

Original article

UNRAVELLING CHALLENGES TO UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE STATUS FOR
EGYPT'S ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: INSIGHTS FROM ABYDOS

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Abstract:

Egypt is home to numerous heritage sites of Outstanding Universal Value, yet only seven have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Egypt currently has 34 sites on its Tentative List. However, no new site has been inscribed since 2005. Among these is Abydos, a major cultural and religious center, which has remained on the tentative list since 2003 due to persistent challenges in the nomination process. This study investigates the governance, resource, and conservation challenges hindering Abydos' nomination, drawing from semi-structured interviews with officials, site managers, and World Heritage experts. Thematic analysis highlights key barriers such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, fragmented stakeholder coordination, and development pressures. Findings also point to the exclusion of stakeholders, limited resources, and inadequate conservation management, which have delayed progress. The article emphasizes the urgent need for enhanced governance, stakeholder collaboration, and a structured nomination strategy to safeguard Egypt's cultural heritage and elevate its global recognition.

1. Introduction

With a history spanning millennia and civilizations, Egypt's cultural heritage is among the richest on the Earth. The depth and richness of this heritage is nearly unparalleled. World Heritage Sites (WHS) are cultural and natural sites considered to be of outstanding universal value and being included in the World Heritage List provides global recognition and helps preserve these sites through legal protection and international funding. Yet, although gaining World Heritage status offers numerous advantages, Egypt is under-represented in UNESCO's permanent list of WHS. In order to be included on the World Heritage List, a site must meet the criteria of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), defined as the cultural or natural significance of such exceptional quality that it transcends national boundaries [1]. This requirement is central to the nomination process, as it ensures that the site is globally important for present and future generations [1]. The assessment of OUV is based on ten criteria, which focus on the site's uniqueness, integrity, and potential for universal significance [1]. As Vigneron [2] outlines, there are several key benefits of achieving World Heritage status, including its positive impact on the site's conservation (via enhanced site management and legal protection and access to international

funding), prestige for the community (via global recognition), and economic development (via tourism growth). Despite these benefits, only seven Egyptian heritage sites are on UNESCO's permanent WHS list. These consist of five cultural sites which were inscribed as WHS in 1979, namely the Abu Mena (Alexandria), ancient Thebes with its necropolis (Luxor), historic Cairo, Nubian monuments from Abu Simbel to Philae, Memphis and its Necropolis, and the Pyramid Fields from Giza to Dahshur, as well as the cultural site of Saint Catherine Area, inscribed in 2002, and the natural site of Wadi Al-Hitan (Whale Valley, Fayoum), inscribed in 2005. However, Egypt has 34 sites on the UNESCO World Heritage Center's tentative list, which represents the first step toward formal inscription on the World Heritage List. These tentative sites [3] include thirteen sites added in 1994, sixteen in 2003, and four after that. The fact that the last inscription was made exactly two decades ago, in 2005, indicates a gridlock in the nomination and inscription processes. However, the reasons for this gridlock have received scant academic attention. Amongst this is the research conducted by Ghodya et al [4], which investigated the problem via the case study of Rashid City in Egypt, a site on the tentative list since 2003. Employing

literature reviews, document analysis and Geographic Information System (GIS), the authors collected and analyzed data on urban planning, tourism impact, and conservation challenges in the historic Rashid city to help establish strategies for WHS nomination. By using the hitherto unconsidered viewpoints of heritage specialists and bureaucrats, the current paper seeks to increase understanding of Egypt's difficulties in obtaining WHS status. Important insider information is obtained through interviews with representatives of archaeological expeditions, government officials, and World Heritage specialists. The research specifically focuses on the Abydos archaeological site, famously known as the city of pilgrimage of the Pharaohs, which has been on the UNESCO World Heritage Center's tentative list since 2003. The study explores the obstacles impeding its nomination for the permanent World Heritage List. The following sections present a brief literature review to set the theoretical background, followed by an explanation of the research context and methodology. The research methodology primarily relies on qualitative interviews to gather perspectives from key stakeholders involved in the nomination process. This is followed by the documentation and analysis of the research findings. The article revolves around the main argument that striving for WHS status for cultural heritage sites in Egypt may become futile, given the lack of governmental commitment due to the required resources and the overwhelming influence of development pressures. Strategies are presented to address the documented problems, revealing the importance of establishing integrated heritage management systems and sustainable development goals and policies for a better way forward.

2. Criteria and Conditions for Inscription as WHS

Managed by the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, the permanent list of WHS represents a global collaborative effort to protect significant cultural and natural sites from destruction and loss by serving as a form of applied global ethics and highlighting the shared responsibility of safeguarding them [5,6]. The inscription on the permanent list represents an acknowledgement of a site's outstanding value, authenticity, and distinctiveness. This recognition emphasizes the property's historical, cultural, or natural importance and strengthens the community's sense of identity and continuity. Additionally, the List draws interest from a wide range of actors, such as the public decision-makers, and the attention of potential donors. As well, profit firms may seek various ways to capitalize on the recognition of World Heritage sites, either by providing services for visiting tourists or by financially supporting a specific site [7]. The role of the WHS status in aiding economic growth by attracting tourism, as well as elevating a nation's cultural and natural heritage on the global stage, boosting its prestige and international profile, is well-established in the literature [8-10]. Perhaps the most significant benefit of gaining WHS status is the enhanced collaborative efforts, engagement with the international heritage community, expertise, and resources [5]. The World Heritage Committee provides technical assistance for the preservation of listed sites. Additionally, the Committee mandates the development of management plans, which serve as valuable tools for collaboration among various stakeholder [7]. However, meeting

the requirements and conditions outlined in the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention is necessary for nomination to WHS on the UNESCO World Heritage Center's permanent list. For the latest version of the operational guidelines for the Implementation of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention [11]. Accordingly, a nominated property must possess Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), which is defined as 'cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity' (UNESCO WHC 2024, para 49, pg.24). The operational guidelines set 10 criteria for the assessment of OUV (UNESCO WHC 2024, para 77, pg.29-30), considering a property as having OUV if the property meets one or more of these criteria. Also, the operational guidelines stipulate that 'To be deemed of outstanding universal value, a property must also meet the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity and must have an adequate protection and management system to ensure its safeguarding' (UNESCO WHC 2024, para 78, pg.30). As we will show later in the paper, while selecting heritage properties with OUV is a significant step, meeting these later conditions is challenging. For protection and management, the preservation of a site's OUV, as well as its authenticity and integrity, is essential [6]. States Parties must ensure the enactment of laws to protect the property from social and economic pressures [9]. Regular monitoring of the property's condition is required [5]. If a buffer zone is necessary, its characteristics, size, and authorized uses should be detailed in the nomination file, along with a map of the property and its surroundings [1]. Each nominated property must have an appropriate management plan that ensures the preservation of its OUV, ideally developed in a participatory manner, to protect the site for future generations [6]. Meeting the requirements for authenticity, integrity, protection, and management is a crucial step in the world heritage nomination process, fig. (1). However, many countries face challenges in meeting these requirements due to limited resources, expertise, and political will [7]. In the Middle East, rapid urbanization, tourism, and residential construction have strained the integrity of heritage sites, impeding successful World Heritage nominations [5]. For instance, many sites on the tentative list in Egypt (e.g., Abydos) are threatened by development projects, including residential areas, infrastructure, and tourism [12]. The lack of urban planning exacerbates these issues, as seen in Abydos, where houses have been constructed within archaeological boundaries despite demolition orders. Tourism brings economic benefits but also challenges, such as overcrowding and environmental degradation, which undermine long-term preservation [7]. Additionally, conservation management is hindered by insufficient funding and a lack of skilled personnel, resulting in fragmented efforts to safeguard sites effectively [1]. Furthermore, one of the significant challenges in the World Heritage nomination process is the conflicting priorities among stakeholders. Different stakeholders, with their varied agendas and conservation policies, may have conflicting views on what should be prioritized, leading to disagreements. This can result in the loss of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) that initially justified the nomination [13].

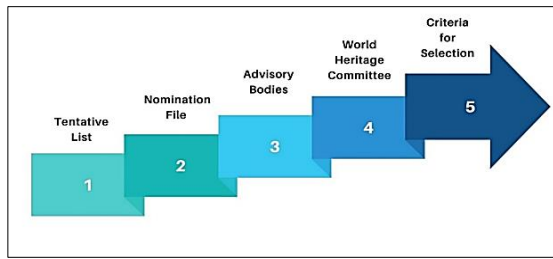


Figure (1) The UNESCO World Heritage Site Nomination [14]

3. Research Context

Before explaining the research context, it must be noted that heritage protection in Egypt has been regulated by the Antiquities Protection Law of 1983, implemented by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (hereafter MoTA, or the Ministry). The monuments of the Abydos site were officially registered as part of the category of ancient Egyptian archaeological antiquities in the same year. The Supreme Council of Antiquities oversees the protection of these assets through Law No. 117 of 1983 and its subsequent amendments—Law No. 3 of 2010, Law No. 61 of 2010, and Law No. 91 of 2018—under the supervision of the Ministry. These laws collectively address various aspects of monument protection, including ownership, rights of use, restoration activities, foreign expedition operations, archaeological exploration, development projects within the archaeological area, and economic activities by local communities in the site's buffer zone. Additionally, they outline the coordination between various stakeholders [12].

3.1. A brief overview of Abydos

Abydos, known to the Greeks and Egyptians as *Abdjou* [15], is an ancient Egyptian Dynastic site located at the edge of the low desert on the western side of the Nile, near the modern village of *Arabah El-Madfuna*, approximately 150 kilometers north of Luxor and 430 kilometers south of Cairo [16]. The site spans about five kilometers in length and up to 2.4 km. in width at its broadest point, situated where the fertile land meets the desert. Abydos was home to several important structures, including a significant temple originally dedicated to *Khenty-Imentiu* and later to Osiris. The site also contains other settlement areas, including short-lived Predynastic sites and later towns that arose in connection with temples established by various pharaohs [17], as shown in fig. (2). Abydos traces its origins back to Egypt's earliest periods, though it never held major political power and could not rival influential centers like Thebes or Memphis. Its primary significance, however, was religious. Abydos served as the spiritual center for Osiris, often referred to as “*he who resides at Abydos*”, and became symbolically associated with the West, as Osiris was also known as “*the God of the West*” [18]. The city of Abydos became known as the “*City of Pilgrimage for the Pharaohs*”. The Egyptians viewed Osiris, the god of the underworld, as central to their pilgrimage practices. Believing his tomb was located at Abydos, both kings and commoners made pilgrimages to the site, making it a sacred destination [19]. Initially associated with several local deities, Abydos became more closely linked to Osiris

by the end of the old kingdom. The journey to Abydos is considered one of the closest equivalents to pilgrimage in its broader sense in ancient Egypt. Over time, different forms of devotion to Osiris developed at Abydos. Worshippers expressed their reverence by erecting commemorative stelae, known as Abydos stelae, in the area surrounding the temple. These stelae often contained inscriptions explaining the purpose for commissioning them, including requests for offerings or the inhalation of sacred incense. Kelley Simpson classified five architectural types for the placement of these stelae around the Temple of Osiris at Abydos, such as stelae along the temple's outer wall, freestanding stelae, mastabas or pyramid tombs, offering chapels, and small chapels arranged around a central stela [20]. In the Middle Kingdom, inscriptions from the tombs of *Intef-iker* and *Senet* include references to the journey to Abydos, such as the phrase “*Going northward to Abydos*”. The textual patterns in the new kingdom, however, show little variation, with phrases like “*Descending with the current in peace to Abydos*” commonly used in Theban tombs. These inscriptions often express the pilgrims' participation in Osiris' festivals at Abydos, requests for spiritual forgiveness, and hopes for eternal companionship with the deity. For instance, one inscription states: “*Descending with the current and in peace to Abydos on the occasion of the Great Festival of Osiris, and returning from it forgiven*” [20].

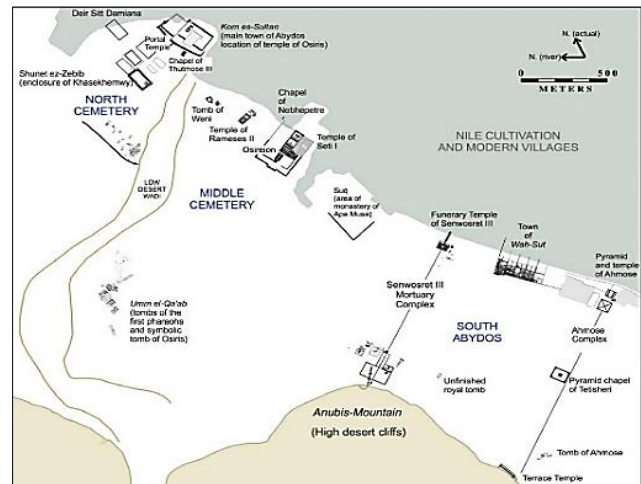


Figure (2) map of the ancient archaeological site of Abydos, Egypt (Courtesy of Joseph Wegner) [21]

The archaeological evidence on the site sheds light on broader patterns of ritual practices, urban development, and economic activity throughout Egypt [22]. The distinctiveness of Abydos is related to its connection between religious beliefs and the surrounding landscape in a more profound way than at any other site in Egypt. This relationship was most vividly demonstrated during the grand festival procession, where Osiris was believed to have journeyed from his temple in the town to his desert tomb to be symbolically buried and resurrected before returning to his temple. this ritual reaffirmed and reestablished the powerful mythic narrative of resurrection triumphing over death [23]. Between 1858 and 1926, numerous archaeologists, primarily British, conducted excavations at Abydos. Among them, Auguste Mariette and

Flinders Petrie played particularly significant roles. Mariette, appointed in 1858 as the first head of the emerging Antiquities Organization, led large-scale excavations at Abydos from 1858 to 1861, employing a large workforce with relatively loose supervision. His efforts resulted in the recovery of an extensive collection of inscribed artifacts and other materials, and he published the first substantial archaeological reports on the site. In contrast, Petrie and his team carried out more systematic excavations at Abydos between 1899-1903 and 1921-1922. Although earlier mapping efforts were made by Napoleon's scholars (1789-1799), Lepsius' Prussian expedition (1842-1845), and others, it was Mariette, Petrie, and their colleagues who provided a detailed understanding of Abydos' archaeological development. Their research demonstrated how the site evolved over time, expanding outward from its original nucleus at the northern corner of Abydos and gradually extending southeastward in widening phases [22]. Abydos was first inhabited by the people of el-Amra and later by those of Nagada, who established a prehistoric and early dynastic settlement that eventually became the city of Abdjou (the Ancient Egyptian name for Abydos). The city's capital was located in the north, while its primary necropolis was situated in the area of Umm el-Qa'ab. Numerous temples, many dedicated to local deities, date back to the Thinite period, along with two fortresses at Shunet el-Zebib. Abydos gained greater significance with the rise of the Osiris cult, as it became the location of his principal tomb, where his head (according to the legend) was believed to have been placed after his body was dismembered by his brother Seth. Abydos covers an area of approximately 8 kilometers. As part of the project's development, which began around 2009, walls were constructed around the archaeological site to protect it from encroachments by the nearby villages of Bani Mansour to the north, Arabah Abydos, and Sheikh Mohammed to the south. These protective walls extend for 3,500 meters and are equipped with a series of gates [12]. Abydos can be categorized based on its geographical location into three main sections: *) *South Abydos*: Includes the town, the temple complex, and the tomb of Senwosret III, along with the cult complex of Ahmose. *) *Middle Abydos*: Features the temple of Seti I, the Osireion, fig. (3-a & b), and the temple of Ramesses II, fig. (3-c). *) *North Abydos*: Contains the ancient temple and town site, situated 1,250 meters northeast of the Seti I temple, as well as the Cultic Zone, the Middle and North cemeteries, and the Early Dynastic Enclosures. To the west of Middle Abydos lies Umm el-Qa'ab, housing the tombs of the Early Dynastic kings. A shallow wadi connects these tombs to North Abydos, extending from the High Desert in the west down to the cultivated land in the east [24]. The most fascinating part of the Temple of Seti I is the northwestern section, organized around a T-shaped arrangement of corridors. One of these corridors, known as the "Abydos King List", fig. (3-d), runs from northwest to southeast, connecting the annex to the main temple. It features a listing of Egypt's kings along with many of its deities [22]. In this scene, King Seti I is shown presenting offerings and honoring his deceased royal ancestors, accompanied by his young son and heir, Prince

Ramesses II. The king holds a censer in his left hand and raises his right hand in reverence toward the cartouches of the departed kings. The prince, depicted on a smaller scale in front of his father, holds two papyrus scrolls, prepared to chant a celebratory hymn venerating the deceased monarchs as gods. Opposite this scene, on the right side, seventy-six royal cartouches are engraved in three horizontal registers, arranged in chronological order. The list begins with King Menes and ends with King Seti I himself [25].



Figure (3) middle Abydos, **a.** temple of Seti I at Abydos, **b.** the Osireion at Abydos, **c.** Ramesses II temple at Abydos, **d.** Abydos king list at Seti I temple [26]

Based on this archaeological and historic significance, Abydos was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Center's Tentative List on 28/07/2003 by Egypt's Ministry of Culture - Supreme Council of Antiquities, satisfying the OUV Criteria (iv) and (vi), as a significant religious centre in Pharaonic Egypt, serving as a place of worship, pilgrimage, and burial for thousands of years [3]. However, efforts to satisfy the conditions and prepare the nomination files have remained minimal, as the site is still on the tentative list two decades after the decision to place it there. Recently, the Ministry has placed Abydos in a new set of proposed sites to prioritize preparing WHS nomination files per the Ministry's 2030 Vision [27].

3.2. The outstanding universal value of Abydos

The outstanding universal value of Abydos resides in its tombs and temples, which indicates that Abydos was a religious and historical center in the ancient times of Egypt, where ivory cards has been discovered in pre-dynastic tombs in Umm-AlQa'ab indicating the Egyptian's knowledge of writing in this ancient period, in addition to being a pilgrimage center for the ancient Egyptians, which was evident in its buildings, chapels and archaeological remains [28]. What follows outlines the criteria under which the Abydos site has been recognized for its OUV [29].

3.3. WHS criteria IV

Abydos is a unique example of Pharaonic architecture that has preserved various types of sacred buildings, spanning from the Early Dynastic period through the Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, and New Kingdom, all the way to the Coptic period. The site is divided into three main sections: Northern, Middle, and Southern. The Middle section houses the most significant and exceptional monuments, including temples and the symbolic tomb of the god Osiris. At the heart of this area is the Temple of Seti I and the Osireion, fig. (4), which illustrates the layout of these monuments), considered the masterpiece of the site. The Temple of Seti I features seven chapels dedicated to various deities, beginning with a now-ruined anchorage, followed by an open courtyard with two circular purification basins. The temple's façade is marked by seven entrances, framed by six columns, leading into two hypostyle halls containing 24 and 26 columns, respectively. Beyond these halls lie the seven sacred chapels, two additional chapels, the renowned King List Corridor, and the so-called Taurus Passage. The temple was later completed by Seti I's son, Ramesses II.

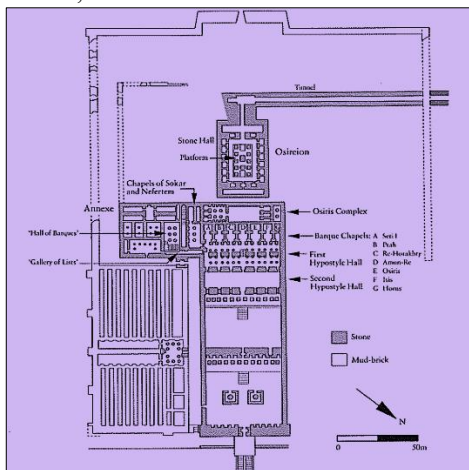


Figure (4) plan of temple of Seti I and the Osireion [22]

Behind the temple of Seti I lies the Osireion, a unique and monumental structure that exemplifies creative Egyptian engineering. Built using limestone, sandstone, and granite, its walls are adorned with murals painted in natural pigments such as yellow and red ochre and carbon black. The Osireion's architecture mirrors that of the temples of the New Kingdom, including the Temple of Seti I, which is distinguished by the seven chapels in its Holy of Holies, dedicated to seven deities: Horus, Isis, Osiris, Ptah, Amun, Ra-Horakhty, and Seti I himself. Additionally, Ramesses II, Seti I's son, erected his own temple at Abydos, marking the first temple constructed by him in Egypt [30]. Special rituals were held at this temple for Ramesses II after his death [22]. The Temple of Ramesses II, constructed of limestone, preserves its original layout of halls, chapels, and Osirian pillars. Long before the construction of pyramids and stone temples elsewhere in Egypt, the *Shunet el-Zebib* (or "Shuneh") was built as the funerary cult enclosure for King Khasekhemwy at the end of the 2nd dynasty, around 2700 BC, for a visual depiction of the site see, fig. (5). This structure stands as one of the world's oldest surviving mud-

brick constructions and the most complete example of the earliest phase of royal funerary architecture in Egypt. It remains a prominent feature of the northern Abydos landscape, influencing the site's development throughout its history to the present day [31]. Shunet el-Zebib is a massive rectangular structure with two concentric walls; its inner wall thicker and taller, suggesting a defensive function. The inner wall features niches resembling those found at the Djoser complex in Saqqara. Additionally, the royal cemeteries and funerary complexes at Abydos reflect distinct differences between the tombs of elites and those of ordinary individuals, offering invaluable insights into ancient Egyptian social structure and burial practices.



Figure (5) general view to Shunet el-Zebib [32]

3.4. WHS criteria VI

Abydos was a prominent center for the worship of Osiris, the lord of the underworld in ancient Egyptian religion. This belief played a key role in the development of Abydos as a major pilgrimage site throughout ancient Egyptian history, evident in its architecture from the Predynastic to the New Kingdom periods [27]. As a sacred city, Abydos became a major pilgrimage destination, often likened to Mecca in its spiritual significance. Devotees followed a sacred path to Osiris's tomb during ritual ceremonies. Research conducted at Abydos provides valuable insights into the political, social, religious, and artistic aspects of ancient Egyptian civilization. The site has been continuously inhabited by royalty and elites from various dynasties, serving as both a political and religious center. Abydos also hosted national festivals that celebrated the divine and spiritual importance of Osiris. Local traditions surrounding the site are still vibrant, particularly in the village of Al-Ghanimiya, just south of Abydos. There, the so-called Al-Sanki Pyramid (i.e., a small step structure) is believed to possess sacred healing powers. Visitors seeking blessings for marriage, health, or fertility participate in a ritual known as 'rolling', in which they leave personal items in a stone cavity in the pyramid's wall. This practice demonstrates the ongoing spiritual connection the local community has with Abydos' ancient sacred landscape.

3.5. Integrity

The site of Abydos is remarkably well-preserved, extending across a substantial area that reflects its cultural significance. It includes several locations that, although not yet open to the public, are in excellent condition and undergoing restoration. Key sites, such as the temple of Seti I, the temple

of Ramesses II, the Kom El-Sultan area, and the Shunet el-Zebib, are accessible to visitors. All the ancient monuments and buildings within the Abydos area, as well as those within its buffer zone, are being maintained and restored to ensure the integrity of the site. Restoration efforts by various missions contribute significantly to the protection and preservation of Abydos.

3.6. Authenticity

Abydos stands as a genuine testament to cultural heritage, with its authentic values reflected in its diverse elements. The site holds a prominent place among Egypt's most significant archaeological landmarks, with a history spanning over 5,000 years. Abydos served as the central hub for the worship of Osiris and as the burial ground for Egypt's rulers over various historical periods. It was also a royal town, housing the palaces of the pharaohs. The site's importance lies in its distinct architectural features, which illustrate the evolution of sacred architecture, from simple chapels to more complex structures. Abydos is a remarkable site with immense historical, aesthetic, and cultural value, and its monuments continue to endure. The authenticity of Abydos is evident not only in its buildings and archaeological remains but also in its hieroglyphic inscriptions and preserved colors. The ongoing excavations further demonstrate the site's authenticity, ensuring that Abydos remains a true representation of ancient Egypt's cultural heritage.

4. Research Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative research methodology consisting of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, physical documentation on the site, and analysis of relevant official documents. In-depth interviews have been conducted with nine professionals from four categories of stakeholders involved in the World Heritage nomination process in Egypt. The first category consists of three World Heritage experts, both of whom have experience with the nomination process and UNESCO's requirements. The second category includes three officials from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), directly involved in the preparation of World Heritage nomination files. The third category comprises archaeological heritage managers at Abydos, responsible for site management and conservation. This includes two site managers appointed by the MoTA at the Abydos archaeological site, and one manager of an active archaeological mission operating at Abydos. The interviewees have between 18 and 32 years of experience in their respective fields. To maintain the interviewee anonymity, each interview was assigned a unique code based on the interviewee's category: *) *WHE#* (World Heritage Expert) – Assigned to the three international experts providing insights on the UNESCO nomination process. *) *MoTA#* (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities) – Used for the three government officials responsible for heritage site nominations. *) *MoTA-A#* (MoTA-Abydos) – Given to the two site managers overseeing the management and conservation of Abydos under the MoTA. *) *AMA#* (Archaeological Mission at Abydos) – Applied to the foreign mission manager involved in excavation and heritage documentation. Interview questions were structured under two primary themes: 1) WHS nomination processes and the involved stakeholder involvement – Addressing the key administrative and technical challenges faced in the nomination process.

holder involvement – Addressing the key administrative and technical challenges faced in the nomination process. 2) Barriers to Abydos' nomination and recommendations for improvement – Exploring specific issues affecting Abydos and possible solutions for advancing the nomination. The data collected from these interviews was supplemented by documentary research, which included reviewing official reports and policy documents related to the MoTA's nomination process and analyzing the current state of the Abydos archaeological site. This research was conducted by the first author as part of a Master's thesis at the University of Sharjah, in collaboration with ICCROM, and was supervised by the second and third authors. All interview transcripts are fully documented and included in the thesis appendices, which is expected to be submitted by the end of 2025.

5. Research Findings

The analysis of research findings is divided into two categories to delineate the obstacles to nomination.

5.1. Governance-related challenges: development pressures, inefficient resources, and clumsy bureaucracies

In Egypt, a country whose economy benefits significantly from tourism, government officials have been aware of the contribution WHS will make to this. This is evidenced by the successful nomination of five heritage sites in 1979, only a year after the first set of WHS inscriptions on the planet were done in 1978. However, the number of sites sleeping on the tentative list since 1994 indicates a hesitance to allocate the necessary resources to the state departments. According to an interviewee, the state's reluctance is evident in its failure to follow up on the preparation of nomination files (MoTA#1). To exemplify this almost chronic reluctance, one of our interviewees mentioned that when a dossier was prepared for the Wadi al Natrum Coptic site, "*the State Party decided to withdraw the nomination despite the problem being a very minor one*" (WHE#1). This hesitancy is due to several factors, including the enormous resources needed to preserve Egypt's extensive archaeological sites, often beyond the capacity of a developing country like Egypt, and the development pressures. Because of the responsibility to preserve the site's integrity that comes with being included in WHS, the nominated/inscribed location will not be included in any upcoming infrastructure or urban expansion plans. One of the most pressing challenges relates to ongoing development pressures near heritage sites, including Abydos. MoTA-A#1 pointed out that some archaeological sites, including Abydos, are impacted by nearby development projects. Houses built on or near archaeological sites have hindered proper protection and preservation. Although demolition orders have been issued, they have not been enforced due to the lack of proper relocation plans, which leaves these structures in place and complicates conservation efforts. This is somewhat challenging when the considered site is vast, and gaining and maintaining a WHS status imposes strict regulations. The removal of Liverpool's historic city center and Germany's Elbe Valley from the UNESCO World Heritage list due to excessive development and modern constructions, along with the delisting of Oman's Arabian Oryx Sanctuary following a drastic reduction in its

conservation area, underscores UNESCO's strict commitment to enforcing its Operational Guidelines [33]. These are cautionary examples for countries like Egypt, whose sites awaiting WHS nomination cover huge areas and require careful conservation management both to protect the material relics and the integrity of the entire landscape. A similar concern was expressed by an interviewee (MoTA#2), who stated that when a committee was formed at the MoTA to determine the priority sites to be nominated as WHS, one of the primary selection criteria was *"their distance from development projects"*. Other key factors hindering the nomination process are related to the complex and clumsy governmental bureaucracies. A diverse group of stakeholders are connected to Egypt's heritage sites. While the MoTA is the central national authority regarding tangible cultural heritage sites, the Ministry of Culture is responsible for the intangible heritage, and the Ministry of Environment for natural heritage sites. Within the MoTA, multiple departments oversee different aspects of heritage site management, from archaeological excavations to museums and restoration and conservation efforts. Additionally, multiple authorities from various ministries are involved in planning and decision-making on heritage sites, depending on the site's location and nature. These may include, among others, the Tourism Promotion Authority, the Railway Authority, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Endowments, the Ministry of Irrigation, the Ministry of Housing, the governorates, and the defense authorities (MoTA#2; MoTA-A#1; MoTA-A#2). However, despite a shared commitment to pursuing WHS nominations, an effective systematic mechanism has yet to be established. As MoTA#2 pointed out, the lack of coordination among these entities often results in delays, inefficiencies, and confusion about responsibilities. WHE#1 further noted that overlapping administrative responsibilities complicate the process, making it harder to move forward with nominations. The UNESCO WHS nomination files were handled by the Egyptian National Commission for UNESCO, which was founded as a communication agency between the state and international organizations until 2002 (MoTA#2). However, according to our interlocutor, a senior Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities manager, the National Commission was ineffective as its role in WHS nominations was unclear and replaced in 2002 by the General Department of Agreements to serve as the liaison between the Ministry and UNESCO (MoTA#2). A year later, in 2003, a total of 16 heritage sites were placed on UNESCO's tentative list. Nevertheless, the nominations have not improved, indicating that establishing new departments would not easily solve the issue. Presidential Decree No. 550 was issued in 2018, forming a Supreme Committee for the Management of World Heritage Sites, chaired by the Assistant to the President for National and Strategic Projects, with 14 ministers and representatives from various agencies and ministries as members. The second article of the decree clarified that the committee is responsible for developing a strategic vision for managing, protecting, preserving, developing, and enhancing the Egyptian WHS, maximizing their potential, and utilizing them in sustainable development plans. It also aims to coordinate with all relevant local and international authorities inside and outside Egypt concerning WHS's management, protection, and preservation

of their surrounding environments. The committee's goal was to develop management plans for sites inscribed on the permanent list of World Heritage Center. Currently, the committee's role is limited to following up on development projects within the Egyptian WHS. Almost two decades after the bulk inclusion of 16 Egyptian sites to the tentative list, the MoTA's Board of Directors approved in 2021 the preparation of nomination files for 10 sites, the sites have been listed as 1) Tell el-Amarna, 2) The Egyptian Museum, 3) The Nileometer, 4) Abydos, 5) Al-Bagawat cemeteries, 6) Sunken antiquities in Alexandria at the Eastern Harbor, 7) The Islamic city of Al-Qasr, 8) Helwan observatory, 9) Beni Hassan tombs, and 10) Dendera temple. over ten years and established a committee to oversee this (MoTA#2). The Abydos archaeological site, which is the focus of the present paper, was ranked fourth on the list. At the same time, a World Heritage Unit was established under the Department of International Relations at the General Department of Agreements in 2022, though yet to be activated. According to recent updates, ad-hoc working groups formed by the MoTA and the General Department of Agreements have been assigned to prepare WHS nomination files for the ten selected sites, ideally with consultation with world heritage experts. In addition to members from the two authorities, these groups also include representatives from relevant external parties and security agencies, as well as a representative from the governorate where the site is located and representatives from other relevant ministries, such as the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Housing, and the Ministry of Education. However, our interviewees widely argued that communication among these stakeholders remains limited, which results in weak resource management and planning (MoTA#1). For instance, one interviewee highlighted how communication between the MoTA's nomination oversight committee and other stakeholders is weak and often limited to theoretical meetings with no practical implications. Perhaps the most important issue is that some key stakeholders, especially those on the ground in local contexts, are not involved in the process at all (MoTA-A#1, MoTA-A#2, AMA#1). The significance of involving 'site managers, local and regional governments, local communities, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other interested parties and partners in the identification, nomination, management and protection processes of World Heritage properties' has been well-established by the UNESCO's Operational Guidelines (UNESCO WHC 2024, para 12, p.12). In complete agreement with these lines, an interviewed World Heritage expert experienced with WHS nomination file preparations explained how success in nomination files relies upon 'the involvement of all the national and international stakeholders from day one' (WHE#1). However, he pointed out what he called a 'grave mistake'—the exclusion of the local municipality and the Coptic Church from preparing the nomination file for Wadi Al Natrun. Commenting on the crucial aspect of consulting with the stakeholders, another interviewee (WHE#2) noted how stakeholders differ from site to site, hence the importance of selecting the correct set of relevant stakeholders for efficient management planning. She also explained how in-depth discussions with all researchers involved with proposed sites are very important for a compreh-

ensive value assessment. This is a key issue in determining the OUV and preparing more inclusive heritage management plans. Note that although Abydos has been on the tentative list since 2003 for meeting OUV criteria (iv) and (vi), the justification for its inscription—clearly defining its OUV and providing detailed supporting information (UNESCO WHC 2024, para 3)—has yet to be publicly disclosed. In the same vein, a foreign archaeological mission manager at Abydos (AMA#1) stated that they, “as foreign missions, have not been contacted by the Ministry regarding this matter [the prioritization of the WHS nomination file for Abydos]”. Emphasizing the site’s significance to the country’s rich history, he stated, “It is clear that not enough effort is being made to prepare its nomination file”, reinforcing the perception of the Egyptian government’s hesitance to pursue WHS nominations. Although the reasons for excluding archaeological missions remain unknown, it is evident that their involvement in preparing the nomination files should be reconsidered. Interestingly, not only have non-governmental heritage experts and archaeological missions on the ground remained unaware of MoTA’s new nomination agenda, but even some departments within the MoTA itself have as well. A senior manager at the General Department of Services at the MoTA, the department was not informed regarding the Ministry’s prioritizing the preparation of the nomination file for Abydos (MoTA#3). He explained that they required this information in advance to prioritize their services to the site effectively. Another crucial issue which needs to be addressed is the lack of resources and expertise available to prepare WHS nomination files. MoTA#1 noted that Egypt suffers from insufficient resources and expertise, which makes

it difficult to prepare robust nomination files. She emphasized the importance of training local staff in file preparation and management. Similarly, MoTA-A#1 highlighted that the Abydos site lacks qualified personnel, further complicating the process. A World Heritage expert interviewee (WHE#1) argued that the core team responsible for preparing the file must consist of a few experts with a competent team leader to facilitate the collection of the required information from all the stakeholders. The lack of expertise and scientific databases in the region, which are crucial for establishing robust institutional frameworks for heritage management, is well known [34]. To address this, heritage professionals and experts have attempted to establish an ‘Arab Heritage Network’ to foster intranational communication and collaboration across Arab countries (MoTA#1). However, while the benefits of such collaborative platforms are manifold, they cannot substitute the essential role of governmental authorities in allocating resources for qualification training and capacity building within WHS nomination teams. In this context, international cooperation can provide valuable support, as illustrated by an ongoing initiative involving the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage, the Supreme Council of Antiquities, and the Culture and Tourism Development Committee of Chongqing’s Fuling District. According to a World Heritage expert (WHE#3), these parties are currently preparing a joint nomination file for the Baiheliang inscriptions in the Fuling area and the Raoudha nilometre in Cairo, both hydrological landmarks that reflect the shared technological ingenuity of past civilizations in monitoring river water levels. A dedicated committee has been formed through the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities to coordinate this effort.

Table (1) Comparison of the views of MoTA officials, site managers, foreign mission representatives, and World Heritage experts.

Aspect	MoTA Officials (MoTA#)	Site Managers (MoTA-A#)	Foreign Mission Representatives (AMA#)	World Heritage Experts (WHE#)
View on WHS nomination process	There is evident confusion over responsibilities, compounded by the complexity and inefficiency of governmental bureaucracies.	Several governmental bodies from different ministries participate in the planning and decision-making processes related to heritage sites, with their involvement varying based on the site’s geographical location and specific characteristics.	The poor communication from MoTA and highlight that the foreign mission, despite being a key stakeholder, has been excluded from the nomination process.	Highlight systemic weaknesses in dossier preparation and stakeholder engagement. Overlapping administrative roles create confusion and hinder progress in advancing nomination efforts.
Stakeholder Participation and coordination	Communication between the MoTA’s nomination oversight committee and other stakeholders is poor, often confined to formal meetings that lack concrete outcomes or practical follow-through.	Lack of integration with local authorities and limited consultation.	The reasons for excluding archaeological missions from participation in nomination files remain unclear; however, it is clear that their participation in drafting the nomination files warrants reevaluation. Notably, many non-governmental heritage specialists and active archaeological missions have also been left uninformed about MoTA’s current nomination plans.	A serious oversight was the exclusion of some stakeholders from the preparation of the nomination file. This highlights the essential importance of engaging relevant stakeholders in the process. The need to identify the appropriate group of relevant stakeholders is essential for effective management planning.
Development pressures	Among the main criteria for selecting priority sites for World Heritage nomination was their remoteness from ongoing development projects.	Direct impact: Houses built on or near archaeological sites nearby complicates conservation; demolition orders unenforced due to the lack of proper relocation plans.	The archaeological sites’ integrity is severely threatened by urban expansion and ongoing infrastructure development.	The reluctance to prepare nomination files stems from multiple factors, including the vast resources required to conserve Egypt’s numerous archaeological sites—resources that often exceed the capabilities of a developing country like Egypt—as well as mounting development pressures. So, one of the most urgent issues involves the continuous development activities occurring in close proximity to heritage sites.
Expertise and resources	The limited availability of necessary resources and specialized knowledge for preparing World Heritage site nomination files. The importance of training local staff in file preparation and management. In an effort to build a scientific database across Arab countries, heritage specialists and experts have worked to create an ‘Arab Heritage Network’ aimed at promoting communication and collaboration within the region.	The absence of adequately trained staff makes the process even more challenging.	The need for a competent core team; highlight absence of scientific databases.	Engaging in dialogue with all researchers associated with the proposed sites is vital to ensure a thorough and well-rounded evaluation of their significance.

5.2. Perspectives from the ground: assessing Abydos' readiness for WHS nomination

5.2.1. The Issue of stakeholder involvement

Stakeholders at the Abydos site include public and private entities, individuals, and authorities with legal or financial interests in the site. As Shabana [12] documented, the stakeholders in Abydos are categorized into the public sector, the voluntary sector, the private sector, and the local community, fig. (6).



Figure (6) stakeholder involvement in the Abydos archaeological site

Accordingly, the public sector consists of:

- *) Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA): Oversees restoration, conservation, and legislative updates to protect the site's assets. It also includes site managers and staff to handle site management, coordinate with expeditions, and interpret the site for visitors on behalf of MoTA.
- *) Ministry of Culture: Coordinates events and ceremonies.
- *) Ministry of Interior: Provides site security through the Tourism and Antiquities Police.
- *) Ministry of Defense: Secures excavation areas and expedition members during seasons.
- *) Governorate or Municipality: Responsible for managing local administration and urban planning. Their duties include the removal of unauthorized structures or encroachments near or within the archaeological site, as well as contributing to the area's lighting and infrastructure development.

The voluntary sector comprises Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and scientific institutions operating in or for Abydos, such as:

- *) Foreign Archaeological Missions' site managers and staff: Conduct archaeological excavation and conservation works in line with agreements and interpret the site for visitors. Currently, eight foreign archaeological missions operate in Abydos.
- *) Organizations such as the University of Pennsylvania Research Foundation and the American Research Center in Egypt: Contribute to excavation, restoration, conservation, and documentation efforts.
- *) Local universities (e.g., Sohag University): On 12/05/2016, the Permanent Committee for Egyptian Antiquities approved a request from Sohag University to conduct geophysical studies in Abydos using non-destructive techniques. Funded by the Science, Technology and Innovation Funding Authority (STDF), the project aimed to discover buried antiquities, such as tombs and statues, using ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and magnetic surveys. This led to the publication of several scientific publications and postgraduate theses [35]. The private sector consists of local businesses such as:
 -) Tourist Agencies: Integrate Abydos into tour programs.

-) Tour guides: Educate visitors about the site's value and lead private tours. -) Local businesses: Cater to the tourist needs (hotels, cafes, restaurants, souvenir shops, etc.) as well as those of the residents. The local community, a key stakeholder in Abydos, comprises residents living in the area surrounding Abydos. Many depend on businesses and services connected to the archaeological site for their livelihood. As mentioned earlier, UNESCO WHC prioritizes the involvement of NGOs, local communities, and other interested parties in preparing the nomination files. However, our interviews in Abydos have revealed that MoTA has yet to communicate its decision to prioritize the site's nomination to key stakeholders, including local residents, private sector entities, and even some governmental departments (MoTA#1, MoTA#3, MoTA-A#1). A foreign mission representative further confirmed that foreign archaeological teams working at Abydos had not been consulted regarding the nomination prioritization (AMA#1).

5.2.2. The issues of conservation management of a substantial archaeological area

The nomination of large areas, whether archaeological sites or historic cities, has been a major challenge for Egypt due to the extensive responsibility it entails. WHS-listed sites such as the Giza Plateau, Saqqara, and the temples from Philae to Abu Simbel face similar challenges regarding preservation, management, and development of restrictions. If Abydos is inscribed, similar challenges might apply. Due to these concerns, a proposal emerged within MoTA to reduce the nominated area to include only the temple of Seti I. However, this idea was met with strong opposition from World Heritage experts and archaeologists (WHE#2, AMA#1, MoTA-A#1). A World Heritage expert (WHE#2) questioned the proposal, stating: "Is the temple of Seti I sufficient to represent all the values associated with the area and narrate the story of Abydos? Does the Temple of Seti I alone reflect the site's Outstanding Universal Value? We must look at the site and its values comprehensively, and this can be done through experts, researchers, and foreign missions who can determine whether the temple of Seti I alone is capable of conveying the complete story of the Abydos area". Similarly, a foreign archaeological mission representative emphasized that "Abydos must be treated as a single entity. Abydos is an area of significant historical depth, and dividing it into separate zones would impact its history as a unified site" (AMA#1). Beyond this debate, on-the-ground complexities regarding property rights and unauthorized excavations persist. A major challenge concerns the 102 houses built between the Temple of Seti I and the Temple of Ramses II. A despite demolition orders issued since the 1990s, these structures remain due to the absence of alternative housing solutions for residents (MoTA-A#1). The foreign mission director added: "I believe that the issue of the 102 houses located east of the temple of Ramses II should be addressed. If it is possible to relocate them to another area—while ensuring

a decent living standard for those who will be moved—it would be beneficial, as the area where these houses are built is historically significant for Abydos” (AMA#1). Illegal excavations remain another pressing issue. Despite efforts by the Tourism and Antiquities Police, illicit digging continues in some locations. In 2014 a recent cleaning operation by the Supreme Council of Antiquities uncovered an ancient Egyptian shrine beneath the built houses after illegal excavation attempts, further highlighting the site's archaeological significance and the need for swift intervention. Both MoTA-A#1 and AMA#1 acknowledged that the construction of a 3.5 km protective fence-wall around Abydos was a significant step toward protecting the site from encroachments. However, they stressed that more resources and personnel are needed to ensure full protection of such a vast area.

5.2.3. Assessing the availability of tourist services at the Abydos archaeological site

As part of this research's fieldwork, the availability of visitor services in Abydos was documented using the checklist template prepared by the Department of Services at Tourist and Archaeological Sites and Museums at MoTA. The template includes eight main categories of services: **1)** visit preparation, **2)** visitor path, **3)** digital services, **4)** visitor services, **5)** health and safety services, **6)** security services, **7)** administrative department, and **8)** accessibility for people with disabilities. According to the fieldwork documentation, apart from security and visitor services, the Abydos archaeological site has significant deficiencies in all other categories as summarized in fig. (7).

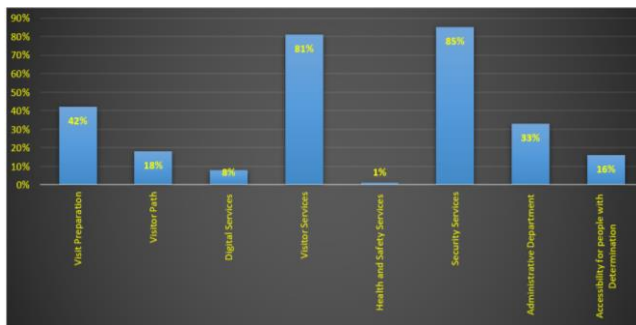


Figure (7) percentage of available services in the Abydos archaeological site (2024)

The assessment revealed that health and safety services were the least available, comprising only 1% of total service elements. Digital services ranked second lowest, with an availability rate of just 8%, suggesting an absence of plans to implement such services. By contrast, security services were the most available, at 85%, likely due to Egypt’s focus on securing archaeological and tourist sites. However, a lack of proper signage, accessibility infrastructure, and digital interpretation tools remains a major obstacle to visitor engagement at Abydos. Highlighting the lack of these services as part of the management assessment of the infrastructure, this pertains to development and enhancements, often aimed at accommodating visitors, including roads, parking areas, facilities,

etc. What is the present condition, and what are the future requirements? Where can new developments be situated, and what impact will they have? [36]. All this will help in preparing a conservation plan for the site.

6. Discussion (Challenges in nominating Abydos for the world heritage list)

While Egypt adopts a strategy for UNESCO WHS nominations, the case of Abydos reveals persistent obstacles that hinder the nomination process. The findings of this study underscore three major challenges: governance and bureaucracy, resource constraints, and development pressures. These issues align with broader patterns observed in other Egyptian sites on the tentative list, reinforcing concerns about the effectiveness of Egypt’s nomination strategies.

6.1. Bureaucratic inefficiencies and stakeholder fragmentation

One of the most pressing challenges in Abydos’ WHS nomination is the complex and fragmented governance structure. Despite the establishment of multiple committees and working groups within the MoTA, a systematic mechanism for managing nomination files remains absent (MoTA#2, WHE#1). Stakeholders from different ministries, local authorities, and foreign missions operate without a unified coordination strategy, leading to delays and inefficiencies. The exclusion of key stakeholders from early discussions further complicates the process. Foreign archaeological missions at Abydos reported that they had not been consulted regarding the nomination prioritization (AMA#1). Additionally, some MoTA departments were unaware that Abydos was listed among the ten sites prioritized for nomination (MoTA#3). This reflects a broader issue of communication gaps within and beyond the MoTA, affecting the effectiveness of file preparation and management planning

6.2. Resource constraints and lack of expertise

The nomination process requires technical expertise, financial resources, and well-trained personnel; all of which remain scarce in the case of Abydos (MoTA#1, MoTA-A#1). The absence of a dedicated, well-trained core team has led to slow progress in file preparation. As noted in previous studies [7], successful nominations often depend on a specialized task force that can oversee the process efficiently, yet Egypt lacks a centralized nomination team with the required expertise. Furthermore, voluntary ad-hoc committees currently tasked with preparing the nomination file lack the necessary institutional support (MoTA#2). While some members possess relevant experience, their work is not officially recognized as a full-time responsibility, leading to inefficiencies in file preparation. This issue has also been observed in other Egyptian sites that remain on the tentative list for decades, with limited tangible progress toward the final inscription.

6.3. Development pressures and site integrity risks

As highlighted in the findings, urban encroachment and infrastructure development pose serious threats to Abydos' integrity (MoTA-A#1, AMA#1). Despite being a site of OUVs, Abydos faces ongoing development pressures, particularly from illegal constructions near key monuments such

as the Temples of Seti I and Ramses II. Demolition orders have been issued for over 102 unauthorized houses, yet enforcement remains stalled due to the lack of relocation plans for affected residents (MoTA-A#1). This mirrors challenges faced by other large-scale archaeological sites in Egypt, where development conflicts often delay nomination efforts [33]. Beyond encroachment, illegal excavations continue to threaten the site. A recent incident uncovered an ancient shrine beneath residential buildings, further demonstrating the archaeological significance of the area and the urgency of conservation measures (AMA#1). The protective fence wall constructed around Abydos has helped mitigate some risks, but ensuring full protection of such a vast site remains a challenge due to limited personnel and funding (MoTA-A#1).

6.4. Comparative analysis

This section offers a comparative analysis between Abydos and other Egyptian sites on the tentative list, such as Raoudha Nilometre in Cairo and Rashid cities, to determine whether the challenges faced are site-specific or indicative of broader, systemic issues affecting World Heritage nominations in Egypt. Regarding Raoudha Nilometer in Cairo: Strabo (c. 58 BC-21/25 AD) described the nilometer as a stone-built well with markings that recorded the Nile's flood levels. The water in the well rose and fell in sync with the river, and inspectors would study these markings to monitor the flood. Their findings were then communicated to the public. The challenges facing the site include, lack of community involvement in decision-making, insufficient encouragement of investment in heritage areas, low public awareness, weak research and capacity levels, absence of digital services, limited information management and preservation, and failure to engage local residents in raising awareness—all contribute to ongoing challenges in heritage site management and protection [37]. Rashid, also known as Rosetta, was considered one of Egypt's key maritime gateways due to its active commercial trade through ports on both the Mediterranean Sea and the Nile River. In the Ottoman period, many of Rosetta's buildings were constructed using materials from earlier historical periods—Pharaonic, Phoenician, Roman, and Greek—reflecting the layered heritage that defines Rosetta today. Rashid faces significant challenges in heritage preservation, particularly due to the neglect of its historic buildings and their surrounding areas, which has led to a decline in its touristic appeal. The deterioration of infrastructure and lack of attention to heritage zones pose serious risks to preservation efforts. Although Ministerial Decree No. 113 of 1986 emphasized the importance of integrating the city's historical assets into both national and international tourism, the failure to effectively capitalize on Rashid's unique heritage and strategic location remains a key reason why it has not secured a place on the global tourism map, despite the richness of its urban and architectural legacy [38]. This comparative analysis illustrates that the challenges facing Abydos—such as limited community involvement, weak institutional coordination, insufficient investment, and inadequate infrastructure—are not unique but rather reflect systemic issues prevalent across other heritage sites in Egypt, including the Raoudha Nilometer and Rashid city. These sites similarly suffer from neglect, lack

of integration into tourism and development strategies, poor information management, and minimal public engagement. This consistency in shortcomings across diverse contexts suggests that the difficulties are rooted in broader structural and governance-related deficiencies within Egypt's heritage management framework, rather than being specific to Abydos alone.

6.5. Implications for Egypt's WHS nomination strategy

The findings of this study echo challenges identified in previous research regarding Egypt's WHS nomination process [12]. Despite having a clear WHS nomination agenda, Egypt lacks an integrated, long-term management strategy that ensures continuity and efficiency. The case of Abydos exemplifies the broader systemic issues preventing Egyptian sites from progressing beyond the tentative list. Additionally, the tendency to limit nomination boundaries (as seen in the proposal to nominate only the temple of Seti I instead of the broader Abydos area) indicates a reactive approach rather than a proactive commitment to protecting the entire site (WHE#2, AMA#1). Such reductions in site boundaries risk undermining the site's universal value, which is crucial for UNESCO inscription. International cooperation plays a vital role in supporting Egypt's World Heritage nomination efforts. For instance, the ongoing collaboration between the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage and the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities to prepare a joint nomination file illustrates the potential of bilateral partnerships. To institutionalize such initiatives, Egypt could establish a formal "International Heritage Cooperation Unit" within MoTA, tasked with identifying and managing joint nomination opportunities, facilitating technical exchanges, and aligning foreign expertise with national priorities. Likewise, the Arab Heritage Network, envisioned as a regional platform for professional collaboration, should be formalized through a binding memorandum of understanding (MoU) among Arab states. This would enable shared access to expertise, comparative site evaluation, and a regional training framework tailored to World Heritage criteria and file preparation. Embedding this network within existing structures, such as ALECSO (Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization), could provide institutional continuity and legitimacy. These steps would ensure that both international and regional collaborations move beyond ad hoc arrangements and become integrated components of Egypt's long-term heritage management strategy.

7. Conclusion

The case of Abydos highlights the broader systemic challenges hindering Egypt's efforts to nominate sites for UNESCO's World Heritage List (WHS). Despite Abydos' Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and its inclusion on the tentative list since 2003, the lack of coordination among stakeholders, bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited expertise, and development pressures have significantly stalled the nomination process. The exclusion of key players, such as foreign archaeological missions and local communities, from early planning discussions further complicates progress. Additionally, resource shortages and weak enforcement of conservation policies continue to pose risks to the site's integrity. This study reaffirms that without a clear,

systematic, and well-coordinated approach, Egypt's WHS nomination process will continue to face delays. The findings emphasize that a fragmented nomination strategy, reliance on ad-hoc committees, and the absence of a dedicated World Heritage department within the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, which should ideally function as a full-time task force composed of local experts in World Heritage and nomination dossiers selected based on their experience in the field, is a significant gap. Once the file is completed by this team, an international reviewer should be consulted. It is also essential to collaborate with relevant academic and research institutions. Moreover, there is currently no allocation in the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities' budget to support the preparation of nomination files. The case of Abydos serves as a critical example of these barriers, reinforcing the need for stronger governance frameworks, sustainable conservation policies, and more inclusive stakeholder engagement to ensure the preservation and global recognition of Egypt's unparalleled heritage.

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