

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Porec (Croatia)

No 809

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The episcopal complex of the Euphrasian Basilica in the historic centre of Porec
<i>Location</i>	Istria
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Croatia
<i>Date</i>	19 July 1996

Justification by State Party

The Euphrasian Basilica in Porec is the most integrally preserved early Christian cathedral complex and unique by virtue of the fact that all the basic components - church, memorial chapel, atrium, baptistery, and episcopal palace - are preserved.

The Basilica, including its earlier phases (oratory, *basilica gemina*, and basilica proper), is a characteristic example of 5th and 6th century religious architecture, showing significant Byzantine influence. It is a unique artistic achievement, especially because of its mosaics.

Criteria i, iii, and iv

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

Churches were established in Porec (the *Municipium Parentium* of the Roman province of Histria) between the early 4th and mid 6th centuries. No fewer than four were built in succession on the north coast of the low peninsula where the town was situated; only the latest of these, the basilica of Euphrasius, has survived.

The earliest phase, a simple oratory within a large Roman private house in which the bones of the local martyr, Maurus, were placed, is dated to around 313.

This was restored and enlarged with the addition of a second hall (the *basilicae geminae*) later in the 4th century, but remained a simple structure with a rectangular plan. In the 5th century a new church was built on the site. It took the form of a three-aisled basilica without an apse, characteristic for Istria and Noricum.

The present church was built in the mid 6th century to the orders of the bishop whose name it retains, Euphrasius. In his dedicatory inscription in the apse mosaic, Euphrasius comments that the church that he found on this site was ruinous and devoid of ornamentation; however, recent studies have established that this was a somewhat exaggerated statement, since the new building incorporated three of the perimeter walls of the earlier structure and traces of mosaics from this phase have been discovered.

In addition to his new basilica, Euphrasius erected a complex of associated buildings - an atrium beyond the narrow narthex of the basilica, a baptistery at the end of the atrium, a monumental episcopal palace between the atrium and the sea, and a small memorial chapel to the north-east of the basilica. All these buildings were richly ornamented with mosaics, alabaster, marble, mother-of-pearl, and stucco, in the lavish tradition of the Byzantine "Golden Age" during the reign of Justinian.

Later additions to the complex were the "Kanonika" (Canon's House) of 1257, the 16th century bell-tower, and some minor buildings such as the sacristy (15th century) and two chapels (17th and 19th centuries respectively).

Description

The episcopal complex is an integral part of the historic centre of Porec, which has preserved its Roman street pattern to a considerable extent. The original church, in an *insula* in the north-eastern quarter of the Roman town, was extended by Euphrasius, so that the narthex of his new basilica occupies part of the Roman street.

The basic complex consists of the three-aisled basilica with a triple apse, the elliptical memorial chapel to the north-east of the basilica, the narthex on its west front, the square atrium, partitioned by a quadriporticus, the octagonal baptistery, and the episcopal palace

The *basilica* built by Euphrasius in the 6th century is three-aisled, with a large central apse flanked by two shallower side apses. The walls on the northern, western, and southern sides are those of the earlier basilica on the site, and the bases of the two rows of nine columns that divide up the interior are also from that structure.

The plain columns are surmounted by capitals with different forms of carved ornamentation (the Byzantine version of Corinthian capitals; inverted basket capitals; fretted capitals with animal and vegetable motifs above), but identical in opposite pairs. They are linked by arcading with stucco ornamentation, which survives intact on the north side, where traces of the original polychrome paint

are still discernible. The 15th century frescos are also still visible on the western wall and in the lunette over the southern apse.

The marble priests' seat extends the whole length of the main apse, with a raised episcopal throne in the centre. The lower part of the wall is decorated with coloured stone and mother-of-pearl. Above there is a stucco band, below the mosaics, which occupy the spaces around the four windows, the interior of the semi-dome, and the front wall. The central feature, inside the dome, is a representation of the Virgin Mary, holding the Christ child and flanked by angels, local martyrs, and Bishop Euphrasius. Only a small portion of the original floor mosaics survive, in the south apse.

The exteriors of the walls are plastered and divided by pilaster strips, connected by blind arcades. The whole of the top section of the west front of the building, above the cloistered narthex, was originally covered with mosaics, but much of this decoration has disappeared.

The *memorial chapel* is reached from the main basilica by a narrow barrel-vaulted corridor. The chapel is of trefoil plan, the apses being round inside and polygonal on the exterior. Traces of mosaic are still visible on the floor of the forecourt.

Only small traces of the 6th century *bishop's palace* can now be recognized. It appears to have been originally an oblong building with an interior arrangement of three aisles, the centre one terminating in an apse. The present structure is more recent, consisting of additional structures added over many centuries; as a result it is utilitarian in appearance.

The *baptistry* and the *atrium* conserve their original forms but have been heavily restored in recent years; they are recorded as having been in ruins as early as the 16th century.

Archaeological excavations in the present century have uncovered substantial remains of the northern of the "twin churches." These are on display and contain some fine 5th and 6th century mosaics.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Euphrasian Basilica is a cultural monument designated according to the 1967 Cultural Monuments Protection Act. It was inscribed in 1968 as No RRI-186 in the Register of Immovable Cultural Monuments. As a result, any intervention requires authorization by the competent local protection agency, in this case the Rijeka Branch Office of the State Agency for the Protection of the Cultural and Natural Heritage.

It is relevant in this context to note that the historic centre of Porec, which retains much of the Roman layout and contains a number of medieval buildings and most of its medieval fortifications, is also protected under this legislation.

Management

The complex is owned by the Porec and Pula Episcopal Ordinariate. It retains its function as the cathedral of the Porec and Pula Diocese, although the residence of the bishop moved from the Bishop's Palace in 1992 (it is now a museum).

Direct management of the complex is the responsibility of the Cultural Monuments Protection and Reconstruction Committee, of which the president is the Mayor of Porec.

The management plan provides for the church, sacristy, atrium, and baptistry to retain their active ecclesiastical functions. The archaeological area and the former Palace will be further developed as a museum.

The maps and plans provided in the nomination dossier contain precise delineation of the monument zone proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List, but there is no indication of any form of buffer zone (but see "ICOMOS recommendations for future action" below).

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The buildings of the complex were in a poor state of repair in the 18th century when Bishop Negri, who was interested in the history of the buildings, instituted the first restoration work on the cathedral.

Extensive reconstruction took place on the portico of the atrium in 1866, whilst the baptistry, which at that time was roofless and in danger of complete collapse, was comprehensively reconstructed. The first major modern project lasted from 1929 to 1939 and involved extensive archaeological excavation and architectural restoration and reconstruction on many parts of the complex.

Since 1953 a large number of restoration and conservation projects have been carried out. A new campaign of overall restoration of the whole complex began in 1994-96 and is continuing.

The report of the ICOMOS expert mission (see "Action by ICOMOS" below) commented that "The recent architectural and structural research measures which have been carried out with extraordinary sensitivity and the consequent conservation and restoration activities bear witness to the high quality of the conservators responsible (as well as the churchmen and civil servants entrusted with the complex's care). It can thus be expected that future conservation and restoration measures will be carried out with the correct proportions of protective and visual authenticity and restraint."

Authenticity

The authenticity of the Euphrasian episcopal complex is an exemplary illustration of historical multi-stratification, in the spirit of the 1964 Venice Charter. Restoration work has been carried out here from the Middle Ages up to the present day, according to the

perceptions and philosophies of the succeeding periods.

The results of this continuous activity have become intrinsic parts of the monument itself and bestow a special value on it as witnesses to historical change.

that is exceptional by virtue of its completeness and its unique basilican cathedral.

Evaluation

ICOMOS, September 1997

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Porec in January 1997.

Qualities

The Porec episcopal complex is an outstanding and almost completely intact early Christian cathedral complex with a unique basilican church and a representative and stylistically important episcopal palace. It is, furthermore, a structural ensemble which, when taken with the archaeological remains of several earlier building phases, forms part of a greater unit, namely, the historic town of Porec. As such it provides the unifying factor for cultural, urban, and architectural history beyond the cathedral complex alone and into the late classical and early medieval town in which it was established.

Comparative analysis

The nomination dossier rightly draws attention to comparable ecclesiastical complexes in Ravenna and Aquileia. However, its exceptional quality when compared with these important sites lies in the fact of the completeness and compactness of the group and in the intimate relationship that it has with its historic town.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

During the ICOMOS expert mission, the attention of the Croatian authorities was drawn to the absence of a buffer zone, and it was suggested that the entire historic centre of Porec should be considered to be the buffer zone. This was judged to be both acceptable, since the historic town is protected under Croatian cultural heritage legislation (see "Legal status" above), and relevant, in view of the relationship between episcopal complex and town. This proposal was accepted by the State Party and a revised supplement to the original nomination form was received making this proposal.

The State Party also supplied additional information at the request of the ICOMOS mission, which has been used in the preparation of this evaluation. The name of the nominated property was also changed, at the suggestion of the ICOMOS mission, to that used in this evaluation.

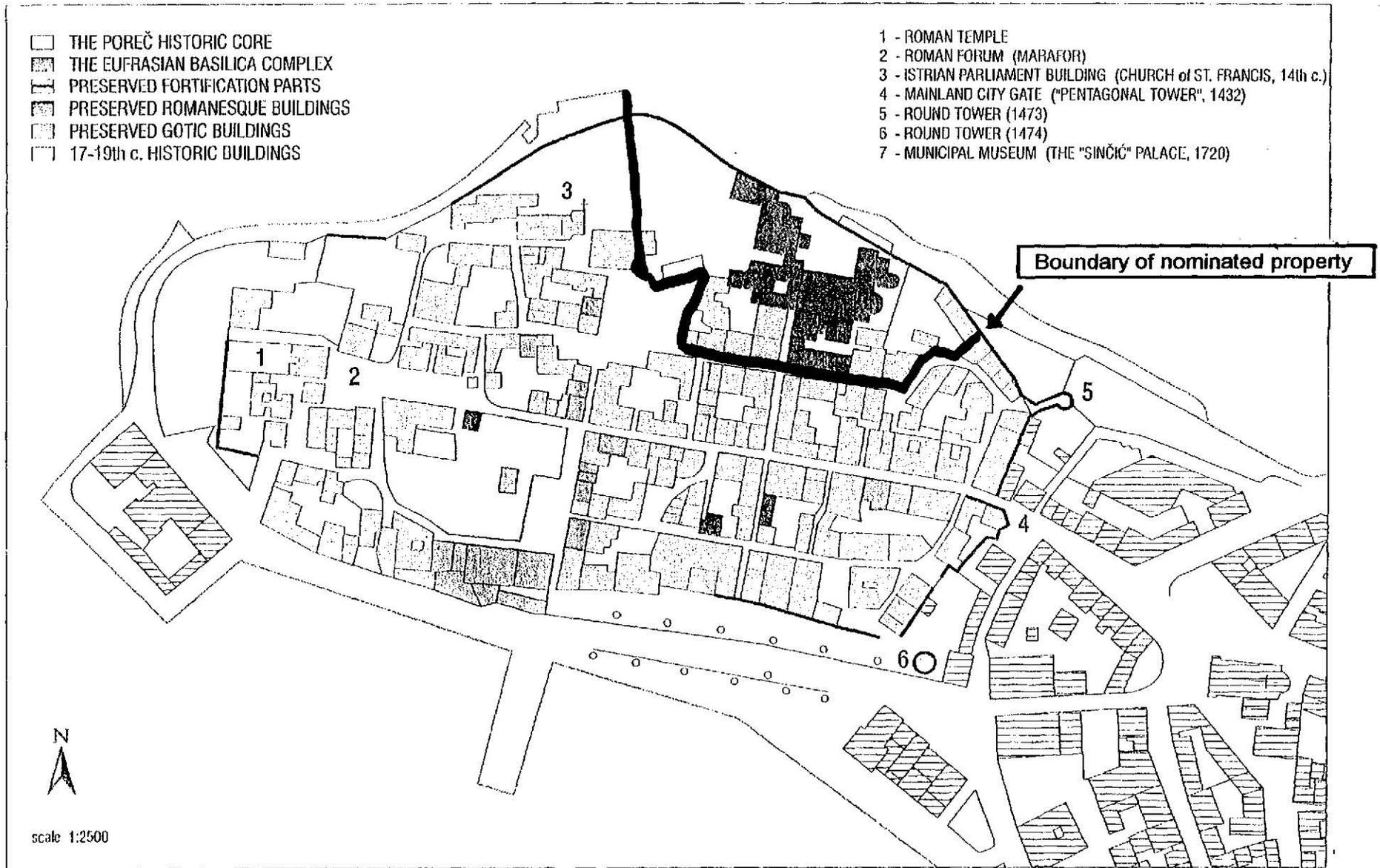
Recommendation

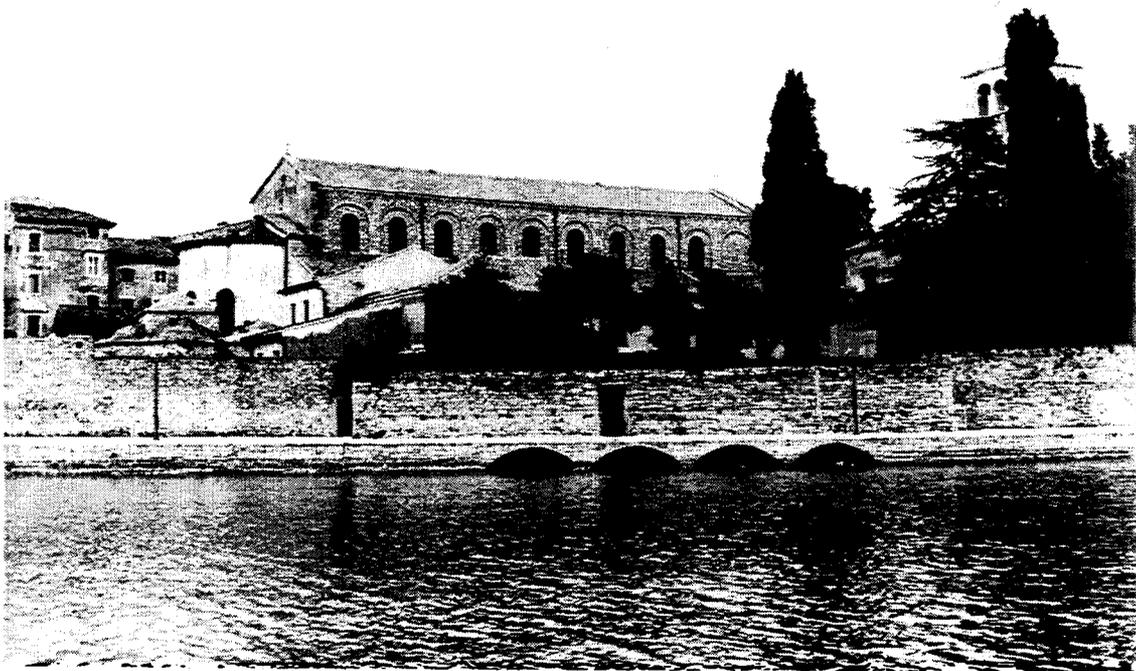
That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii, iii, and iv*:

The episcopal complex of the Euphrasian Basilica in the historic centre of Porec is an outstanding example of an early Christian episcopal ensemble

EPISCOPAL COMPLEX OF EUFRASIAN BASILIKA WITHIN HISTORICAL CENTER OF POREČ

Poreč :
 Plan de Vieille Ville indiquant la localisation de la basilique /
 Street plan of Poreč Old City, showing location of Basilica





Porec :
Ensemble de la basilique euphrasienne vu du nord /
The Euphrasian Basilica complex from the north



Porec :
Porche de l'atrium et façade ouest de la basilique /
The atrium porch and the west front of the Basilica