

# Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery State of Conservation Report

National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia

January 2013

This Report on the State of Conservation of the *Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery (Georgia)* has been prepared by the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia for the World Heritage Centre so that the World Heritage Committee may examine the state of conservation of the property at its 37<sup>th</sup> session in Phnom Penh in 2013.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

State Party	Name of the Property	Date of Inscription	Criteria	Organization responsible for the preparation of the report	Date of Report
Georgia	Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery	1994	C (iv)	Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sport of Georgia, Georgian World Heritage Committee	2013

## 2. SIGNATURE ON BEHALF OF STATE PARTY

Nikoloz Vacheishvili  
Director General  
National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation

## 3. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### 3.1 AS PROVIDED BY STATE PARTY IN THE NOMINATION DOSSIER

#### 3.1.1 Gelati Monastery

“Gelati ensemble is a well preserved historical ensemble. It is of special importance for its architecture, mosaics, wall paintings, enamel and metal work. Gelati was not only a monastery, but a scientific and educational centre as well. The academy established in the Monastery was one of the most important cultural centres of ancient Georgia. By virtue of its high architectural quality and the outstanding examples of artwork that it houses, Gelati Monastery is a unique treasure of Georgian culture, and a rare example of the world culture”.

#### 3.1.2 Bagrati Cathedral

“The outer appearance of the building is monumental and grand, varied and dynamic. Ornamental decoration contributes to the picturesqueness of the cathedral. The building amazes and fascinates the viewer by perfect proportions, free and perfect execution of the mouldings, ornaments, arches, light constructions. Bagrati cathedral ornamentation makes it possible to trace the evolution undergone by Georgian architectural ornament in less than half a century; this ornamentation is an excellent sample of the world architectural plastics. High artistic value of Bagrati cathedral goes far beyond the local significance. It is one of the best monuments of the medieval Christian architecture”.

## 3.2 AS PROVIDED IN ICOMOS EVALUATION

“The two monuments presented in this report belong to the period of flowering of middle age Georgian feudal monarchy. Due to the strategic location on the crossroad of Eastern and Western worlds, the country created its own stylistic idiom. Both of the monuments represent the brightest outbreaks of this idiom in the context of the royal capital of Georgian kingdom.

[...] Detailed maps showing the areas proposed for inscription and the buffer zones, which had been omitted from the nomination dossier, were supplied to the mission. [...]

*Recommendation:* That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion iv:

*Criterion iv:* Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery represent the highest flowering of the architecture of medieval Georgia”.

## 4. STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY/INTEGRITY

### 4.1 EVALUATION OF THE AUTHENTICITY AT THE TIME OF INSCRIPTION

“Bagrati Cathedral nowadays is a ruin and may be considered *ipso facto* completely authentic. Gelati Monastery has been in continuous use since its construction, so it inevitably contains certain elements introduced before the modern philosophy of conservation was formulated. Nevertheless, its authenticity and integrity is generally preserved”.

### 4.2 PRESENT EVALUATION OF THE AUTHENTICITY/INTEGRITY

#### 4.2.1 Bagrati Cathedral

In 2011, the State Party requested the possibility to undertake urgent consolidation works in parts of Bagrati Cathedral, which was agreed with the World Heritage Centre. Furthermore, on 9 November 2011, in a meeting with representatives of the State Party, UNESCO, ICOMOS and ICCROM, a process for resolving the rehabilitation problem was agreed. The first draft of the Rehabilitation Strategy submitted by the State Party in January 2012 set out an approach for the project. This was reviewed by ICOMOS and subsequently a revised version was submitted on 15 May 2012. Nevertheless, in the meantime the works on the site had continued, and when the joint UNESCO/ICOMOS mission visited Bagrati Cathedral, they considered this was not consistent with the agreed policies.

The State Party on its hand provided argumentation for implemented works, arguing that the site has been rehabilitated according to international requirements and standards and that it had fully retained its authenticity. The discussion over the methodologies of rehabilitation has been ongoing at national and international levels.

#### 4.2.2 Gelati Monastery

The authenticity of the Monastery is fully preserved. The Gelati Monastery Rehabilitation Project – commonly known as Conservation Master Plan elaborated in 2008 enabled to implement crucial works in 2008-2012 such as the restoration of the Gelati Academy building and the Porches, St. Nikoloz Church, Bell tower, carry out consistent archaeological excavations, improve infrastructure. The project provides full set of documentation

and research material to plan long term restoration of the interior and exterior of the churches of the ensemble and to develop adequate infrastructure for visitors, taking into account the demands that the restored monastic life, increased number of clergy and the congregation poses to the utilization of the ensemble. The Gelati Monastery Complex Rehabilitation Project has been the basis for the preservation of the authenticity of the monument, restoration and rehabilitation of all its components and the same time its presentation to visitors and its utilization by the clergy.

The Gelati Monastery Rehabilitation Project, and all following projects based on it were duly provided to the WHC for evaluation in 2009-2012.

## 5. MANAGEMENT

### 5.1 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The protection of Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery is provided by the Law of Georgia “On Cultural Heritage” and other laws related to heritage listed in the Table 1 below. According to the Georgian Tax Legislation, the reconstruction, rehabilitation and conservation works, as well as archeological excavations on national monuments and WHS are not liable for VAT.

According to the Concordat concluded by the State and the Georgian Orthodox Church, all the buildings for public worship within the State, including Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery are transferred in the ownership of the Church.

**Table 1:** Georgia's national laws related to/having a major impact on cultural heritage protection. Source: the Parliament of Georgia online database.

Field of Regulation	Title of the Law
Movable Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Law on the Import and Export of Cultural Goods, 2001 (last amendment 2007)</li> <li>The Law on Museums, 2001 (last amendment 2007)</li> <li>The Law on Culture, 1997 (last amendment 2007)</li> </ul>
Relationship of the State and the Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Concordat – Constitutional Agreement between the State and the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia, 2002</li> </ul>
Penalties for violation of cultural heritage legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Administrative Infringement Code, 1994 (amendment related to cultural heritage, 2007)</li> <li>The Criminal Code, 1999 (amendment related to cultural heritage, 2007)</li> </ul>
Financial policy for cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Tax Code, 2004 (amendment related to cultural heritage, 2007)</li> <li>The Law on Local Tariffs, 1998 (amendment related to cultural heritage, 2007)</li> <li>The Law on State Excise Duty, 1998 (amendment related to cultural heritage, 2007)</li> <li>The Law on the Budgetary System, 2004</li> <li>The Law on the State Budget of Georgia, 2005</li> </ul>
Privatization and land management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Law on Privatization of Agricultural Land Existing in State Ownership, 2005</li> <li>The Law on State Property Privatization, 1997</li> <li>The Law on Recognition of Title to the Land Plots Possessed (Used) by Individuals and Public Entities under the Public Law, 2007 (last amendment 2008)</li> <li>The Law on Ownership of Agricultural Land, 1996</li> </ul>
Licensing and permissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Law on Licenses and Permits, 2005 (amendment related to cultural heritage, 2007)</li> </ul>
Competences of self-government bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Organic Law on Self Government, 2005</li> <li>The Law on Privatization and Transfer with the Right of Use of State Property and Local Self-Government Unit Property, 2007</li> </ul>

## 5.2 MANAGEMENT PLAN

No management plan has been established for the property. The so called Conservation Master Plan provides guidance for the rehabilitation actions within the property boundaries since 2008.

## 5.3 NATIONAL INSTITUTION

Since 2008 the National Agency for cultural Heritage Preservation has been established as an entity of public law under the umbrella of the Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sport (today the Ministry of Culture and Monuments Protection). The Agency is responsible for management and monitoring of national monuments and World Heritage Sites in the country and for granting permits for conservation and rehabilitation project for these monuments. The Agency is also responsible for inventory and promotion of cultural heritage objects, research, consulting and expertise in the field of cultural heritage.

Since 2009 the UNESCO and International Relations Unit has been established in the Agency. The unit oversees the implementation of the recommendations of the WH committee, advises the Directorate of the Agency on the World Heritage issues, ensures preparation of the reports and documents requested by the WHC and provides advice to other units of the Agency on the WH regulations.

### Address of the institution:

National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation  
Director General: Mr. Nikoloz VACHEISHVILI  
N27a Atoneli str, 0105, Tbilisi, Georgia

## 5.4 MANAGEMENT AGENCY

The local management agency is the Kutaisi Historical Architectural Museum Reserve. It was established in 1981. Following the institutional reform in the field of cultural heritage in 2008, the Kutaisi Historical Architectural Museum-Reserve along with other museum-reserves in the country has become a structural division of the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation.

### Address of the institution:

Kutaisi-Gelati Museum-Reserve  
Director: Mr Roland Isakadze  
7, Nazarishvili St., Kutaisi, Georgia

The current level of staffing is as follows:

1. Manager
2. Museum Collections Keeper
3. Site Manager for Geguti fortress
4. Site Manager – for Historical Architectural Museum (in Kutaisi)
5. Monitoring Specialist - archaeologist
6. Monitoring Specialist– art historian
7. Monitoring Specialist - historian
8. Educational Program Specialist
9. Technical Support Specialist
10. Exhibition Supervisor
11. Security Guard of Geguti Fortress
12. Security Guard of Museum (in Kutaisi)

The manager of the museum-reserve and monitoring specialists are responsible to provide the periodical monitoring and reporting on the Gelati monastery as well as other sites within their territory to the relevant unit of the National Agency.

The day to day maintenance and operational activities, such are: basic tourist services, cleaning of the territory, etc. are carried out by the monks.

## **6. NATIONAL INVENTORY**

The Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery are registered as Listed Properties according to the Georgian Legislation. Following the detailed inventory in 2008 the Registration Card and a detailed documentation for the site were developed, which are the mandatory documents for Listed Properties provided by legislation. They contain information on the state of conservation of the monument, location, description, etc. The documents are kept in the archive of the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia.

## **7. FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROPERTY**

Despite significant increase of financing the State funding for implementation of the master plan for Gelati Monastery is still not sufficient. This problem is partially solved for wall painting conservation that is included in the co-operation agreement in scopes of the Imereti Regional Development programme the discussion of which is under way with the World Bank.

Gelati village does not face intensive development pressures. The mining activities that are carried out in the area do not have a visual or other direct physical impact on the site. A stone quarry that is located particularly close impacts the site indirectly by circulation of heavy trucks and resulting noise and pollution. Different solutions are suggested in the master plan to solve this issue, such as re-routing the road to the quarry.

Gelati is located close to the urban-industrial hub, that is the city of Kutaisi, second largest city in Georgia with about 200 000 population. In such a context Gelati is subjected to air pollution that bears particular threat to the interior paintings.

Gelati is one of the most visited site in Georgia. Since the collapse of the Soviet regime, the restored monastic function has also added to the site significant number of visitors from all over Georgia. The religious community, composed of about 20 monks resides on the territory of the site. The master plan provides special solution for this issue, by introducing the different zones for visitors and monks, providing clear signage and pathways for circulation of visitors. In the long term perspective the master plan suggests to move the monks out of the site and provide for them a suitable residence nearby.

The lack of management plan remains one of the factors affecting the property. Despite the progress in improving the state of conservation the responsibilities and management tasks yet need to be clearly articulated among the stakeholders.

Along the man made risks, the negative influence of natural conditions and climate change is one of the main problems. Moreover, as Georgia is located in a seismically active zone, thus planning and assessing rehabilitation measures of the property the need for sufficient structural stability has to be considered.

## **8. MONITORING**

National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia, through its structural unit - Kutaisi Historical Architectural Museum-Reserve, implements the periodic monitoring of the property. The monitoring expert is obligated to present the short monitoring report to the National Agency Central Office monthly. The report consists of textual and photo documentation.

The interdisciplinary group from the Agency's central office implements the monitoring of the property once per 3 months, to evaluate the different issues of the state of conservation.

On the basis of the short periodical reports the annual report on the state of conservation of the property is elaborated by the UNESCO and International Relations Unit at the Agency.

On the basis of periodic reports the short and long term strategies are planned to maintain and improve the state of conservation of the property.

In line, the special council established at the National Agency implements the periodic monitoring of the ongoing works of the Property. The periodicity of this monitoring depends on the specification and duration of the particular project.

### **8.1 BAGRATI CATHEDRAL**

#### **The works implemented in 2011-2012**

In 2011-2012 in accordance with the resolution 35COM 7A.29 the State Party commissioned the preparation of the Rehabilitation Strategy for Bagrati Cathedral to Dr. Jukka Jokilehto. The first draft of the Rehabilitation Strategy submitted by the State Party in January 2012 set out an approach for the project. This was reviewed by ICOMOS and subsequently a revised version was submitted on 15 May 2012.

In parallel, the works continued on the rehabilitation project for the cathedral. Since 2010 Dr. Andrea Bruno has been in charge to develop the project in accordance with the international standards.

On 9 November 2011, the project was presented at the working meeting at the WHC with representatives of the State Party, UNESCO, ICOMOS and ICCROM, where a process for resolving the problem was agreed. The final project proposal was submitted to the WHC in June 2012.

In the meantime the State Party requested the possibility to undertake urgent consolidation works in parts of Bagrati Cathedral, which was agreed with the World Heritage Centre. The works on the site had continued to the full rehabilitation of the building that was completed in September 2012.

### **8.2 GELATI MONASTERY**

Complete scope of design works and researches implemented from 2008 onwards (maps/layouts, project and research activities carried out) are attached to/listed in the earlier reports that have already been submitted to the World Heritage Centre, so they are omitted herein.

The state of conservation of the components was significantly improved in recent years. Most of the buildings, such as the academy, both the South and East gates, the bell tower, the St. Nikoloz church and the bishop Gabriel palace were conserved and restored. The structural issues related to these buildings were successfully solved. The works included: dismantling and re-assembling the loosened stones, fixing and plastering with lime, cleaning the stones, infilling the missing stones, replacing with traditional tiles the tin roofs arranged in the 20th century.

Special note has to be given to the re-roofing of the academy with reversible light wooden roofing that after centuries long break brought back public use and function to the building. The building is now used for



different educational purposes, presentations, lectures, etc. The careful excavations were made inside and outside the Academy building have produced very interesting finds, bringing unknown aspects of the medieval period of the monastery life to light. The finds inside the Academy have already been incorporated successfully in the restored building and presented to public. All interventions were carried out by hand without the use of large mechanical equipment due to the problems of access to the enclosure of the Monastery. The tiles for roofing were acquired locally, most of them probably from 19th century. Significant improvement was the removal of a reinforced concrete addition that had been installed on the south-west part of the building. The original appearance was restored with a wooden balcony.

Thanks to the co-operation with the Restoration Faculty at the State Academy of Fine Arts, it was made possible to develop the stone conservation program at the site together with international conservators. With the financial support of the Swiss National Science Foundation and in partnership with the Lugano University the State Academy of Fine Arts implemented the two years project (2010-2011) for assessment of the stone and wall painting conservation issues of Gelati Monastery. The project included the student exchange and on site workshops with the guidance of following international specialists: Mr. Stefano Volta for stone conservation, Mr. Giovanni Cavallo, Geologist and Mr. Alberto Felicci for mural paintings. As a result of this co-operation the following works were undertaken:

- Assessment of condition of mural paintings in the St. Marine chapel of the main church of Gelati
- Stone condition assessment of the St. George church of Gelati and risk mapping
- Conservation of carved stone frame around the entrance door of the St. George church of Gelati.

One of the particular problems of the site was to elaborate proper methodology for the repair of cornices of the churches heavily damaged as a result of inappropriate treatment during Soviet period. In co-operation with Italian stone conservators a special method was developed with lime, crushed stone and straw mixture to infill the weathered surfaces, cracks and gaps and infilling the missing stones with the same kind of stone where large blocks were missing.

The conservation of mural paintings and frescos in the interiors of the churches remains one of the priority issues. The research and conservation has been carried out in different periods started from the Soviet times. Some of the studies, including the research of the moisture content, chemical and biological analysis, etc. were carried out in 2002-2003 in the Church of the Virgin.

As mentioned above the research and mapping works continued in scopes of the co-operation with Lugano university. Apart from these some urgent conservation works were implemented in previous years in different parts of St. George church. Since 2012 a long term conservation programme is being planned in co-operation with the Curtauld Institute of Arts (UK) and the Tbilisi State Academy of Fine Arts. The best international experts are being mobilized to take part in the project along with the students of the restoration faculty of the Tbilisi Arts Academy. The program contains extensive training component and will ensure the necessary skills are in place to prevent and eliminate any problems related to interior paintings in future. In 2012 the agreement was reached with the World Bank to ensure necessary financing of the wall painting conservation and research works at Gelati.

A turning moment in conservation of the site was the development of the Conservation Master Plan in 2008. The intensive research and archaeological works enabled the development of the individual rehabilitation projects for different components of the site. The master plan, elaborated in 2008, provides full set of documentation and research material to plan long term restoration of the interior and exterior of the churches of the ensemble and to develop adequate infrastructure for visitors, taking into account the demands that the restored monastic life, increased number of clergy and the congregation poses to the utilization of the ensemble. The master plan guarantees the preservation of the authenticity of the monument, restoration and

rehabilitation of all its components and the same time its presentation to visitors and its utilization by the clergy.

In accordance with the Master Plan the improvement of infrastructure was carried out in recent years: the paths were repaired, visitor signage, lighting was installed, site drainage system improved. It is planned to build a small scale visitor centre just outside the site in the following year. The project has been agreed with the WHC and is included in the co-operation program presently discussed with the World Bank.

The information on the abovementioned projects as well as the master plan was being regularly submitted to the WHC in 2009-2012.

The master plan remains a guiding document for future conservation works. As a World Heritage Site, Gelati Monastery receives priority consideration within the state programme for cultural heritage.

# PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

## 8.3 PROTECTION ZONES

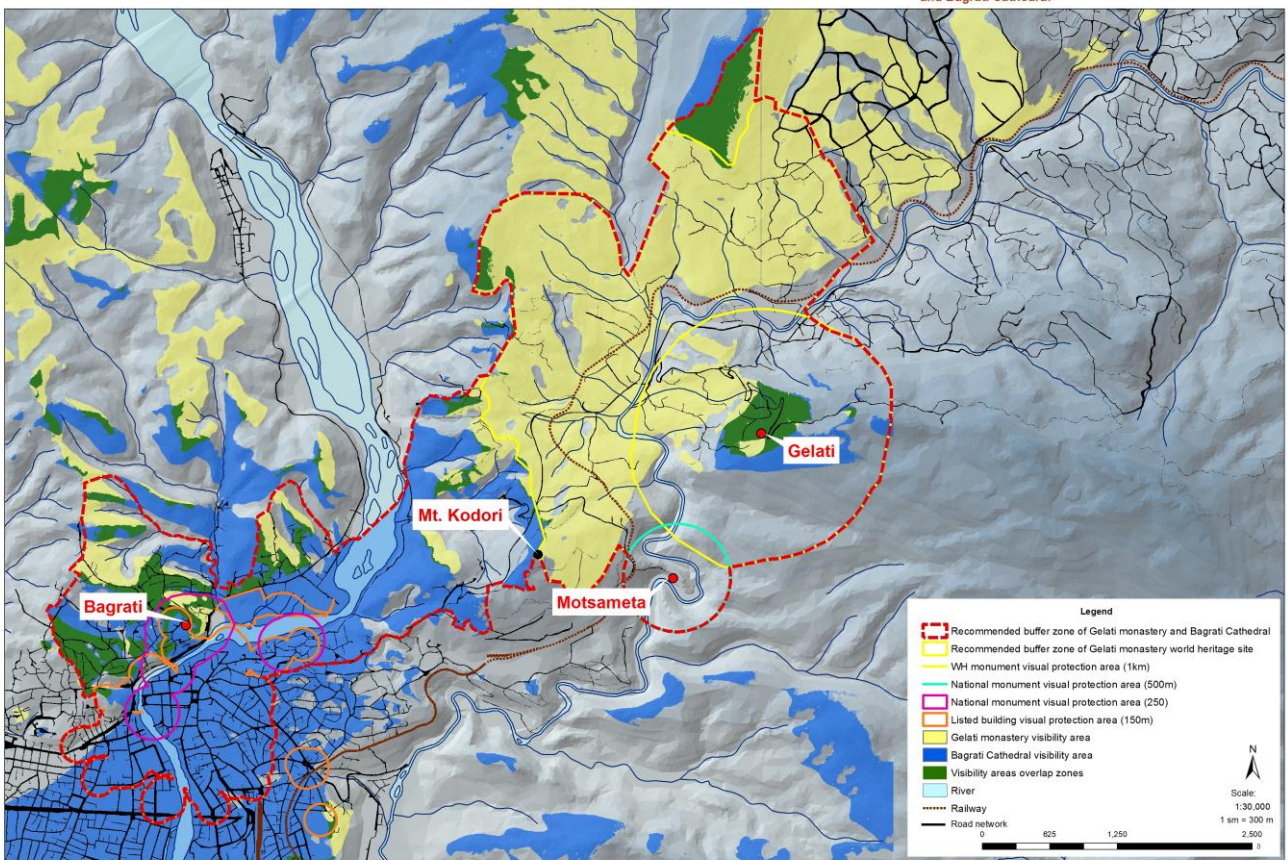
Gelati Monastery and Bagrati Cathedral are protected by the individual protection zones defined by the Law on Cultural Heritage. Thus there is a Physical Protection Area with the 50 m radius around the sites and a Visual Protection Area with a 1 km radius beyond the physical protection area.

In 2011-2012 in scopes of the Major Boundary Modification of the site a needs assessment for the buffer zone has been undertaken. Based on the analysis an extended buffer zone has been proposed for Gelati Monastery taking into account its close relation with ancient Kutaisi as the kings residence. The proposal is submitted to the WHC in scopes of the Major Boundary Modification. Following the approval from the WHC the legal procedures will be implemented to apply respective protective regimes to the designated buffer zone according to the national legislation.



Cartographical research-analysis of buffer zones of Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati monastery world heritage site

Recommended buffer zone of Gelati monastery and Bagrati Cathedral 2012 y.



## **8.4 CONSERVATION WORKS IN GELATI MONASTERY**

### **List of Conservation Activities Carried out in 2011-2012**

The Gelaty monastery Conservation Master Plan, presented to the WHC in 2010, remains the guiding document for implementing and planning the long term rehabilitation and conservation of the property.

In 2010-2011 the 2 year co-operation program between the Conservation faculties of Tbilisi State Academy of Fine Arts and Lugano University, Switzerland was launched aimed at developing of the comprehensive assessment of stone and mural paintings of Gelaty Monastery. In scopes of the program the detailed stone condition assessment and risk mapping of St. George church, as well as assessment of condition of the mural paintings in the interior of the main, church and physical conservation of the carved stone decoration of the South Gate were implemented by international experts (Mr. Alberto Felici, Mr. Stefano Volta, Mr. Giovanni Cavallo) together with Georgian and Swiss students.

The 2011 annual plan was focused on the rehabilitation of one of the components of the site - the Palace of Bishop Gabriel. The summary report of this project was provided to the WHC together with the 2012 SoC report.

In 2012 the urgent rehabilitation works on St. Marine's chapel of the Church of the Virgin was implemented. The rehabilitation works represent preparatory stage for further conservation works on the wall paintings of the chapel. The works implied rehabilitation of the roof, restoration of the wooden construction and the roof covering, arrangement roof's waterproof layer and sheet roof covering, installation of 2 chestnut tree windows with ventilation opening. The works aimed at stabilization of the chapel's architectural condition through repair of the primary architectural damage and protection of the interior from atmospheric condensation.

## **9. PREVIOUS WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE**

### **9.1 DECISION**

#### **Decision: 36 COM 7A.30**

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Decides exceptionally to adjourn the debate on the agenda item until its next 37th ordinary session of the World Heritage Committee (2013).

### **9.2 IMPLEMENTATION BY STATE PARTY**

As there were no specific instructions adopted at the 36<sup>th</sup> session of the WH Committee, the State Party continues to act in accordance with the recommendations provided by the World Heritage Centre and its advisory bodies.

## **10. CONCLUSIONS**

The conclusions presented below are aimed at contributing to the analysis which will facilitate to the Advisory Body and the Secretariat the preparation of the Committee draft decision.

**Strengths**

Improved communication with the WHC

The high quality expertise and involvement of international consultants in conservation and rehabilitation

**Weaknesses**

Lack of management plan and multi stakeholder management approach

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