

Villa d'Este (Italy)

No 1025

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Villa d'Este
<i>Location</i>	Region of Latium, Province of Rome, Commune of Tivoli
<i>State Party</i>	Italy
<i>Date</i>	23 June 2000

Justification by State Party

[**Note** The text below is the summary of a longer version in the nomination dossier.]

The Villa d'Este is the masterpiece of Pirro Ligorio, architect, painter, and "antiquary," whom recent studies have established among the great Renaissance artists; moreover, in the 17th century, Gianlorenzo Bernini contributed many additions to it. **Criterion i**

Among its contemporaries, the Villa d'Este soon became famous, thanks to its innovative plan, magnificence, rich decorations, and the extraordinary variety of its *jeux d'eau*. The influence of the Villa d'Este was decisive for the development of the art of European gardens, and it remained an unrivalled model until the French garden of Versailles and Vaux-le-Vicomte came into fashion.

With the revival of formal gardens in the first decades of the 20th century, the Villa d'Este became once more a source of inspiration for architects and landscape designers, particularly British and Americans who had studied in Roman academies. Back in their own countries they put the principles they had learnt into practice. **Criterion ii**

The Villa d'Este is one of the most refined and complete examples of Italian Renaissance civilization. Besides bearing witness to the learning and refinement of its creator, today the Villa d'Este still represents an exceptional synthesis of the values of an epoch, combining elements ranging from architectural styles to the humanities, from science to antiquarian passion, from hydraulics to complex iconology. **Criterion iii**

The Villa d'Este owes its enduring fame to its fountains and countless *jeux d'eau*, by means of which its 16th and 17th century builders experimented with all kinds of water forms and sounds. However, the Villa d'Este is most of all an unrivalled example of an 16th century Italian garden, representing, with its architectural works (palace, fountains, loggias, nymphaea, and grottoes) and precious decorations (such as the pictorial cycles painted

by famous artists from the Roman Mannerist school, such as Federico Zuccari and Girolamo Muziano), one of the most fascinating accomplishments of Italian Renaissance architecture. **Criterion iv**

Based on 16th century theory on gardens by B Taegro (1559), according to which "by combining art with nature a third nature is produced," at the Villa d'Este the original landscape was remodelled by means of colossal works, a sort of demiurge-like feat much admired at the time. Hence a new landscape, a third nature, was produced, featuring Tivoli's *genius loci*, with its mountains, woods, and small and large waterfalls. The Villa d'Este also commands a breathtaking view of the Roman countryside, despite rampant post-war urbanization. **Criterion v**

For centuries the Villa d'Este was a must in travellers' and artists' Grand Tours in Italy. It inspired, either directly or indirectly, painters, composers, and literary men from all countries. Among Italian monuments, the Villa d'Este is one of the most often portrayed, to the point that almost every European museum has a painting, a watercolour, an engraving, a drawing portraying it. Today, five hundred years since it was built, the Villa d'Este's beauty has not waned: every year hundreds of thousand of tourists, scholars, and artists come to it, making it one of Italy's five most visited monuments. **Criterion vi**

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is an *group of buildings*. It is also a cultural landscape, as defined in paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

History and Description

History

On 9 September 1550, Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este (1509–72) arrived in Tivoli, having obtained the post of governor of the town. The Cardinal came from the cultured background of the Court of Ferrara and had immersed himself in humanist studies. He was therefore an erudite and cultivated art patron who was surrounded by famous artists, painters (Girolamo da Carpi, Girolamo Muziano, Federico Zuccari, Livio Agresti, etc), silversmiths and goldsmiths (Benvenuto Cellini), musicians (Palestrina), and poets (Tasso, Ariosto).

The official residence assigned to him in Tivoli, part of the monastery of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, did not suit him. He therefore decided to build a splendid villa with gardens, the design of which is traditionally attributed to Pirro Ligorio (1500–83), an antiquary and archaeologist who carried out archaeological excavations at the Villa Adriana nearby.

The church and monastery stood at the top of a hill, with slopes covered in gardens, vineyards, and a few houses and churches. The cardinal, who was removed from the circles of power in Tivoli and Rome for a while because of simony (1555–59), needed a little over ten years to buy the land and demolish the buildings.

Between 1563 and 1565 the land was remodelled to create a steep slope descending to the old monastery and another gentler slope facing the north-east. A terrace was laid out in the south-west, supported by the old wall of the town.

Starting in 1560 great efforts were made to supply the water needed for the numerous fountains that were intended to embellish the garden. First, an aqueduct was built to capture the waters from Monte Sant'Angelo, but this source of water turned out to be inadequate and so an underground canal was dug beneath the town to harness the waters of the Anio river (1564–65).

Once the water supply had been ensured and its flow made possible by the natural gravity created by the different levels of the garden, work started on constructing the fountains, ornamental basins, and grottoes and on laying out the landscape.

During this period the old monastery was converted into a villa and the original cloister was modified to become the central courtyard, its south-east wall being that of the old church of Santa Maria Maggiore. The pace of the decoration work for the palace speeded up between 1565 and 1572, the year in which Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este died. Much of the work remained unfinished and many of the fountains for the garden still have to be built

Cardinal Luigi d'Este (1538–86) inherited the property of his uncle but his financial resources only allowed him to complete the work already started and to carry out a few repairs. After the Villa d'Este was placed at the disposal of the Dean of the Holy College of Cardinals, it returned to another cardinal of the house of Este in 1605, Alessandro (1568–1624). He wasted no time in starting a huge programme of work, which was not limited to repairing the damages caused by a lack of maintenance on the part of the Deanery but also included many innovations to the layout of the garden and the decoration of the fountains

The maintenance, restoration, and layout works (the rotunda of the Cypresses around 1640) continued under the Dukes of Modena, who were related to the House of Este, until 1641. Cardinal Rinaldo I (1618–72) turned to Bernini (the Fountain of the Bicchierone) in 1660–61 and, starting in 1670, the architect Mattia de Rossi carried out more work, including changes to the palace.

The period when the Villa d'Este was abandoned started with Rinaldo II (1655–1736). The situation worsened when the complex passed into the hands of the Hapsburgs in 1803. However, thanks to the work undertaken by Cardinal Gustav von Hohenlohe (1823–96), the villa was saved from what might have been an irreversible loss. In 1920 the Villa d'Este became the property of the Italian State, which initiated a restoration campaign from 1920 to 1930, and another following damage caused by bombing in 1944.

Description

The Villa d'Este is situated in the historical centre of Tivoli, in the midst of hills bordered by the turbulent waters of the river Anio. The ensemble composed of the palace and gardens forms an uneven quadrilateral and covers an area of about 4.5ha.

Pirro Ligorio, Cardinal Ippolito II, and his secretary, the humanist Marc-Antoine Muret, designed the Villa d'Este

according to a very elaborate iconography that celebrated the residence and Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este by magnifying his virtues and lineage. A statue of Hercules in the middle of the garden above the Fountain of the Dragons identifies the Tivoli garden with the mythological Garden of the Hesperides. According to 16th century historians, Hercules was the legendary ancestor of the Este family, but he was also one of the old protective divinities of Tivoli. Both the decorative elements of the garden (fountains, basins, etc) and the painted decoration of the palace and the antique statues adorning the garden and palace illustrate these allegories and symbols, which complement each other to form a cohesive whole.

The plan of the villa is irregular because the architect was obliged to make use of certain parts of the previous monastic building. The present entrance at Piazza Trento (originally the secondary one because the main entrance used to be at the bottom of the garden) leads to the central courtyard, the reconverted former cloister (1566–67) embellished with the Fountain of Venus. On the garden side the architecture of the palace is very simple: a long main body of three storeys, marked by bands, rows of windows, and side pavilions that barely jut out. This uniform facade is interrupted by an elegant loggia in the middle, with two levels and stair ramps, built by Raffaello da Firenze and Biasioto (1566–67). The lower level is decorated with the Fountain of Leda.

The main rooms of the villa are arranged in rows on two floors and open on to the garden. The private apartment of the Cardinal, consisting of four rooms, is on the same level as the courtyard, and the reception rooms, linked together at the back by a long corridor called the *Manica lunga*, are on the lower level.

The precious furniture and antique statues from the Cardinal's collection were dispersed but the rooms still have much of their magnificent painted decoration, the work of several studios of painters and stucco artists, under the supervision of Federico Zuccari, Girolamo Muziano, Livio Agresti, and Cesare Nebbia. The paintings, framed by wide stucco cornices, in the Cardinal's apartment (drawing room, antechamber, bedroom, and chapel) were painted by Livio Agresti around 1568 and are based on the central theme of the victory of virtue over vice. The drawing room has four idealized landscapes of the region of Tivoli, depicting the ruins of the temple of Sibylla and Hercules. The decoration of the small chapel, the work of artists close to Federico Zuccari, consists of large figures of prophets and sibyls in alcoves, surmounted by monochrome panels depicting the life of the Virgin and the Coronation on the ceiling. The painted decoration of the reception rooms on the ground floor is unusual, with imitations of various materials (marble, fabrics, etc), optical illusions to make the rooms seem bigger, false windows and doors, prospects and landscapes, and scenes from classical mythology (the Hercules Salon and the Tibur Salon) or the Bible (the Moses Salon and the Noah Salon).

The Villa d'Este garden stretches over two steep slopes, descending from the palace down to a flat terrace in the manner of an amphitheatre. The loggia of the palace marks the longitudinal and central axis of the garden. Five main transversal axes (paths and promenades) – an unusual feature in gardens of this period – become the central axis from the fixed point of view created by the

villa, since each of these axes terminates in one of the main garden fountains. Even though the central aisle stops beyond the axis of the Hundred Fountains to give way to a network of diagonal paths that make it easier to climb back to the palace, the latter remains the main visual axis.

This arrangement of axes and modules was adopted to disguise the irregular outline of the garden, to rectify by means of an optical illusion the relationship between the transversal and longitudinal dimensions, and to give the palace a central position, even though it is in fact out of alignment in relation to the whole

At the same time, the garden does not give priority, as is the case in contemporary villas, to a longitudinal distribution of water down the steepest slope, but offers more complex walks along transversal axes that in fact follow the direction of the Anio.

These waters supply some fifty fountains, ornamental basins, nymphaea, and grottoes, only a few of which are described below.

The first main transversal axis, bordering the flat part of the garden, the *Peschiere* (Fishponds), is composed of a row of three basins. At the extreme east of this water chain is the *Fontana dell'Organo* (Fountain of the Organ), begun in 1547 by the French fountain-maker Luc Leclerc. It is rectangular in shape with two orders crowned by a double-scrolled pediment. A deep recess is cut out in the centre, with a statue of Diana of Ephesus at the end, containing an octagonal kiosk. The facings of the building are decorated with bands, made of different materials, of reliefs of busts of telamons, caryatids, and pastoral scenes. The two lower alcoves hold statues of Apollo and Orpheus. The water organ is the work of Claude Venard, inspired by examples from antiquity (Hero of Alexandria in his treatise *Pneumatica* and Vitruvius in *De Architectura* describe this technique, while Banu Musa and Al Jazari in the Arab world had worked on hydraulic sound mechanisms). It gives its name to the fountain that stands behind the statue of Diana of Ephesus. The interaction between water and air produced music, probably madrigals for four or five voices. This music was preceded by the sound of two trumpets, followed by the release of water jets that were so violent that they were compared to the Deluge.

This taste for sophisticated hydraulic mechanisms and automata can also be also found in the Fountain of the Owl, where the songs of some twenty bronze birds produced by the pressure of water are stopped by the appearance of the owl.

Beyond the *Peschiere*, two staircases start climbing towards the villa. The side stairs, the *Scalinata dei Bollori* (Bubbling Stairs) of 1567, are flanked by two stepped parapets crowned with basins pouring out torrents of water.

Beyond the transversal path of the Dragons, the central stairway is divided into oval flights around the *Fontana dei Draghi* (Fountain of the Dragons), erected in honour of the visit of Pope Gregory XIII in 1572. This nymphaeum and its exedra, placed on the longitudinal axis of the garden, is the real centre of the ensemble. Four winged dragons emerge from the middle of the large oval basin, spurting out strong jets of water. The parapet with

the flights of stairs is ornamented with vases from which water also flows.

The Alley of the Hundred Fountains is formed of three long rectilinear superposed basins, its streams of water crossing the entire garden. The edge of the upper watercourse is adorned with obelisks, small boats, eagles bearing the Este coat-of-arms, and the *fleur-de-lys* of France spurting out water in the shape of a fan. The low reliefs illustrating scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* had almost totally disappeared by the end of the last century.

Several fountains have been arranged on each side of the Alley of the Hundred Fountains, including the *Fontana dell'Ovato* to the east, one of the main fountains in the garden laid out by Pirro Ligorio. It has a large oval basin with a rim decorated in majolica. At the back it is delimited by an exedra pierced with arcades and alcoves holding ten statues pouring water into the basin.. However, the most striking effect is produced by the big cascade flowing out of a *crater* perched in the middle of the exedra. Jets of water were activated whenever unsuspecting people walked under the arcades. Behind the exedra rises an artificial mountain, with three alcoves holding statues of the Sibylla of Tibur with her son Melicerte (1568) and the river divinities Erculaneo and Anio.

To the west is its counterpart, the Fountain of Rome (the *Rometta*) built in 1567–70 by the fountain-maker Curzio Maccarone to symbolize ancient Rome bathed by the Tiber after it merges with the waters of the Anio. The water theatre is situated on a big terrace supported by a vaulted structure with arcades as much as 10m high. This cascade represents the famous waterfall of the Anio river in Tivoli, with a statue of the river god Anio bearing the temple of Sibylla. Under the cascade is a statue representing the Apennines supporting the hill from which the Anio flows. Below, the waters of the Anio join those of the Tiber to form a small pool in the centre of which floats a boat with a mast in the shape of an obelisk, illustrating the Tiber Island (*Isola Tiberina*) in Rome. Small-scale models of famous Roman buildings used to decorate the large upper terrace, like a stage setting. Most of them were lost when the supporting wall collapsed in the 19th century.

The *Fontana del Bicchierone* (Fountain of the Great Glass), built according to a design by Bernini (1660–61) was added to the decoration of the central longitudinal axis in the 17th century. This fountain is in the shape of a serrated chalice, from which a high jet of water falls into a conch shell. It was also during this period that the large pergola at the original entrance to the villa was replaced by the Rotunda of the Cypresses (around 1640), a circular area adorned with four small fountains and surrounded by ancient cypress trees.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Villa d'Este has been the property of the Italian government since 1920 and falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Cultural Property and Activities. As a listed monument it has been protected by national legislation on the Protection of Artistic and Historic Property (No 1089 of 1 June 1939) since 1988 and by

several decrees implemented by the Soprintendenza per i Beni Ambientali e Architettonici del Lazio, the regional branch of the Ministry. According to these decrees, the external volumes, colours, and architectural lines of cultural property cannot be changed without the prior permission of the Ministry of Cultural Property and Activities. The Villa d'Este also benefits from regulations protecting landscapes prescribed in the law of the Ministry of Education (No 1497 of 29 June 1939, decrees of 29 September 1956 and of 11 May 1955). This landscape protection covers the entire buffer zone around the nominated property. Protection of landscapes is also ensured through the application of the Territorial Plan for the Landscape of Sector 7 – Monterotondo–Tivoli, approved by the Regional Council (Decision No 4477 of 30 July 1999). A series of appropriate measures combine to safeguard the Villa d'Este and guarantee its protection.

Management

At national level, the management of the Villa d'Este falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Cultural Property and Activities (Central Office for Archaeological, Architectural, Artistic, and Historical Property) and at regional level under the responsibility of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Ambientali e Architettonici del Lazio.

In view of the complex problems relating to the conservation of the property, the Central Restoration Institute in Rome has been carrying out a specific multidisciplinary study since 1997 with its own technical and scientific staff, which has assisted in perfecting methods and techniques for the restoration of fountains

The Soprintendenza has drawn up a plan to enhance the Villa d'Este. This plan includes the restoration of the palace and garden, the adaptation and completion of technical amenities in the palace (electricity, heating, drainage, etc) and garden, the modernization of services (access, welcome, and information facilities for visitors, sign panels, cultural activities, etc).

As the growing number of visitors has been identified as one of the management aspects of the property which would also have an effect on the local economy, the Region of Latium, the Soprintendenza, and the town council of Tivoli drew up a project in 1995, now in progress, to give added value to the archaeological and monumental heritage of the town, as well as its tourist and cultural resources.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Because of micro-climatic conditions that have caused rapid deterioration in the decoration and finishing materials, the Villa d'Este has gone through several restoration campaigns, with the use of techniques and materials that were sometimes different from the originals.

In the last ten years the Villa d'Este has benefited from an active policy in favour of the renovation of monuments. The palace has been the object of some major restoration works undertaken by the Soprintendenza (5000m² of structures and decoration), using very rigorous methods in conformity with the

principles laid down in the Venice Charter. These will continue on the top floor of the north-east wing (installation of a documentation centre), the *Manica lunga*, the ground-floor rooms, and the courtyard.

One of the major problems concerning the quality of water has been solved. Water was indispensable for feeding the fifty fountains, jets, and basins. The restoration programme for these elements, initiated at the end of the 1980s (restoration of the Fountain of Proserpine and the Rotunda of the Cypresses) had come to a halt in 1990 because of the polluted water from the Anio that flowed into these fountains. This programme could not start again until 1998, after the construction of a purifying plant which ensured the flow of water into the garden in perfect condition. At present, there is still work to do on half of the fountains, grottoes, and nymphaea. In this context, part of the sound effects of the fountains and the *jeux d'eau* will be restored.

Authenticity

The degree of authenticity of both the palace and of the garden is very high, and the different periods of the ensemble are clearly visible and recognizable. The remains of the Roman villa and the monastery on which the palace was built are still visible. Moreover, a large part of the spatial and ornamental structure of the garden has been preserved. The restoration of the murals is methodical and rigorous. Other notable Baroque works, such as those by Bernini, have been well conserved and restored.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the Villa d'Este in February 2001. ICOMOS also consulted the ICOMOS-IFLA International Scientific Committee on Historic Gardens and Cultural Landscapes

Qualities

The Villa d'Este in Tivoli, and in particular its garden, is outstanding by virtue of its refinement and the innovative character of its design and architectural works. The ingenious and creative way the fountains, ornamental basins, etc make use of water – the main feature of the garden – was unequalled in Europe during the Renaissance.

Comparative analysis

The Villa d'Este formed part of a series of villas belonging to the aristocracy and princes of the Church which developed in particular around large Italian towns. Even though other very important villas exist, such as Villa Lante, Villa Farnese in Caprarola, Boboli and Pratolino in Florence, the Palladian Villas, and Fontainebleau in France, the Villa d'Este is undoubtedly the most representative and the most important. Moreover, the Villa d'Este still retains its original structure and statuary in the most complete form possible. The decoration of its garden, above all, with the first “water theatre,” the *scala d'acqua* (water staircase), the artificial cascade, the Hundred Fountains, and the terraces, has been the source of inspiration for artists from all over the world. The fountains at the Villa d'Este play a vital role, and they are incomparable because of

the abundance of water, the large number of fountains, the grottoes, and the statues all concentrated in a single garden.

As a place of culture and nature, technology and the mastery of water, land and landscape, and as an allegory of the ancient and symbolic world, the Villa d'Este is one of the finest examples and an outstanding landmark in the art of gardens during the Italian Renaissance period.

The Villa d'Este played a very important role in the design of villas and gardens all over Europe, and it was an endless source of inspiration for many artists. It is unquestionably one of the most important ensembles of this period.

Recommendations by ICOMOS for future action

Access to the garden is a problem. It should be changed so as to meet the required standard and to permit a better understanding of the whole. The town of Tivoli has already initiated a master plan and a project entitled *Tivoli ama la Città* aimed at rehabilitating its historic centre. Restoration works have already started, and these include an alternative itinerary for leaving the garden. Improved access to the garden should, however, be seriously taken into consideration.

Although there are many projects, budgets, plans, general information notes, and schedules for the works, the State Party should have included in its nomination dossier an overall management plan in the form of a more detailed and finalized document. This overall management plan was provided in March 2001 and ICOMOS considers it to be acceptable

The overall restoration project for the garden is more complex. A series of activities is under way, including the restoration of the fountains, a botanical inventory, treatment against diseases, historical research, etc, but it is crucial to establish general and specific criteria for restoration, including archaeological research and landscape analysis. A master plan for the appropriate restoration of the garden should be established within the next two years.

It is therefore recommended that the World Cultural Heritage Committee request the State Party to provide assurances as to the implementation of the overall management plan and the preparation of a master plan for the garden.

Even though this is not absolutely necessary, it would be desirable to carry out an in-depth analysis of the landscape surrounding the Villa d'Este. The Villa has a very close relationship with the surrounding landscape, since its abundant water resources determined the location of the villa and garden. It is impossible to ignore the influence of this relationship or that of the Roman remains in Tivoli on the symbolic decorative programme of the palace and its garden. Such an analysis would reinforce and give coherence to an understanding of one of the richest and most significant landscapes of humankind.

If in the future the town council of Tivoli successfully implements its plan to restore the historical centre near the garden, an extension of the zone proposed for inscription could be envisaged.

Brief description

The Villa d'Este in Tivoli, started for Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este in 1550, was designed by the architect and antiquary Pirro Ligorio according to an iconographic plan and very elaborate composition so as to form an ensemble typical of the Renaissance. The palace still has its original painted decoration dating back to the 16th century, the work of studios of the Roman Mannerist School. The Villa is outstanding, however, mainly for its water garden, embellished with a profusion of fountains, nymphaea, ornamental basins, and grottoes, one of the first *giardini delle meraviglie*.

Statement of Significance

The Villa d'Este in Tivoli, with its palace and garden, is one of the most remarkable and comprehensive illustrations of Renaissance culture at its most refined. Owing to its innovative design and the creativity and ingenuity of the architectural components in the garden (fountains, ornamental basins, etc), is a true water garden and a unique example of an Italian 16th century garden. The Villa d'Este, one of the first *giardini delle meraviglie*, served as a model for and had a decisive influence on the development of gardens in Europe.

ICOMOS Recommendation

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

Criterion i The Villa d'Este is one of the most outstanding examples of Renaissance culture at its apogee.

Criterion ii The gardens of the Villa d'Este had a profound influence on the development of garden design throughout Europe.

Criterion iii The principles of Renaissance design and aesthetics are illustrated in an exceptional manner by the gardens of the Villa d'Este.

Criterion iv The gardens of the Villa d'Este are among the earliest and finest of the *giardini delle meraviglie* and symbolize the flowering of Renaissance culture.

Bureau Recommendation

That the Villa d'Este be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, iii, and iv*.

ICOMOS, September 2001