflict in Gaza. This proposal cannot risk waiting to be nominated under the normal procedure.

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer is one of three sites that have been on the Palestinian Tentative List for World Heritage for many years. The other two sites, Wadi Gaza and Anthedon Harbour have already been fully or partially destroyed. St. Hilarion Monastery has so far suffered only minor damages.

The State of Palestine has been preparing the preliminary studies for the normal dossier for St. Hilarion Monastery for the past two years. A Conservation and Management Plan was developed and is attached to this dossier (Annex One). It was the intention of the State Party to nominate the site once all the studies by international and Palestinian experts were completed.

Gaza is at the crossroads between the western and eastern parts of the Mediterranean as well as between the southern and northern parts of the Middle East. It used to boast more than one hundred registered important heritage monuments, most of which have been completely or partially destroyed in the various recent conflicts. The current conflict has resulted in the destruction of a large part of the heritage of the area. This devastation is well-documented by Palestinian institutions and internationally recognized bodies such as UNESCO and ICOMOS (See Annex 2& 3).

St. Hilarion Monastery is an outstanding site. Founded by the hermit Hilarion, who studied under Anthony of Egypt and is considered the founding father of monasticism in Palestine, this monastery is the oldest in Palestine. It continuously developed between the 4th and 8th centuries, becoming the largest in its later version. The site contains a very complex ecclesiastical space, including one of the largest crypts in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as a hostel with adjacent baths. The monastery was abandoned and covered by sand until it was recently rediscovered. The ruins were conserved and consolidated with the help of international funding. The bath area has been given an architectural cover, and funds exist for an archaeological cover for the ecclesiastical area. The site includes exceptional mosaics and many other important artefacts. It is by far the most complex and complete monastery from the 4th century and the largest such monastery for this period in Palestine.

For around ten years, the site has served as a training centre for heritage professions for students from Gaza and has supported socio-economic development for the local community. The site is in a very vulnerable position, on the sand dunes, close to the city of Nuseirat and the refugee camp. The State Party could not present the dossier at an earlier date because of the constant daily

development of the conflict. Every passing day makes the site more and more vulnerable in this conflict.

The site received extended protection under the Hague Convention in December 2023 due to its vulnerability. Therefore, the State Party has no option but to present the site under the emergency procedure allowed by the Operational Guidelines. To support this, the State Party has prepared a dossier to demonstrate the Outstanding Universal Value of the site.

## Forward

It is with great honour that I bring forth the nomination dossier for Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer on behalf of the Palestinian people. This remarkable site stands as a testament to early Christian monastic life and architectural heritage in the region. Renowned for its well-preserved examples of early Byzantine monastic architecture, the ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery, dating back to the 4th century AD, are the oldest monastery in Palestine and one of the oldest and most important Christian monastic sites in the world. It embodies the spread of Christianity and the development of monastic traditions in this historic area.

Due to the ongoing war in Gaza, this nomination is submitted on an emergency basis to ensure the protection and preservation of this invaluable cultural heritage. The site is under significant threat, making its preservation a matter of urgent international concern. The property is protected by Palestinian law on Tangible Cultural Heritage (No. 11, 2018) and managed by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) in cooperation with local communities and international heritage organizations. It was inscribed on the list of “the cultural property under enhanced protection” on 14 December 2023 by the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954 Hague Convention).

This nomination dossier highlights the potential Outstanding Universal Value of Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer, positioning it as one of the most significant examples of early Christian monasticism. The inscription of Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer on the UNESCO World Heritage List is essential for humanity to understand and experience the early Christian monastic traditions that influenced religious, cultural, and architectural developments in the Holy Land and beyond.

The monastery exemplifies the integration of spiritual and practical life, showing the early Christian communities' resilience, devotion, and cultural contributions amidst the broader historical and political contexts of the time. The protection and recognition of this as a world heritage property will contribute significantly to preserving this exceptional cultural heritage.

The State of Palestine remains unequivocally committed to safeguarding this heritage, not only for the Palestinian people but also for the enrichment and enlightenment of humanity as a whole. This effort supports peace and cultural understanding in the region.

  
**Hani Al-Hayek**  
**Minister of Tourism and Antiquities**







# Executive Summary

## Executive Summary

### State Party

Palestine

### State, Province, or Region

Governorate of Deir Al-Balah, Gaza Strip

### Name of Property

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer

### Geographical coordinates to the nearest second

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer: Central Point (E 34° 21' 56.518" N 31° 26' 48.758" (UTM-36N))

### Textual description of the boundary (ies) of the nominated property

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer, is situated on the sand dunes along the main sea road near the city of Nuseirat, approximately 10 km south of Gaza City. It is close to both Wadi Gaza, an important source of fresh water, and 10 km south of the port of Gaza, where pilgrims from the Western Mediterranean arrived. This location made it a crucial transit point for Christians visiting the Holy Land from the 4th to the 8th century. The site is an important archaeological and historical landmark, combining natural and cultural elements, including ancient ruins and significant artefacts from the 4th to 8th centuries AD. The monastery is divided into two main sections: the ecclesiastical complex to the south and the bath and hotel to the north.

The boundaries of the nominated World Heritage Property are defined by the current fenced boundaries of the Saint Hilarion Monastery archaeological park, covering approximately 1.33 hectares. This boundary includes all the main attributes carrying Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and encompasses two distinct architectural complexes: the ecclesiastical section in the south, covering approximately 4,650 m<sup>2</sup>, and the thermal baths and hotel to the north, spanning about 3,650 m<sup>2</sup>, ensuring the site's authenticity and integrity.

Surrounding the nominated property zone is a buffer zone of approximately 7.32 hectares, designed to include any potential future significant archaeological discoveries and to preserve the site's authenticity and integrity. This buffer zone acts as a protective measure, mitigating potential negative impacts from surrounding activities, such as urban development, infrastructure projects, and other threats. The buffer zone is sufficiently wide to prevent urban encroachment and protect the visual integrity of the site. It must be integrated with local urban planning frameworks to ensure its effectiveness and minimize negative impacts.

Given the above, the table below summarizes the dimensions and rationale for the delineation of the buffer zone boundaries:

Direction	Dimension from the Property Zone Boundaries
East	90-95m
North	146-150m
North and northwest	173-177m
West	125-137m
South Direct	45-47m
South and south-west	139-141m

Therefore, the total area of the nominated property, including the buffer zone, is 8.652 hectares. Integrating the buffer zone within the urban physical spatial plan of Nuseirat ensures adequate protection and management of the site's authenticity and integrity.



A4 or A3 size map(s) of the nominated property, showing boundaries and buffer zone (if present)



Code	Longitude	Latitude
<b>NOMINATED PROPERTY</b>		
P1	34° 21' 56.518" E	31° 26' 48.758" N
P2	34° 21' 56.603" E	31° 26' 46.178" N
P3	34° 21' 59.289" E	31° 26' 48.667" N
P4	34° 21' 59.053" E	31° 26' 48.927" N
P5	34° 21' 59.258" E	31° 26' 49.960" N
P6	34° 21' 59.101" E	31° 26' 50.125" N
P7	34° 21' 58.450" E	31° 26' 50.404" N
P8	34° 21' 58.089" E	31° 26' 50.205" N
P9	34° 21' 58.028" E	31° 26' 50.157" N
P10	34° 21' 57.538" E	31° 26' 50.389" N
P11	34° 21' 56.287" E	31° 26' 51.203" N
P12	34° 21' 54.121" E	31° 26' 49.298" N
P13	34° 21' 53.407" E	31° 26' 48.482" N
P14	34° 21' 54.035" E	31° 26' 48.080" N
P15	34° 21' 54.598" E	31° 26' 47.709" N
<b>BUFFER ZONE</b>		
B1	34° 21' 59.037" E	31° 26' 43.958" N
B2	34° 22' 4.075" E	31° 26' 48.073" N
B3	34° 22' 0.165" E	31° 26' 51.809" N
B4	34° 21' 58.411" E	31° 26' 53.677" N
B5	34° 21' 56.228" E	31° 26' 56.001" N
B6	34° 21' 49.690" E	31° 26' 50.695" N
B7	34° 21' 46.752" E	31° 26' 47.872" N
B8	34° 21' 51.338" E	31° 26' 46.231" N

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer  
Nominated Property



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## Criteria under which property is nominated (itemize criteria)

### Criterion (ii, iii, and vi)

#### Cultural Landscape

The property is a cultural property.

#### Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

##### a) Brief synthesis

The ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer represent one of the earliest and most significant monastic sites in the Middle East, dating back to the 4th century. Founded by Saint Hilarion, it is the first monastic community in the Holy Land, laying the groundwork for the spread of monastic practices throughout Palestine and beyond. Situated on the coastal dunes in Nuseirat Municipality, approximately 10 km south of Gaza City and 10 km from its port, the monastery occupies a strategic position at the crossroads of major trade and communication routes between Asia and Africa. This prime location facilitated its role as a hub of religious, cultural, and economic interchange, exemplifying the flourishing of monastic desert centres during the Byzantine period.

The first settlement on the site was established during the Roman period on Wadi Gaza, close to the seashore. It appears on the sixth-century Madaba Mosaic Map, labelled with the name of Tabatha. The monastery holds potential Outstanding Universal Value due to its exceptional historical, religious, architectural, and cultural significance. It provides significant insight into the development of monastic life in the desert centres of Palestine during the Byzantine period, evidenced by well-preserved architectural elements, including a complex of five superimposed churches, a crypt, baths, water systems, heating systems, residences, and roads. These attributes collectively highlight its significance in the spread of Christian monasticism in the Holy Land and beyond.

Saint Hilarion Monastery began with solitary hermits (anchoritic phase) and evolved into a thriving coenobitic community by the fifth and sixth centuries until its decline during the early Islamic period. Under Saint Hilarion's guidance, the monastery established a model of communal living centred on spiritual guidance and intellectual exchange. The community maintained earlier monastic traditions while developing its intellectual and ascetic practices, attracting scholars and monks from across the Byzantine Empire and fostering an intellectual community known as the Monastic School of Gaza, established in the 5th century AD. This hub enriched theological discourse and propagated monastic ideals, transcending theological boundaries and leaving a lasting impact on Christian traditions. In the fifth century, following the Council of Chalcedon, the monastic centre in Gaza became a stronghold of anti-Chalcedonian struggle. This attracted intellectual monks and strengthened ties with Gaza's intellectual centre. Despite theological differences, the monastic school of Gaza emerged as a complex and thriving centre whose legacy



transcended boundaries, highlighting the monastery's significant role in the political and ecclesiastical landscape of the time.

The architectural innovations and artistic contributions, particularly in mosaic art, underscore the site's exceptional value. The historical layers of the site illustrate its architectural evolution and technological advancements, continuously developing between the 4th and 8th centuries. It is one of the most complex and complete monasteries from the fourth century and the largest of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean. It also contains complex ecclesiastical spaces, including one of the largest crypts in the region, as well as a hostel with adjacent baths, making it a key witness to the sophisticated monastic community that once thrived there. The site's role in the distribution and development of Christian monasticism across the region further justifies its Outstanding Universal Value. Saint Hilarion Monastery is not only a monument to early Christian monasticism but also a testament to the enduring spiritual and cultural legacy of Saint Hilarion. His influence on monastic practices and the spread of Christianity in the Middle East, combined with the site's rich artistic and architectural heritage, make it a site of distinctive Outstanding Universal Value.

The ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery exemplify the highest levels of integrity and authenticity, preserving its Outstanding Universal Value through meticulous conservation efforts and a management system. The site's significance is rooted in its status as the first and oldest monastic establishment in Palestine, founded by Saint Hilarion, a pivotal figure in early Christian monasticism. This historical precedence sets it apart from other monastic sites in the region.

## **b) Justification for Criteria**

**Criterion (ii): to 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.**

The monastic complex of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer exemplifies a significant interchange of human values in architecture and religious practices between the 4th and 8th centuries AD, during the emergence of Christianity in the Holy Land. Its strategic location on a major trade and pilgrimage route made it a melting pot of religious and cultural influences, reflecting cross-cultural interactions between Christian monastic traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Greco-Roman world. This interaction is evident in the adaptive reuse of classical architectural elements in the construction of monastic buildings and the architectural features of the property.

The architectural complexity of Saint Hilarion Monastery, characterized by its superimposed churches and well-organized bath facilities, represents an outstanding example of the evolution of ecclesiastical architecture and construction techniques. The historical layers of the site illustrate its architectural evolution and technological advancements, continuously developing between the

4th and 8th centuries. It is one of the most complex and complete monasteries from the fourth century and one the largest of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The layout of the monastery, designed to guide pilgrims through its sacred elements, demonstrates innovative planning and reflects the spiritual journey of early Christian pilgrims. The site contains intricate ecclesiastical spaces, including one of the largest crypts in the region, and a hostel with adjacent baths, making it a key witness to the sophisticated monastic community that once thrived there. The site's beautiful mosaics with geometric, floral, and animal decorations showing the high level of craftsmanship and artistry of the monastic community, highlighting their exceptional skill and artistic expression.

Furthermore, the architectural and artistic contributions of Saint Hilarion Monastery are crucial for understanding the distribution and development of Christian monasticism across the region. Its architectural complexity and exceptional mosaics, demonstrate the site's outstanding universal value. The historical significance of the site, its role in the development of Christian monastic traditions, and its influence on subsequent religious architecture in the Middle East firmly establish its importance.

The architectural ingenuity of Saint Hilarion Monastery influenced the development of monastic architecture throughout the Middle East, setting a precedent for future religious complexes. Beyond architecture, the monastery played a crucial role in the cultural and spiritual landscape, preserving early monastic traditions while advancing intellectual and ascetic practices. It attracted scholars and monks from across the Byzantine Empire, fostering the Monastic School of Gaza in the 5th century AD. This hub enriched theological discourse, propagated monastic ideals, and left a lasting impact on Christian traditions.

The well-preserved monastic complex, including the large basilica, domestic and communal buildings, and sophisticated water system, stands as a testament to the significant interchange of human values in monastic architecture and religious practices. Its architectural innovations and cultural significance exemplify the impact of cross-cultural interactions in the development of monastic traditions and the broader spiritual heritage of the Middle East.

Overall, Saint Hilarion Monastery testifies to the significant interchange of human values in monastic architecture and religious practices during a formative period in Christian history. Its contributions to ecclesiastical architecture, its role as a centre of spiritual and cultural exchange, and its influence on Christian monasticism affirm its outstanding universal value.

**Criterion (iii): to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.**

The ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer are among the oldest and most archaeologically complete monastic sites in the Middle East, providing exceptional insights into early Christian traditions and monastic life. Founded by the hermit Hilarion, who is revered as the

founding father of monasticism in Palestine and studied under Anthony of Egypt, the monastery holds significant historical and religious importance as the oldest in Palestine and beyond.

Dating back to late antiquity, Saint Hilarion Monastery evolved continuously between the 4th and 8th centuries, culminating in its expansion and development into the largest monastic complex of its time in the region. This growth is reflected in its expansive ecclesiastical spaces, which include a substantial crypt—one of the largest found in the Eastern Mediterranean—and a hostel with adjoining baths. The monastery's architectural layout, intricately designed to accommodate religious practices and communal living, serves as a testament to its organizational complexity and spiritual significance.

Abandoned and buried under sand for centuries, the monastery was rediscovered and has since been meticulously preserved with international support. The preservation efforts have revealed not only the architectural prowess of early Christian builders but also the sophisticated infrastructure designed to sustain a monastic community in a semi-desert environment. Of particular note is the monastery's advanced bath complex, which shows the ingenuity and adaptive skills of its inhabitants in managing water resources—an essential element for sustaining life in such an arid setting.

Overall, Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer exemplifies exceptional architectural and archaeological attributes. These features provide unparalleled insights into the development and practices of early Christian monasticism, offering a clear evolution from solitary asceticism to communal religious life. The site's enduring significance underscores its Outstanding Universal Value, serving as a pivotal link in the broader narrative of Christian history and cultural heritage in the Middle East.

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

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer holds profound significance in the history of Christianity in Palestine and the Middle East, intimately connected to pivotal events, traditions, beliefs, and artistic works of Outstanding Universal Value. Founded by Saint Hilarion in the 4th century AD, the monastery not only preserves the physical remnants of early Christian monasticism but also embodies the enduring legacy of Saint Hilarion's teachings and influence. It marks a transformative phase in Christian monasticism, evolving from solitary hermitages to a thriving communal centre by the 5th and 6th centuries. This transition not only preserved early monastic traditions but also advanced intellectual and ascetic practices, influencing communities across the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond. Saint Hilarion's influence echoes through the cultural and religious traditions still observed in regions like Sicily, Cyprus, and Croatia. His impact, documented in texts such as "Vita Sancti Hilarionis" by Jerome, continues to inspire spiritual devotion and intellectual inquiry.

Saint Hilarion himself, influenced by Anthony of Egypt, played a foundational role in establishing monasticism in the Holy Land. His rigorous ascetic lifestyle and spiritual teachings shaped the religious landscape of the region. Situated strategically along a major trade and pilgrimage route, the monastery became a hub of cultural exchange, attracting diverse influences and fostering the renowned Monastic School of Gaza. This centre was instrumental in theological discourse, especially during the debates following the Council of Chalcedon in the 5th century AD, where Saint Hilarion Monastery became a bastion of anti-Chalcedonian confrontation.

Architecturally, Saint Hilarion Monastery evolved continuously from the 4th to the 8th centuries, culminating in its expansion to become the largest monastic complex of its time in the region. The site's physical remains, including churches, communal buildings, and exceptional, mosaic floors and a substantial crypt—one of the largest found in the Eastern Mediterranean, provide tangible evidence of its historical and cultural significance. Notably, the monastery features one of the largest crypts in the region, alongside a complex with a hostel and adjacent baths, showing advanced ecclesiastical architecture and artistic expression.

Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer stands as a site of exceptional importance, directly associated with significant events, traditions, beliefs, and artistic achievements in early Christian monasticism. Its profound impact on the development of Christian religious practices, its pivotal role in theological discourse, and its enduring cultural legacy collectively affirm its pivotal position in the history of Christianity in the Middle East. It serves not only as a testament to early Christian monasticism but also as a symbol of the enduring human quest for spiritual enlightenment and communal harmony.

Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer stands as a site of exceptional importance, directly associated with significant events, traditions, beliefs, and artistic achievements in early Christian monasticism. Its profound impact on the development of Christian religious practices, its pivotal role in theological discourse, and its enduring cultural legacy collectively affirm its pivotal position in the history of Christianity in the Middle East, standing out not only as a testament to early Christian monasticism but also as a symbol of the enduring human quest for spiritual enlightenment and communal harmony.

### **c) Statement of Integrity (for all properties)**

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer exemplifies a robust level of integrity within its property zone boundaries, maintained through meticulous conservation efforts led by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), the French NGO Première Urgence Internationale (PUI), the French School of Biblical Studies, and the UNESCO Ramallah Office. Despite being buried under sand for centuries, the site has been carefully preserved and protected with minimal impact on its

original fabric and authenticity. Key interventions, such as the installation of an archaeological cover over the bath area and temporary shelters in the ecclesiastical section, have effectively maintained its integrity, ensuring structural stability and safeguarding against environmental degradation.

The nominated property demonstrates completeness and maintains its integrity, encompassing all attributes of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) within its boundaries. Encompassing a complex of five superimposed churches, a crypt, baths, water systems, heating systems, and residences, the property provides a comprehensive representation of its OUV attributes. Ongoing scientific and professional interventions guided by UNESCO frameworks are integral to preserving the site's integrity and authenticity. The recent preliminary CMP integrates conservation strategies, monitoring systems, and measures to mitigate potential threats, demonstrating a proactive approach to long-term conservation.

Regular monitoring over the past decade by PUI and the UNESCO office, in collaboration with MoTA, ensures continuous compliance with integrity requirements, essential for safeguarding the site's universal value and addressing its vulnerabilities on the international stage. Saint Hilarion Monastery stands as one of the oldest and best-preserved monasteries in the holy land, meeting the stringent conditions of integrity. It serves as a testament to the successful application of international conservation principles and practices, reaffirming its recognition as a site of exceptional universal value.

#### **d) Statement of authenticity for properties nominated under criteria (i) to (vi)**

Saint Hilarion Monastery exemplifies a high level of authenticity, supported by interventions guided by approved conservation principles and meticulous monitoring. Excavations revealed structural instability after centuries under sand, necessitating careful anastylosis interventions in key areas. For example, from 2018 to 2022, extensive restoration was undertaken in the crypt, focusing on the west wall and vault of the south vestibule, incorporating over 850 new blocks. Similarly, interventions in the baptismal chapel (2021-2022) addressed the east part of the south wall with seven layers of blocks, alongside repairs to the top of the apse and north wall using more than 120 new blocks. In the pilgrim hostel (2021-2022), upper walls were reconstructed with 1 to 3 layers, totalling around 450 new blocks.

These anastyloses strictly adhered to international conservation standards, employing original materials such as Gaza stone, quarry sand, and lime, and utilizing traditional stone-cutting techniques. The reconstructions were intentionally set slightly back from the original structures to ensure clear differentiation. These interventions served as crucial structural consolidation measures, particularly in vulnerable lower areas of the site disposed to stormwater flow, thereby preventing collapse and enriching visitor comprehension of the site's historical significance.



Most attributes of the nominated property authentically and credibly express its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), as well as its historical and cultural significance. This authenticity is manifested through the property's original form, design, materials, techniques, and associated cultural practices. Furthermore, the site effectively evokes a genuine sense of time and place, offering visitors an authentic experience of its historical and cultural context.

Thus, Saint Hilarion Monastery unequivocally attains a high level of authenticity, meticulously preserved through approved conservation practices and rigorous monitoring. The interventions, particularly the anastylosis efforts in critical areas such as the crypt, baptismal chapel, and pilgrim hostel, have ensured that the site authentically represents its historical, cultural, and architectural significance. Through the use of original materials and adherence to international conservation standards, the monastery vividly conveys its original form, design, and associated cultural practices. This authenticity allows visitors to genuinely experience the historical context and significance of Saint Hilarion Monastery, affirming its recognition as a testament to early Christian monasticism in Palestine and worldwide.

#### **e) Requirements for protection**

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer is owned by the State of Palestine and managed by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA). It benefits from robust protection under Palestinian national heritage laws and is actively managed by local and international conservation bodies. The property is fully safeguarded by the Decree Law of Tangible Cultural Heritage (No. 11, 2018). This legal framework aligns Palestinian standards with international conventions, unifying the legal basis for protecting tangible cultural heritage while enhancing its management, conservation, and promotion efforts.

MoTA is empowered to comprehensively manage tangible cultural heritage sites, including World Heritage Properties. The law clearly defines the roles of stakeholders involved in the conservation and management of cultural properties. It grants MoTA authority to interpret the law, identify archaeological materials, delineate site boundaries, settle disputes, list heritage assets, and supervise conservation interventions effectively.

The recently preliminary Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) for the nominated property (see Annex One) integrates multiple conservation objectives, strategies, and a management system to ensure the sustainable protection and conservation of the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and its associated values and attributes. This plan includes provisions for archaeological research, community engagement, sustainable tourism initiatives, systematic monitoring to mitigate environmental and human impacts, and visitor management strategies aimed at safeguarding the property.

The buffer zone surrounding the nominated property is protected under the Building and Planning Law (no. 28, 1936) and its Modified Building Bylaws in Gaza Strip 2020, which governs building and zoning in towns and villages, supplemented by the municipal physical spatial urban plan of Nuseirat

Municipality. This plan regulates urban development to prevent conflicts with the archaeological site's integrity, focusing on enhancing the surrounding urban infrastructure while preserving the privacy of the site.

However, the current urban plan lacks a designated buffer zone for the archaeological site. Establishing buffer zones within the zoning plan is essential to create a protective barrier against potential negative impacts from nearby development activities, such as construction, pollution, or encroachment. Additional challenges include recent conflict impacts on the buffer zone and the necessity for further excavations to confirm integrity in specific areas. Long-term strategies prioritize adaptive management, continuous monitoring, and collaborative efforts to sustain the site's Outstanding Universal Value while addressing vulnerabilities and threats to its authenticity and integrity.

Under Palestinian national cultural heritage legislation, Saint Hilarion Monastery is designated as a high-priority site for protection and preservation. MoTA controls and monitors all interventions at the site according to international conventions and charters. Although much of the buffer zone is privately owned, it is safeguarded from inappropriate development by the Protection Law of Tangible Cultural Heritage (No. 11, 2018) and by the physical spatial plan of Nuseirat Municipality. These provisions control the buffer zone's land use, new developments, and new buildings. MoTA collaborates closely with related local and international organizations to ensure the safeguarding of this significant site, thereby reinforcing its role as a testament to early Christian monasticism in Palestine and worldwide

#### **Name and contact information of official local institution/agency**

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## Chapter One

# Identification of the Property

## Chapter One: Identification of the Property

### Identification of the Property

Saint Hilarion Monastery, also known as Tell Umm Amer, is situated on the coast in Nuseirat City, approximately 10 km south of Gaza City and 10 km southeast of Gaza port on the Mediterranean Sea (figure 1.2).



*Figure 1.1: General view of Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer (©CCHP2023)*

#### 1.a Country (and State Party if Different)

Palestine

#### 1.b State, Province or Region

Governorate of Deir Al-Balah, Gaza Strip

#### 1.c Name of Nominated Property

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer

#### 1.d Geographical Coordinates to the Nearest Second

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer Central Point (E 34° 21' 56.518" N 31° 26' 48.758" (UTM-36N))


Code	Longitude	Longitude
Nominated Property = 1.32931 ha.		
P1	34° 21' 56.518" E	31° 26' 48.758" N
P2	34° 21' 56.603" E	31° 26' 46.178" N
P3	34° 21' 59.289" E	31° 26' 48.667" N
P4	34° 21' 59.053" E	31° 26' 48.927" N
P5	34° 21' 59.258" E	31° 26' 49.960" N
P6	34° 21' 59.101" E	31° 26' 50.125" N
P7	34° 21' 58.450" E	31° 26' 50.404" N
P8	34° 21' 58.089" E	31° 26' 50.205" N
P9	34° 21' 58.028" E	31° 26' 50.157" N
P10	34° 21' 57.538" E	31° 26' 50.389" N
P11	34° 21' 56.287" E	31° 26' 51.203" N
P12	34° 21' 54.121" E	31° 26' 49.298" N
P13	34° 21' 53.407" E	31° 26' 48.482" N
P14	34° 21' 54.035" E	31° 26' 48.080" N
P15	34° 21' 54.598" E	31° 26' 47.709" N
Buffer Zone = 7.322646 ha.		
B1	34° 21' 59.037" E	31° 26' 43.958" N
B2	34° 22' 4.075" E	31° 26' 48.073" N
B3	34° 22' 0.165" E	31° 26' 51.809" N
B4	34° 21' 58.411" E	31° 26' 53.677" N
B5	34° 21' 56.228" E	31° 26' 56.001" N
B6	34° 21' 49.690" E	31° 26' 50.695" N
B7	34° 21' 46.752" E	31° 26' 47.872" N
B8	34° 21' 51.338" E	31° 26' 46.231" N



## 1.e. Maps and Plans Showing the Boundaries of the Nominated Property and Buffer Zone

### Map of the World & Nominated Property



 Property Location

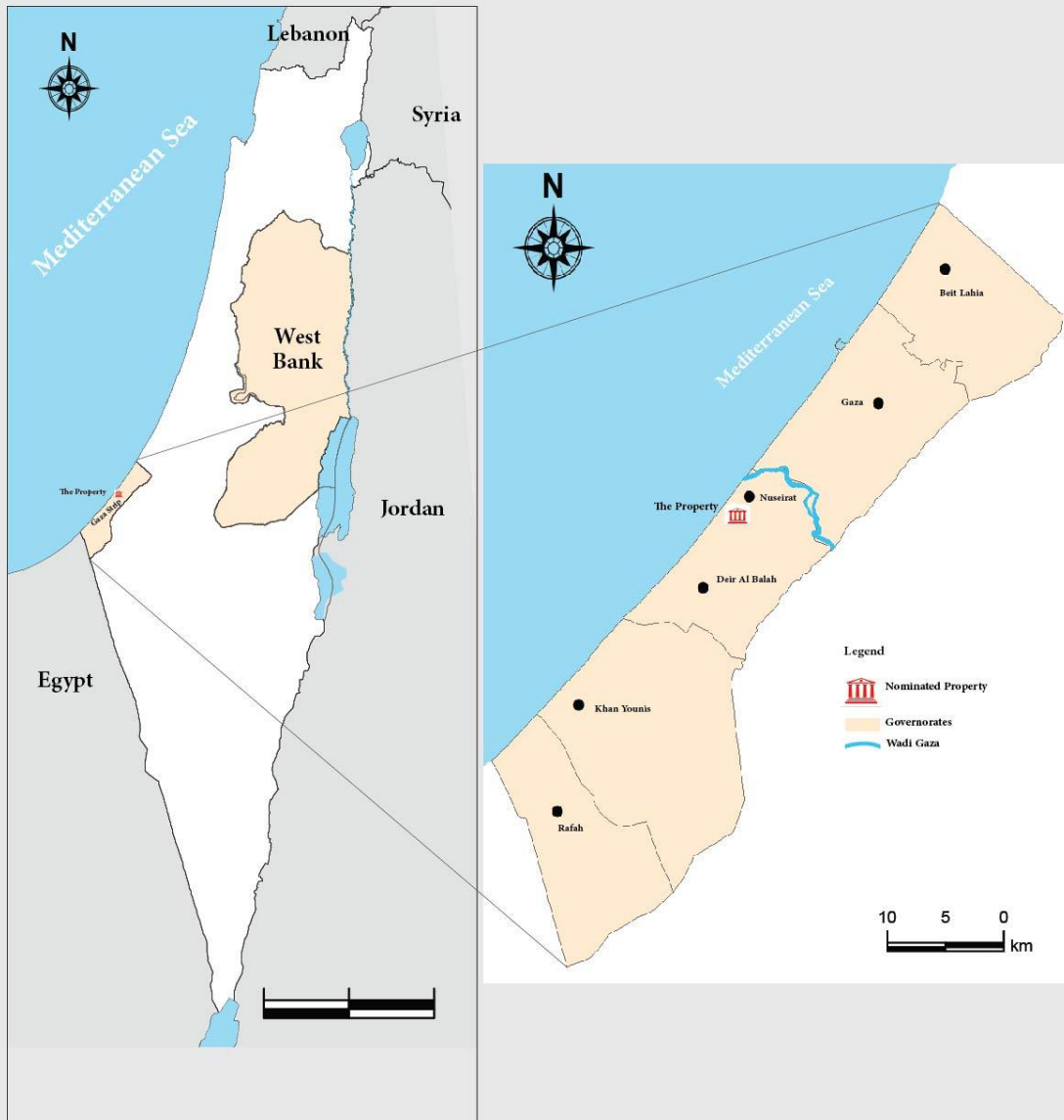


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Prepared by: Younes Rjoub  
GIS Expert & Environmental Researcher  
Email: younesrjoub2004@gmail.com



Figure 1.2: World Map and the Nominated Property (©MoTA 2024)

## Map of Palestine and Nominated Property



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Figure 1.3: Property Location Map (©MoTA 2024)

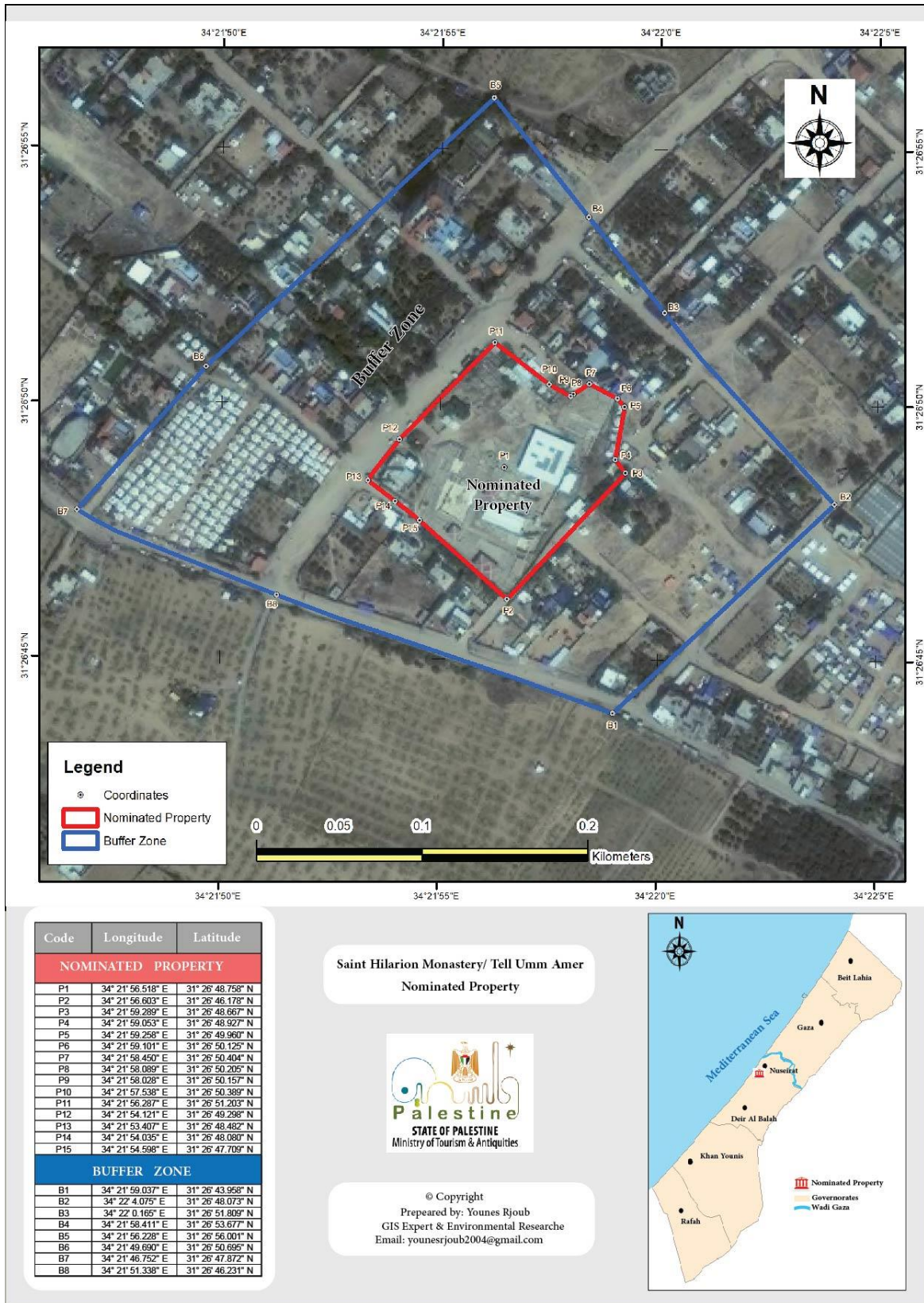


Figure 1.4: Nominated property and buffer zone (©MoTA 2024)



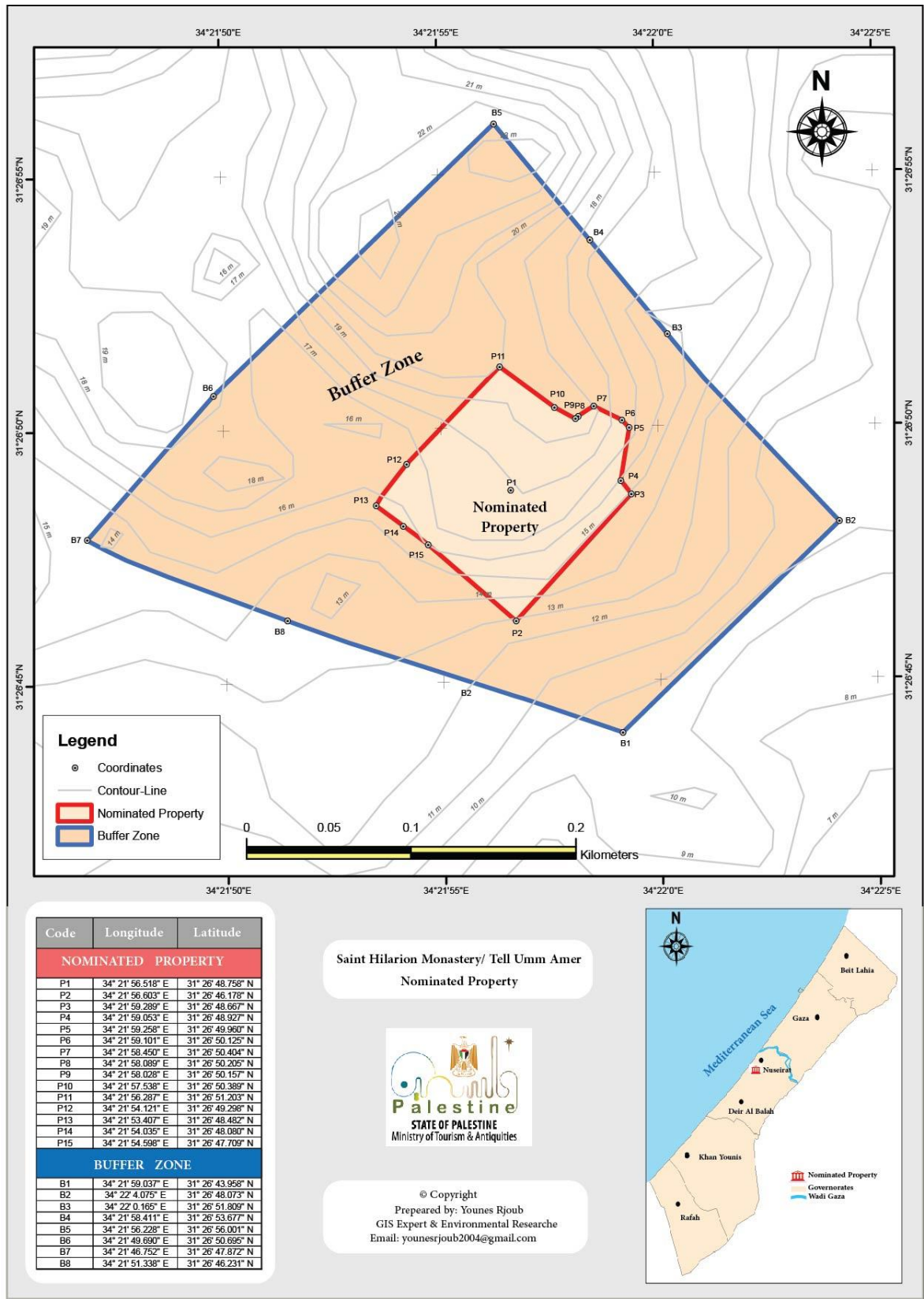


Figure 1.5: Topography of the Nominated Property (©MoTA 2024)

## 1.f Area of nominated property (ha.) and proposed buffer zone (ha.)

Area of:

Nominated property: 1.32931 ha

Buffer zone: 7.322646 ha

Total: 8.651956 ha





## Chapter Two

# Description and History

## Chapter Two: Description and History

### 2.1 a Description of Property

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer, is situated on the coast within Nuseirat city Municipal boundaries, 10 km south of Gaza City. Despite appearing isolated in the desert, it was actually at a crucial crossroads of communication and human affairs (Elter 2012; Taha 2017). The monastery is considered the birthplace of monasticism in Palestine, founded by Saint Hilarion, and was listed on Palestine's Tentative List for cultural sites of potential Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) in 2012.

Saint Hilarion Monastery, also known as Tell Umm Amer, holds particular significance as the oldest Byzantine monastery in Palestine (Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2004; Elter 2012, 2021). It is the largest excavated monastery in the Holy Land and one of the most complete and best-preserved (Elter 2021).

The remains of the site cover an area of approximately 13,000 m<sup>2</sup> (Figure 2.1). It encompasses two distinct architectural complexes with a combined area of 8,300 m<sup>2</sup>: the ecclesiastical section in the south, covering approximately 4,650 m<sup>2</sup>, and the thermal baths and hostel to the north, spanning about 3,650 m<sup>2</sup> (Elter 2012). This makes it one of the oldest and most archaeologically complete monastic sites in the Middle East, providing exceptional insights into early Christian traditions and monastic life (Elter 2012, 2021; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2000).

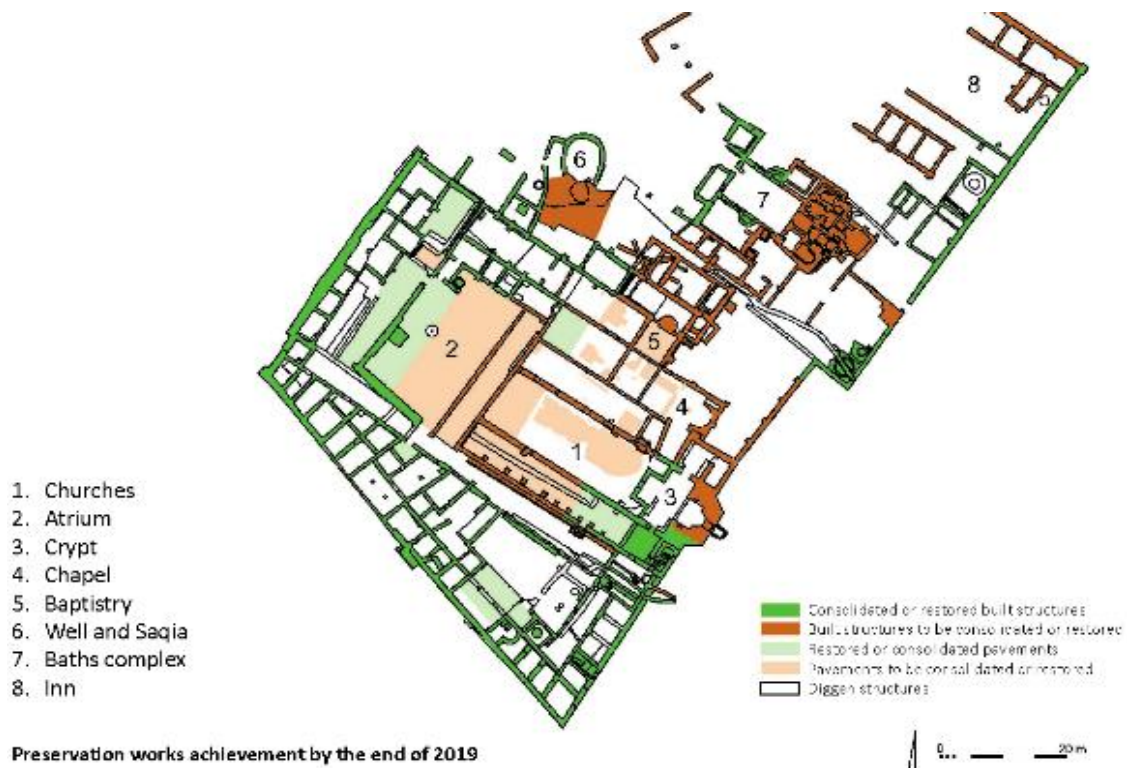


Figure 2.1: Main Attributes of the Nominated Property (©Elter, 2020)



The site features an ecclesiastical complex complete with three superimposed churches, four baptistries, a large crypt, an atrium, a chapel, cells, a refectory, bathhouses, a well, drainage channels, service annexes, and a guest house/pilgrim's hostel (Inn) —features not always found in similar sites (Sadeq 2000; Downey 1963; Elter 2012, 2021) (Figure 2.1). The buildings were paved with limestone and adorned with colourful mosaics featuring plant and animal scenes. A notable fifth-century mosaic, possibly laid on the floor of a chapel, includes a Greek inscription mentioning Saint Hilarion, the founder of monasticism in Palestine (Figur 2.2), indicating the importance of monasticism in the region during the Byzantine era (Elter 2012,; Taha 2017; Parrinello 2010).



*Figure 2.2: One of the mosaic pavements including a Greek inscription mentioning Saint Hilarion (@Elter, 2012)*

The monastery was equipped with a hostel and baths, comprising Frigidarium, Tepidarium, and Caldarium halls supported by a water supply and drainage system (Figure 2.3), which served pilgrims and merchants travelling through the Holy Land from Egypt to the Fertile Crescent via the main route of Via Maris.



*Figure 2.3: Water supply and drainage system in the Bath complex (©CCHP, 2023)*

Founded by the hermit Hilarion, who studied under Anthony of Egypt, the monastery holds significant historical, architectural, and religious importance as the oldest in Palestine and beyond. It retains remnants of a Byzantine-era monastery and church complex dedicated to Saint Hilarion, a Christian hermit and ascetic who lived during the 4th century AD. The site is a testament to the rich history of early Christian monasticism in the region (Downey 1963; Elter 2021; Sadeq 2000). It serves as a reminder of the spiritual and architectural legacy of the Byzantine period, providing a glimpse into the life and teachings of Saint Hilarion (Downey 1963; Sadeq 2000; Elter 2012).

The site bears outstanding testimony to the diversity of exceptional historical, architectural, religious, and cultural values. Known during the Byzantine period and up to the early Islamic period as Thauatha, it appears on the 6th-century Madaba map (Donner 1995; Sadeq 2015; Elter 2012).



## Key Attributes of Saint Hilarion Monastery

### Ecclesiastical Complex

The ecclesiastical complex of Saint Hilarion Monastery is located in the southern section of the site, covering approximately 4,650 m<sup>2</sup>. It forms the core of this historic site. Designed in a quadrilateral shape and facing east (Figure 2.1), it serves as the spiritual and communal centre of the monastery (Elter 2012, 2021). At its core lies the main church, a significant spiritual edifice with sandstone walls varying in height from 70 centimetres to one meter. The church houses the crypt where Saint Hilarion's remains were enshrined, making it a revered pilgrimage site. An adjacent atrium acts as a central courtyard for gatherings and communal activities (Figure 2.5, Right), while the four baptisteries (Figure 2.4) facilitate the rite of baptism, essential to Christian initiation. An additional chapel offers a more intimate setting for prayer and reflection (Ibid).

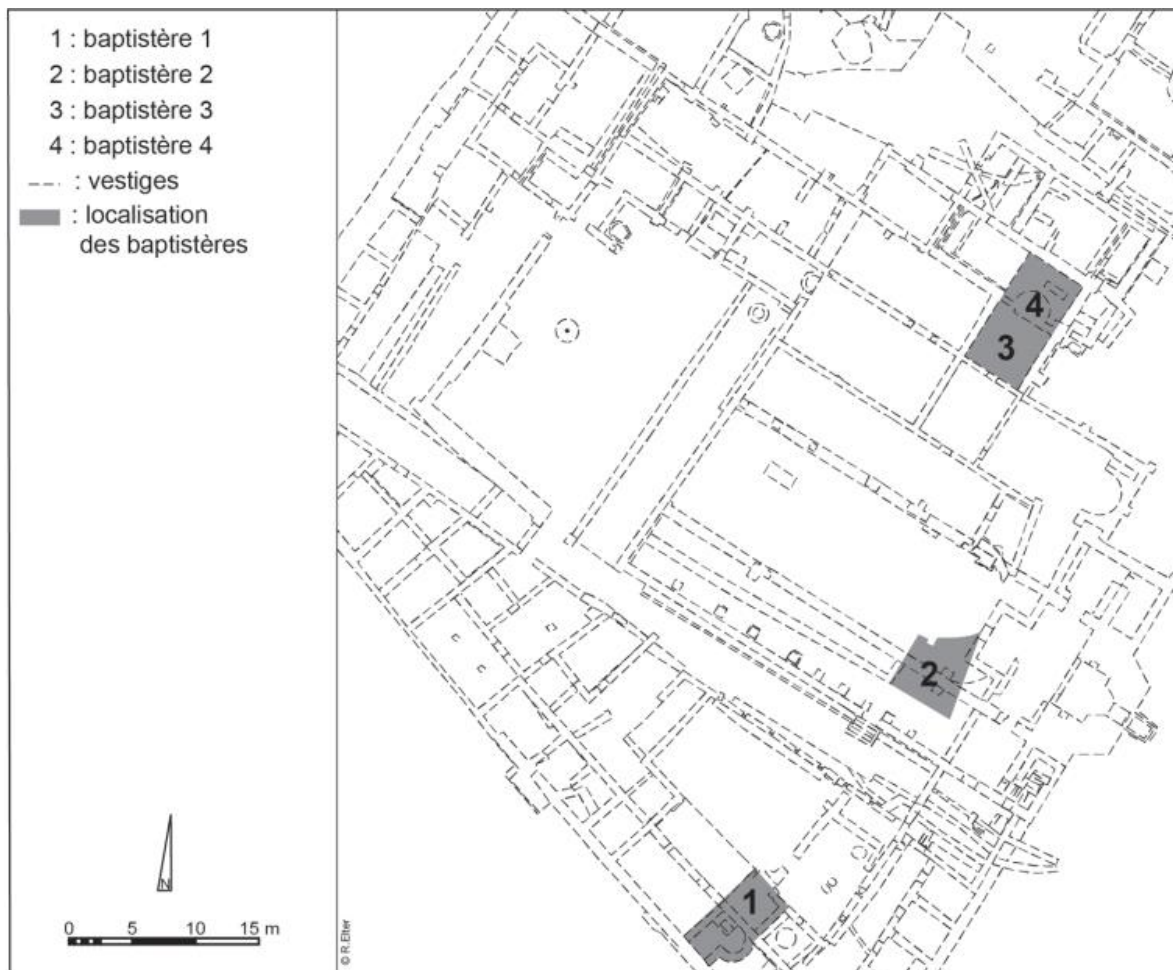


Figure 2.4: General Plan of the four Baptisteries in the Property (©Elter, 2012)



The monks' living quarters (Figure 2.5, Left) or cells, were probably modestly furnished to support their ascetic lifestyle. Other functional areas include the refectory for communal meals, interior roads connecting different parts of the complex, and annexes such as attics, kitchens, and latrines. The complex also boasts thirteen distinct mosaics, some preserved and restored, others protected under geotextiles and gravel. These mosaics, with their intricate patterns and religious iconography, enhance the spiritual ambiance of the site (Elter 2012, 2021).



*Figure 2.5: (Left) Monks' zone (Right) Atrium, marble, sandstones  
Pavement, and fountain (©CCHP, 2023)*

### **Thermal Baths**

Located northeast of the ecclesiastical complex (Figure 2.1, 2.6), the thermal baths cover about 1200 square meters. Constructed from bricks and stones, the baths reflect the high standards of hygiene maintained in the monastery. The central feature is a large rectangular room with two basins, bordered by a spacious courtyard to the south and hot and warm rooms to the east. These rooms, fitted with benches or bathtubs, were coated and whitewashed with lime, and covered with fine white limestone or marble slabs. Lead pipes ensured efficient water drainage, while terracotta pillars, suspended floors, and heated vertical walls maintained optimal temperatures. Vaults and domes further enhanced the thermal efficiency. Boiler rooms to the east managed heating, with fuel stored in open spaces outside. Ash piles along the east wall indicate the long-term use of these facilities. Additionally, a freshwater fish farm and basins southeast of the main baths, constructed with coastal sandstone block walls coated with thick lime mortar, underscores the complex's comprehensive design (Elter 2012, 2014, 2021; Sadeq 2000, 2015).



*Figure 2.6: The Thermal Baths (©Elter 2012)*

## Hostel/Inn

The hostel, located northeast of the thermal baths (Figure 2.1), occupies the eastern corner of the monastery enclosure, covering about 1000 square meters. This rectangular structure included kitchens to the East and accommodation for pilgrims to the south. The sandstone walls of the hostel were consolidated and elevated 50 centimetres above the floor. Serving as a lodging facility for pilgrims and travellers, the hotel likely functioned as a caravanserai during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Its development beyond the monastic function reflects the monastery's role in supporting travellers and merchants passing through the region (Elter 2021, 2014; Sadeq 2015).



## Well and Western Area

The well, the monastery's water supply system, is located between the ecclesiastical complex and the bath (Figure 2.1, 2.7). Built with sandstone in a circular shape, the well played a crucial role in ensuring a reliable water supply for daily use. This area also served as a camp and burial site, emphasizing the monastery's self-sufficient nature. Archaeological excavations in the western area have revealed significant elements of the water system, including cisterns and drainage channels, underscoring the advanced infrastructure designed to support the monastery's inhabitants and guests comprehensively.



*Figure 2.7: Saqia and well area (©CCHP, 2023)*

Together, these features illustrate the Saint Hilarion Monastery as a thriving centre of religious, social, and cultural activity during the Byzantine era. The architectural and artistic elements of the ecclesiastical complex, thermal baths, hotel, and water supply system reflect the monastery's significance as a beacon of early Christian monasticism in the region. The site offers invaluable insights into the spiritual and communal life of its inhabitants. The monastery's advanced infrastructure, sophisticated design, and cultural heritage make it an exceptional example of early Christian monastic life and its enduring legacy, making it an exceptional testament to Early Christian Monasticism.

## 2.b History and Development

The site of Tell Umm Amer, identified as the "Saint Hilarion Monastery," is located on the coast of the Mediterranean within the Nuseirat municipal boundaries, 10 km south of Gaza City. This site, associated with ancient Thauatha, is mentioned in the 6<sup>th</sup>-century Madaba map and various classical sources, including Mark Diaconus, Sozomen, and Jerome, who documented the life of Saint Hilarion. These sources place Hilarion's monastery about 10 km south of Gaza, aligning with the location of Tell Umm Amer. Modern scholars such as Stark and Karl (1852), Meyer and Martin (1907), Glucker (1987), and White (1998) have also confirmed this identification (Taha 2017; Elter 2021,2012; Sadeq 2000, 2015).

Archaeological surveys, including those by Edward Robinson in 1832, Van der Velde in 1866, the British Survey of 1872-1878, and the Gaza Inventory of 2019, have documented the site's historical significance. These surveys consistently identify Tell Umm Amer with ancient Thauatha, mentioned in the 6<sup>th</sup>-century Madaba map and other classical sources (Elter 2021,2012; Sadeq 2000, 2015; Basouin 2013; Taha 2017).

The first settlement on the site dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, near the seashore of Wadi Gaza. It is depicted on the Madaba map from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, indicating its significance from the Byzantine to the early Islamic period (see the table 2.1). The site included three churches, a baptism hall, a cemetery, and dining rooms. The monastery had a robust infrastructure, including water cisterns, clay ovens, drainage channels, and baths, serving pilgrims and merchants travelling along the main thoroughfare of Via Maris, which connected Egypt to the Middle East (Elter 2012, 2021; Sadeq 2015).

Period / Date (AD)	Event or Intervention
c. 291-292	Birth of Hilarion in Tabatha
303-306	Persecutions of Christians under Emperor Diocletian
c. 306-310	Hilarion retires to the desert near Tabatha, in a hut
c. 306-361	Hilarion founded a hermitage and then developed a community. Construction of a primitive mud-brick building. It encompasses the hermit's hut or cell and houses the first community. (Level 8).
c. 310	Hilarion builds himself a small cell: "From his sixteenth to his twentieth year he shielded himself from heat and rain in a little hut which he had constructed of reeds and sedge. Afterwards he built himself a small cell which remains to the present day."
313	Edict of Milan marking the tolerance of Christianity in the Roman Empire and the end of persecutions

c. 356	Death of Anthony, the founder of monasticism in Egypt, who had welcomed and influenced Hilarion when he came to Alexandria in his youth.
c. 361	Departure of Hilarion for Egypt where he will visit the tomb of Anthony.
c. 361-363	Hilarion spends a year in an Egyptian oasis. After the persecutions, he refuses to return to his monastery and leaves his oasis to go to Libya Sicily.
c. 365	Hesychius finds Hilarion in Sicily. He does not wish to return to his monastery and they leave for Epidaurus in Dalmatia.
c. 366	Hilarion goes to Cyprus where he stays two years near Paphos.
c. 371	Death of Hilarion who had chosen Hesychius, then absent, as his heir. Following his last wishes, Hilarion is buried in the garden of his last Cypriot home.
c. 372	Hesychius removes the body of Hilarion to bury it in his monastery at Tabatha.
c. 372-425	A vault is built over the cell of Hilarion, transformed into a tomb. Development of the sanctuary and a cemetery near the tomb of the saint. (Level 7, phase 7a).
c. 390	Jerome writes the life of Hilarion, mentioning his "small cell which remains to the present day, five feet in height, that is less than his own height, and only a little more in length; one might suppose it a tomb rather than a house". His last sentence is: "Even at the present day one may see a strange dispute between the people of Palestine and the Cypriotes, the one contending that they have the body, the other the spirit of Hilarion. And yet in both places great miracles are wrought daily, but to a greater extent in the garden of Cyprus, perhaps because that spot was dearest to him."
c. 400-450	A first church is built over the sanctuary and the ad sanctos cemetery. The apse and the choir follow the orientation of Hilarion's vaulted tomb. The basilica plan of the church reuses the layout of the orthogonal frame of the first cenobium. An inscription mentioning Hilarion is placed in the mosaic pavement of the central nave at the right of the entrance to the vaulted tomb. (Level 6).
c. 440-450	In his Ecclesiastical History, Sozomen mentions Hilarion and his monastery.



c. 450-500	A second larger church completely encompasses the first. The new apse retains the same orientation as that of the first church. (Level 5, phase 5b).
c. 486	According to Jean Rufus, Peter the Iberian stayed three years near the sanctuary of Saint Hilarion at Magdal Tûtha (Tauatha).
c. 475-500	The orientation of the church is straightened towards the East, towards the original crypt. A baptistery is installed to the southeast of the sanctuary (level 5, phase 5a).
c. 500-520	According to Jean Rufus, a monastery in Tauatha bears the name of Seridos. It is not excluded that this monastery is that of Hilarion, henceforth designated by the name of its abbot, Seridos. If this hypothesis is confirmed, during the 6th century AD, the monastery of Tell Umm Amer would have hosted very eminent personalities (Barsanuphius, John of Gaza and Borotheus of Gaza) and would have been the place of an exceptional literary production.
c. 500-525	A third, even larger church was built. The geometry and plans of the new edifice are determined from the original location of the vaulted tomb of Hilarion. The east-west longitudinal axis of the earlier buildings is moved south and aligned with the first crypt. The use of marble for the paving, columns, and capitals breaks with previous architectural programs. A baptismal complex takes place in the northern part of the sanctuary. (Level 4, phase 4b).
c. 525-600	A second, larger crypt was built over the first, and the church choir was extended to the east. The final church then reached 40 meters in length. The new crypt appears to be the largest in the eastern Mediterranean at that time. During this phase, the baptismal complex was enlarged and included a chapel. The bath and the hostel were also enlarged. (Level 4, phase 4a).
c. 560-570	Pilgrim Antonius of Placentia locates Hilarion's tomb 2 miles south of Gaza.
c. 615-629	Sassanian occupation of Gaza territory.
c. 637	Muslim troops arrive in Gaza.
c. 650-750	Under the Umayyads and after a series of earthquakes, the place is still used for Christian worship and craft activities. The well and the bath remain useful for caravans and travelers. (Level 3, phase 3c).
c. 750-900	After the earthquake of 746, the church complex was abandoned. Under the Abbasids, the well and the bath are still used. (Level 3, phase 3 a & b).

<b>c. 900-1300</b>	The Site is permanently abandoned. Before disappearing under the dunes, the stones are removed and reused elsewhere (Level 2)
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*Table 2.1: Nominated Property Chronology (@Taha 2017; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2006; Elter 2012, 2021, 2014; Sadeq 2015; CMP 2024)*

The site was discovered in 1991. Following the transfer of authorities to the Palestinian side in 1994, a series of excavations and restorations were carried out at the site under the direction of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Ebaf. These activities are summarized in the table below.

<b>Period /Date (AD)</b>	<b>Event or intervention</b>
<b>1991- 1992</b>	In 1991, during the start of a building project and the exploitation of the dune as a sand quarry, ancient remains were fortuitously discovered on the site (bases and columns in marble from the Byzantine period, Corinthian capitals, coins, sandstone and limestone building materials, various artifacts).
<b>1997-2001</b>	Due to a housing project on the dune, the site is excavated by the Palestinian Antiquities Department of Gaza (directed by Moain Sadeq). Field operations (directed by Yasser Matar) in the church and its surroundings (site I), as well as at the northeast end of the tell (site II), brought to light a set of Romano-Byzantine remains (ceramics, mosaics of large white tesserae, remains of sandstone buildings then wrongly identified as a palace). The ruins uncovered around the church were considered, at first, as those of a village; possibly that of Thabatha. To the southwest, a Christian cemetery is identified (5th-6th c.). Nearly 150 m to the northeast, below the dune (site II), another architectural complex was unearthed which includes a large building consisting of several rooms arranged around a courtyard, with annexes.
<b>2001</b>	At the request of the MoTA, a scientific and technical partnership was set up with France (Consulate General of France in Jerusalem), within the framework of the Franco-Palestinian Archaeological Cooperation Mission in Gaza (directed by Jean-Baptiste Humbert, EBAF). Two expert missions took place, including one in October (under the direction of René Elter, EBAF) in order to assess the archaeological potential of the site and to draw up a preservation and enhancement program for opening to the public.
<b>2002-2006</b>	The chronology of the site's occupation is confirmed from the 4th to the end of the 8th century (from the Romans to the Umayyads), during which time the church was completely rebuilt three times. Two architectural complexes have been identified. The first, of approximately 4650 m <sup>2</sup> around the southern part of the sanctuary, is for ecclesiastical purposes.

	<p>It includes the church, the crypt, the atrium, the baptisteries, the chapel, the cells, the refectory and the service annexes. The second, of about 3600 m<sup>2</sup>, develops to the north and includes thermal baths and a hostel.</p> <p>Two levels of mosaics, coming from two superimposed churches, are unearthed. A mosaic inscription mentioning Hilarion is discovered (October 25, 2003) as well as the saint's tomb (November 11, 2003), confirming that the site corresponds to the monastery he founded.</p>
<b>2007-2010</b>	<p>The unearthed remains suffered the effects of very rainy winters, visits that were sometimes uncontrolled or too numerous, as well as bombardments during the winter of 2008-2009. The damage could not be stopped, for lack of financial, logistical and technical means due to the particular situation of the Gaza Strip.</p> <p>During the winter of 2009-2010, part of the west wall of the crypt collapsed and the apses of the sanctuary slipped into the crypt.</p>
<b>2010-2012</b>	<p>After an assessment mission led by René Elter (EBAF), on the initiative of MoTA and the Islamic University of Gaza and with the support of France and UNESCO, an emergency intervention program took place from December 2010 to July 2012. It included preparing the first site survey plan, level plans, a study of the water channels and where the water courses end, and urgent strengthening work for some weak structural elements in the eastern part.</p> <p>Before the reconstruction of the western wall of the crypt, an important archaeological trench was made in the church to a depth of 5 m, after the removal of the mosaics by Fadel al-Utol. The chronology could thus be refined. The southeast corner of the second church, the contemporary levels of the first church and the hermitage dating from the first half of the 4th century have been unearthed, confirming that the monastery of Tell Umm Amer is one of the oldest in Palestine, if not the oldest.</p>
<b>2018-2019</b>	<p>The program launched in December 2017 included the construction of a reception building and of a roof over the baths, the restoration of the crypt, the consolidation of the structures and the construction of a permanent walkway along the remains.</p> <p>February-March 2018: Before the construction of the site reception building, 5 archaeological test trenches were excavated (112m<sup>2</sup>) at the south-west corner of the site in a closed ground, including a garden, the old archaeological storeroom and the house of the site guardian. Only one trench yielded ancient remains including a floor and a wall, as well as a hearth and jars.</p>

	February-December 2019: Documentary survey of the walls (mainly photogrammetric), documentation and study of the construction of the crypt (before restoration work on the west wall and on the vault of the south narthex). About fifty archaeological trenches were excavated in 3 areas: the bath (before the installation of the roof), the well (before consolidation and restoration), and the ecclesiastical complex (before soil stabilization).
2020-2022	Monitoring of work in the crypt.
	Archaeological trench in the apse of the baptismal chapel, reconstruction of the south wall, consolidation of the elevation of the north wall, study of the floors, with two tombs inside, before stabilization.
	Archaeological and architectural study of baptisteries 3 and 4 before consolidation and conservation treatment.
	Conservation and restoration of the floor of the atrium.
	Restoration of hostel walls.

Table 2.2: History of intervention (@Elter 2012, 2014, 2021; CMP 2024)

Archaeological excavations have definitively established Tell Umm Amer as the oldest monastery in Palestine. At its heart lies a remarkably well-preserved large crypt, revered as the site where the relics of Saint Hilarion are venerated, akin to a mausoleum honouring his memory. Moreover, the mosaic floor at Tell Umm Amer is adorned with a Greek inscription referencing Saint Hilarion, further underscoring the site's historical and religious significance. These mosaics also show the distinctive style of the "Gaza Mosaic School," renowned across the region for its intricate designs and profound religious iconography (Ibid).

Saint Hilarion, the founder of monasticism in Palestine, was born in Thauatha near Gaza in 291 AD and died in Cyprus in 371 AD. He studied in Alexandria, influenced by the Egyptian monk Anthony. Hilarion returned to Palestine at the beginning of the 4th century and established the first Palestinian monastery (Elter 2012). Fleeing religious persecution during Emperor Julian's reign (361-363 AD), he travelled to Egypt seeking solitude. Unable to return to Palestine and fleeing from fame, he went to Libya in 363 and then sailed to Sicily the same year (Ibid 2012). The journey continued to Dalmatia (present-day Croatia) in 366 and ended in Cyprus, where he passed away in 371. According to Jerome, who documented Hilarion's life in "Vita Sancti Hilarionis" in 390 AD, the year after his death, his body was secretly transported by one of his disciples and laid to rest in his monastery in Gaza. Hilarion is a saint still revered in Sicily and Cyprus, with a late depiction in the Monreale church in Palermo and other representations in Cyprus. Caves dedicated to him also exist, and a tradition surrounding him continues in the vicinity of Dubrovnik, Croatia (Elter 2012; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2006).

Monasticism in Gaza has a rich history dating back to the early centuries of Christianity (Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2004; Elter 2012). Many ascetics and monks sought solitude, prayer, and asceticism in the region (Hevelone-Harper 2005). During the Byzantine period, Gaza hosted a

significant Christian monastic community with numerous monasteries founded near Saint Hilarion's monastery (Downey 1963; Sadeq 2000). The area became a major centre for monasticism, attracting renowned Desert Fathers and Mothers known for their spiritual teachings (Basouin 2013; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2006; Elter 2012).

Despite facing challenges such as persecution and invasions, the monastic communities in Gaza thrived for centuries. However, their prominence declined over time due to changing political landscapes. The enduring presence of the Monastery of Saint Hilarion serves as an architectural testament to the Christological debates that arose following the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Until the first quarter of the 6th century, Gaza remained an important monastic centre that maintained distinct theological views in response to the Council of Chalcedon (Ibid). It is likely that the Monastery of Tell Umm Amr was a hub of the theological struggle for these reforms until the arrival of Seridos around 520 (Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2006). Historical texts indicate that from this point onward, the rules imposed by the Council and imperial legislation were implemented (Ibid). These changes, driven by an imperial aim to harmonize monastic practices, are reflected in the monastery's architecture and functions, marked by the construction of the large stone enclosure, the grand church with white marble columns and floors, the expansive crypt, the northern baptismal complex, and the development of baths and hostels (Elter 2012, 2014, 2021).

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer stands as a venerable testament to early Christian monasticism in the Middle East, renowned for its antiquity and archaeological completeness. Founded by the ascetic Hilarion, the monastery holds profound historical, architectural, and religious significance as Palestine's oldest extant monastery. Its preservation of a Byzantine-era monastery and church complex dedicated to Saint Hilarion, a 4th-century Christian hermit, underscores its role in preserving the spiritual and architectural heritage of the Byzantine period (Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2000; Elter 2012, 2014).

The site serves as a scholarly focal point for comprehending the life and teachings of Saint Hilarion, drawing the attention of both academic researchers and pilgrims (Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2000; Sadeq 2000, 2015; Elter 2012, 2014, 2021). Its stratigraphic layers provide a vivid narrative of monastic architectural evolution and technological advancements spanning from the 4th to the 8th centuries. As one of the most intricate and comprehensive fourth-century monastic complexes in the Eastern Mediterranean, it features elaborate ecclesiastical spaces (Ibid). Particularly notable is its encompassment of one of the region's largest crypts and a hostel complex with adjoining baths, underscoring its significance as a primary testament to the sophisticated monastic community that flourished within its walls (Elter 2012, 2021).

Saint Hilarion's influence extended far beyond the physical boundaries of his monastery. His role in the dissemination and development of Christian monastic practices throughout the broader region was pivotal (Elter 2012; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2006). He established a model of ascetic life that inspired numerous other monastic foundations across the Eastern Mediterranean



and beyond (Ibid). His teachings and way of life were instrumental in shaping the spiritual and communal practices of early Christian monasticism, influencing not only Palestine but also Egypt, Libya, Sicily, and Dalmatia (Elter 2012). His legacy is evident in the spread of monastic ideals and the establishment of similar communities that adopted his principles of asceticism, communal living, and spiritual discipline (Downey 1963; Elter 2012, 2014, 2021; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2006; Sadeq 2000).

Hilarion's impact is also reflected in the cultural and religious traditions of these regions. In Sicily and Cyprus, he is still revered, with late depictions in the Monreale church in Palermo and other representations in Cyprus. Caves dedicated to him exist, and a tradition surrounding him continues in the vicinity of Dubrovnik, Croatia (Elter 2012, 2014; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2006). His life and works, as documented by Jerome in "Vita Sancti Hilarionis," served as a blueprint for monastic life, promoting ideals of solitude, piety, and service that resonated with Christian communities across the Mediterranean (Downey 1963).

The site's importance, therefore, lies not only in its historical and architectural significance but also in its representation of Saint Hilarion's enduring influence on Christian monasticism. It stands as a testament to the far-reaching impact of his teachings, which continue to inspire and guide monastic communities to this day (Elter 2012, 2021; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2006).



## Chapter Three

# Justification for Inscription

## Chapter Three: Justification for Inscription

### 3.1 Justification for Inscription

#### 3.1.a Brief Synthesis

The ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer) represent one of the earliest and most significant monastic sites in the Middle East, dating back to the 4th century. Founded by Saint Hilarion, it is the first monastic community in the Holy Land, laying the groundwork for the spread of monastic practices throughout Palestine and beyond. Situated on the coastal dunes in Nuseirat Municipality, approximately 10 km south of Gaza City and 10 km from its port, the monastery occupies a strategic position at the crossroads of major trade and communication routes between Asia and Africa. This prime location facilitated its role as a hub of religious, cultural, and economic interchange, exemplifying the flourishing of monastic desert centres during the Byzantine period.

The first settlement on the site was established during the Roman period on Wadi Gaza, close to the seashore. It appears on the sixth-century Madaba Mosaic Map, labelled with the name of Tabatha. The monastery holds potential Outstanding Universal Value due to its exceptional historical, religious, architectural, and cultural significance. It provides significant insight into the development of monastic life in the desert centres of Palestine during the Byzantine period, evidenced by well-preserved architectural elements, including a complex of five superimposed churches, a crypt, baths, water systems, heating systems, residences, and roads. These attributes collectively highlight its significance in the spread of Christian monasticism in the Holy Land and beyond.

Saint Hilarion Monastery began with solitary hermits (anchoritic phase) and evolved into a thriving coenobitic community by the fifth and sixth centuries until its decline during the early Islamic period. Under Saint Hilarion's guidance, the monastery established a model of communal living centred on spiritual guidance and intellectual exchange. The community maintained earlier monastic traditions while developing its intellectual and ascetic practices, attracting scholars and monks from across the Byzantine Empire and fostering an intellectual community known as the Monastic School of Gaza, established in the 5th century AD. This hub enriched theological discourse and propagated monastic ideals, transcending theological boundaries and leaving a lasting impact on Christian traditions. In the fifth century, following the Council of Chalcedon, the monastic centre in Gaza became a stronghold of anti-Chalcedonian struggle. This attracted intellectual monks and strengthened ties with Gaza's intellectual centre. Despite theological differences, the monastic school of Gaza emerged as a complex and thriving centre whose legacy transcended boundaries, highlighting the monastery's significant role in the political and ecclesiastical landscape of the time.

The architectural innovations and artistic contributions, particularly in mosaic art, underscore the site's exceptional value. The historical layers of the site illustrate its architectural evolution and technological advancements, continuously developing between the 4th and 8th centuries. It is one of the most complex and complete monasteries from the fourth century and the largest of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean. It also contains complex ecclesiastical spaces, including one of the largest crypts in the region, as well as a hostel with adjacent baths, making it a key witness to the sophisticated monastic community that once thrived there. The site's role in the distribution and development of Christian monasticism across the region further justifies its Outstanding Universal Value. Saint Hilarion Monastery is not only a monument to early Christian monasticism but also a testament to the enduring spiritual and cultural legacy of Saint Hilarion. His influence on monastic practices and the spread of Christianity in the Middle East, combined with the site's rich artistic and architectural heritage, make it a site of distinctive Outstanding Universal Value.

The ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery exemplify the highest levels of integrity and authenticity, preserving its Outstanding Universal Value through meticulous conservation efforts and a management system. The site's significance is rooted in its status as the first and oldest monastic establishment in Palestine, founded by Saint Hilarion, a pivotal figure in early Christian monasticism. This historical precedence sets it apart from other monastic sites in the region.

### 3.1.b Criteria under which Inscription is Proposed (Justification for Inscription under these Criteria)

**Criterion (ii): to 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.**

The monastic complex of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer exemplifies a significant interchange of human values in architecture and religious practices between the 4th and 8th centuries AD, during the emergence of Christianity in the Holy Land. Its strategic location on a major trade and pilgrimage route made it a melting pot of religious and cultural influences, reflecting cross-cultural interactions between Christian monastic traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Greco-Roman world. This interaction is evident in the adaptive reuse of classical architectural elements in the construction of monastic buildings and the architectural features of the property.

The architectural complexity of Saint Hilarion Monastery, characterized by its superimposed churches and well-organized bath facilities, represents an outstanding example of the evolution of ecclesiastical architecture and construction techniques. The historical layers of the site illustrate its architectural evolution and technological advancements, continuously developing between the



4th and 8th centuries. It is one of the most complex and complete monasteries from the fourth century and one of the largest of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The layout of the monastery, designed to guide pilgrims through its sacred elements, demonstrates innovative planning and reflects the spiritual journey of early Christian pilgrims. The site contains intricate ecclesiastical spaces, including one of the largest crypts in the region, and a hostel with adjacent baths, making it a key witness to the sophisticated monastic community that once thrived there. The site's beautiful mosaics with geometric, floral, and animal decorations showing the high level of craftsmanship and artistry of the monastic community, highlighting their exceptional skill and artistic expression.

Furthermore, the architectural and artistic contributions of Saint Hilarion Monastery are crucial for understanding the distribution and development of Christian monasticism across the region. Its architectural complexity and exceptional mosaics, demonstrate the site's outstanding universal value. The historical significance of the site, its role in the development of Christian monastic traditions, and its influence on subsequent religious architecture in the Middle East firmly establish its importance.

The architectural ingenuity of Saint Hilarion Monastery influenced the development of monastic architecture throughout the Middle East, setting a precedent for future religious complexes. Beyond architecture, the monastery played a crucial role in the cultural and spiritual landscape, preserving early monastic traditions while advancing intellectual and ascetic practices. It attracted scholars and monks from across the Byzantine Empire, fostering the Monastic School of Gaza in the 5th century AD. This hub enriched theological discourse, propagated monastic ideals, and left a lasting impact on Christian traditions.

The well-preserved monastic complex, including the large basilica, domestic and communal buildings, and sophisticated water system, stands as a testament to the significant interchange of human values in monastic architecture and religious practices. Its architectural innovations and cultural significance exemplify the impact of cross-cultural interactions in the development of monastic traditions and the broader spiritual heritage of the Middle East.

Overall, Saint Hilarion Monastery testifies to the significant interchange of human values in monastic architecture and religious practices during a formative period in Christian history. Its contributions to ecclesiastical architecture, its role as a centre of spiritual and cultural exchange, and its influence on Christian monasticism affirm its outstanding universal value.

**Criterion (iii): to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.**

The ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer are among the oldest and most archaeologically complete monastic sites in the Middle East, providing exceptional insights into

early Christian traditions and monastic life. Founded by the hermit Hilarion, who is revered as the founding father of monasticism in Palestine and studied under Anthony of Egypt, the monastery holds significant historical and religious importance as the oldest in Palestine and beyond.

Dating back to late antiquity, Saint Hilarion Monastery evolved continuously between the 4th and 8th centuries, culminating in its expansion and development into the largest monastic complex of its time in the region. This growth is reflected in its expansive ecclesiastical spaces, which include a substantial crypt—one of the largest found in the Eastern Mediterranean—and a hostel with adjoining baths. The monastery's architectural layout, intricately designed to accommodate religious practices and communal living, serves as a testament to its organizational complexity and spiritual significance.

Abandoned and buried under sand for centuries, the monastery was rediscovered and has since been meticulously preserved with international support. The preservation efforts have revealed not only the architectural prowess of early Christian builders but also the sophisticated infrastructure designed to sustain a monastic community in a semi-desert environment. Of particular note is the monastery's advanced bath complex, which shows the ingenuity and adaptive skills of its inhabitants in managing water resources—an essential element for sustaining life in such an arid setting.

Overall, Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer exemplifies exceptional architectural and archaeological attributes. These features provide unparalleled insights into the development and practices of early Christian monasticism, offering a clear evolution from solitary asceticism to communal religious life. The site's enduring significance underscores its Outstanding Universal Value, serving as a pivotal link in the broader narrative of Christian history and cultural heritage in the Middle East.

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

Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer holds profound significance in the history of Christianity in Palestine and the Middle East, intimately connected to pivotal events, traditions, beliefs, and artistic works of Outstanding Universal Value. Founded by Saint Hilarion in the 4th century AD, the monastery not only preserves the physical remnants of early Christian monasticism, but also embodies the enduring legacy of Saint Hilarion's teachings and influence. It marks a transformative phase in Christian monasticism, evolving from solitary hermitages to a thriving communal centre by the 5th and 6th centuries. This transition not only preserved early monastic traditions but also advanced intellectual and ascetic practices, influencing communities across the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond echoes through the cultural and religious traditions still observed in regions like Sicily, Cyprus, and Croatia. His

influence, documented in texts such as "Vita Sancti Hilarionis" by Jerome, continues to inspire spiritual devotion and intellectual inquiry.

Saint Hilarion himself, influenced by Anthony of Egypt, played a foundational role in establishing monasticism in the Holy Land. His rigorous ascetic lifestyle and spiritual teachings shaped the religious landscape of the region. Situated strategically along a major trade and pilgrimage route, the monastery became a hub of cultural exchange, attracting diverse influences and fostering the renowned Monastic School of Gaza. This centre was instrumental in theological discourse, especially during the theological debates following the Council of Chalcedon in the 5th century AD, where Saint Hilarion Monastery became a bastion of anti-Chalcedonian resistance.

The monastery's architectural and archaeological remains, including its churches, crypts, and intricate mosaics, provide tangible evidence of its historical and cultural significance. As a centre of theological discourse and cultural exchange, it fostered the development of early Christian thought and artistic expression. Architecturally, Saint Hilarion Monastery evolved continuously from the 4th to the 8th centuries, culminating in its expansion to become the largest monastic complex of its time in the region. The site's physical remains, including Saint Hilarion's tomb, churches, communal buildings, and exceptional mosaic floors, illustrate its historical and cultural significance. Notably, the monastery features one of the largest crypts in the region, alongside a complex with a hostel and adjacent baths, showing advanced ecclesiastical architecture and artistic expression.

Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer stands as a site of exceptional importance, directly associated with significant events, traditions, beliefs, and artistic achievements in early Christian monasticism. Its profound impact on the development of Christian religious practices, its pivotal role in theological discourse, and its enduring cultural legacy collectively affirm its pivotal position in the history of Christianity in the Middle East. It stands not only as a testament to early Christian monasticism but also as a symbol of the enduring human quest for spiritual enlightenment and communal harmony

### 3.1.c Statement of Integrity

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer exemplifies a robust level of integrity within its property zone boundaries, maintained through meticulous conservation efforts led by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), the French NGO Première Urgence Internationale (PUI), the French School of Biblical Studies, and the UNESCO Ramallah Office. Despite being buried under sand for centuries, the site has been carefully preserved and protected with minimal impact on its original fabric and authenticity. Key interventions, such as the installation of an archaeological cover over the bath area and temporary shelters in the ecclesiastical section, have effectively maintained its integrity, ensuring structural stability and safeguarding against environmental degradation.

The nominated property demonstrates completeness and maintains its integrity, encompassing all attributes of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) within its boundaries. Encompassing a complex of five superimposed churches, a crypt, baths, water systems, heating systems, and residences, the property provides a comprehensive representation of its OUV attributes. Ongoing scientific and professional interventions guided by UNESCO frameworks are integral to preserving the site's integrity and authenticity. The recent preliminary CMP integrates conservation strategies, monitoring systems, and measures to mitigate potential threats, demonstrating a proactive approach to long-term conservation.

Regular monitoring over the past decade by PUI and the UNESCO office, in collaboration with MoTA, ensures continuous compliance with integrity requirements, essential for safeguarding the site's universal value and addressing its vulnerabilities on the international stage. Saint Hilarion Monastery stands as one of the oldest and best-preserved monasteries in the holy land, meeting the stringent conditions of integrity. It serves as a testament to the successful application of international conservation principles and practices, reaffirming its recognition as a site of exceptional universal value.

### 3.1.d Statement of Authenticity

Saint Hilarion Monastery exemplifies a high level of authenticity, supported by interventions guided by approved conservation principles and meticulous monitoring. Excavations revealed structural instability after centuries under sand, necessitating careful anastylosis interventions in key areas. For example, from 2018 to 2022, extensive restoration was undertaken in the crypt, focusing on the west wall and vault of the south vestibule, incorporating over 850 new blocks. Similarly, interventions in the baptismal chapel (2021-2022) addressed the east part of the south wall with seven layers of blocks, alongside repairs to the top of the apse and north wall using more than 120 new blocks. In the pilgrim hostel (2021-2022), upper walls were reconstructed with 1 to 3 layers, totalling around 450 new blocks.

These anastyloses strictly adhered to international conservation standards, employing original materials such as Gaza stone, quarry sand, and lime, and utilizing traditional stone-cutting techniques. The reconstructions were intentionally set slightly back from the original structures to ensure clear differentiation. These interventions served as crucial structural consolidation measures, particularly in vulnerable lower areas of the site disposed to stormwater flow, thereby preventing collapse and enriching visitor comprehension of the site's historical significance.

Most attributes of the nominated property authentically and credibly express its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), as well as its historical and cultural significance. This authenticity is manifested through the property's original form, design, materials, techniques, and associated cultural practices. Furthermore, the site effectively evokes a genuine sense of time and place, offering visitors an authentic experience of its historical and cultural context.



Thus, Saint Hilarion Monastery unequivocally attains a high level of authenticity, meticulously preserved through approved conservation practices and rigorous monitoring. The interventions, particularly the anastylosis efforts in critical areas such as the crypt, baptismal chapel, and pilgrim hostel, have ensured that the site authentically represents its historical, cultural, and architectural significance. Through the use of original materials and adherence to international conservation standards, the monastery vividly conveys its original form, design, and associated cultural practices. This authenticity allows visitors to genuinely experience the historical context and significance of Saint Hilarion Monastery, affirming its recognition as a testament to early Christian monasticism in Palestine and worldwide.

### 3.1.e Protection and Management Requirements

Saint Hilarion Monastery /Tell Umm Amer is owned by the State of Palestine and managed by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA). It benefits from robust protection under Palestinian national heritage laws and is actively managed by local and international conservation bodies. The property is fully safeguarded by the Decree Law of Tangible Cultural Heritage (No. 11, 2018). This legal framework aligns Palestinian standards with international conventions, unifying the legal basis for protecting tangible cultural heritage while enhancing its management, conservation, and promotion efforts.

MoTA is empowered to comprehensively manage tangible cultural heritage sites, including World Heritage Properties. The law clearly defines the roles of stakeholders involved in the conservation and management of cultural properties. It grants MoTA authority to interpret the law, identify archaeological materials, delineate site boundaries, settle disputes, list heritage assets, and supervise conservation interventions effectively.

The recent preliminary CMP for the nominated property (see Annex One) integrates multiple conservation objectives, strategies, and a management system to ensure the sustainable protection and conservation of the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and its associated values and attributes. This plan includes provisions for archaeological research, community engagement, and sustainable tourism initiatives, systematic monitoring to mitigate environmental and human impacts, and visitor management strategies aimed at safeguarding the property.

The buffer zone surrounding the nominated property is protected under Building and Planning Law (no. 28, 1936) and its Modified Building Bylaws in Gaza Strip 2020, which governs building and zoning in towns and villages, supplemented by the municipal physical urban plan of Nuseirat Municipality. This plan regulates urban development to prevent conflicts with the archaeological site's integrity, focusing on enhancing the surrounding urban infrastructure while preserving the privacy of the site.

However, the current urban plan lacks a designated buffer zone for the archaeological site. Establishing buffer zones within the zoning plan is essential to create a protective barrier against potential negative impacts from nearby development activities, such as construction, pollution, or encroachment. Additional challenges include recent conflict impacts on the buffer zone and the necessity for further excavations to confirm integrity in specific areas. Long-term strategies prioritize adaptive management, continuous monitoring, and collaborative efforts to sustain the site's Outstanding Universal Value while addressing vulnerabilities and threats to its authenticity and integrity.

Under Palestinian national cultural heritage legislation, Saint Hilarion Monastery is designated as a high-priority site for protection and preservation. MoTA controls and monitors all interventions at the site according to international conventions and charters. Although much of the buffer zone is privately owned, it is safeguarded from inappropriate development by the Protection Law of Tangible Cultural Heritage (No. 11, 2018) and by the physical spatial plan of Nuseirat Municipality. These provisions control the buffer zone's land use, new developments, and new buildings. MoTA collaborates closely with related local and international organizations to ensure the safeguarding of this significant site, thereby reinforcing its role as a testament to early Christian monasticism in Palestine and worldwide

## 3.2 Comparative Analysis

### 3.2.a Introduction

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer, founded by Saint Hilarion in the 4th century, and continuously developing until the 8th century AD, is one of the most complex and complete monasteries from the fourth century and the largest of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean, testified by architectural innovations, including a complex ecclesiastical spaces with a large crypt, considered one of the largest crypts in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as a hostel with adjacent baths, and mosaic art with geometric, floral, and animal decorations show the high level of craftsmanship and artistry of the monastic community, highlighting their exceptional skill and artistic expression, underscore the site's exceptional value. It profoundly influenced the development of monastic architecture throughout the Middle East, setting a precedent for future religious complexes in the region. The historical significance of the site, combined with its role in the development of Christian monastic traditions and its influence on subsequent religious architecture in the Middle East, firmly establishes its importance.

It stands as a pioneering institution in the development of early Christian monasticism in the Holy Land and beyond. Evolving from a community of solitary hermits into a thriving coenobitic centre by the fifth and sixth centuries, the monastery significantly influenced monastic traditions across Palestine and beyond. Situated within the influential context of the monastic school of Gaza, Saint Hilarion Monastery gained renown for its intellectual and ascetic practices, attracting scholars and monks from the Byzantine Empire and nurturing a vibrant spiritual community.

The historical significance of Saint Hilarion Monastery transcends its religious impact. Following the Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century, it emerged as a focal point of theological discourse, showcasing its broader influence on the political and ecclesiastical landscape of its era. Today, the ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery exemplify exceptional integrity and authenticity, meticulously preserved through dedicated conservation efforts and management practices.

As the oldest monastic establishment in Palestine, founded by Saint Hilarion himself, its historical precedence distinguishes it from other monastic sites in the geo-cultural region.

Its influence extended across the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond, resonating through the cultural and religious traditions observed in regions such as Sicily, Cyprus, and Croatia. Saint Hilarion's teachings, documented in texts like "Vita Sancti Hilarionis" by Jerome, continue to inspire spiritual devotion and intellectual inquiry to this day.

This comparative analysis examines Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer alongside similar properties listed on the World Heritage List (WHL) and Tentative Lists (TLs) within the geo-cultural region of Greater Syria and the broader Middle East, spanning from late antiquity to the early Islamic periods. By systematically comparing attributes and criteria, this analysis aims to underscore the potential Outstanding Universal Value and significance of Saint Hilarion Monastery relative to its counterparts inscribed on the WHL and TLs. The analysis employs a Tabulation and Analysis technique to delineate similarities, differences, and distinctive features, affirming Saint Hilarion Monastery's exceptional status within the geo-cultural regional monastic heritage, as demonstrated in the following table.

### 3.2.b Table of the Comparative Analysis

Site	Status & Criteria	Key OUV and Attributes	Comparison
<b>Saint Hilarion Monastery</b> (Palestine)	TL II, III, VI	First monastic foundation in Palestine, Complex architectural layout with churches, mosaics, and baths. Advanced water and heating systems	Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer stands as a pivotal site of historical and cultural significance in Palestine and the broader Middle East. Founded in the 4th century AD by Saint Hilarion, a disciple of Saint Antony of Egypt, it holds the distinction of being the oldest and largest monastic complex in Palestine. This monastery exemplifies an exceptional evolution in ecclesiastical architecture and construction techniques, evolving continuously between the 4th and 8th centuries. Renowned as one of the most complex and complete monasteries from the fourth century, it is the largest of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean, featuring a substantial crypt—one of the region's largest—and intricate mosaic artistry.  Beyond its architectural marvels, the monastery's profound influence extended across the Eastern

			Mediterranean and beyond, resonating through the cultural and religious traditions observed in regions such as Sicily, Cyprus, and Croatia. Saint Hilarion's teachings, documented in texts like "Vita Sancti Hilarionis" by Jerome, continue to inspire spiritual devotion and intellectual inquiry to this day. His influence on Christian monasticism across the Eastern Mediterranean underscores its unique significance, shaping religious practices and spiritual life in the region for centuries.
<b>Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls</b>	WHL II, III, IV	Among its 220 historic monuments, the Dome of the Rock and Aqsa Mosque with their beautiful geometric and floral motifs. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, walls of Jerusalem, etc.	Both the Old City of Jerusalem and Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer hold immense historical and cultural significance, distinguished by their exceptional architectural styles and profound cultural impacts. Jerusalem stands as a paramount centre of religious diversity and dynamic urban development, encompassing sacred sites revered by Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. In contrast, Saint Hilarion Monastery embodies the foundational principles of early Christian monasticism, characterized by its pioneering architectural innovations and spiritual significance within the context of Palestine's coastal landscape. Each site contributes exceptionally to our understanding of the cultural and historical contexts of their respective periods and regions.
<b>Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity (Palestine)</b>	WHL IV, VI	Birthplace of Jesus, Church and pilgrimage route, Significant religious site, etc.	Both Saint Hilarion's monastic site and the Birthplace of Jesus are early Christian sites with foundational religious significance. Saint Hilarion founded the oldest monastic site in Palestine, focusing on spiritual growth, theological education, and ascetic practices. In contrast, the Birthplace of Jesus in Bethlehem marks the Nativity of Christ, making it a major pilgrimage destination. While both sites are pivotal to early Christianity and attract visitors for spiritual enrichment, Saint Hilarion's site is notable for developing monasticism, whereas the Birthplace of Jesus is revered for its association with Christ's birth.
<b>El-Bariyah: Wilderness with Monasteries (Palestine)</b>	TL I, II, III	Desert monastic sites with significant architecture, scenic significance for their remote monastic life, and rich religious	Both El-Bariyah and Saint Hilarion's monastic sites are pivotal to early Christian monasticism, yet they differ significantly in focus and influence. El-Bariyah is celebrated for its multiple monastic sites nestled in scenic canyons, emphasizing a solitary and austere monastic lifestyle. In contrast, Saint Hilarion's site, the oldest monastery in Palestine, inspired the establishment of other monasteries in the region. It



		traditions, associated with early Christian monasticism, such as Mar Saba Monastery Wadi Qelt and Saint George's Monastery	integrates diverse theological perspectives and established the monastic school of Gaza, becoming a hub for theological education and community cohesion. While both emphasize early Christian spirituality, El-Bariyah highlights remote monasticism, while Saint Hilarion's site is renowned for fostering theological diversity and scholarly collaboration.
<b>Baptism Site "Eshria'a" (Al-Maghtas)</b> (Palestine)	TL II, III, VI	Site of Jesus Christ's baptism, Archaeological remains of churches, monasteries, and baptismal pools	Both Al-Maghtas and Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer hold profound significance in early Christianity. Al-Maghtas is revered as a primary pilgrimage site where Christians gather to commemorate the baptism of Jesus Christ in the Jordan River, drawing pilgrims seeking spiritual connection and historical insight. However, Saint Hilarion Monastery, recognized as the oldest monastery in Palestine, is renowned for its ancient architecture and pivotal role in shaping monasticism and theological education in the region. It stands as a testament to the enduring traditions of asceticism and Christian scholarship.
<b>Saint Catherine's Monastery</b> (Sinai, Egypt)	WHL I, III, IV, VI	One of the oldest working Christian monasteries, Rich Manuscript Library	Both Saint Catherine's Monastery and Saint Hilarion Monastery are important early monastic sites, but they differ in their historical significance and timelines. Saint Hilarion Monastery, established in the 4th century, is the first monastic foundation in Palestine, marking the beginning of organized monastic life in the region. In contrast, Saint Catherine's Monastery, founded in the 6th century at Mount Sinai, is the oldest continuously operating Christian monastery, renowned for its rich manuscript library and association with the Biblical Burning Bush. While both sites exhibit high integrity and preservation, Saint Hilarion Monastery is notable for its pioneering role in Palestinian monasticism, whereas Saint Catherine's Monastery is celebrated for its enduring monastic tradition and cultural heritage.
<b>The monasteries of the Arab Desert and Wadi Natrun,</b> including St.	TL II, IV, V	Ancient monasteries with desert-adapted architecture with fortifications, rich manuscript	The monasteries of the Arab Desert and Wadi Natrun share significant similarities with Saint Hilarion Monastery, such as early Christian monastic heritage and advanced architectural features. However, key differences highlight their unique aspects. Saint Hilarion Monastery, established in the 4th century, is the oldest

<p>Anthony Monastery, St. Paul Monastery, St. Macarius Monastery, Anba Bishoy Monastery, Paromeos, Monastery, Syrian Monastery (Deir El-Suryan), and Wadi Natrun monasteries (Egypt)</p>		<p>collections and libraries, and centers of Coptic heritage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Combination of hermitic and coenobitic elements, and large complex with chapels.</li> <li>- Fortress-like towers, churches with frescoes.</li> <li>- water systems</li> </ul>	<p>monastic foundation in Palestine, notable for its pioneering architecture and communal living, featuring churches, cisterns, baths, and advanced water systems. In contrast, the Egyptian monasteries, particularly those in Wadi Natrun, are known for their hermitic traditions, frescoes, preserved relics, fortress-like structures, and emphasis on Coptic heritage and Roman influences. These differences reflect diverse regional expressions of early Christian spirituality and architectural innovation.</p>
<p><b>Baptism Site "Bethany Beyond the Jordan" (Al-Maghtas)</b> (Jordan)</p>	<p>WHL III, VI</p>	<p>Site of Jesus' baptism, Archaeological remains of churches and baptismal pools</p>	<p>Both Al-Maghtas and Saint Hilarion Monastery hold profound significance in early Christianity. Al-Maghtas is revered as a primary pilgrimage site where Christians gather to commemorate the baptism of Jesus Christ in the Jordan River, drawing pilgrims seeking spiritual connection and historical insight. In contrast, Saint Hilarion Monastery recognized as the oldest monastery in Palestine, is renowned for its ancient architecture and pivotal role in shaping monasticism and theological education in the region. It stands as a testament to the enduring traditions of asceticism and Christian scholarship.</p>
<p><b>Um er-Rasas</b> (Jordan)</p>	<p>WHL I, IV, VI</p>	<p>Early Christian churches, Mosaics, Fortified Roman military camp</p>	<p>Both Um er-Rasas and Saint Hilarion Monastery are early Christian settlements, but they differ in focus. Um er-Rasas includes a mix of military, civilian, and religious structures, highlighting diverse aspects of early Christian society. It offers a broad view of early Christian life, characterized by its stylite tower and hermitage located outside the town. Saint Hilarion Monastery, on the other hand, is dedicated solely to monastic life as the first monastic foundation in Palestine, emphasizing communal living and advanced infrastructure. While Um er-Rasas presents a comprehensive perspective of early Christian society, Saint Hilarion Monastery is notable for its pioneering role in monasticism.</p>

<p><b>Qal'at Sim'an (Church of Saint Simeon Stylites):</b> Ancient Villages of Northern Syria (Syria)</p>	<p>WHL I, III, IV</p>	<p>Byzantine church ruins, Pillar of St. Simeon Stylites</p>	<p>Qal'at Sim'an and Saint Hilarion Monastery share significant religious importance in early Christian history. However, they differ in focus and architectural design: Qal'at Sim'an revolves around the solitary asceticism of Saint Simeon Stylites atop a pillar, while Saint Hilarion Monastery is a comprehensive monastic complex illustrating communal monastic life. Both sites contribute uniquely to understanding early Christian practices and beliefs, with Qal'at Sim'an highlighting asceticism and Saint Hilarion Monastery showing organized communal living in monastic communities.</p>
<p><b>Monastery of Saint Thecla in Maaloula (Syria)</b></p>	<p>TL V, VI</p>	<p>Early Christian monastic sites, Crypts and burial practices</p>	<p>Both sites offer unique insights into early Christian practices and beliefs. Saint Thecla Monastery emphasizes its connection to Saint Thecla and its role as a pilgrimage destination within a region steeped in rich historical narratives. In contrast, Saint Hilarion Monastery highlights architectural innovation and its foundational impact on Palestinian monastic history.</p>
<p><b>Goreme National Park and the Rock Sites of Cappadocia (Turkey)</b></p>	<p>WHL I, III, V, VII</p>	<p>Rock-hewn sanctuaries, Byzantine art, Exceptional landscape</p>	<p>The monastic complexes of the Rock Sites of Cappadocia, carved into natural rock formations and adorned with Byzantine art and frescoes, seamlessly integrate cultural and natural elements. In contrast, Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer emphasizes built structures on coastal dunes, demonstrating advanced early Christian architecture and integrated infrastructure. This highlights distinct approaches to architectural design and the integration of natural and cultural heritage between the two sites.</p>
<p><b>Monasteries of Daphni, Hosios Loukas and Nea Moni of Chios (Greece)</b></p>	<p>WHL I, IV</p>	<p>Byzantine monasteries, known for their significant mosaics and architectural innovations</p>	<p>Both Saint Hilarion Monastery and the Greek monasteries embody important early Christian monastic heritage, but they differ in focus, age, and criteria. Saint Hilarion Monastery emphasizes advanced early Christian architecture and infrastructure integration on coastal dunes, illustrating its foundational role in Palestinian monasticism and aligning with criteria II, III, and VI. In contrast, the Greek monasteries are renowned for their architectural techniques and elaborate mosaics, reflecting primarily the cultural and religious influences of the 11th and 12th centuries and aligning with criteria I and IV. These monasteries are decorated with superb</p>

			marble works and mosaics on a gold background, characteristic of the 'second golden age of Byzantine art.'
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Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer stands as a pivotal site of historical and cultural significance in Palestine and the broader Middle East. Founded in the 4th century AD by Saint Hilarion, a disciple of Saint Antony of Egypt, it is recognized as the oldest and largest monastic complex in Palestine. This monastery represents an outstanding example of the evolution of ecclesiastical architecture and construction techniques advancements, continuously developing between the 4th and 8th centuries. It is one of the most complex and complete monasteries from the fourth century and the largest of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean, attesting to a substantial crypt—one of the largest in the Eastern Mediterranean—and intricate mosaic artistry. Beyond its architectural marvels, the monastery's profound influence on Christian monasticism across the Eastern Mediterranean underscores its unique significance, shaping religious practices and spiritual life in the region for centuries.

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer, founded by Saint Hilarion in the 4th century, holds an exceptional position as a foundational institution in early Christian monasticism within the Holy Land. Beginning as a community of solitary hermits, it transitioned into a prominent coenobitic centre by the fifth and sixth centuries, playing a pivotal role in shaping monastic traditions across Palestine and beyond. Situated within the influential context of the monastic school of Gaza, established in the 5th century, Saint Hilarion Monastery became renowned for its intellectual and ascetic practices, attracting scholars and monks from the Byzantine Empire and fostering a vibrant spiritual community. This evolution underscores its profound influence on the development of early Christian monasticism in the region.

The monastery's historical significance extends beyond its religious impact. Following the Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century, it became a centre of theological debate, influencing the political and ecclesiastical landscape. Until the early 6th century, Gaza, including the Monastery of Saint Hilarion/Tell Umm Amer, maintained distinct theological views in response to the Council's reforms. The arrival of Seridos around 520 AD marked the implementation of these reforms and imperial legislation, aiming to standardize monastic practices. These changes are evident in the monastery's architecture and functions, including the large stone enclosure, a grand church with white marble columns and floors, an expansive crypt, a northern baptismal complex, and the development of baths and hostels.

Today, the ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer stand as among the oldest and most archaeologically complete monastic sites in the Middle East, offering unparalleled testaments to early Christian traditions and monastic life. As one of the earliest and largest monastic complexes in the region from late antiquity, it vividly illustrates the transition from hermitic to communal



monastic life, significantly influencing Christian monastic traditions. The well-preserved site features expansive ecclesiastical spaces, including a substantial crypt—one of the largest in the Eastern Mediterranean—alongside a hostel with adjacent baths and a sophisticated water system. These attributes collectively provide a detailed understanding of the daily life, religious practices, and communal organization of early monastic settlements.

The ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery exemplify exceptional integrity and authenticity, maintained through dedicated conservation efforts and management practices. As the oldest monastic establishment in Palestine, founded by Saint Hilarion himself, its historical precedence distinguishes it from other monastic sites in the geo-cultural region. This historical and architectural significance underscores its potential Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), reflecting its pivotal role in the development of early Christian monasticism and its enduring cultural impact in the Middle East.

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer stands out due to its foundational role in monasticism, dating back to the 4th century, and its significant influence on developments in architecture, technology, and monumental arts during the late Roman and Byzantine periods (Criterion ii). It also serves as a profound testimony to cultural traditions (Criterion iii). Moreover, Saint Hilarion Monastery is associated with exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition and its profound impact on religious practices, beliefs, and ideas (Criterion vi). The monastic school of Gaza, including the Monastery of Saint Hilarion/ Tell Umm Amer, became a thriving intellectual and spiritual hub, whose legacy transcended theological differences and boundaries.

Unlike Saint John Monastery in the Wilderness and the Baptism Site of “Bethany Beyond the Jordan” (Al-Maghtas), recognized under criteria (iii) and (vi) for their association with biblical events, Saint Hilarion Monastery's significance lies in its foundational role and status as one of the oldest and most influential monastic sites in the region. This reflects its early development during the Byzantine period.

The architectural complexity of Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer, including multiple superimposed churches, a crypt for the veneration of Saint Hilarion's relics, baths, and advanced water management and heating systems, highlights its technological and artistic contributions. These innovations not only served the monastic community but also influenced subsequent architectural developments in the region. The practice of constructing multiple churches on the same site, one atop the other, demonstrated a sophisticated approach to utilizing limited space and preserving sacred sites. The monastery's use of the crypt for the veneration of Saint Hilarion's relics allowed it to function as a mausoleum. Its advanced water management and heating systems reflected impressive engineering skills that improved the health, hygiene, and comfort of its inhabitants. These innovations influenced later monastic communities across the region, underscoring Saint Hilarion Monastery's significant impact on the development of monastic

architecture and communal living standards. This practice also influenced other monastic complexes, such as Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, Egypt, which adopted similar strategies in the 6th century to expand their facilities while preserving sacred spaces.

Strategically located at the crossroads of major trade and communication routes between Africa and Asia, Saint Hilarion Monastery served as a hub of religious, cultural, and economic interchange during the Byzantine period. This position facilitated interactions that enriched the monastic community and extended its influence far beyond its immediate geographic boundaries.

Compared to other monastic sites, such as Saint Catherine's Monastery in Egypt and Mar Saba Monastery in El-Bariyah, Saint Hilarion Monastery's exceptional combination of age, foundational significance, and architectural innovation places it in a class of its own. While other sites have their own historical and cultural importance, Saint Hilarion's role as the birthplace of Palestinian monasticism and its pioneering contributions to monastic architecture and practices are unparalleled.

### 3.2.c Conclusion of the Comparative Analysis

Saint Hilarion Monastery stands out as a pioneering site in the geo-cultural region and globally, embodying the essence of early Christian monasticism. Founded in the 4th century by Saint Hilarion and continuously evolving until the 8th century, it expanded into the largest monastic complex of its time in the region. The monastery introduced innovative architectural concepts, including superimposed churches and advanced infrastructure. These innovations not only fulfilled practical needs but also symbolized spiritual ideals and communal living practices, emphasizing the monastery's profound historical and cultural significance and enhancing its Outstanding Universal Value.

Compared to other inscribed monastic sites on the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists, Saint Hilarion Monastery's distinction lies in its foundational role in Palestinian monasticism and its influence during the late Roman and Byzantine periods. Its architectural advancements, including layered construction and advanced infrastructure, set a precedent for later developments worldwide. This innovative spirit reflects Saint Hilarion's profound influence on monastic architecture and technology, shaping monastic communities globally.

Under Saint Hilarion's guidance, the monastery established a model of communal living centred on spiritual guidance and intellectual exchange. Saint Hilarion, a pioneer of Palestinian monasticism, attracted scholars and monks from across the Byzantine Empire, fostering the Monastic School of Gaza in the 5th century. This hub enriched theological discourse and propagated monastic ideals, transcending theological boundaries and leaving a lasting impact on Christian traditions. The monastery's significance is evident in its advanced architecture, including

a grand church, expansive crypt, and sophisticated infrastructure, reflecting its historical and religious importance.

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer potentially meets the criteria for inscription on the World Heritage List under ii, iii, and vi. Its architectural innovations and foundational influence on Christian monasticism underscore its significance. Preserving this site honours its historical legacy and ensures its ongoing inspiration in understanding the origins and evolution of monastic traditions worldwide. As a symbol of human creativity, spirituality, and communal living, Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer resonates across cultures and time, representing the enduring legacy of Christian monasticism in the Middle East and beyond.

### 3.3 Proposed Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

#### a) Brief synthesis

The ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer) represent one of the earliest and most significant monastic sites in the Middle East, dating back to the 4th century. Founded by Saint Hilarion, it is the first monastic community in the Holy Land, laying the groundwork for the spread of monastic practices throughout Palestine and beyond. Situated on the coastal dunes in Nuseirat Municipality, approximately 10 km south of Gaza City and 10 km from its port, the monastery occupies a strategic position at the crossroads of major trade and communication routes between Asia and Africa. This prime location facilitated its role as a hub of religious, cultural, and economic interchange, exemplifying the flourishing of monastic desert centres during the Byzantine period.

The first settlement on the site was established during the Roman period on Wadi Gaza, close to the seashore. It appears on the sixth-century Madaba Mosaic Map, labelled with the name of Tabatha. The monastery holds potential Outstanding Universal Value due to its exceptional historical, religious, architectural, and cultural significance. It provides significant insight into the development of monastic life in the desert centres of Palestine during the Byzantine period, evidenced by well-preserved architectural elements, including a complex of five superimposed churches, a crypt, baths, water systems, heating systems, residences, and roads. These attributes collectively highlight its significance in the spread of Christian monasticism in the Holy Land and beyond.

Saint Hilarion Monastery began with solitary hermits (anchoritic phase) and evolved into a thriving coenobitic community by the fifth and sixth centuries until its decline during the early Islamic period. Under Saint Hilarion's guidance, the monastery established a model of communal living centred on spiritual guidance and intellectual exchange. The community maintained earlier monastic traditions while developing its intellectual and ascetic practices, attracting scholars and monks from across the Byzantine Empire and fostering an intellectual community known as the Monastic School of Gaza, established in the 5th century AD. This hub enriched theological discourse and propagated monastic ideals, transcending theological boundaries and leaving a lasting impact on Christian traditions. In the fifth century, following the Council of Chalcedon, the monastic centre in Gaza became a stronghold of anti-Chalcedonian struggle. This attracted intellectual monks and strengthened ties with Gaza's intellectual centre. Despite theological differences, the monastic school of Gaza emerged as a complex and thriving centre whose legacy transcended boundaries, highlighting the monastery's significant role in the political and ecclesiastical landscape of the time.

The architectural innovations and artistic contributions, particularly in mosaic art, underscore the site's exceptional value. The historical layers of the site illustrate its architectural evolution and technological advancements, continuously developing between the 4th and 8th centuries. It is one

of the most complex and complete monasteries from the fourth century and the largest of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean. It also contains complex ecclesiastical spaces, including one of the largest crypts in the region, as well as a hostel with adjacent baths, making it a key witness to the sophisticated monastic community that once thrived there. The site's role in the distribution and development of Christian monasticism across the region further justifies its Outstanding Universal Value. Saint Hilarion Monastery is not only a monument to early Christian monasticism but also a testament to the enduring spiritual and cultural legacy of Saint Hilarion. His influence on monastic practices and the spread of Christianity in the Middle East, combined with the site's rich artistic and architectural heritage, make it a site of distinctive Outstanding Universal Value.

The ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery exemplify the highest levels of integrity and authenticity, preserving its Outstanding Universal Value through meticulous conservation efforts and a management system. The site's significance is rooted in its status as the first and oldest monastic establishment in Palestine, founded by Saint Hilarion, a pivotal figure in early Christian monasticism. This historical precedence sets it apart from other monastic sites in the region.

#### **b) Justification for Criteria**

**Criterion (ii): to 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.**

The monastic complex of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer exemplifies a significant interchange of human values in architecture and religious practices between the 4th and 8th centuries AD, during the emergence of Christianity in the Holy Land. Its strategic location on a major trade and pilgrimage route made it a melting pot of religious and cultural influences, reflecting cross-cultural interactions between Christian monastic traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Greco-Roman world. This interaction is evident in the adaptive reuse of classical architectural elements in the construction of monastic buildings and the architectural features of the property.

The architectural complexity of Saint Hilarion Monastery, characterized by its superimposed churches and well-organized bath facilities, represents an outstanding example of the evolution of ecclesiastical architecture and construction techniques. The historical layers of the site illustrate its architectural evolution and technological advancements, continuously developing between the 4th and 8th centuries. It is one of the most complex and complete monasteries from the fourth century and one of the largest of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The layout of the monastery, designed to guide pilgrims through its sacred elements, demonstrates innovative planning and reflects the spiritual journey of early Christian pilgrims. The site contains intricate ecclesiastical spaces, including one of the largest crypts in the region, and a



hostel with adjacent baths, making it a key witness to the sophisticated monastic community that once thrived there. The site's beautiful mosaics with geometric, floral, and animal decorations showing the high level of craftsmanship and artistry of the monastic community, highlighting their exceptional skill and artistic expression.

Furthermore, the architectural and artistic contributions of Saint Hilarion Monastery are crucial for understanding the distribution and development of Christian monasticism across the region. Its architectural complexity and exceptional mosaics, demonstrate the site's outstanding universal value. The historical significance of the site, its role in the development of Christian monastic traditions, and its influence on subsequent religious architecture in the Middle East firmly establish its importance.

The architectural ingenuity of Saint Hilarion Monastery influenced the development of monastic architecture throughout the Middle East, setting a precedent for future religious complexes. Beyond architecture, the monastery played a crucial role in the cultural and spiritual landscape, preserving early monastic traditions while advancing intellectual and ascetic practices. It attracted scholars and monks from across the Byzantine Empire, fostering the Monastic School of Gaza in the 5th century AD. This hub enriched theological discourse, propagated monastic ideals, and left a lasting impact on Christian traditions.

The well-preserved monastic complex, including the large basilica, domestic and communal buildings, and sophisticated water system, stands as a testament to the significant interchange of human values in monastic architecture and religious practices. Its architectural innovations and cultural significance exemplify the impact of cross-cultural interactions in the development of monastic traditions and the broader spiritual heritage of the Middle East.

Overall, Saint Hilarion Monastery testifies to the significant interchange of human values in monastic architecture and religious practices during a formative period in Christian history. Its contributions to ecclesiastical architecture, its role as a centre of spiritual and cultural exchange, and its influence on Christian monasticism affirm its outstanding universal value.

**Criterion (iii): to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.**

The ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer are among the oldest and most archaeologically complete monastic sites in the Middle East, providing exceptional insights into early Christian traditions and monastic life. Founded by the hermit Hilarion, who is revered as the founding father of monasticism in Palestine and studied under Anthony of Egypt, the monastery holds significant historical and religious importance as the oldest in Palestine and beyond.

Dating back to late antiquity, Saint Hilarion Monastery evolved continuously between the 4th and 8th centuries, culminating in its expansion and development into the largest monastic complex of

its time in the region. This growth is reflected in its expansive ecclesiastical spaces, which include a substantial crypt—one of the largest found in the Eastern Mediterranean—and a hostel with adjoining baths. The monastery's architectural layout, intricately designed to accommodate religious practices and communal living, serves as a testament to its organizational complexity and spiritual significance.

Abandoned and buried under sand for centuries, the monastery was rediscovered and has since been meticulously preserved with international support. The preservation efforts have revealed not only the architectural prowess of early Christian builders but also the sophisticated infrastructure designed to sustain a monastic community in a semi-desert environment. Of particular note is the monastery's advanced bath complex, which shows the ingenuity and adaptive skills of its inhabitants in managing water resources—an essential element for sustaining life in such an arid setting.

Overall, Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer exemplifies exceptional architectural and archaeological attributes. These features provide unparalleled insights into the development and practices of early Christian monasticism, offering a clear evolution from solitary asceticism to communal religious life. The site's enduring significance underscores its Outstanding Universal Value, serving as a pivotal link in the broader narrative of Christian history and cultural heritage in the Middle East.

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

Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer holds profound significance in the history of Christianity in Palestine and the Middle East, intimately connected to pivotal events, traditions, beliefs, and artistic works of Outstanding Universal Value. Founded by Saint Hilarion in the 4th century AD, the monastery not only preserves the physical remnants of early Christian monasticism, but also embodies the enduring legacy of Saint Hilarion's teachings and influence. It marks a transformative phase in Christian monasticism, evolving from solitary hermitages to a thriving communal centre by the 5th and 6th centuries. This transition not only preserved early monastic traditions but also advanced intellectual and ascetic practices, influencing communities across the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond echoes through the cultural and religious traditions still observed in regions like Sicily, Cyprus, and Croatia. His influence, documented in texts such as "Vita Sancti Hilarionis" by Jerome, continues to inspire spiritual devotion and intellectual inquiry.

Saint Hilarion himself, influenced by Anthony of Egypt, played a foundational role in establishing monasticism in the Holy Land. His rigorous ascetic lifestyle and spiritual teachings shaped the religious landscape of the region. Situated strategically along a major trade and pilgrimage route, the monastery became a hub of cultural exchange, attracting diverse influences and fostering the

renowned Monastic School of Gaza. This centre was instrumental in theological discourse, especially during the theological debates following the Council of Chalcedon in the 5th century AD, where Saint Hilarion Monastery became a bastion of anti-Chalcedonian resistance.

The monastery's architectural and archaeological remains, including its churches, crypts, and intricate mosaics, provide tangible evidence of its historical and cultural significance. As a centre of theological discourse and cultural exchange, it fostered the development of early Christian thought and artistic expression. Architecturally, Saint Hilarion Monastery evolved continuously from the 4th to the 8th centuries, culminating in its expansion to become the largest monastic complex of its time in the region. The site's physical remains, including Saint Hilarion's tomb, churches, communal buildings, and exceptional mosaic floors, illustrate its historical and cultural significance. Notably, the monastery features one of the largest crypts in the region, alongside a complex with a hostel and adjacent baths, showing advanced ecclesiastical architecture and artistic expression.

Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer stands as a site of exceptional importance, directly associated with significant events, traditions, beliefs, and artistic achievements in early Christian monasticism. Its profound impact on the development of Christian religious practices, its pivotal role in theological discourse, and its enduring cultural legacy collectively affirm its pivotal position in the history of Christianity in the Middle East. It stands not only as a testament to early Christian monasticism but also as a symbol of the enduring human quest for spiritual enlightenment and communal harmony

### **c) Statement of Integrity (for all properties)**

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer exemplifies a robust level of integrity within its property zone boundaries, maintained through meticulous conservation efforts led by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), the French NGO Première Urgence Internationale (PUI), the French School of Biblical Studies, and the UNESCO Ramallah Office. Despite being buried under sand for centuries, the site has been carefully preserved and protected with minimal impact on its original fabric and authenticity. Key interventions, such as the installation of an archaeological cover over the bath area and temporary shelters in the ecclesiastical section, have effectively maintained its integrity, ensuring structural stability and safeguarding against environmental degradation.

The nominated property demonstrates completeness and maintains its integrity, encompassing all attributes of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) within its boundaries. Encompassing a complex of five superimposed churches, a crypt, baths, water systems, heating systems, and residences, the property provides a comprehensive representation of its OUV attributes. Ongoing scientific and professional interventions guided by UNESCO frameworks are integral to preserving the site's integrity and authenticity. The recent preliminary CMP integrates conservation strategies,

monitoring systems, and measures to mitigate potential threats, demonstrating a proactive approach to long-term conservation.

Regular monitoring over the past decade by PUI and the UNESCO office, in collaboration with MoTA, ensures continuous compliance with integrity requirements, essential for safeguarding the site's universal value and addressing its vulnerabilities on the international stage. Saint Hilarion Monastery stands as one of the oldest and best-preserved monasteries in the holy land, meeting the stringent conditions of integrity. It serves as a testament to the successful application of international conservation principles and practices, reaffirming its recognition as a site of exceptional universal value.

**d) Statement of authenticity for properties nominated under criteria (i) to (vi)**

Saint Hilarion Monastery exemplifies a high level of authenticity, supported by interventions guided by approved conservation principles and meticulous monitoring. Excavations revealed structural instability after centuries under sand, necessitating careful anastylosis interventions in key areas. For example, from 2018 to 2022, extensive restoration was undertaken in the crypt, focusing on the west wall and vault of the south vestibule, incorporating over 850 new blocks. Similarly, interventions in the baptismal chapel (2021-2022) addressed the east part of the south wall with seven layers of blocks, alongside repairs to the top of the apse and north wall using more than 120 new blocks. In the pilgrim hostel (2021-2022), upper walls were reconstructed with 1 to 3 layers, totalling around 450 new blocks.

These anastyloses strictly adhered to international conservation standards, employing original materials such as Gaza stone, quarry sand, and lime, and utilizing traditional stone-cutting techniques. The reconstructions were intentionally set slightly back from the original structures to ensure clear differentiation. These interventions served as crucial structural consolidation measures, particularly in vulnerable lower areas of the site disposed to stormwater flow, thereby preventing collapse and enriching visitor comprehension of the site's historical significance.

Most attributes of the nominated property authentically and credibly express its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), as well as its historical and cultural significance. This authenticity is manifested through the property's original form, design, materials, techniques, and associated cultural practices. Furthermore, the site effectively evokes a genuine sense of time and place, offering visitors an authentic experience of its historical and cultural context.

Thus, Saint Hilarion Monastery unequivocally attains a high level of authenticity, meticulously preserved through approved conservation practices and rigorous monitoring. The interventions, particularly the anastylosis efforts in critical areas such as the crypt, baptismal chapel, and pilgrim hostel, have ensured that the site authentically represents its historical, cultural, and architectural significance. Through the use of original materials and adherence to international conservation

standards, the monastery vividly conveys its original form, design, and associated cultural practices. This authenticity allows visitors to genuinely experience the historical context and significance of Saint Hilarion Monastery, affirming its recognition as a testament to early Christian monasticism in Palestine and worldwide.

#### **e) Requirements for protection**

Saint Hilarion Monastery /Tell Umm Amer is owned by the State of Palestine and managed by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA). It benefits from robust protection under Palestinian national heritage laws and is actively managed by local and international conservation bodies. The property is fully safeguarded by the Decree Law of Tangible Cultural Heritage (No. 11, 2018). This legal framework aligns Palestinian standards with international conventions, unifying the legal basis for protecting tangible cultural heritage while enhancing its management, conservation, and promotion efforts.

MoTA is empowered to comprehensively manage tangible cultural heritage sites, including World Heritage Properties. The law clearly defines the roles of stakeholders involved in the conservation and management of cultural properties. It grants MoTA authority to interpret the law, identify archaeological materials, delineate site boundaries, settle disputes, list heritage assets, and supervise conservation interventions effectively.

The recent preliminary CMP for the nominated property (see Annex One) integrates multiple conservation objectives, strategies, and a management system to ensure the sustainable protection and conservation of the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and its associated values and attributes. This plan includes provisions for archaeological research, community engagement, and sustainable tourism initiatives, systematic monitoring to mitigate environmental and human impacts, and visitor management strategies aimed at safeguarding the property.

The buffer zone surrounding the nominated property is protected under Building and Planning Law (no. 28, 1936) and its Modified Building Bylaws in Gaza Strip 2020, which governs building and zoning in towns and villages, supplemented by the municipal physical urban plan of Nuseirat Municipality. This plan regulates urban development to prevent conflicts with the archaeological site's integrity, focusing on enhancing the surrounding urban infrastructure while preserving the privacy of the site.

However, the current urban plan lacks a designated buffer zone for the archaeological site. Establishing buffer zones within the zoning plan is essential to create a protective barrier against potential negative impacts from nearby development activities, such as construction, pollution, or encroachment. Additional challenges include recent conflict impacts on the buffer zone and the necessity for further excavations to confirm integrity in specific areas. Long-term strategies prioritize adaptive management, continuous monitoring, and collaborative efforts to sustain the



site's Outstanding Universal Value while addressing vulnerabilities and threats to its authenticity and integrity.

Under Palestinian national cultural heritage legislation, Saint Hilarion Monastery is designated as a high-priority site for protection and preservation. MoTA controls and monitors all interventions at the site according to international conventions and charters. Although much of the buffer zone is privately owned, it is safeguarded from inappropriate development by the Protection Law of Tangible Cultural Heritage (No. 11, 2018) and by the physical spatial plan of Nuseirat Municipality. These provisions control the buffer zone's land use, new developments, and new buildings. MoTA collaborates closely with related local and international organizations to ensure the safeguarding of this significant site, thereby reinforcing its role as a testament to early Christian monasticism in Palestine and worldwide



## Chapter Four

# State of Conservation and Factors Affecting the Nominated Property

## Chapter Four: State of Conservation and Factors Affecting the Nominated Property

### 4.a Present State of Conservation

#### 4.a.1 Main Interventions at the Property

The site was discovered in 1991. Following the Oslo Accords, a series of excavations and conservation interventions were conducted in 1994, led by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and École Biblique et Archéologique Française (EbaF) (Humbert 2000; Humbert and Hassoune 2005; Haldimann 2007; Alby et al. 2013; Al-Utol and Elter 2018; Sadeq 2005; Alby 2021). Below is a brief timeline of previous excavation and conservation efforts:

##### **1991- 1992**

In 1991, during the initiation of a building project and the exploitation of the dune as a sand quarry, ancient remains were discovered at the site: marble bases and columns from the Byzantine period, Corinthian capitals, coins, sandstone and limestone building materials, and various artefacts.

##### **1997-2001**

Due to a housing development project on the dune, the site was excavated by the Palestinian Antiquities Department of Gaza, directed by Moain Sadeq. Field operations, led by Yasser Matar, uncovered significant findings in the church and its surroundings (Site I), as well as at the northeast end of the tell (Site II). These excavations revealed a collection of Romano-Byzantine remains, including ceramics, mosaics with large white tesserae, and sandstone building remnants, initially misidentified as a palace.

The ruins uncovered around the church were initially thought to be those of a village, possibly Tabatha. To the southwest, a Christian cemetery dating to the 5th-6th centuries was identified.

Approximately 150 meters to the northeast, below the dune (Site II), another architectural complex was unearthed. This complex includes a large building with several rooms arranged around a courtyard, along with annexes.

##### **2001**

At the request of the MoTA, a scientific and technical partnership was established with the Consulate General of France in Jerusalem as part of the Franco-Palestinian Archaeological Cooperation Mission in Gaza, directed by Jean-Baptiste Humbert of EbaF. Two expert missions were conducted, including one in October led by René Elter of EbaF, to assess the archaeological potential of the site and develop a preservation and enhancement program for public access.

## **2002-2006**

The chronology of the site's occupation was confirmed from the beginning of the 4th to the end of the 8th century (from the end of the Roman period to the beginning of the Abbasid period), during which the church was completely rebuilt three times. Two architectural complexes were identified. The first, approximately 4650 m<sup>2</sup> around the southern part of the sanctuary, served ecclesiastical purposes and includes the church, the crypt, the atrium, the baptisteries, the chapel, the cells, the refectory, and service annexes. The second complex, about 3600 m<sup>2</sup>, extends to the north and includes thermal baths and a hostel.

Two levels of mosaics from two superimposed churches were unearthed. A mosaic inscription mentioning Hilarion was discovered on October 25, 2003, and the saint's tomb was found on November 11, 2003, confirming that the site corresponds to the monastery he founded.

## **2007-2010**

The unearthed remains suffered from very rainy winters, uncontrolled or excessive visits, and the effects of the bombings during the winter of 2008-2009. The damage could not be halted due to the lack of financial, logistical, and technical resources, given the particular situation of the Gaza Strip. During the winter of 2009-2010, part of the west wall of the crypt collapsed, and the apses of the sanctuary slipped into the crypt leading to the collapse of the mosaic floor of the choir of the primitive church.

## **2010-2012**

After an assessment mission led by René Elter (EbaF), initiated by MoTA and the Islamic University of Gaza with the support of France and UNESCO, an emergency intervention program took place from December 2010 and April 2014. This program included the implementation of reinforcement and consolidation of the collapsed parts (crypt, apses of churches, mosaic floors) and emergency protection of the remains (bath and choir of the primitive church)

Before reinforcing the west wall of the crypt, a major archaeological verification was carried out in the south nave of the large church to a depth of 5 meters. Before the excavation the mosaic floor which covered this part of the nave of the church had been laid down by Fadel al-Utol and his team. The intervention made it possible to refine the chronology of the sanctuary. The southeast corner of the second church, the contemporary levels of the first church, and the hermitage dating from the first half of the 4th century were unearthed, confirming that the monastery of Tell Umm Amer is one of the oldest in Palestine, if not the oldest.

## 2015

Funding from UNESCO makes it possible to continue for a few months the program which remained unfinished following the conflict in the summer of 2014. It involves cleaning and consolidating emergency facilities set up between 2010 and 2014.

## 2018-2019

The program launched in December 2017 included constructing a reception building, installing a roof over the baths, restoring the crypt, consolidating the structures, and building a permanent walkway along the remains.

From February to March 2018, before constructing the site reception building, five archaeological test trenches (totaling 112 m<sup>2</sup>) were excavated at the southwest corner of the site in a closed area, including a garden, the old archaeological storeroom, and the site guardian's house. Only one trench yielded ancient remains, including a floor, a wall, a hearth, and jars all dated to the 5th century.

From February to December 2019, a documentary survey of the walls (mainly photogrammetric) was conducted, along with documentation and study of the crypt's construction before restoration work on the west wall and the south narthex vault. Around thirty, archaeological trenches were excavated in three areas: the bath (before installing the roof), the well (before consolidation and restoration), and the ecclesiastical complex (before soil stabilization).

## 2020-2022

The work including monitoring of work in the crypt, archaeological trench in the apse of the baptismal chapel, reconstruction of the south wall, consolidation of the elevation of the north wall, study of the floors, with two tombs inside, before stabilization as well as archaeological and architectural study of baptisteries 3 and 4 before consolidation and conservation treatment. In addition to the conservation and restoration of the floor of the atrium and the hostel walls.

**Further efforts will be undertaken through the implementation of the Conservation and Management Plan (see Annex One)**

### 4.a.2 The state of conservation of the main attributes

Since the ruins have been rediscovered an extensive project of conservation and reconsolidation has been undertaken. The ruins have been uncovered and considerable conservation work has been done.

The project in the very complex bath area has been completed. All extra material has been removed. The ruins have been well documented and researched. This area was given an archaeological cover to protect it from climatic damage. The cover allows for natural lighting and



circulation of air. It is not completely enclosed. A wooden pathway allows for the visitor to visit the site without damaging the ruins. Information panels explain the ruins to the visitor.

The ecclesiastical area needed more intervention as parts of it needed extensive consolidation. The anastylosis was undertaken under strict conservation standards and in a way that the modern stonework is readable and easily identified. Stone cutting was done using traditional methods. Wooden walkways allow the visitor to visit the site following a historic path. Some of the areas were covered by a temporary shelter but the project envisions that there will be an archaeological cover for most of this area as well, for which financing is already available.

The state of conservation is a very good one after the interventions that have been done but it is important that the project is completed as the site is exposed to climatic conditions that could harm the ruins which are very close to the sea and subject to sand erosion and other climatic conditions of extreme heat and very strong rainy period.

**For Future details regarding the state of conservation see Chapter 3: Condition Assessment in the *Conservation and Management Plan (Annex One)*.**

#### **4.b Factors Affecting the Property**

The current conflict has severely impacted the entire Gaza Strip, causing widespread devastation across the region. Many heritage sites, some of extreme importance, have suffered significant damage. Notably, the port of Anthedon and the coastal wetlands of Wadi Gaza, both long-listed on the Palestinian Tentative List for World Heritage, have been fully or partially destroyed. The destruction of these sites represents a profound loss of substantial historical and cultural value for both Palestinians and humanity as a whole. Additionally, numerous significant historical buildings in Gaza City have also been either fully or partially destroyed. These structures hold the rich history and cultural legacy of the area, reflecting centuries of architectural and cultural development.

Given this context, the emergency protection of Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer is of the highest importance. This site, one of the most significant Byzantine archaeological sites in the region, is a critical link to understanding the area's historical and cultural heritage. Preserving it within the current conflict is essential to safeguarding the cultural and historical narrative of the Gaza Strip for future generations. Immediate measures are required to ensure its protection and to prevent further damage from both the conflict and the elements.

Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer faces several challenges that could compromise its key attributes. These challenges stem from both human and natural factors. Human factors include the current conflict and urban development pressures in the region. On the other hand, natural factors affecting the site's conservation include severe and unpredictable winter precipitation, intense rainfall-runoff, rising groundwater levels, fluctuating and extreme temperatures, wind, sand, vegetation growth, earthquakes, and wildlife.

Efforts to safeguard the monastery have included installing an archaeological cover over parts of the site, with plans to expand this protective measure across more of the area. Furthermore, to protect valuable attributes such as mosaics, they have been temporarily relocated and stored until the completion of a planned small interpretation centre, after which they will be returned to their original location within the monastery complex. These conservation strategies aim to mitigate the threats posed by both human activities and natural elements, ensuring the preservation of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer for future generations.



## Chapter Five

# Protection and Management of the Property

## Chapter Five: Protection and Management of the Property

### 5.a. Stakeholders

Stakeholders are specified as those for whom cultural heritage place has value, those who have significant information about it and have direct or indirect interests in its management and conservation. They are diverse from one place to another, and from country to country depending on the nature and location of cultural heritage resources. In general, they include decision-makers, government ministries, professionals, academic specialists, on-site staff, owners, local communities, and civil institutions, etc. (Sullivan 1997; Clark 2001).

The following table summarizes related stakeholders and right-holders of the nominated property:

Stakeholders/ right-holders	Duty / interest
Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities:	Owner of the property and has the legal responsibility over it.
Public institutions: - Ministry of Culture - Environment Quality Authority - Ministry of Finance - Ministry of education -Ministry of Agriculture - Minister of interior affairs/ Tourism and Antiquities Police	Each of these institutions has its impact on the property through activities such as cultural festivals, educational programs, projects, and so on.
Al Nuseirat Municipality (NM)	Controls land use, infrastructure, local planning (Master plans, comprehensive plans, and strategic plan)
Première Urgence Internationale (PUI)	a non-profit international NGO. Their mission is to defend basic human rights. In 2017, PUI received funding from the British Council Cultural Protection Fund which aims at protecting and preserving the property and the Byzantine Church in Jabalia. Since 2017, PUI has been considered the main stakeholder that raised funds and implemented conservation works at the Site.
French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem (—École Biblique et Archéologique Française)	A world-renowned research institute specializing in archaeology and based in Jerusalem, EbaF has extensive experience working in Gaza since 1995, conducting excavations, research, and emergency preservation at numerous archaeological sites. The institute collaborates closely with MoTA, the French government, and international aid organizations. For over 15 years, EbaF has conducted annual excavations

	at the property, as well as at Jabalia Church, the Roman Cemetery east of Jabalia, Anthedon, Tell Al Sakan, and Tell Rafah.
INTIQAL 2030	With the support of the British Council Cultural Protection Fund and the ALIPH Foundation, INTIQAL 2030 creates and runs a safe space in which girls, boys, young people, and families engage in concrete actions and express their fears and hopes in a protective environment while developing their resilience following traumatic experiences. INTIQAL 2030 is an active internationalnational initiative that is directing its main activities at the property.
Palestinian Universities The Islamic University of Gaza and the University of Palestine	The two universities actively participate in educational and training programs held at the Site. Numerous students and faculty members benefit from the research and training initiatives led by INITQAL and PUI. The Iwan Center, affiliated with the Islamic University, has made significant strides in the preservation of cultural heritage in Gaza
Community-heritage-based grassroots	There are three active community-heritage-based grassroots organizations active in the fields of cultural heritage awareness, children, local heritage, and women’s empowerment: NAWA Association, Al Qarara Museum, and the Culture and Free Thought Association.
Owners: landowners (mostly families living in Al Nuseirat), farmers, and refugees.	Own or use the land surrounding the property.

*Table 5.1:-Stakeholders and Right-holders*

By identifying and collaborating with these diverse stakeholders, the management and conservation efforts for the nominated property can be more effectively coordinated and supported, ensuring the site's long-term preservation and relevance.

### 5.a.i. Ownership and Inhabitants

The nominated property is an archaeological site encompassing 1.3293 hectares. This site contains no residences and is owned by the State of Palestine. It is managed by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA). Surrounding the site is a buffer zone of 7.322646 hectares, primarily owned by private individuals. The private properties within this buffer zone are utilized for various purposes, including agriculture, high-density residential areas, and a few tourism-related activities.



By having no residential structures within the archaeological site itself, the focus remains on the preservation and study of the site's historical and cultural significance. The buffer zone, while mostly privately owned, plays a crucial role in protecting the integrity of the site by regulating land use and maintaining a supportive environment for conservation efforts. The diverse usage of the buffer zone highlights the need for balanced management that accommodates agricultural practices, residential living, and tourism while ensuring the site's protection.

### 5.a.ii. Indigenous Peoples

Not applicable.

### 5.a.iii. Participation

The preparation of the recent Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) for Saint Hilarion/Tell Umm Amer involved extensive consultation and participation from a range of stakeholders. The local community, particularly the residents of the western part of Al Nuseirat, played a crucial role, bringing their traditional knowledge and ties to the site. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), as the site owner, collaborated closely with Al Nuseirat Municipality, which provided the necessary infrastructure and managed the adjacent land.

Additionally, the Ministry of Local Government oversaw zoning and planning, while Première Urgence Internationale (PUI) facilitated significant conservation efforts funded by the British Council Cultural Protection Fund. The French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem contributed their expertise from years of archaeological work in the region.

Educational institutions such as the Islamic University of Gaza and the University of Palestine were involved through educational and training programs, benefiting students and staff. Community-heritage-based grassroots organizations, including NAWA Association, the Al-Qarara Museum, and the Culture and Free Thought Association, were active in promoting cultural heritage awareness.

This inclusive approach ensured that the CMP reflected the collective vision and needs of all involved, facilitating a sustainable management plan. The feedback and outcomes from this participatory process were integral in elaborating the Nomination Dossier for the site, demonstrating the shared commitment to preserving Saint Hilarion/Tell Umm Amer's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and strengthening the case for its inscription on the World Heritage List. Despite the challenges posed by the Israeli occupation and the displacement of people living around and within the site, there have been no noted instances of vandalism affecting its attributes, authenticity, or integrity.

## 5.b. Protective Designation

After the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) assumed its responsibilities over cultural heritage in 1994, a presidential decree was issued to reinstate all laws and regulations that were in effect prior to the Israeli Occupation of Palestine in June 1967. The Gaza Strip and West Bank were respectively subject to the 1929 British Mandate Law of Antiquities and the 1966 Jordanian Law of Antiquities. Saint Hilarion Monastery and its environs were therefore managed and protected in accordance with these rules until 2018, when the Decree Law of Tangible Cultural Heritage was enacted. The following sections present the laws and regulations related to the protection of the nominated property, ensuring comprehensive professional protection and management of the nominated property and the buffer zone.

### 5.b.1. The Decree-Law of Tangible Cultural Heritage (no. 11, 2018) <sup>1</sup>

As part of the State of Palestine, Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer is fully protected by the Decree Law of Tangible Cultural Heritage (no. 11, 2018), and managed by MoTA. It provides the tangible cultural heritage of Palestine with the necessary legal protection in line with established standards and provisions of international conventions, which have been ratified by Palestine. The law unifies the Palestinian legal framework for the protection of Palestine’s tangible cultural heritage and strengthens its management, conservation, and promotion. It explicitly repeals the 1966 Jordanian Law of Antiquities and the 1929 British Law of Antiquities as well as all other provisions that contradict these provisions (art. 78). One of the significant improvements over the previous laws is the change from older terms like “antiquities” and “historical buildings” to “cultural heritage” which broadens the scope of application. The law addresses virtually all aspects of tangible cultural heritage: movable and immovable; on the ground, under the ground, and under water; cultural landscapes; museum holdings; and the protection, conservation, and management of cultural heritage as well what constitutes violations of accepted international standards. This law also specifies legal protection and conservation measures during an armed conflict according to international conventions, guidelines, and standards. Moreover, it defines tangible cultural heritage sites as public properties unless private parties can demonstrate legal ownership (art. 5 para. 1). New structures, remodelling existing buildings, and changes to site infrastructures are permitted only after Heritage and Environmental Impact Assessments (HIA& EIA) have been performed and approved by MoTA (art. 23 para. 2).

The law gives MoTA a clear mandate to prepare nomination files for World Heritage Properties as well as to manage, conserve, and develop these properties. It also clearly defines the roles of all stakeholders and those with legal rights in the conservation and management of cultural heritage properties. This is a far-reaching law that gives MoTA a broad mandate: to interpret the law;

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<sup>1</sup> The Decree Law of Tangible Cultural Heritage (no. 11, 2018) is located at: [rb.gy/y7casx](http://rb.gy/y7casx)

identify archaeological materials; delineate the boundaries of archaeological sites; render final decisions on disputed cultural heritage matters; list archaeological and cultural heritage artefacts, monuments, buildings, and sites; and supervise and implement appropriate conservation interventions.

### **5.b.2. Building and Planning Law (no. 28, 1936) and its Modified Building Bylaws in Gaza Strip 2020 <sup>2</sup>**

This law and its bylaws empowers MoTA to investigate any building prior to construction and during any building excavations, and to stop the construction in the event of an archaeological discovery. The construction may be postponed until an archaeological excavation is conducted and conservation and management procedures are taken and approved. According to this law, the Ministry of Local Government is mandated to prepare spatial urban plans for Palestinian localities, which are to be endorsed by a higher planning council. The Minister of Local Government chairs this council which is composed of representatives from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Agriculture, the Environment Quality Authority, and other ministries as the situation requires.

This law, implemented by Al Nuseirat Municipality, provides additional protection to the nominated property which is classified as a protected archaeological area per its spatial urban plan.

### **5.c. Means of Implementing Protective Measures**

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) bears primary legal responsibility for managing, conserving, protecting, and revitalizing all cultural heritage properties in Palestine. This includes licensing and supervising tourist entities, whether national or international. MoTA is also responsible for promoting Palestine as a domestic and international tourist destination.

Many archaeological sites in Gaza lack adequate protection and are vulnerable to encroachments by various parties, including private landowners, the municipality, and governmental institutions. Saint Hilarion Monastery holds significant value, prompting stakeholders to take interest in protecting the site through the following legislative framework:

- MoTA possesses the authority to issue governmental decisions aimed at safeguarding the site. The Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) and the Central Physical Planning Committee are supportive bodies involved in land-use decisions around the site. The MoLG and the Central Committee have prioritized the site for preservation, with the Central

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<sup>2</sup> Building and Planning Law (no. 28, 1936) is located at: <https://11nk.dev/Rc20W>

Committee establishing policy guidelines for protecting cultural heritage properties throughout the Gaza Strip.

- The Nuseirat Municipality sees itself as a representative of the local community, particularly the residents who own land parcels surrounding the site. The municipality is resistant to altering the width of surrounding streets and building regulations in the site's buffer zone. However, it is keen to collaborate and share responsibility for the site, viewing it as a catalyst for local area development.

According to the Decree Law of Tangible Cultural Heritage (no. 11, 2018), Saint Hilarion Monastery is a national archaeological park that is managed by MoTA. Professional architects, conservators, and archaeologists—who are employed by the Directorate of Conservation and Sites and the Directorate of World Heritage—must approve all interventions and plans for conservation and development before implementation.

All building permits around the site and in the buffer zone and across the Nuseirat Municipality must be approved by the MoTA. Before issuing a permit, MoTA has the power to reject and/or alter any construction projects. Additionally, MoTA has the authority to forbid any illegal activities, such as vandalism, illegal digging, etc., at the property and/or in Gaza Strip in coordination with the Tourism and Antiquity Police.

#### **5.d. Existing Plans Related to the Municipality and Region in which the Proposed Property is Located**

The Nuseirat Municipality has approved a comprehensive master plan developed by the City Planning Central Committee of Gaza in 2018 for the block encompassing the archaeological site. This plan focuses on protecting the site itself, ensuring unobstructed views of its surroundings, and establishing a necessary buffer zone. While the land immediately surrounding the site is designated for residential use, adjacent blocks are zoned for agricultural purposes. The master plan also includes regulations for the streets surrounding the site.

However, there remains a critical need to safeguard the archaeological fabric, which extends to the north, east, and south, overlapping into adjacent parcels and streets. As per the 2018 master plan, these areas are currently considered to be illegally encroaching on privately owned land and obstructing three designated streets.

The existing master plan lacks specific building regulations and restrictions necessary to create an adequate buffer zone. This oversight has had a detrimental impact on the archaeological site. Addressing the shortcomings of the current zoning plan and making necessary adjustments are crucial steps to mitigate adverse effects on the site's conservation.

## 5.e. Property Management Plan and Other Management System

The nominated property is managed by MoTA in accordance with the Tangible Cultural Heritage Law (No. 11, 2018). A conservation and management plan (CMP) for the property was prepared and endorsed in 2024. It is supported by the French Agency for Development (AFD). The CMP's overall goal is to ensure long-term sustainable management and conservation for the nominated property and is anticipated to be implemented after stopping the ongoing war.

The Conservation and Management Plan<sup>3</sup> aims to uphold, enhance, and sustainably develop our cultural heritage at this unique and significant site. Rehabilitating and preserving the site, as well as promoting its enhancement, require meticulous planning and efficient management, necessitating collaboration among various stakeholders, including civil society and local community representatives.

The primary objective of this plan is to maintain and enhance the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the site by enriching its cultural assets. The plan will outline the extent and diversity of key features, characteristics, and attributes of the site to identify and address existing challenges comprehensively. It will provide a structured framework and specific management tools designed to protect and conserve the site.

This Conservation and Management Plan is designed to safeguard the site, oversee current activities, and provide a strategic vision for its future development, use, and visitation. A multidisciplinary technical team, comprising national and international experts in world heritage, cultural heritage, archaeology, architecture, heritage management, urban planning, and ethno-sociology, collaboratively developed this plan. An inclusive approach was employed to ensure the involvement of all relevant stakeholders and actors throughout its preparation and development phases. The primary objectives include:

1. Developing a Conservation and Management Plan in accordance with UNESCO Management guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites and international Charters and Conventions.
2. Creating a detailed work plan, methodology, and structure for the Conservation and Management Plan, considering potential risks and mitigation strategies.
3. Collecting and analyzing data, conducting surveys to assess the site's cultural significance, physical attributes, integrity, and authenticity.
4. Documenting the property, including its description and history, and defining its boundaries and territorial framework. This involves drafting thematic and analytical maps and preparing a State of Conservation report for the site.
5. Providing a clear description of the site's potential Outstanding Universal Value and related attributes.
6. Identifying and addressing challenges facing the site, such as development projects, urban pressures, climate conditions, conflicts, and management issues. This includes

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<sup>3</sup> See annex 1: The Conservation and Management Plan



preparing a risk assessment report covering environmental and social risks and proposing mitigation measures.

7. Analyzing the existing institutional and legal framework affecting the site.
8. Offering operational recommendations for construction activities that protect the site's cultural heritage significance.
9. Establishing a management system, structure, and comprehensive framework tailored to specific management needs.
10. Developing strategies for monitoring and maintenance.
11. Facilitating the formation of a steering committee and technical committee for the Conservation and Management Plan.
12. Conducting workshops, meetings, and consultations with stakeholders, working teams, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), and other relevant entities.

This plan is designed to ensure the sustainable preservation and management of the site, emphasizing its cultural significance while fostering responsible development and stakeholder engagement.

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) oversees all operations within the property and its buffer zone. The MoTA organizational structure clearly delineates horizontal and vertical lines of authority and responsibility among the various directorates and departments involved in the management system. All conservation, development, excavation, and other interventions at archaeological sites and their surroundings are centrally planned, approved, and implemented. This system applies to both the nominated property and its buffer zone.

To enhance the management and conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List, as well as those on the Tentative List, MoTA has established a new General Directorate for World Heritage. This directorate's mandate is to conserve, manage, valorize, and ensure the long-term conservation, monitoring, and protection of the Outstanding Universal Values (OUVs) and attributes of the inscribed World Heritage Properties. It monitors and oversees the current management system to ensure it meets the requirements of MoTA and the obligations of international conventions, particularly the 1972 World Heritage Convention.

**The World Heritage General Directorate has the following responsibilities.**

1. Supervise the preparation of nomination files for heritage sites on the Tentative List to be inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Promote and interpret the World Heritage Sites at national and international levels.
2. Supervise the preparation and implementation of management and conservation plans for inscribed and nominated sites in cooperation with stakeholders which will ensure long-term conservation of their OUVs and attributes.
3. Conduct or supervise all studies and required periodic technical reports and studies that will be submitted to the World Heritage Committee.

4. Conduct or supervise all activities, interventions, and procedures needed to achieve the DSOCR and Corrective Measures to remove the inscribed properties from the List of World Heritage in Danger.
5. Oversee and monitor all activities and projects planned for or implemented in the WHPs to ensure compliance with the conservation and protection of their OUVs and attributes, and to avoid all activities that might have significant adverse effects on the OUV.
6. Promote the presentation and interpretation of the World Heritage Properties at national and international levels by engaging local communities.
7. Enhance outreach strategies and programs for raising public awareness of the OUVs of the WHPs and their other values.
8. Develop appropriate mechanisms to seek funds to implement the MCP's action plans.
9. Oversee, monitor, and report significant changes of Palestinian sites on the Tentative List.

#### 5.f. Sources and Levels of Finance

The costs of maintenance, repair, presentation, and promotion are covered by the regular annual budget of MoTA. However, the conservation and management of the property primarily rely on donations and projects funded by other states, institutions within those states, and international organizations. The main donors for the conservation and development of the property include Première Urgence Internationale (PUI), the French Agency for Development (AFD), the British Council Cultural Protection Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem, INTIQAL 2030, and the ALIPH Foundation.

#### 5.g. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

Most of the property's staff hold first academic degrees in archaeology, history, administration, or architecture from Palestinian universities. The staff have additional training in complementary fields, such as conservation, documentation, ethical tourism, and museum management.

#### 5.h. Visitor Facilities and Infrastructure

Increased visitation to the site in Gaza not only strengthens connections with its rich history, culture, and Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) but also promotes mutual understanding among people of different ages and cultural backgrounds. Understanding these visitor trends is crucial for achieving this important goal.

The site was already a notable educational and tourist destination in Gaza even before being listed on the Tentative List. As a result, there was no sudden increase in visitors, including schoolchildren and university students, following the restoration and interpretation efforts by PUI, unlike some other archaeological sites on the tentative World Heritage list. However, there has been a steady growth in visitor numbers, reflecting growing interest among educational institutions in Gaza in archaeology and the region's civilizations. Recent restoration and preservation activities temporarily affected visitor numbers. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic severely restricted movement within Gaza, leading to a significant decline in visitors. The tightened siege and bombardments in 2023-24 further exacerbated the situation.

The Saint Hilarion Monastery stands out as one of Gaza's most unique architectural sites, embodying a significant aspect of identity and culture. It remains the sole archaeological site in Gaza accessible to the public and international visitors. During 2018-19, the Tell Umm Amer Site welcomed nearly 13,000 visitors. The site was temporarily closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, receiving approximately 2,700 visitors in 2021. Awareness and community engagement initiatives led by INTIQAL notably boosted visitor numbers, with over 3,000 individuals of various ages visiting the site in 2022, emphasizing youth and children. Group visits during school and university semesters are popular, and local community participation, including youth summer camps and activities, significantly contributes to visitor numbers. Annually, the site also hosts around 600 foreign visitors.

Predicting future visitor numbers at the Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer presents challenges, influenced by factors like popularity, accessibility, marketing efforts, and broader social, economic, and political conditions. Local and international events, such as PUI-organized musical events like "Kamanjati-Jerusalem," have positively impacted visitor numbers. This event marked the site's inaugural cultural gathering, demonstrating the potential for festivals, conferences, or exhibitions related to its rich history and archaeology to attract a diverse audience.

Physical structures surrounding the site play a crucial role in enhancing visitor experiences and supporting site interpretation. Below are the physical structures found in the vicinity of the site:

**Visitor Building:** This serves as an entry point to the site, providing information, orientation, and facilities for visitors. It includes a film screening room, a mosaic and pottery restoration room, a room to classify artefacts found at the Site, and a room for training graduates and staff.

**Interpretive Trails:** Pathways that wind through the surrounding landscape guide visitors to significant areas within the Site. These trails feature interpretive signage, markers, and audio guides that provide information about specific points of interest along the way. The current pathways are modest and these trails and interpretive signage need to be developed.

**Temporary and Permeant Protective Structures:** The site is vulnerable to environmental factors, and protective structures have been erected to protect mosaic pavements. Some structures were built to be temporary and should be removed and replaced by permanent structures. A new permanent protective shelter was erected to protect the path complex. These structures and shelters shield sensitive areas from direct sunlight, rain, wind, and erosion, helping to preserve fragile remains.

**Parking and Access Infrastructure:** The Site has no adequate parking area. There are earthen-collector roads surrounding the Site with limited traffic. These roads are essential for accommodating visitor vehicles and ensuring smooth traffic flow. Parking and access roads should be replanned to minimize visual impact on the surrounding environment while providing safe and convenient access to the Site.

## 5.i. Policies and Programmes related to the Presentation and Promotion of the Property

The tourism industry plays a crucial role in the Palestinian economy, contributing approximately 12% to the national GDP. However, this sector is highly vulnerable to both local and international political events, such as conflicts and economic downturns, as well as natural disasters like floods and earthquakes. In Gaza, the tourism industry faces additional challenges due to the prolonged siege lasting more than 15 years, severely restricting movement and economic activities. For instance, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to a significant decline in tourism across Palestine, including Gaza. Despite these setbacks, Palestine has historically rebounded swiftly, often emerging stronger with renewed promotion strategies and plans that align with current international standards.

Over the past decade, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) has diligently adopted international standards and strategies aimed at developing the Palestinian tourism sector while conserving and promoting cultural heritage sites. These strategies have focused on several key areas: enhancing institutional capacities, improving tourism infrastructure and marketing efforts, reviewing and updating management policies, and bolstering human resources within the tourism sector.

The Ministry has prioritized tourism as a key pillar to strengthen the Palestinian economy based on the following three strategic objectives:

- **Provide high-quality tourism products through:**
  - Developing tourist sites to receive more visitors and to prolong the length of their stay.
  - Facilitating positive competition, ensuring high quality, and enhancing capacity.
  - Creating new tourism packages and enhancing existing ones.

- **Market and promote Palestine as an independent, safe, and distinctive tourist destination through the following:**
  - o Increasing the share of Palestine in the international tourism market by developing existing markets and targeting new ones.
  - o Creating an environment for tourism investment.
  - o Using information technology for reservations, sales, and marketing.
  - o Establishing the Palestine Tourism Consultative Board.
  - o
- **Protect, maintain, and effectively manage cultural heritage sites through:**
  - o Creating an effective protection system for cultural heritage sites.
  - o Conservation and managing cultural heritage sites.
  - o Developing and promoting the cultural heritage sector.

## 5.J. Staffing Levels and Expertise (Professional, Technical, and Maintenance)

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) centrally plans, approves, and implements conservation, development, excavation, protection, and other interventions at the nominated property and its surroundings. The site is overseen by a dedicated team of permanent staff responsible for managing tourism and addressing property management issues. Additionally, PUI, a French NGO with extensive experience in site protection and preservation, provides crucial support through its involvement in ongoing conservation efforts. Together, these teams ensure comprehensive oversight and expertise in maintaining and safeguarding the site's cultural and historical significance.





## Chapter Six: Monitoring

## Chapter Six: Monitoring

### 6.a Key Indicators for Measuring State of Conservation

According to Chapter 4.b, a range of human and natural factors exert both positive and negative influences on the conservation of the property. These factors have been systematically identified within the Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) to establish a strategic framework aimed at enhancing the monitoring and management of the nominated property. Chapter 7 of the CMP (Annex One) highlights the critical factors impacting the site's conservation and delineates key indicators that will be monitored to evaluate its condition and ensure effective maintenance.

### 6.b. Administrative Arrangements for Monitoring Property

The following are the names and contact information of the agencies that are responsible for monitoring the site as referenced in 6.a.

#### 1. Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA)

P.O. Box 534

Bethlehem, Palestine

Tel: + 972 (0)2 274 1581/2/3

Fax: + 972 (0)2 274 3753

Email: [arjoob@travelpalestine.ps](mailto:arjoob@travelpalestine.ps) ; [rjooba2@gmail.com](mailto:rjooba2@gmail.com) ; [marwa.adwan@yahoo.com](mailto:marwa.adwan@yahoo.com);

<http://www.travelpalestine.ps/>

#### 2. Nuseirat Municipality

Nuseirat - Main Street, Gaza, Palestine

Mobile: +970592370900

Email: [pal.nuseirat@gmail.com](mailto:pal.nuseirat@gmail.com)

#### 3. Première Urgence Internationale (PUI)

French NGO

2, rue Auguste Thomas

92600 Asnières-sur-Seine France

Email: [scientific.co@intiqal.org](mailto:scientific.co@intiqal.org)

Website: <https://www.premiere-urgence.org/en/who-are-we/our-history/>

### 6.c. Results of Previous Reporting Exercises

Section 2, Chapter 3 of the Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) provides a comprehensive overview of previous monitoring, conservation interventions, and programs, along with an assessment of the site's condition. This section offers detailed findings and conclusions derived from systematic reporting exercises that evaluated essential aspects for the conservation and management of the property. These assessments include evaluations of the site's physical

condition, structural integrity, cultural significance, environmental impact, and other relevant factors. The insights gathered from these exercises are crucial in shaping ongoing strategies and initiatives aimed at preserving the site's values and attributes while effectively addressing emerging challenges and opportunities.



## Chapter Seven Documentation

## Chapter Seven: Documentation

### 7.a. Photographs and Audio-visual Image Inventory and Authorization Form

The dossier contains photographs of Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer, provided by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities for the CMP preparation. UNESCO is granted permission to reproduce and upload these photos free of charge for the purpose of this nomination. Any reproduction must include appropriate acknowledgement.

### 7. b Texts Relating to Protective Designation, Copies of Property Management Plans, or Documented Management Systems and Extracts of Other Plans Relevant to the Property

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer is fully protected under the Decree Law of Tangible Cultural Heritage (no. 11, 2018) and is managed by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA). A comprehensive management and conservation plan for the property has been developed and it is enforced in 2024, contingent upon a permanent ceasefire and the restoration of normalcy in the Gaza Strip. Detailed legislation pertaining to the protection of the proposed World Heritage Property, planning tools, and other relevant laws and regulations can be accessed on the website and are listed in Chapter 5 of the documentation.

### 7. c Form and Date of the Most Recent Records or Inventory of the Property

The records of all unearthed objects, excavation field reports, and photos were stored in the archive of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in Gaza, which has been tragically destroyed during the current conflict. The majority of the artifacts discovered have been relocated to the storage facilities of École Biblique ET Archéologique Française (EBAF) for thorough study and documentation. It is planned that these artifacts will eventually be displayed in a future museum at the site.

### 7. d Address of where inventory, records, and archives are kept.

Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) in Gaza, which has been tragically destroyed during the current conflict.



## 7.e Bibliography

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# **Chapter Eight**

## **Contact Information of Responsible Authorities**

## Chapter Eight: Contact Information of Responsible Authorities

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## Chapter Nine

# Signature on Behalf of the State Party



Chapter Nine: Signature on Behalf of the State Party

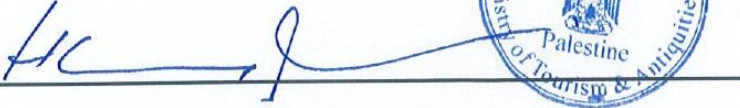

**SIGNATURE ON BEHALF OF THE STATE PARTY**

**For the Nomination File of**

**Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer**

**Hani Al-Hayek**

**Minister of Tourism and Antiquities**

**State of Palestine**

SIGNATURE ON BEHALF OF THE STATE PARTY

For the Nomination File of

Saint Hilarion Monastery/ Tell Umm Amer



State of Palestine



# Annex Two

# ICOMOS Press Release on the Situation in Gaza and Israel

- Created: 21 December 2023

 [Print](#)

Following ICOMOS' [appeal on 17 October](#), and in the face of the increasingly distressing developments over the last months, ICOMOS again expresses its sadness and horror at the unacceptable and unconscionable price being paid by civilians, in particular children, and at the destruction of cultural, archaeological and living heritage, since the present round of this conflict began over two months ago.

Cultural heritage not only plays a central role in the history of this ongoing conflict but also serves as a source of social cohesion and humanitarian values, and gives people a sense of place, belonging and identity. The heritage of Gaza, with its over 3000-year history as a strategic crossroads of civilisations, whose traces – religious buildings, historic buildings, museums, archaeological sites, traditional neighbourhoods – can be found throughout the Strip but especially in and around the densely urbanised Gaza City in the northern part, has suffered irreversible damages – and every further day of fighting puts it at greater risk. Among others, reports are available on the destruction of the 7th century Great Omari Mosque and airstrikes within the compound of the 5th century Church of St. Porphyrius. Furthermore, mass population displacement and destruction of homes and neighbourhoods will have an incalculable impact on the living culture and intangible heritage of the Palestinians.




ICOMOS again calls on all parties to do all in their power to protect cultural heritage and to respect to the letter and the spirit their obligations under international law, both treaty and customary – and in particular the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two protocols, the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. ICOMOS reminds and stresses that the intentional targeting of cultural and religious sites (that are not legitimate military objectives and have no imperative military necessity), as other civilian objects, is prohibited specifically, under any circumstances, in international humanitarian law and is considered a war crime.

ICOMOS is in constant contact with its colleagues in both Israel and Palestine. Our International Scientific Committee on Risk Preparedness (ICORP) and its Crisis Monitoring and Response Working Group are tracking developments, gathering information on impacts to cultural heritage and preparing strategic response and recovery activities.

ICOMOS welcomes the UN General Assembly [resolution A/ES-10/L.27](#) adopted on 12 December 2023, demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as ensuring humanitarian access to Gaza. ICOMOS urges all parties involved to work toward a sustainable cessation of hostilities.

ICOMOS offers its scientific and technical assistance and cooperation to all those working to protect the heritage in the region and towards paths which embrace dialogue, mutual respect and dignity for the people and their shared cultural heritage – as an indispensable element to rebuilding peace. As always, our thoughts remain foremost with our colleagues in both ICOMOS Israel and ICOMOS Palestine, and their families.

 [Read the full press release in English / Spanish](#)

# Annex Three

## UNESCO's action in the Gaza Strip / Palestine

[News](#) >

### **Gaza: UNESCO grants enhanced provisional protection to Saint Hilarion monastery**

The Saint Hilarion monastery complex has been provisionally inscribed on the International List of Cultural Property under Enhanced Protection



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**18 December 2023** - Last update:30 January 2024

Paris, 18 December 2023 – The UNESCO intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954 Hague Convention) has decided on 14 December to grant “provisional enhanced protection” to Saint Hilarion monastery complex, located south bank of Wadi Gaza.

The ruins of Saint Hilarion are one of the oldest monasteries in the Middle East and bear a unique exceptional testimony to the emergence of Christianity in the region. The site is currently guarded under the direct supervision of the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

To prevent any threat to this site, the UNESCO Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, meeting on 14 December, has decided to grant “provisional enhanced protection” - the highest level of immunity established by the 1954 Hague Convention and its Second Protocol.

## UNESCO calls for the protection of cultural heritage

UNESCO is deeply concerned about the impact of the ongoing fighting on cultural heritage. In the Gaza Strip, UNESCO was already concerned about the state of conservation of sites, before October 7, due to the lack of adequate policies to protect heritage and culture.

While priority is rightly given to the humanitarian situation, the protection of cultural heritage in all its forms must also be taken into account. In accordance with its mandate, UNESCO calls on all parties involved to strictly respect international law. Cultural property should not be targeted or used for military purposes, as it is considered to be civilian infrastructure.

The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), ratified by Palestine and Israel, stipulates in particular that States undertake “to respect cultural property situated within their own territory as well as within the territory of other High Contracting Parties by refraining from any use of the property and its immediate surroundings or of the appliances in use for its protection for purposes which are likely to expose it to destruction or damage in the event of armed conflict; and by refraining from any act of hostility, directed against such property”.

Also as part of its mandate, UNESCO has been monitoring remotely the impact of the conflict on cultural heritage in the Gaza Strip and in the region, relying on satellite data and information transmitted by UNITAR/UNOSAT. This information remains to be verified and complemented through a more thorough assessment on the ground.

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