

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Modena (Italy)

No 327

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Cathedral, Torre Civica and Piazza Grande in Modena
<i>Location</i>	Town of Modena, Region of Emilia-Romagna
<i>State Party</i>	Italy
<i>Date:</i>	28 June 1996

Justification by the State Party

The various historical and artistic aspects of the monumental complex constituted by the cathedral, here briefly outlined, are completely in line with the criteria indicated for inclusion on the World Heritage List. They are:

- Modena cathedral, with its extraordinary collection of sculptures, is a testament to the creative genius of man;
- at the beginning of the 12th century, the cathedral represented one of the principal forming grounds for a new figurative language, destined greatly to influence the development of the Romanesque in the Po plain. At the European level, the sculpture of the cathedral of Modena represents a privileged observatory for the understanding of the cultural context accompanying the revival of monumental stone sculpture. Only very few other monumental complexes, such as Toulouse and Moissac, can claim to be so important in this respect;
- the cathedral is one of the most exceptional testimonies of urban society in Northern Italy between the 12th and 13th centuries: its organization, its religious character, its beliefs, and its values are all reflected in the history of the building of the cathedral;
- the monumental complex constituted by the cathedral, the tower, and the square offer an example of urban development closely connected with the values of civic life, especially in the relationships it reveals between economy, religion and the political-social life of the city.

[Note The State Party does not make any proposals in the nomination dossier concerning the criteria under which it considers the property should be

inscribed on the World Heritage List. However, in the tentative list for Italy, sent to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre on 28 June 1996, criteria i, ii, iii and iv are quoted.]

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the cathedral, bell-tower, and Piazza Grande in Modena constitute a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

Modena is located in the Po plain at the cross-roads of the ancient *Via Aemilia* linking Piacenza with Rimini and the road leading to the Brenner Pass. The history of Modena between the 11th and 12th centuries centres on three institutions: the famous Benedictine abbey of Nonantola, the Modena bishopric, and the Canossas, the most powerful noble dynasty in the central part of northern Italy at the time. With the decline in royal authority (end of the 9th century to the early 10th century) the bishops of Modena and the Canossas obtained land donations and tax privileges that enhanced their authority and influence in the ensuing centuries. Adalberto di Canossa, who had become a faithful ally of Emperor Otto I (966-973), was raised to the rank of Count of the Modena territories, although the town still remained under the control of its bishop. A century later, the Canossas' territories extended to the central Po plain and to Tuscany.

At the time of the Investitures Dispute, which opposed the empire and the papacy from the end of the 11th century, Mathilda di Canossa (1045-1115) initially played the role of mediator, and then took the papacy's side. The history of the Modena bishopric followed at that time the fluctuations of the imperial party, which was linked with the fortunes of the Canossas in Modena. Following the excommunication of Bishop Eribert (1055-1094) the bishopric experienced a succession crisis (1095-1100), which was temporarily relieved by the election of Benedict, who was close to Mathilda, and finally solved in 1100 by the arrival of his successor, Dodon (1100-1134). The new bishop appointed by Pope Urban II ended the rift and marked the triumph of Gregorian reform in the town.

The construction of the cathedral, dedicated to San Geminiano, Bishop of Modena and patron saint of the town (+349), and of the bell-tower was decided when the bishop's see was vacant. The inscriptions in the cathedral and the text of the *Relatio translationis sancti Geminiani* provide invaluable evidence of the first phase of building (1099-1106). These documents, unusually for medieval tradition, mention the names of the architect, Lanfranco, and the sculptor, Wiligelmo, who collaborated to produce this outstanding monument of architecture and sculpture, commissioned by the people of Modena. The new cathedral had to be larger than its predecessor, built by the schismatic Bishop Eribert

in 1070, to prove that the clergy and people of Modena had fully returned to the fold of the Roman catholic church. By returning the lands to the monasteries and churches at the end of her life, Mathilda di Canossa confirmed that her estates were disintegrating. At the same time local liberties grew in Modena, to be fully exercised by the consuls from 1227 onwards.

The construction of the cathedral and the bell-tower took place in an urban structure that was already largely formed. Although documents before the 12th century tended to emphasize the cathedral as the reference point in the town, attention now extended to the space surrounding the building, which was destined to become a public square. Here it was possible to identify buildings, such as the seats of the ecclesiastical administration and the civil courts of the Bishop and subsequently of the municipality. This was the bishop's residence and the administrative centre connected to it (1070), the cathedral's chapter and its school, which produced a vast amount of literature between the 10th and 12th centuries, the Palazzo Comunale (1194), and houses with vegetable gardens on the south-east side of the Square. Over the centuries, the buildings on the southern side of the Square housed craft workshops, shops, the municipal meat market, the seat of the Giudici delle Vettovaglie (1615), and a prison.

The present cathedral was built on the site of the one constructed by Bishop Eribert (1070), which had five naves and was destroyed at the time the new cathedral was built, on an axis oblique to the original. Between the laying of the foundation stone on 9 May 1099, the removal of the Saint's relics into the crypt (30 May 1106), and the consecration of the altar several months later (consecration by Pope Lucius III took place in 1184), construction of the choir and western wing was completed simultaneously. Construction of the large transverse arches linking the two walls of the nave and those linking the other aisles was probably also well advanced. The Maestri Campionesi, architects and sculptors who were commissioned to maintain the building by the Cathedral's works office from the second half of the 12th century onwards, opened two side portals and the rose window in the facade, followed by the Porta Regia on the southern side (around 1180). Inside they enlarged the crypt, raised the choir, and expanded the roof in order to build a false transept (end 12th to start of 13th century). During the 15th century the original wooden ceilings were replaced by stone vaulting.

The bell-tower, whose tall silhouette (85m) is a landmark to travellers approaching the town, is closely linked to the cathedral by two arches. It gave the town its daily rhythm as well as housing the civil registers. It was built at the same time as the cathedral and was thus designed by Lanfranco (up to the fourth storey) and by the Maestri Campionesi (top half) (1261-1319).

Description

Only minor changes have been made to the Piazza Grande. Its quadrangular shape has been preserved, and it has been lined since it was built in the

second half of the 12th century on its northern side by the flank of the cathedral. In the last century some of the old chapter buildings built round a cloister were cleared to build a small street, currently the Via Lanfranco, on the line of the old Via delle Pellicchiere. The Cathedral's Stonework Museum, the chapter's archives, and the sacristy, which are linked to the cathedral by an elevated passage, open on this street. The old and new Palazzi Comunali were connected by the Clock Tower (13th to 16th centuries) and blended in by the means of new facades and arcades (17th to 19th centuries). Two monuments that are intimately connected to the Palazzo Comunale illustrate the civic life of the square: the Bonissima statue, symbol of the administration which was responsible for trade, and the Preda Ringadora, used by orators for haranguing the citizenry. The Archbishop's Palace, closely connected to the cathedral by means of a private passage, is on the western side of the square. This brick building underwent a first transformation at the end of the 15th century, and an additional floor was added in 1776. Further changes were made in the ensuing decades. The appearance of the southern side radically changed when the new Law Courts were built by Luigi Giacomelli in 1892. This imposing monumental building was replaced by a new building designed by Giò Ponti in the 1960s.

The bell-tower, called the Ghirlandina, and the cathedral make up an indivisible unit in both physical and stylistic terms. This monumental tower, built in the same materials as the cathedral, consists of six floors emphasized by small blind arcades lit by simple openings, and then by two- and then three-light windows on the upper floors. The austerity and power of the bottom half of the tower, which is reminiscent of Roman towers, is surmounted by an octagonal drum and an upper lantern which express the new feeling of the Maestri Campionesi for Gothic architecture.

Lanfranco decided to clad his new cathedral in Istrian stone, to give the building the splendour of the temples of antiquity. The elegant tripartite facades and the side-walls have embedded semi-columns linked to arches with arcades below. All the architectural features underlining the structure of the building - embedded semi-columns, small columns, cornices, and blind arcades - are decorated with sculptures. The six portals opening along the wall feature Roman-style open lunettes and architraves. Four of them are preceded by a two-storey canopy, in palaeo-Christian style, supported for the first time in Modena by monumental lions.

The all-brick interior has mostly preserved its original structure, consisting of a nave on which opens an unfloored gallery and tall windows, two aisles, and a choir raised above a crypt ending in three straight apses. The arches are supported by a system of alternating supports whose marble columns have Corinthian capitals at their tops sculpted by Wiligelmo; these are one of the best examples of the imitation of antiquity in Europe. Despite the changes made to Lanfranco's original part, the cathedral shows the architect's attempt to move away from the Lombard tradition in order to create a completely new style of building, integrating

the basilica style inherited from palaeo-Christian models, with internal wooden ceiling and columns, with a formula of Burgundian origin that stresses the strongly vertical development of the building by means of large semi-circular transverse arches, an alternating system of supports in the nave, and broken vaults in the side-aisles. In addition, the latest research has shown that in calculating the modules of the plan, the architect adapted the geometrical ratio recommended by Vitruvius (*De Architectura*, VI, 3, 141, 1-7) which was widely used in the Middle Ages in large complex buildings, such as the third church at Cluny. This emphasizes the classical training of Lanfranco who, furthermore, used the same refined technique in working stone as in brick, as shown, amongst other examples, by the zigzag frets in the main arches clad in pointed brickwork, a very rare decorative motive in Italy at that time.

All the interior decorations designed by the architect seem to have been very plain. The Maestri Campionesi introduced the false transept (end of the 12th to the beginning of the 13th century) and the vaulting on the nave (beginning of the 15th century). They were undoubtedly also involved in the interior decorations when the decision was taken to paint the walls and to decorate the architecture with facing painted to resemble brickwork, particularly on the main arches, the pilasters in the large bays, and the friezes running along the walls (these decorations have now disappeared). The most complete evidence of the Campione sculptors is the large rood screen, built for the consecration of the cathedral by Pope Lucius III (1184), which illustrates five scenes of Christ's passion in monumental style. The ambo (raised reading desk) with figures of the Fathers of the Church and symbols of the Evangelists, which has always been associated with the rood screen, is slightly older (1208-1225). In the Renaissance, the cathedral was enriched with works of art carved and painted by Agostino di Duccio, Cristoforo Lendinara, and Dosso Dossi.

Modena Cathedral was also a large sculpture workshop, brilliantly illustrated by Wiligelmo, particularly in the facade, which is a veritable corpus of the sculptor's work. An iconographic programme was developed there suggesting the promise of salvation to the faithful. This theme can be seen in the climbing stems festooned with people, animals, and fantastic creatures inspired by bestiaries, in the moulding of the intrados and in the jambs of the central portal, which depict the prophets, and then in the discontinuous frieze, where the events of Genesis are developed in four groups; their iconography is related to "Adam's Game," one of the first medieval sacred plays. The sculptor's talent can be appreciated in these works, served by his flexible, agile way of using images, varying the positions of the characters, as well as his attention to expression and detail, his ability to create the effects of depth by accentuating volumes, and his wide repertoire of draping. Wiligelmo drew in particular on Roman antiquity, but he was also inspired by western palaeo-Christian and medieval composition methods, themes, and techniques, which he modified to create a new entirely Romanesque figurative language. He

introduced new coherent iconographic systems based on the links between the Old and New Testaments that were developed later not only in Italy but also in France.

The central portal of the facade undoubtedly acted as a prototype for the others. In the southern portal, the Porta dei Principi, dedicated to the New Testament, the Master who took his name from this gate (Maestro della Porta dei Principi) and who belonged to Wiligelmo's school took up, but in a drier, more nervous way, the motif of the peopled climbing stem on the intrados and introduced the Twelve Apostles on the jambs. The architrave tells the story of the journey of San Geminiano to Constantinople to cure the Emperor's daughter, his return to Modena and his death. The decision to insert these themes in the southern door of the building which faces the Piazza Grande was interpreted as the church wanting to tell its own story which, through the life of the holy bishop, is also the town's history.

The Porta della Pescheria, in the north, provides the earliest representation of the legend of King Arthur, where he attacks a castle in which Princess Guinevere is held prisoner. The jambs again feature the climbing stem motive, a representation of the twelve months of the year for which the Master of the Pescheria dispensed with the traditional zodiac, replacing it with the works characteristic of each month; the architrave depicts *fabliaux* (humorous tales).

In Modena Cathedral, for the first time in medieval sculpture, one sees the series of subjects (prophets, apostles, and months) superimposed and located beneath arches. These were later to be placed on the columns of the large portals for the prophets and apostles and on the jambs or the plinths for the months.

Management and protection

Legal status

The monumental complex recommended for inclusion belongs to the church (cathedral and chapter buildings, archbishop's palace), and to the municipality (bell-tower, Piazza Grande, and Palazzo Comunale). The cathedral, bell-tower and Piazza Grande are protected by the provisions of Italian State Law No 1089/39 covering the artistic and architectural heritage of the Italian State. This law ensures that approval must be sought from the Soprintendenza ai Beni Ambientali e Architettonici d'Emilia (Bologna) before any modifications can be made to the buildings concerned.

Management

The Episcopal Curia of the Diocese of Modena, the municipality, the Soprintendenza ai Beni Ambientali e Architettonici d'Emilia, and the Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici di Modena e di Reggio Emilia are responsible for the protection and conservation of the nominated property.

The organizations involved in this project include the Regional Council of Emilia-Romagna, Modena

Provincial Council, the Regional Institute for Cultural Heritage for Emilia-Romagna, Italia Nostra, and the FAI (Italian Environment Fund).

The town has a structure plan (1996) which defines the boundaries of the historical centre and guarantees the preservation of buildings in the buffer zone.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Various restoration and conservation schemes have been undertaken on Modena Cathedral for over a century. The first schemes at the end of the last century and the early years of the 20th century included reconstruction of the large apse and restoration of the interior ornamental tiling in 1913, which enabled the remains of the earlier cathedral to be uncovered, and the restoration of the rood screen, the work of the Maestri Campionesi, which had been modified in the 17th century. A restoration project was started after bombing in 1944 had damaged the monument, particularly the Porta dei Principi. Programmes were carried out in 1955 to restore the original features of the crypt that had disappeared under its Baroque decoration.

Since the 1970s, the Soprintendenza ai Beni Ambientali e Architettonici of Modena has carried out exemplary restoration projects on the cathedral, based on detailed research and observation. Work commenced on the roof and facade (1977-84) and continued on the northern side (1984), the southern side (1988-1989), and finally with the apses (1995). These schemes revealed the remains of the painted decorations, particularly on the southern side. At the same time the Soprintendenza ai Beni Ambientali e Architettonici of Modena conducted, in collaboration with the Episcopal Curia, restoration work on the sculptures and paintings inside the building, as well as the metopes preserved in the Lapidary Museum. Important architectural, photogrammetric, and photographic documentation work was also initiated by the Municipality (1983-84).

A scheme for restructuring the presentation of material in the Cathedral's Lapidary Museum should be completed by spring 1998. There will also be an information area for the public on the historical and urban background of the cathedral and the planning of the square.

Following the violent earth tremors in the 16th century, the top octagonal and pyramidal section of the civic tower was consolidated. At the end of the 19th century, the conical section of the covering, which was threatened by water seepage, was restored. In 1901 engineers completed a series of stability and inclination measurement studies on the tower. The most recent schemes include studies on the foundations of the tower and restoration of the roof (1981).

Authenticity

The nominated monumental complex is undeniably authentic as far as its design, form, materials, and function are concerned.

The unfortunate addition of a modern building on the southern side of the square in the 1960s alerted the authorities responsible for the property. The project by a group that brought together the Soprintendenza ai Beni Ambientali e Architettonici, the Municipality, and the Episcopal Curia reflects the concern for collaborative action in order to improve management of the nominated cultural complex.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

A mission was sent to Modena in February 1997. ICOMOS has also consulted an eminent specialist in Romanesque art.

Qualities

The monumental complex in Modena in many ways bears exceptional testimony to the cultural traditions of the 12th century - through the relationship between the worship of relics and religious building, since the reason for the rebuilding of the cathedral was the translation of the body of San Geminiano, and through the link between ecclesiastical and civic initiative, as illustrated by the monuments in the Piazza Grande.

The rebuilding of Modena Cathedral in 1099 is a key landmark in medieval history for many reasons, of which two are of most importance. First, the building is a characteristic and documented example of the reuse of ancient remains, which was common practice in the Middle Ages before the quarries were reopened in the 12th and particularly the 13th centuries. Secondly, Modena Cathedral was, at the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries, one of the first buildings, and certainly the most important one, where collaboration between an architect (Lanfranco) and a sculptor (Wiligelmo) has been demonstrated by explicit inscriptions. It also marked the shift from a conception of artistic production emphasizing the quality of the buildings as a masterpiece or the munificence of its founder to a more modern concept in which the role of the creator is recognised.

Modena Cathedral is a very complete, integrated building which offers the exceptional combination of rich external decoration on its west facade and side portals, and remarkably well preserved interior decoration, notably its 12th century rood screen.

Comparative analysis

The influence of the art of Modena is dominant in a series of important sites, including Piacenza, Cremona, and Nonantola. The sculptures recently found showing the monthly working cycle at San Benedetto al Polirone illustrate the influence of Wiligelmo's style over a very wide cultural area.

ICOMOS comments

ICOMOS encourages the authorities responsible for protecting and preserving the monumental complex to continue their efforts to maintain its unity, particularly regarding the use of the Piazza Grande.

which should comply with the historical and aesthetic values of the complex.

Recommendation

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

The joint creation of Lanfranco and Wiligelmo is a masterpiece of human creative genius in which a new dialectical relationship between architecture and sculpture was created in Romanesque art. The Modena complex bears exceptional witness to the cultural traditions of the 12th century and is one of the best examples of an architectural complex where religious and civic values are combined in a medieval Christian town.

ICOMOS, September 1997

