



World Heritage

37 COM

WHC-13/37.COM/INF.7A

Paris, 17 May 2013

Original: English/French

**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION
CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE
WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE**

Thirty-seventh session
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
16 – 27 June 2013

Item 7A of the Provisional Agenda: State of conservation of World Heritage properties inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger
INF.7A: Compendium on the Statements of Significance and of Outstanding Universal Value for World Heritage properties Inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger and discussed for in-Danger listing

SUMMARY

This document presents, as requested by the World Heritage Committee at its 32nd session (see Decision [32 COM 7B.129](#)), a compendium on the Statements of Significance and of Outstanding Universal Value for World Heritage properties inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger and discussed for in-Danger listing.

/...

I. PROPERTIES INSCRIBED ON THE LIST OF WORLD HERITAGE IN DANGER

NATURAL PROPERTIES

/...

ARAB STATES

/...

25. Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls (site proposed by Jordan) (C 148 rev)

No Statement is available for this property.

26. Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, Bethlehem (Palestine) (C 1433)

A provisional Statement of Outstanding Universal Value was adopted by the World Heritage Committee for this property in 2012 (see Decision **36 COM 8B.5**). The final Statement is being presented to the World Heritage Committee in Document *WHC-13/37.COM/8B.Add*.

Provisional Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (Decision 36 COM 8B.5)

Brief synthesis

Since at least the 2nd century AD people have believed that the place where the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, now stands is where Jesus was born. One particular cave, over which the first Church was built, is traditionally believed to be the Birthplace itself. In locating the Nativity, the place both marks the beginnings of Christianity and is one of the holiest spots in Christendom. The original basilica church of 339 AD (St Helena), parts of which survive below ground, was arranged so that its octagonal eastern end surrounded, and provided a view of, the cave. This church is overlaid by the present Church of the Nativity, essentially of the mid-6th century AD (Justinian), though with many later alterations. It is the oldest Christian church in daily use. Since early medieval times the Church has been increasingly incorporated into a complex of other ecclesiastical buildings, mainly monastic. As a result, today it is embedded in an extraordinary architectural ensemble, overseen by members of the Greek Orthodox Church, the Order of St Francis and the Armenian Church in a partnership (the *Status Quo*) established by the Treaty of Berlin (1878).

For most of the last 1500 years, Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity have been, as is still very much the case, a pilgrim destination. The eastern end of the traditional route from Jerusalem to the Church is along what is now officially called the Pilgrimage Route, that is, along Star Street, through the Damascus Gate, and along a short stretch of Paul VI Street and Manger Square. This route is still followed ceremonially each year by the Patriarchs of the three Churches at their several Christmases. The Christian Christmas, centred on Bethlehem, is the most widely-celebrated religious festivity in the world.

Criterion (iv): The Church of the Nativity is an outstanding example of an early church in a remarkable architectural ensemble which illustrates both a significant stage in human history in the 4th-6th centuries AD and in later stages up to the present century.

Criterion (vi): The Church of the Nativity, and the Pilgrimage Route to it, are directly associated with events and beliefs of outstanding universal significance. The city of Bethlehem is Holy to Christians as well as to Muslims. It is a strong symbol for more than 2 billion believers in the world.

Integrity

The integrity of the architectural ensemble embracing the Church of the Nativity and its neighbours is conceptually unimpaired and only physically diminished in relatively minor respects by modern additions. The immediate surroundings included in this nomination embrace a small area of land to the east and some other structures directly associated with the ensemble, an area known to contain as yet systematically unexamined and largely

undisturbed evidence of occupation and burial from the early centuries AD back to at least the mid-2nd millennium BC. The approach to the Church via Star Street and Paul VI Street retains the street width and line fossilized by urban development since c. 1800 AD. This 'width and line', as well as defining a working street in a busy town, now formalize a commemorative route for a religious ceremony. For the purposes of this nomination, the significant historical and religious feature is this line in the urban fabric rather than the architectural and historical features of the individual buildings which collectively delimit that line. Nevertheless, a few buildings of earlier date still stand and the street is now mainly defined by facades of the 19th and 20th centuries. The general aspect, almost completely in pale yellow limestone, is attractive. Most of the buildings incorporate traditional design and appearance, for example with living accommodation above and workshops at street level opening out on to the street. Most importantly, the relatively few unsympathetic modern intrusions are along the south side of Paul VI Street and around Manger Square.

Authenticity

Located on the spot believed to be the Birthplace of Jesus Christ for some 2000 years, the Church of the Nativity is one of the most sacred Christian sites in the world. In relation to this outstanding fact the authenticity of the place is unquestionable. That has been enhanced by worship and pilgrimage to the site since at least the 4th century AD up to the present. The sanctity of the site is maintained by the three churches occupying it. The construction of the church in 339 AD above the grotto commemorates the birth and attests to seventeen hundred years-long tradition of belief that this grotto was indeed the birthplace of Jesus Christ.

Protection and management requirements

The Church of the Nativity is managed under the terms and provisions of the '*Status Quo*' currently supplemented by an advisory committee formed by the Palestinian President. Each of the three adjacent Convents is maintained under its own arrangement: the Armenian Convent is controlled by the Armenian Patriarchate in the Holy City of Jerusalem; the Greek Orthodox Convent by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in the Holy City of Jerusalem; and the Franciscan Convent and the Church of St Catherine by the Custody of the Holy Land, Holy City of Jerusalem. The second main component, the Pilgrimage Route, principally Star Street, is part of the Municipality of Bethlehem and is therefore covered by the provisions of 'Building and Planning Law 30, 1996', of 'the Bethlehem Charter 2008', of the 'Guidelines for the Conservation and Rehabilitation of the Historic Towns of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour, 2010, and of the 'General Rules for the Protection of the Historic Area and Historic Individual Buildings, Bethlehem, 2006'. 'Protection', 'Conservation', and 'Rehabilitation' are the stated objectives of the last two enactments, and the 'Charter', which is already working well in the Historic Town, embodies a statement of principles as well as working practices to achieve those objectives.

/...