

WEST-CENTRAL ASIA

IRAN

Meidan Imam, Esfahan

II.1 Introduction

Year of Inscription 1979

Organisation Responsible for the Report

- Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization (ICHO)
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II.2 Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria C i, v, vi

Statement of Significance

- Proposed as follows:
“The complex of Imam Square is important from the following point of views: (i) historical – its history dates back to the 17th century; (ii) scientific – it features an elaborate architectural & urban design; (iii) artistic – it demonstrates the entire popular arts and crafts of its time; (iv) cultural & social.”

“World Heritage inscription has been a major factor in protecting the site’s integrity.”

Status of Site Boundaries

- Borders and buffer zone of the property are considered adequate.
- * The WH Committee does not have the most recent map indicating clear core and buffer zone. The authorities have expressed their intention to extend the WH protected area to better represent the Heritage values of the Historic Centre.

II.3 Statement of Authenticity/Integrity

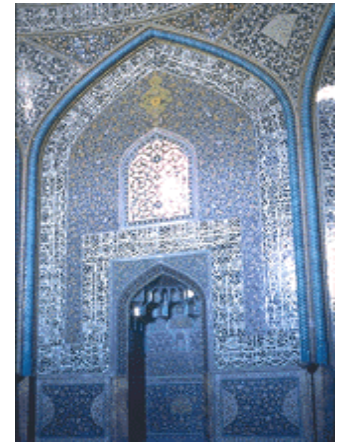
Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage value is considered to have been maintained. No changes are foreseen.

II.4 Management

Administrative and Management Arrangements

- “The ICHO imposes strict rules concerning building licences in Imam Square and its surroundings. These rules require the presence of an expert of the ICHO during restoration works in historic and cultural structures.”
- The Executive Director of the Esfahan Office of ICHO is responsible for the supervision and management planning in the complex. He heads the technical and monitoring departments.
- The ‘Rehabilitation Plan’ foresees conservation works and allocates national and provincial budgets for the property’s conservation and development.



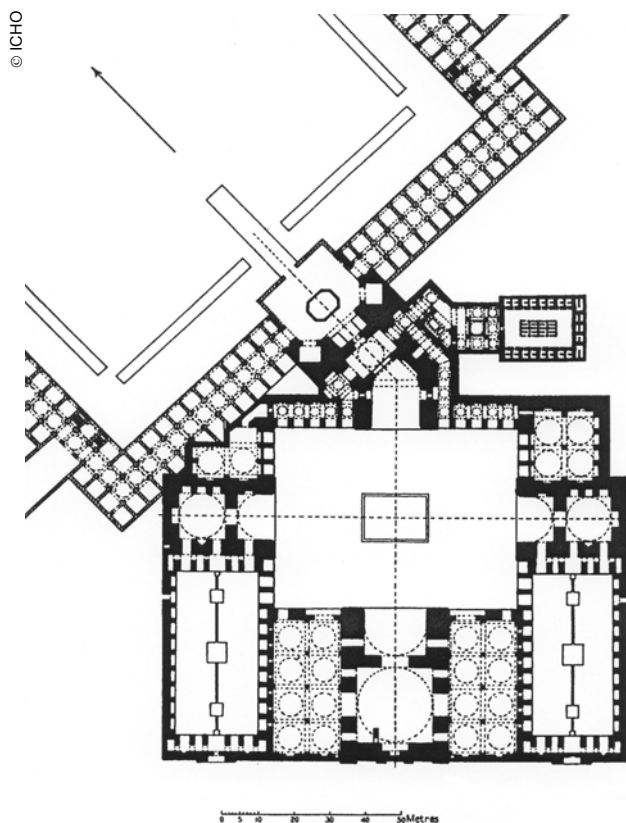
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Present State of Conservation

- Comprehensive restoration work has been in progress since 1965. Because of the delicate and vulnerable nature of the structures these works are still in progress.
- The neighbouring bazaars outside the current World Heritage core zone have been restored and new constructions cleared.
- Sidewalks have been re-paved.
- WH inscription has been a major factor in protecting the site’s integrity.

Staffing and Training Needs

- There are restorers and service personnel located in four buildings of the World Heritage Property: the Imam Mosque, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Ai Qapou Palace and the Portal of the Great Bazaar.
- “The number of guards and supervisors, particularly during the peak tourist seasons, is not sufficient.”
- Tourist guides need additional training.



Plan of Meidan Imam Square

Financial Situation

- There are National and Provincial budget allocations for restoration of the property. Traders owning shops within the property contribute to the rehabilitation of business premises, for which credit facilities also exist.
- Admission is charged at three of the principal monuments. No figures supplied.
- Funding is inadequate because “the municipality and the financial department of Isfahan are [spending] all the taxes collected from the trade establishments in the complex’s vicinity for purposes of restoration and preservation of Imam Square and its structures.”
- * International Assistance from WHF as follows: (i) 2003, US\$2,752 training assistance for the 3 Iranian WH Properties.

Access to IT

- No PCs, no email or internet access.
- * The ICHO Esfahan Office has IT equipment.

Visitor Management

- Basic tourist facilities such as guides, refreshments, restrooms, telephones, taxis, shops and a police station exist.
- There is a need for improved communication technology.
- There is no tourism management plan, and no visitor statistics.

II.5 Factors Affecting the Property

Threats and Risks

- Economic development is giving rise to pressures to allow the construction of multi-storey commercial and parking buildings in the historic centre within the nationally designated WH buffer zone
- Road widening schemes threaten the boundaries of the site.
- The number of tourists is adversely affecting historic floors & staircases.
- The city was damaged by bombardment during the Iran-Iraq War and this damage has not yet been repaired.
- * Fire is a risk to the property.

Counteractive Plans

- There is no emergency plan. A mechanism however exists for instituting repairs in response to needs identified through monitoring.
- Traffic, air pollution and pressures arising from the number of visitors are all increasing. A traffic plan, which foresees pedestrianisation around the Square, has been developed but not yet implemented.
- * Negotiations and consultation between the national, municipal governments, UNESCO and ICOMOS experts resulted in reducing the height of a large multi-storey building which was constructed after demolition of a historic caravanserai within the nationally designated World Heritage buffer zone.



Constructions in the buffer zone

II.6 Monitoring

Monitoring Arrangements

- The office responsible for monitoring is based in the nationally designated WH buffer zone.
- Routine monitoring is viewed as the responsibility of the police and security personnel.
- No formal monitoring system is in place, monitoring activities are dealt with on a day-to-day basis.

Monitoring Indicators

- Indicators identified relate to fire fighting equipment and a fire alarm system as the key monitoring needs.

II.7 Conclusions and Recommended Actions

Conclusions and Proposed Actions

- “The preservation and restoration activities in the complex of Imam Square, following its inclusion on the World Heritage List, resulted in: (i) increasing public awareness of the square's cultural value; (ii) mobilization of the cooperation and assistance of the local private sector; (iii) growth of domestic and foreign tourism in Esfahan; (iv) vast expansion of restoration works in the vicinity and within the limits of the complex.”
- Proposed actions include: (i) launching a website, publications in various languages and establishing a museum; (ii) a necessary increase in the number of qualified personnel to carry out both presentation and restoration work; (iii) increased funding needed to complete all restoration programmes within the next 10 years.

* State of Conservation Reports

1995 WHC-95/CONF.203/5 The authorities were requested to consider the establishment of meaningful buffer zones. The authorities invited international experts to assess the state of conservation of all three World Heritage cultural properties in Iran. The Centre requested ICCROM to take part in this exercise. A joint Iran-UNESCO-ICCROM mission took place in September 1995.

The 1995 ICHO/ICCROM Mission Report highlighted development pressures within the Historic Centres of Esfahan, and recommended an extension of the property to increase protection of the historic city.

An ICCROM Mission in 1999 drew attention to lack of human and financial resources, development pressures, growing pressure of visitor numbers, a need to increase public awareness of the importance of historic residential buildings, and to develop a system for monitoring changes in the use and condition of historic buildings.

2002 WHC-2002/CONF.202.17 A WHC staff undertook a mission in January 2002. In line with the 1995 Mission recommendations, the authorities were redefining and extending the protected World Heritage area to include monuments and architectural ensembles of the Safavid period in the Historic Centres of Esfahan. The authorities submitted a draft extension nomination dossier for consultation. The Mission noted the high level of conservation of the monuments and recommended that site-interpretation and signage be enhanced. The Mission reported the construction of a commercial complex within the Conservation Protective Zone adopted by the Government which is the nationally designated World Heritage buffer zone. The construction plan was not authorized by Central Government, and exceeds the maximum height limitations. The World Heritage Centre requested clarification on discussions between the Municipality and Government to correct the situation. The Bureau, at its 26th session, requested the Government to provide a report on the discussions between the Municipality and the Government. A monitoring mission to be undertaken by ICOMOS and an urban planner under the UNESCO-France Convention had been postponed but proposed for July 2002.