

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Caserta (Italy)

No 549rev

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The 18th Century Royal Palace at Caserta, with the Park, the Aqueduct of Vanvitelli, and the San Leucio Complex
<i>Location</i>	Provinces of Campania and Benevento, Campanian Region
<i>State Party</i>	Italy
<i>Date</i>	19 July 1996

Justification by State Party

The estate at Caserta is a unique creation of the 18th century spirit, which created buildings of great architectural value that fitted well into a natural landscape, in accordance with planning designs. These influenced the development of the territorial characteristics of Campania and its Late Baroque and Neo-Classical architecture.

The Royal Palace, the crowning achievement of Luigi Vanvitelli, anticipated the external appearance of 18th century buildings whilst at the same time representing the swan song of the spectacular art of the Baroque, from which it adopted all the features needed to create the illusions of multidirectional space.

The gardens at Caserta recall the great French *parterres*, with a series of fountains and fishponds reminiscent of the great Renaissance tradition of Caprarola and Bagnaia. The garden in the English style is the work of the British gardener G A Graefer, who worked with Carlo Vanvitelli to translate to southern Italy the form that was popular in the courts of Europe at the end of the 18th century.

The Carolino Aqueduct was built to supply the fountains and fishponds. It is a work of high-level hydraulic engineering and architectural construction, capable of providing the San Leucio silk factories with water as well as the gardens.

The significant cultural value of the Caserta estate lies in the way in which the cultural enlightenment of 18th century Naples was expressed in an architectural and landscape creation, the functional aspects of which harmonized with the overall

planning design, to leave an indelible mark on the hills of Campania.

[**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 vi** are quoted.]

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 Convention, this is a *site*. It may also be considered as a "clearly defined landscape designed and created by man," as described in paragraph 39(i) of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (1997).

History and Description

History

In 1734 Charles III (Carlo Borbone), son of Philip V, became King of Naples, a self-governing kingdom that was no longer part of the Spanish realm. He decided in 1750 to build a new royal palace, to rival, and perhaps outdo, the palace of Versailles, as the symbol of the new kingdom. It was designed to be the centre of a new town that would also compete with the leading European cities. He employed the famous architect Luigi Vanvitelli, at that time engaged in the restoration of the Basilica of St Peter's in Rome. The first stone was laid in 1752 and continued throughout the reign of Ferdinand IV, Charles's successor, until Vanvitelli's death in 1773.

The Bosco di San Silvestro (Wood of St Sylvester), on the two neighbouring hills of Montemaiuolo and Montebriano, was covered with vineyards and orchards when in 1773 Ferdinand IV decided to enclose it, together with some adjacent land, and create a hunting park. The building there served as a hunting lodge on the upper floor, the lower being used for agricultural purposes.

The hill of San Leucio takes its name from the Lombard church at its top. A hunting lodge, known as the Belvedere, had been built at its foot in the 16th century by the Acquaviva family, Princes of Caserta. The fief had been purchased by Charles III, and in 1773 Ferdinand IV initiated work on the so-called Old Hunting Lodge, to be abandoned after the death of his son. Between 1776 and 1778 the Belvedere was restored, the main hall being converted to a church.

In 1778 the King decided to begin the production of silk. His architect, Collecini, converted the building for this purpose, as the centre of a large industrial complex, including a school, accommodation for teachers, silkworm rooms, and facilities for spinning and dyeing the silk. He issued a series of laws in 1789 to regulate the San Leucio Royal Colony: this laid down piecework rates of pay, abolished dowries,

and prescribed similar clothing for all the workers, in what has been described as a form of proto-socialism. During the decade that followed, plans were made for enlargement of the village, and Collecini produced designs for a town, to be known as "Ferdinandopolis," but this dream was not realized because of the French occupation.

The fishponds in the gardens of the Royal Palace, the Royal silk factory, and the planned new town all required large amounts of water, and so the Carolino Aqueduct was built (completed in 1769) to bring water from the Fizzo spring over a distance of 38km to the top of Montebriano. The final stretch runs through the Tifatini hills, where the medieval village of Casertavecchia, with its Romanesque cathedral, forms part of the panorama visible from the Royal estate.

In 1744 Charles III acquired the rich Carditello estate. The hunting lodge there was built in 1784, as part of a complex of rural houses and roads radiating fanwise from the main building. This had the Royal apartments in the centre and rooms for agricultural and stock-rearing activities on either side. The courtyard in front, which has the shape of a Roman circus, was used for racing horses and decorated with fountains and obelisks. In the 19th century Ferdinand II expanded the agricultural activities.

Description

The *Royal Palace* is rectangular in plan, with four large interior courtyards intersecting at right-angles. It covers 45,000m² and its five storeys rise to a height of 36m. An indication of its scale can be judged from the fact that there are 143 windows on the main facade and the building contains 1200 rooms and 34 staircases. The building is constructed in brick, the two lower storeys being faced with travertine ashlar. The whole structure is crowned by a central cupola (four corner towers were planned but never built because Vanvitelli died before they could be designed). In front of the main facade is the elliptical parade ground, out of which opens the monumental main street (named after Charles III) leading to Naples.

Inside, there are three octagonal vestibules, aligned on the main axis of the building and acting as fulcrums for the entire complex. The monumental main staircase gives access to the Royal apartments, which are decorated and furnished in 18th century style. The chapel, directly inspired by that at Versailles, opens out of the lower vestibule. Another noteworthy feature is the Royal Theatre, a superb example of 18th century design.

The *Park*, which lies behind the Palace, was planned by Luigi Vanvitelli but completed by his son Carlo. The main axis is punctuated by a series of Baroque fountains and stretches of water, totalling 3km in overall length. This magnificent perspective terminates in the Great Fountain, where water cascades down from a height of 150m into an ornate basin that depicts Diana bathing, observed by the unfortunate Actæon.

The *English Garden*, which covers some 25ha, was laid out in 1782 by the English landscape designer G A Graefer (with advice from Sir William Hamilton, then English Ambassador to the Court in Naples, and the great botanist, Sir Joseph Banks) for Maria-Carolina of Austria, wife of Ferdinand IV. It is an excellent example of a romantic garden, with exotic trees, rare plants, small streams, and small pools, and embellished with artificial ruins.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Royal Palace and Park, with the English Garden, the Bosco di San Silvestro, the Belvedere Estate, the village of Casertavecchia, and the Carditello hunting lodge, are protected by the basic Italian antiquities legislation, Law No 1089/1939. The former Royal Estate of San Leucio, Monte Sommacco, Monte Marmorella, the Tifatini Hills, the area around Casertavecchia, and the land on either side of the Viale Carlo III are covered by the basic environmental protection Law No 1497/1939.

Management

The Palace and Park (which receive over one million visitors a year), the Bosco di San Silvestro, and the Carolino Aqueduct are State-owned. The Municipality of Caserta owns the Belvedere Estate and the Waterworks Syndicate of the Lower Voltumo Basin owns the hunting lodge at Carditello.

Management of the Royal Palace and Park (including the English Garden) is the responsibility of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Ambientali, Architettonici, Artistici e Storici per le Provincie di Caserta e Benevento, which is a regional agency of the Ministry for Cultural and Environmental Property (*Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali*). This body is also responsible for supervision of all protected monuments in the region. Parts of the Royal Palace complex are in use by the Italian Air Force, which assumes responsibility for their management. Maintenance of the Park is carried out by an independent enterprise, working on a contract that is renewable annually.

The Bosco di San Silvestro is managed by volunteers of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), which preserves it as a flora and fauna "oasis," open to the public. The Municipality of Caserta manages the Belvedere Estate, the Tifatini Hills, and the Royal hunting lodges on Monte Sommacco and Monte Marmorella.

The Soprintendenza is awaiting approval of its request that there should be designation under the provisions of Law No 1497/1939 of a wide area around the entire estate within which there will be controls over new construction.

A landscape management plan (*Piano Paesistico*) for the San Leucio Estate, the two Royal hunting lodges, and the Tifatini Hills, as provided for in Law No 1497/1939, was approved by the Ministry of Cultural and Environmental Property in January 1996. This

limits interventions to those designed to preserve the tree cover or restore areas damaged by fire or other causes.

The Carolino Aqueduct still functions, bringing water to the town, and is regularly maintained by the waterworks company.

Work is in progress in preparing a management plan for the Belvedere Estate, where restoration work is still in progress.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

All the properties that make up this nomination have been subject to conservation interventions by the responsible authorities for many years. These have been continuous in the case of the Royal Palace and Park. Current projects include the construction of parking areas for staff and visitors (the latter beneath the Piazza d'Armi in front of the Palace), so as to remove cars from the complex itself, and a major cleaning and restoration operation on the facades of the palace.

The ill-advised introduction of fallow deer into the Bosco di San Silvestro resulted in serious damage to the undergrowth and a consequent threat to the tree cover. An environmental restoration project is being carried out to make good the damage. There are also conservation works in progress at the buildings within this area.

At the historically significant Belvedere Estate, work is being carried out to rehabilitate all the residential and industrial buildings.

Failure on the part of the owner of the Carditello Estate to restore the less important buildings and surroundings has led to the drafting of an overall restoration plan, with Ministry assistance.

Authenticity

The level of authenticity in this complex of buildings and open spaces is high, the original appearance being well preserved and the inappropriate or unsympathetic intrusions kept to an acceptable minimum.

The exceptions are the Bosco di San Silvestro, and the large San Leucio estate, and the Tifatini Hills, where the original appearance has largely disappeared as a result of post-18th century activities

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the property in March 1997. ICOMOS also benefited from the advice of its International Committee on Historic Gardens and Sites.

Qualities and comparative analysis

The Caserta complex was deliberately created as a rival to Versailles and Madrid, with which it must

inevitably be compared. Its special quality lies in the way in which it was adapted to the surrounding landscape and incorporated individual pre-existing elements into an integrated whole, rather than seeking to modify or ignore it, as is the case with comparable royal and aristocratic estates. The idealistic industrial development of the Belvedere Estate is also unique among such monumental complexes.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

Administration of the Palace is spread among several agencies - the Soprintendenza, the Ministry of Defence, and the tourist agency. There is an urgent need for the introduction of some form of effective coordination mechanism, to avoid duplication of effort and conflicts of interest. There is also a pressing need for the formulation of an overall management plan for the Park, covering *inter alia* aspects such as traffic handling and scientifically oriented maintenance. It would be desirable to create a small permanent working group, consisting of an architect, a botanist, and an art historian, to oversee the preparation and implementation of this plan. (In this context, the ICOMOS mission report stresses that some of the statuary lining the basins is in need of restoration.)

In the Bosco di San Silvestro, the landscaping carried out to the orders of Ferdinand IV has largely been obscured. ICOMOS feels that it would be desirable for plans to be prepared for this to be restored, since its cultural value would be greatly enhanced if it were displayed as an outstanding example of 18th century landscaping rather than as a natural "oasis."

There is at the present time a discussion in progress regarding the future of the post-World War II railway station in the Baroque main square. In the opinion of ICOMOS, it would be desirable for this to be replaced by a structure more in harmony with the overall appearance of the square.

ICOMOS recommended strongly that the extent of the area proposed for inscription on the World Heritage should be reduced. It was inappropriate to include the entire 343ha of the San Leucio area or the 525ha of the Tifatini Hills, since these have almost completely lost their historic cultural qualities. Detailed proposals were discussed by the ICOMOS expert mission and the Soprintendenza.

Subsequently, supplementary documentation was received from the State Party. This showed a more restricted area forming the nomination, as proposed by ICOMOS. A commission was being set up by the Soprintendenza to coordinate all work within the Palace ensemble. The Soprintendenza also undertook to restore the Bosco di San Silvestro as an example of 18th century landscape art, in collaboration with the Comitato Nazionale per i Giardini Storici.

Recommendation

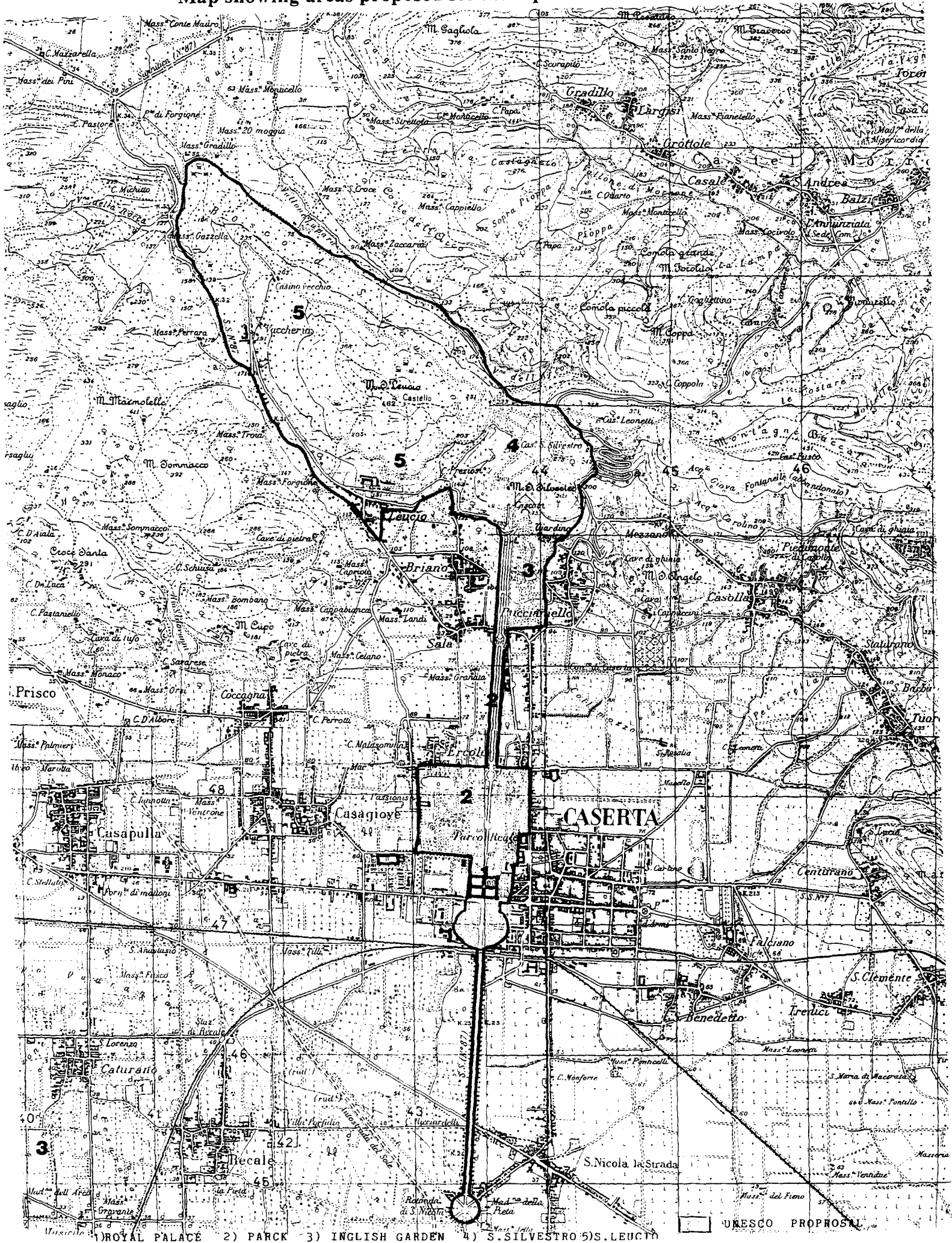
That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, iii, and iv*:

The monumental complex at Caserta, whilst cast in the same mould as other 18th century royal establishments, is exceptional for the broad sweep of its design, incorporating not only an imposing palace and park, but also much of the surrounding natural landscape and an ambitious new town laid out according to the urban planning precepts of its time. The industrial complex of the Belvedere, designed to produce silk, is also of outstanding interest because of the idealistic principles that underlay its original conception and management.

ICOMOS, September 1997

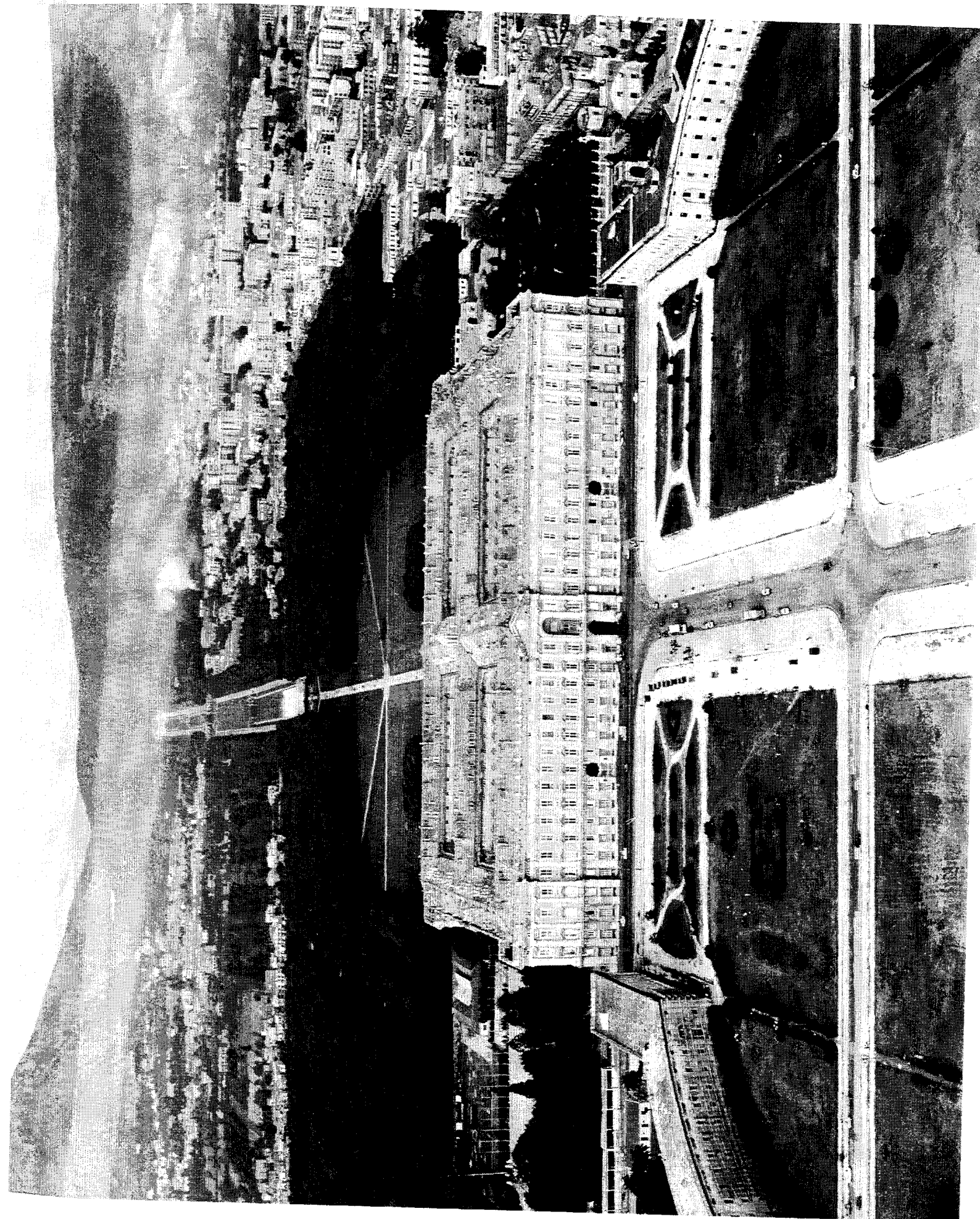
Caserta :

Carte indiquant les zones proposées pour inscription et la zone tampon /
Map showing areas proposed for inscription and buffer zone

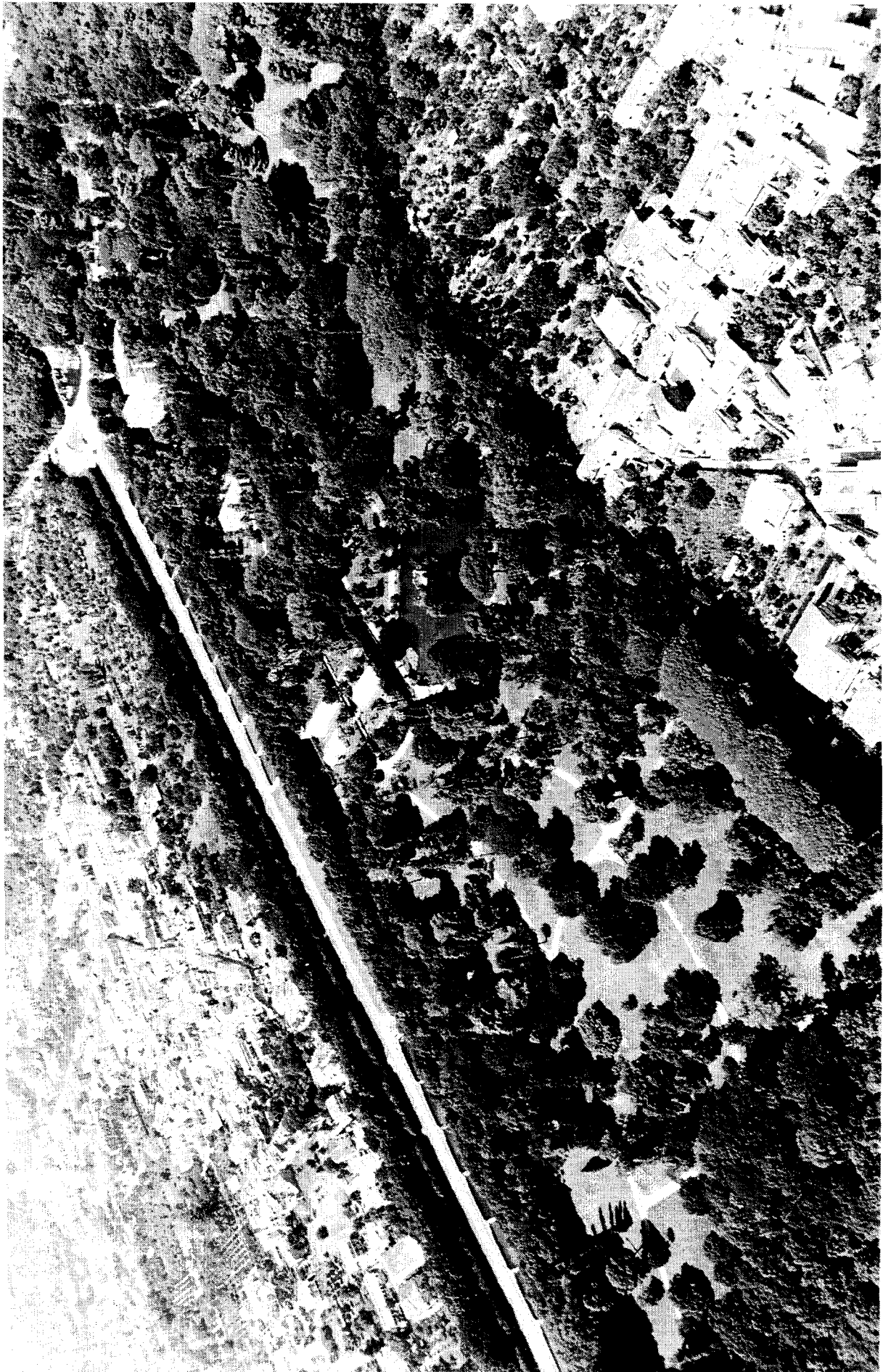


1) ROYAL PALACE 2) PARCK 3) INGLISH GARDEN 4) S. SILVESTRO 5) S. LEUCIO

UNESCO PROPOSAL



Caserta :
Vue aérienne du palais et du parc /
Aerial view of palace and park



Caserta :
Le jardin anglais /
The English garden