# Val d'Orcia (Italy)

# No 1026 rev

## 1. BASIC DATA

*State Party:* Italy

*Name of property:* Val d'Orcia

*Location:* Province of Sienna, Tuscany

*Date received:* 30 January 2003

*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 *site*. In terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, paragraph 39, this is a *cultural landscape*

*Brief description:*

The Val d'Orcia is part of the agricultural hinterland of Sienna, colonised by the city in the 14th and 15th centuries and developed to reflect an idealised model of land management. The landscape's distinctive aesthetics, flat chalk plains out of which rise almost conical hills, on top of which cluster, fortified settlements, was the inspiration for many artists. Their images have come to exemplify the beauty of well managed, Renaissance, agricultural landscapes.

## 2. THE PROPERTY

### Description

The Val d'Orcia lies to the south-east of Sienna its northern boundary approximately 25 km from the city centre. The whole site coincides with the boundaries of the Park of Val d'Orcia (*Parco Artistico Naturale e Culturale della Val d'Orcia).*

The landscape is a network of farms, villages and towns reflecting the prosperity of the farmland, the mercantile wealth of Sienna, and the need for defence. The working landscape of fields, farms, trees and forests, is interspersed with low almost conical hills, many with settlements clustering around their summits decorated with statuesque cypress trees.

The landscape was largely re-written in the 14th and early 15th centuries when it was colonised by Sienna at the height of its power as a city-state. The nominated site reflects the persistence of those interventions, their ideology, and the way the beauty of the site influenced great Siennese painters of the Renaissance and later travellers on the European 'Grand Tour'.

The boundaries of the site almost correspond to the five Renaissance municipalities - the exceptions are small areas now defined as buffer zones.

Linking the landscape to Sienna in the north and to Rome in the south is the Via Francigena, Roman road and later a pilgrim route.

The site thus consists of the following tangible qualities:

➢ *Planned colonised agrarian and pastoral landscape reflecting innovative land management systems*

➢ *Towns and villages*

➢ *Farmhouses*

➢ *Via Francigena and its associated abbeys, inns, shrines, bridges etc*

And the following associative qualities:

➢ *Landscape as an icon*

These are dealt with separately:

*Planned colonised agrarian and pastoral landscape reflecting innovative land management systems*

The landscape reflects colonisation by the merchants of Sienna in the 14th and 15th centuries. They aimed to create a landscape of efficient agricultural units but also one that was pleasing to the eye. The landscape that resulted was one of careful and conscious planning and design and led to the beginning of the concept of 'landscape' as a man-made creation. Although reflecting the wealth of Siennese merchants – who owned the land, the landscape layout was not designed to reflect their prestige as much as their ideals of good governance, as portrayed in the paintings of Lorenzetti in the Town Hall in Sienna.

The landscape was thus created to be efficient, functional, equitable and aesthetically pleasing. It was based on innovative tenure systems whereby the estates owned by merchants were divided into small properties and cultivated by families who lived on the land. Half of the produce was paid to the merchants as rent – sufficient to allow the merchants to re-invest in further agricultural improvements.

The farms were mixed farms cultivating grain, vines, olives, fruit and vegetables and with hay meadows and pastures interspersed between the farms for livestock. Farmers practiced transhumance with routes to Meremma and l'Amiata. An illustration of the aim for the farming landscape to create pleasing pictures is the persistent tradition of planting roses to embellish vineyards.

Cypresses form a striking addition to the landscape planted along routes and around settlements, their regular from punctuating the rounded shapes of the hills and their dark colour contrasting strikingly with the pale landscape. It is not clear from the dossier who planted and cared for these trees.

Given the detailed documentation that exists for this period, it would be interesting to know more about how the ideal vision for the landscape was translated into reality, of the social structure of the landscape, who lived in the nucleated settlements, the arrangements for building farmhouses, who owned the mills, how produce was marketed, who controlled the markets, how the landscape overall functioned, where the merchant's agents lived, and how far the systems put in place by the Siennese have persisted.

The landscape seems to have created a strong cultural identity and people have chosen to remain on the land in this area unlike other parts of Italy where over the past 40

years there has been a gradual drift from the countryside. The landscape patterns have thus survived in the Val d'Orcia.

*Towns and villages*

The colonisation of the landscape involved creating new settlements for farmers and their families and labourers needed to work the land. It also involved greatly enlarging and improving existing villages.

The most dramatic example of a planned new town is Pienza named after its founder Pope Pius II who commissioned in 1459 Bernardo Rossellino to enlarge his village to create an ideal city with cathedral, palaces and civic buildings surrounding a central piazza, thus bringing together civil and religious authorities. This town is already a World Heritage Site and is not included in the new nomination.

Larger fortified settlements on hills include Montalcino, originally a 13th century frontier post, Radicofani, Castiglion d'Orcia, Rocca d'Orcia and Monticchello. Elsewhere the landscape is studied with smaller villages on smaller hills, some also fortified. In many cases these settlements include remains of 13th buildings when Sienna first gained control of the area, buildings from the great period of expansion in the 14th and 15th centuries and also later buildings constructed under Florentine control in the 16th centuries.

The nomination gives detailed descriptions of buildings in the following towns and historic centres with information on their history and development and this brings out the wealth of Renaissance architecture:

> Pienza

> Castiglion d'Orcia and its surrounding monuments

> Montalcino – including fortress, civic buildings, palaces, cathedral

> Centre of Castelnuovo dell'Abate – palace and church

> San Quiricio d'Orcia

> Radicofani

> Castiglion del Bosco – chateau and church

> Chateau de la Velona

> Many individual buildings, including the mill complex of Bagno Vignoni

The dossier does not however attempt to paint a picture of the way these individual buildings fit together or into the wider landscape picture

*Farmhouses*

The statement of significance draws attention to the way the large farmhouses assume a dominant position in the landscape and are enriched by prominent architectural elements such as loggias, belvederes, porches and avenues of trees bordering the approach roads.

There is a general description of the characteristic of farmhouses and farm buildings but the nomination does not give details of individual farms or farm buildings – the farms of Vadossi, l'Amorosa, Sparampaglia and merely listed – nor how many farms there are in the site.

*Via Francigena and its associated abbeys, inns, shrines, bridges etc*

The strategic importance of the area, its connection with Sienna, and its development, are all intertwined with the Via Francigena which has traversed the area north - south since Roman times (when it was know as the Via Cassia) linking Rome with the north of Italy and France. Since late medieval times, the route has been used an ecclesiastical route, linking the Church of Rome with its dioceses. It also facilitated a flow of pilgrims and merchants and generally allowed the transmission of people and ideas to enter the region. The route fostered the development of fine churches and monasteries such as the Collegiata de San Quirico in the Abbey of Saint Antimo.

*Landscape as socio-economic ideal*

In the Val d'Orcia (and in Sienna too) the landscape is strongly associated with utopian ideals. Sienna was a sort of 'commune'; the Val d'Orcia a model of sustainable rural development, and both manifested the highest aesthetic qualities. The ideal landscape was painted by Lorenzetti in the Town Hall in Sienna in 1338-40; it became reality in the Val d'Orcia and was then immortalised in paintings by artists such as Giovanni di Paolo, and Sano di Petri, who in turn helped to strengthen the ideals.

*History*

The Val d'Orcia bears testimony from archaeological remains to prehistoric settlement, to an important role during the Etruscan period and to further development during the Roman Empire. The area seems to have been largely abandoned agriculturally in the Middle Ages. A revival in the economy and a certain stability in the 10th and 11th centuries led to the establishment of monasteries, greater use of the Via Francigena and the development of villages under a feudal system.

Sienna's dramatic growth as a trading state in the 13th and 14th centuries, led it to expand its agricultural base outwards from the periphery of Sienna. The Val d'Orcia was colonised together with other outlying areas such as the Maremma along the coast. The wealth of Siennese merchants was invested in turning the landscape into productive farmland within an innovative land tenure framework. So far from being at the edge of the state, the valley became a focus for display. Merchants supported the development of settlements, built palaces and churches and commissioned paintings that depicted the life of ordinary people in the landscape.

Sienna's rivalry with Florence, the seat of aristocratic power, lasted for more than two centuries. The weakening of Sienna at the end of the 16th century was followed by a Florentine victory after which the Val d'Orcia gradually declined in economic importance and the Via Francigena became a secondary route for local traffic.

The comparative poverty and marginalisation of the area over the following four centuries has had the effect of sustaining traditional land-use patterns and structures. In the 1960s the new laws on land management in Italy which

translated tenancies into contracts, and which have led to the abandonment of land in many regions, seem to have had less effect in the Val d'Orcia.

In the past thirty-five years or so the farmland has undergone some improvements such as an extension of the cultivated land and better control mechanisms for water management. A few areas of intensive change have been put into the buffer zone.

In 1999 the area was protected as an Artistic, Natural and Cultural Park. This was the initiative of the five municipalities who established a common management body, which was then integrated within the provincial administration.

### Management regime

*Legal provision*:

Ownership of the site is shared between public, ecclesiastical and private bodies.

Law No 1089/1939, for the Conservation of items of Historic or Artistic interest gives protection to various individual buildings and structural complexes.

In addition ten acres of the park are protected under Law No 1497/1939 on landscape conservation. This includes some town centres, surrounding areas and some areas around individual sites such as Spedaleto.

The 'Parco Artistico Naturale e Culturale della Val d'Orcia' was created in 1999 as a specific regional park for the coordinated management of the natural and cultural resources of the region.

*Management structure*:

Management responsibility in the Park of Val d'Orcia includes the five municipalities, the Provincial administration of Sienna and representatives of the private sector.

The management plan for the Park of Val d'Orcia emphasizes the living landscape as its main focus. It is ambitious and inclusive and. stresses the need to share knowledge and increase the historical awareness among all involved. A new cooperation with the neighbouring community of Monte Amiata is now been developed, mainly for ensuring long-term environmental protection.

The director of the park meets often with the small municipalities to discuss and resolve different questions. The smallness of the communities facilitates a direct communication and consultation, which seems to be very effective. However, limited staff resources (a total of fifteen employees, collaborators and consultants) must be seen as a vulnerable point in dealing with management issues.

The current management plan is for 2003 -2006. Its objectives include environmental tourism development, and the promotion and support of traditional agriculture and its products. The management plan is also seeking for innovative strategies for local ecological development (for example implementation of ISO 14000 for the whole territory in order to coordinate funding), coordination measures for infrastructural and technical installations (for example power lines, road projects) as well as for ecological rehabilitation.

*Resources*:

Details of funds available to implement specific plans are given in the Management Plan. These amount to E3m in 2003, and are projected to continue at a slightly lower level.

### Justification by the State Party (summary)

The Val d'Orcia is seen as representing the 'bel paesaggio' the ideal or prototype landscape of the early Italian Renaissance. This landscape consists of rolling hills above a clay plain which have been developed through the course of history along the route of the Via Francigena and which particularly reflect the radical reorganisation of the existing feudal and mediaeval landscape in the 14th century. Fortified settlements adorn the hills and in the plains large elaborate farmhouses surrounded by fields look like villas in parks or gardens.

The landscape has been celebrated by artists who portrayed the agricultural systems of the land as images of beauty.

## 3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

### Actions by ICOMOS

The nominated site was visited by an ICOMOS assessor in September 2003.

The site was previously nominated and considered by the WH Committee in 2000. The site was then deferred with a request that the State Party reformulate the nomination and re-submit it based on evidence of landscape history with a clearer view of the cultural qualities of the overall landscape.

### Conservation

*Conservation history*:

There is no detailed conservation history given in the dossier and the comments made relate entirely to buildings rather than to the wider landscape.

However it should be said that the conservation of the whole landscape does in effect stretch back to the conquest by Florence when the Val d'Orcia became marginalized and this precluded any drastic changes or further development.

*State of conservation*:

The main buildings in the settlements seem to be well conserved. No details are given for vernacular buildings or for natural elements such as cypress trees, woods, scattered trees, tracks and paths, or watercourses that are such crucial parts of the 'ideal' landscape.

*Management*:

During the mission, discussions with citizens, local politicians, farmers and entrepreneurs testified to the

strong feeling of identity with, and pride in, the Val d'Orcia and a will to develop the area in a sustainable way.

*Risk analysis*:

The following threats were identified in the nomination:

*Development pressures*

It is stated that the Park regulations should be sufficient to limit extensive modern farming techniques. As an example some new extensive viticulture projects, which were not compatible with the traditional land-use pattern, have been rejected by the Park. However, the wider agricultural policies and subsidies for the production of cereals are of concern to the Park management, as they are outside its influence.

It would be helpful to have a more detailed assessment of natural processes that affect the landscape such as soil erosion, vegetation and water management as a means of monitoring and managing changes to the agricultural landscape.

There is no mention of gentrification of dwellings – although this was discussed during the mission when it was said that this was now being discouraged.

*Environmental degradation*

The dossier states that there are no threats from industrial processes or excessive traffic.

*Natural catastrophes*

Fire is listed as the main threat and preventative measures are in place.

*Tourist pressure*

After a high increase in 1992, visitor numbers have now stabilized. The profile of the visitors is changing as Val d'Orcia is becoming better known in Italy and visitors are now staying overnight or longer in the area.

The management of the Park is well aware of the possible threats from tourism development and has started a detailed tourist-monitoring programme. Efforts to target the tourism are not yet developed. However there is emphasis on agritourism and smaller hotels in the urban centres and villages. There are no larger hotel complexes in Val d'Orcia. Agritourism is seen as a way of sustaining living agriculture. New festivals have been focussing on traditional/local food and wine in cooperation with the local producers.

The following could also have been listed as potential threats:

*Aging population*

*Loss of scattered trees*

### Authenticity and integrity

*Authenticity*:

The area has a high degree of authenticity largely due to its comparative neglect for four centuries after its conquest by Florence.

*Integrity*:

The nominated site covers almost all of the five municipalities created when the area was colonised.

### Comparative evaluation

No thorough comparative analysis is given in the dossier. The analysis states that the landscape is unique for the following reasons: its geology, the route Francigena, the remarkable density and quality of historic buildings, mixed farming, and a particular manifestation of the share-cropping tenure system.

In comparing the Val d'Orcia with other Renaissance landscapes in for instance Florence, Umbria or the Marches, it is said that the Val d'Orcia is distinctively different. It also draws comparisons with Navarre and Punta La Reina in Spain – linked to the Val d'Orcia by the pilgrims' route- which also have mixed farming. The conclusions are that the Val d'Orcia is unique in being the result of strategic decisions taken by the State of Sienna which give it a certain homogeneity.

More detailed discussions on comparisons would have been useful. What singles out Val d'Orcia from other landscapes is not just its direct development by Sienna but the way that development was seen as a sort of pilot project in rural, sustainable development, and that what was being created was a reflection of ideal governance. Furthermore it is the involvement of architects and artists in the development of the landscape that is so crucial. The ideal landscape was seen as something visual not merely socio-economic. The area reflected a sort of mini agricultural revolution when the old feudal tenures were swept away and the farmers became key parts of the new system, and their work in creating beautiful landscape was seen as something to be celebrated by artists. The Val d'Orcia was a reflection of the comparatively egalitarian nature of the Sienna State. Its creation is well documented in Renaissance treaties.

Comparison needs therefore to be sought not just in Italy but also more widely for similar associations between city and countryside where colonisation was seen as a reflection of good governance and where the countryside was viewed as an artistic creation by its creators. In many countries the agricultural landscape is seen by observers to be idyllic, but few rural landscapes reflect deliberate aesthetic control.

The only European comparison is the 17th century Droogmakerij de Beemster (The Beemster Polder) north of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, the oldest area of reclaimed land in the country. This was funded by the merchants of Amsterdam and laid out in accordance with classical and Renaissance planning principles. Unlike Val d'Orcia, the majority of the grand houses have now disappeared, and the agricultural system did not have idealised connotations. However the landscapes were immortalised by Dutch landscape artists.

Further afield, comparisons with the Protestant settlements of Philadelphia in USA might be worth exploring.

*Outstanding universal value*

The Val d'Orcia is of outstanding universal value for the combination of the following cultural qualities:

➢ The Val d'Orcia is an exceptional reflection of a colonised agricultural area where the development of land use practices reflected an ideal of good governance, innovative land tenure systems, and the deliberate creation of beautiful landscapes

➢ The Val d'Orcia is a planned and designed landscape where the whole process and the thinking behind it are extraordinarily well-documented

➢ The landscape of the Val d'Orcia has been immortalised by artists in such a way that it has come to be seen as the ideal Renaissance landscape and one that has profoundly influenced the development of landscape thinking throughout Europe north of Amsterdam

*Evaluation of criteria*:

The Val d'Orcia is nominated on the basis of the *criteria ii, iii, iv and vi*.

*Criterion ii*: The nomination says that the Val d'Orcia has influenced successive landscape development in Italy and in the rest of Europe. This is difficult to justify in either technological or spatial terms.

*Criterion iii*: This is justified on the grounds that the Val d'Orcia constitutes an exceptional testimony to architectural, town planning, landscape and environmental values as seen in the integration between structures urban and rural. More pertinent would have been the idea of the Val d'Orcia as reflecting an ideal way of managing the landscape in harmony with nature – which in effect is the justification for criterion iv as well.

*Criterion iv*: The Val d'Orcia is an exceptional reflection of the way the landscape was re-written in Renaissance times to reflect the ideals of good governance and of how landscape was designed to be aesthetically pleasing.

*Criterion vi*: The landscape of the Val d'Orcia was celebrated by painters from the Siennese School, which flourished during the Renaissance. Images of the Val d'Orcia and particularly depictions of ideal landscapes where people live in harmony with nature, have come to be seen as icons of the Renaissance and have had a profound influence on the development of landscape thinking.

## 4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

*Recommendation for the future*

This second nomination still does not quite deliver a detailed analysis of the Val d'Orcia landscape. Nor does it provide detailed examination of comparisons with other landscapes in Europe and further afield. Perhaps surprisingly it does not stress sufficiently those aspects of the landscape that give it is unique qualities: the way Sienna developed the area as an idealised project in land management, one that has strong aesthetic qualities, one

that has come to epitomise Renaissance landscapes and one that was extraordinarily well documented.

Pienza, a key part of the Val d'Orcia is already a World Heritage site and will become surrounded by the Val d'Orcia if it is inscribed. Consideration should be given to combining the two sites.

*Recommendation with respect to inscription*

That the property be inscribed on the World Heritage List as a *cultural landscape* on the basis of *criteria iv and vi*:

*Criterion iv*: The Val d'Orcia is an exceptional reflection of the way the landscape was re-written in Renaissance times to reflect the ideals of good governance and to create an aesthetically pleasing pictures.

*Criterion vi*: The landscape of the Val d'Orcia was celebrated by painters from the Siennese School, which flourished during the Renaissance. Images of the Val d'Orcia, and particularly depictions of landscapes where people are depicted as living in harmony with nature, have come to be seen as icons of the Renaissance and have profoundly influenced the development of landscape thinking.

*subject to the following:*

1. The State Party is asked to undertake as soon as possible a landscape survey identifying qualities and features of the planned 'colonial' landscape and their association with traditional practices.

2. The State Party is asked to undertake as soon as possible a survey of vernacular buildings.

3. The State Party is asked to compile an accessible history of the colonisation process drawing on contemporary documentation to explain the political, social, economic and visionary thinking behind the project, the involvement of artists and architects, and the way the area was subsequently managed, in order that the full significances of the area can be understood and sustained.

4. The State Party is asked to put in place an assessment of the condition of natural elements that affect the landscape of the park, such as soil, vegetation and water management, in order to inform sustainable management practices.

ICOMOS, March 2004