

## ICOMOS Technical Review

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| <b>Property</b>         | <b>Site of Palmyra</b>                  |
| <b>State Party</b>      | <b>Syrian Arab Republic</b>             |
| <b>Property ID</b>      | <b>23bis</b>                            |
| <b>Date inscription</b> | <b>1980</b>                             |
| <b>Criteria</b>         | <b>(i) (ii) (iv)</b>                    |
| <b>Project/issue</b>    | <b>Reconstruction of Triumphal Arch</b> |

### Documentation provided

The 1862 pages of documentation on « Assessment of the impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of 'Site of Palmyra' World Heritage Site of the project of the package of measures to restore the Triumphal Arch of Palmyra » encompasses four volumes. The work has been coordinated by N.F. Soloveva for the Institute for the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The documentation may be broken down into two main blocks.

**Volume 1** organized in 2 Books:

Book 1 presents in 175 pages details of the proposed **Arch restoration** project.

Book 2 presents in 125 pages, an Heritage Impact Assessment of the **impact on** of the Arch restoration project on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property.

**Volumes 2 to 4** are organized in 17 Books or 23 Sections, detailing the scientific work accomplished by IHMC RAS (Institute for the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences) in preparation for the proposed restoration project. A Bibliography and a list of abbreviations have been included.

Page numbering is continuous (1 to 1862) on the pdf file, with partial page numbering in Annexed documents.

Books 1 & 2 make ample use of the scientific work condensed in Volumes 2 to 4.

While each scientific report considers its material through its own perspective, Books 1 & 2 are written in the perspective of World Heritage Convention, presenting the positive aspects of the restoration project considered.

Arguments in favour of the project of restoration of Palmyra Arch are mentioned on pages 147, 188, 199, 214, 218, 221, 222 (this list is not exclusive).

## Analysis

The documentation provided has three strands. Scientific research accomplished on the Palmyra Triumphal Arch, the proposed restoration project of the Arch, and an impact assessment of the proposals on the OUV of the property. This allows independent evaluation of each strand.

Documents in volumes 2 to 4 are convincing for the rigorous and complete character of studies executed with state-of-the-art means. They document the first comprehensive archaeological study undertaken in 2022.

Books 1 & 2 make use of those results in order to demonstrate the multiple interest of the restoration project and its conformity to heritage conservation principles.

The scientific studies have been coordinated by N.F. Soloveva from IHMC RAS.

The architectural-archaeological part has been developed by two architects, Maksim Atayants and Nikita Yavein, whose competence has been proven in a large number of realizations. For the main lines of the projected restoration, they rely upon Robert Amy's restoration for the French Mandate authorities (begun in 1930, published in 1933, Syria Tome 14 fascicule 4, pp. 396-411, [https://www.persee.fr/doc/syria\\_0039-7946\\_1933\\_num\\_14\\_4\\_3706](https://www.persee.fr/doc/syria_0039-7946_1933_num_14_4_3706)). Not only do they set the objective to restore the visual appearance of the Arch as it had been restored in the 1930s, they propose to accomplish what R. Amy wrote he wanted to do but stopped short of doing (restore the verticality of piles, replace degraded stone blocks) because he did not have, at the moment, the necessary material and financial means.

The project recalls (page 71, 116-117, 146, 167) that a large amount of original blocks have survived the explosion, either remaining in place, fallen nearby, or found in the vicinity of the Arch. Completely missing or destroyed blocks are only a minor part.

In detail, the following activities have been undertaken to justify the approach proposed:

- Historical, archival and bibliographic studies;
- Historical and architectural research on the Triumphal Arch, including the stages of erection and restoration;
- Photo fixation, photogrammetry and scanning of the Triumphal Arch and the area adjacent to it before the beginning of the works in order to create high-precision three-dimensional digital models of the current state, as well as during and after each of the stages;
- Development of the methodology of the field studies and surveys;
- Comprehensive on-site studies of the Triumphal Arch and its surrounding area, including: visual inspection of the geological and archaeological survey of the area adjacent to the Triumphal Arch, engineering and technical survey of the Triumphal Arch, including the condition of its structures;
- Chemical and technological study of the materials and technologies used in the construction and restoration of the Triumphal Arch;
- Clearing of the rubble, study and systematization of the surviving elements located around the Triumphal Arch;

- Scanning of each collapsed block of the Arch by the structured-light method and creating their 3D models;
- Topographic survey of the Triumphal Arch and the surrounding area;
- Study of the sources of materials used in the construction of the Triumphal Arch;
- Determination of the methodology for the preservation of the Triumphal Arch based on the existing world principles, the requirements of the WHC, ICOMOS and ICCROM;
- Digital reconstruction of the historical appearance of the Triumphal Arch;
- Graphic reconstruction of the Triumphal Arch;
- Development of the restoration project for the Triumphal Arch.

In total, this analytical and research work can be seen as exemplary.

The Heritage Impact Assessment that has been presented is also exemplary. It analyses clearly the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value and then sets out to demonstrate the particular contribution to OUV of the Triumphal Arch as part of an integrated system of urban components.

The Arch is seen to have value not just as a piece of architecture, embracing a ‘unique’ superimposition of pilasters and Palmyran art that symbolises the possible triumph in war and the emerging religious cult of Baal, but also for its key focal position in the urban plan of the city. It was not a free standing monument, but linked a turn in the main street with the colonnade of the giant temple of Baal, and marked both a change in direction and change in scale of the street. The Arch can thus be seen as highly visible part of the social identity of the city.

Before the terrorist strike, the Arch was a dominant part of the urban remains and of the perceived beauty of its silhouette.

The Heritage Impact Assessment sets out with admirable clarity the contribution of the Arch to the Outstanding Universal Value. It also justifies its restoration both in terms of what a restored Arch would contribute in terms of reinstating important symbolism and reintegrating a part of the city’s remaining fabric, and also in terms of the credibility of such a restoration in relation to the knowledge that has been obtained from the comprehensive archaeological survey, and the survival of sufficient fragments.

The proposed restoration can thus be seen to reinstate an important attribute of Outstanding Universal Value, is credible in relation to authenticity, both in terms of material authenticity and for the way the reconstruction could enhance the way the remains convey their value, and strengthens integrity in terms of recreating the wholeness of the Arch as a key component of the urban form of the property.

A restored Arch could also be seen as a new symbol of peace and a lode stone for local and national communities.

What the documentation also outlines is the practicality of the Arch reconstruction, given its small size and the abundant documentation that provides good scientific security. This is in marked comparison with the highly complex remains of the adjacent Temple of Baal which was also the object of the terrorist attack.

It is acknowledged that the 'restoration of the Triumphal Arch, important as it is, is only the first step on the long road to the restoration of all the destroyed monuments and further preservation of the architectural and archaeological complex of the ancient Palmyra'. But this restoration is an important benchmark in terms of setting standards for such further work both at Palmyra and further afield.

### **Recommendation**

ICOMOS fully supports the justification of the proposed restoration of the Triumphal Arch, in scientific terms and in relation to potential impact on Outstanding Universal Value.

It congratulates the State Party on submitting exemplary background documentation and impact analysis for this project.

ICOMOS remains at the disposal of the State Party for further clarification on the above or assistance as required.

ICOMOS, Charenton-le-Pont  
August 2023