

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The <i>trulli</i> of Alberobello
<i>Location</i>	Puglia Region, Bari Province
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Italy
<i>Date</i>	23 October 1995

Justification by State Party

Alberobello, the city of *trulli*, is an exceptional example of vernacular architecture. It is one of the best preserved and most homogeneous urban areas of this type in Europe. Its special features, and the fact that the buildings are still occupied, makes it unique. It represents a remarkable survival of prehistoric building techniques in a country which is recognized as being one of the most important regions in the world for outstanding architecture and town planning.

Note The State Party does not make any proposals concerning the criteria under which the property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List in the nomination dossier.

Category of property

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

History and Description*History*

There is evidence of prehistoric settlement in the Itria valley, and it is possible that the *tholos* tradition of building may have come to the region at this time. It is generally considered that the present settlement dates from the mid 14th century, when what appears at the time to have been an uninhabited area was granted to the first Count of Conversano by Robert d'Anjou, Prince of Taranto, in recognition of his service during the Crusades. He and his successors colonized the area by moving people from their other fiefs such as nearby Noci, allowing them to build cottages known as *caselle*. However, recent research by local planners suggests that scattered rural settlements that began around AD 1000 on either side of the small river that now runs underground through the town gradually coalesced to form the village units of latter-day Aja Piccola and Monti.

Tradition has it that drystone walling was imposed upon the new settlers so that their houses could be quickly dismantled. This served two purposes: recalcitrant householders could be dispossessed easily and, later, it would be possible to avoid taxation on new settlements. In the latter case the buildings could be reconstructed equally rapidly. This is known to have occurred in 1644 to thwart tax inspectors sent by the King of Naples. However, historical and comparative analysis suggests that this technique was no more than a minimal physical response to local conditions and circumstances, later to be exploited for fiscal or punitive purposes.

By the mid 16th century the Monti area was already occupied by some forty *trulli*, but it was in 1620 that the settlement, then still part of the town of Noci, began to expand, when the Count of the period, Gian Girolamo Guercio, ordered the construction of a bakery, a mill, and an inn. By the end of the 18th century the community numbered over 3500 people, and in 1797 they succeeded in bringing the feudal rule of the Acquaviva family to an end by obtaining the status of royal town from Ferdinand IV, Bourbon King of Naples. The name of Alberobello was adopted, taken from the medieval Latin name of the region, *silva arboris belli*. From this time onwards the construction of new *trulli* quickly declined.

Description

Rural *trulli* are to be found throughout the Itria valley, but the only concentration is in Alberobello, and specifically in the Monti and Aja Piccola quarters of the town, which are proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List.

These buildings were constructed using roughly worked limestone boulders collected from neighbouring fields and, later, the large water-collecting basins in the area. They were built directly on the underlying natural rock, using exclusively the drystone technique (ie without mortar). The walls that form the rectangular rooms are double, with rubble cores, and are pierced by small windows. Fireplaces, ovens, and alcoves are recessed into the thickness of the walls, which rise to 1.5-1.8 m. The roofs, which are also double-skinned, spring directly from the walls, simple squinches allowing the transition from the rectangular to the circular or oval sections of the roofs themselves. These are built up of successive courses of grey limestone slabs, 5-7 cm thick, known as *chianche* or *chiancarelle*. (This technique, involving the laying of successive courses projecting slightly inwards over the preceding ones, is known to archaeologists as "corbelling," a slightly different use of the word from that adopted by architects.) The roofs of the larger buildings terminate in a decorative pinnacle (*cucurneo* or *tintinule*), often apotropaic in function. There are ingenious provisions for collecting rainwater using projecting eaves at the base of the roof which divert the water through a channelled slab into the cistern beneath the house. Flights of narrow stone steps give access to the roofs.

The interiors are equipped with wooden fittings, such as door frames, barrel-vaulted niches, etc, and in some of the larger *trulli* there is a second storey formed from a wooden floor and reached by means of a wooden staircase. Stone fireplaces and ovens exhaust through stone chimneys that project alongside the roofs. Ancillary rooms may have conical roofs of *chianche* or simple stone slabs covering them. The roofs are not painted and develop a patina of mosses and lichens; they sometimes bear mythological or religious symbols in whitewash. By contrast, the walls of the *trulli* must be whitewashed at regular intervals, which has the effect of rounding the outlines of the stones, giving a brilliant homogeneous surface.

The Monti quarter, which covers 6 ha on a hillside, contains 1030 *trulli*. Its streets run downhill and converge at the base of the hill. The Aja Piccola quarter, with 590 *trulli*, is less homogeneous than Monti. The streets converge on a common farmyard where in the feudal period the peasants were forced to thresh wheat.

There are two classifications of *trulli*. That of Bertaux (1899) identifies three categories: rectangular structures with truncated pyramid roofs, circular structures with ogival roofs (both more common in the countryside), and the typical Alberobello rectangular-plan building with conical roofs. Battaglia (1952) divides them into five categories: *trulli* with domed roofs, those with truncated cone/pyramid roofs, those with terraced roofs, those with round plans and conical domes, and the Alberobello type identified also by Bertaux.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Monti quarter was declared a National Monument in 1928. The Monti and Aja Piccola quarters were declared a monumental area by legislative decree in 1930. Law No 1089/1939, which imposes controls over any works within or in the vicinity of the protected monuments, is also applicable to these areas.

The *trulli* are largely in private ownership, though certain of them have been acquired by the Town Council of Alberobello.

Management

The General Housing Plan (GHP) of the Town of Alberobello was approved by the Bari Provincial Council in October 1978. The Soprintendenza per i Beni Ambientali e Architettonici di Puglia is responsible for overseeing aspects of the Plan relating to the quarters and monuments subject to Law No 1089/1939. The properties that are the subject of this nomination are identified as restoration areas within the historic town centre. Key elements of the GHP in respect of these properties are the systematic purchase of groups of neglected or abandoned houses with special architectural and historical features and structural reassessment and reconstruction of properties so as to eliminate undesirable or unnecessary interventions.

The GHP includes two types of Reassessment Plan. The Reassessment and Preservative Reconstruction Plans are concerned with the preservation of the physical features of the built-up area. The Recovery, Reassessment, and Reconstruction Plans provide for combined interventions, either for conservation reassessment and reconstruction (including demolition where deemed essential) or for reconstructions resulting in changes in

the structural aspects of the areas concerned. Both types of plan are restricted to small areas defined in the GHP as "project areas."

Regional Law No 72/1979 is a source of financial support for work connected with the *trulli*. It allocates funds for the Alberobello Town Council to expropriate, purchase, restore, and preserve properties, and contributions to enable private owners to carry out necessary works. A Historic Town Sector within the Alberobello Town Planning Office is responsible for implementing this law. It has been responsible for carrying out a systematic study of all the *trulli* in the town using aerial photography. All projects coming within this programme are subject to the approval of the Soprintendenza.

When Regional Law No 72/1979 ceased to apply, the Town was granted almost 1 billion lire (c US\$ 450,000) of European Union financing administered by the Puglia Region. This is for the same categories of works as those covered by the Law.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The relative simplicity in design and construction of the *trulli* has assisted in their conservation over the centuries. Over the past half-century active protection and, more recently, preservation policies have ensured that they have been maintained in a good state of conservation. This has been heightened by a keen awareness on the part of most owners of the historical value of their properties, and also by the greatly increased tourist traffic of recent years.

Following the enactment of Regional Law No 72/1979 and the preparation of the Reassessment and Restoration Plans, a *Handbook for the restoration of trulli (Prontuario del Restauro dei Trulli)* was produced in the early 1980s, as a technical guide to all such interventions. It has, however, not yet been published, although it is understood that it will appear shortly.

Authenticity

There is a high overall level of authenticity in the properties that constitute this nomination. By virtue of the simplicity in design and construction of the *trulli* it has been possible over a long period to preserve their authentic form and decoration intact. The provisions of the General Housing Plan for Alberobello operate to prevent inappropriate additions to or modifications of historic buildings. Only lime whitewash, the traditional material, is used for external decoration.

Whilst the overall urban fabric has survived to a remarkable degree, there has been a certain measure of loss of authenticity in individual buildings as a result of disregard for regulations regarding doors, windows, and other features by their owners. Legal action is slow and so municipalities are reluctant to move except in the most flagrant cases.

It is in terms of function that the authenticity has unavoidably been lost. At the present time 30% of the *trulli* are in commercial use, largely in connection with tourism, 40% are abandoned, and only 30% in residential use. It is recognized that this last figure will continue to decline.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

ICOMOS consulted its International Committee on Vernacular Architecture. An ICOMOS expert mission visited the town in February 1996.

Qualities

The *trulli* of Alberobello represent the remarkable survival of what is essentially a prehistoric building technique, that of drystone walling, for domestic use in a western European country. The extent and homogeneity of the nominated areas are also exceptional, and policies are in force that ensure the continued existence intact of the buildings. These are not the only *trulli* in Apulia - there are several thousand in rural contexts - but Alberobello is the major urban concentration, and one where protection and conservation policies and programmes are actively pursued.

Comparative analysis

Settlements composed of stone-built houses, often using the drystone technique, are not uncommon round the Mediterranean - in the islands of the Aegean, for example, the *damassi* of Pantelleria, the Istrian peninsula, Menorca, or in some parts of the Maghreb. Alberobello is, however, unique in its special form of building with corbelled roofs of stone slabs, a technique whose nearest ancestors are to be found in prehistory, in the *tholos* tombs of Mycenaean Greece or the *nuraghi* of Sardinia.

ICOMOS comments and recommendations

The ICOMOS expert mission recommended that the late, two-storey *Trullo Sovrano*, the *Casa d'Amore*, and the *trulli* at present being restored by the Municipality as a museum complex, together with the open space between Aja Piccola and Monti (the traditional market place for the town) should be included in the nominated area. This proposal was accepted by the State Party, which supplied a revised plan for the nominated area.

ICOMOS also recommends that the municipal authorities give careful consideration to the upgrading of streetscape improvements (paving, lighting) in certain areas of lesser tourist visitation, to greater control over tourist signs, and the possible resiting of the proposed new bus park, away from the historic centre of the *trulli* concentrations.

Recommendation

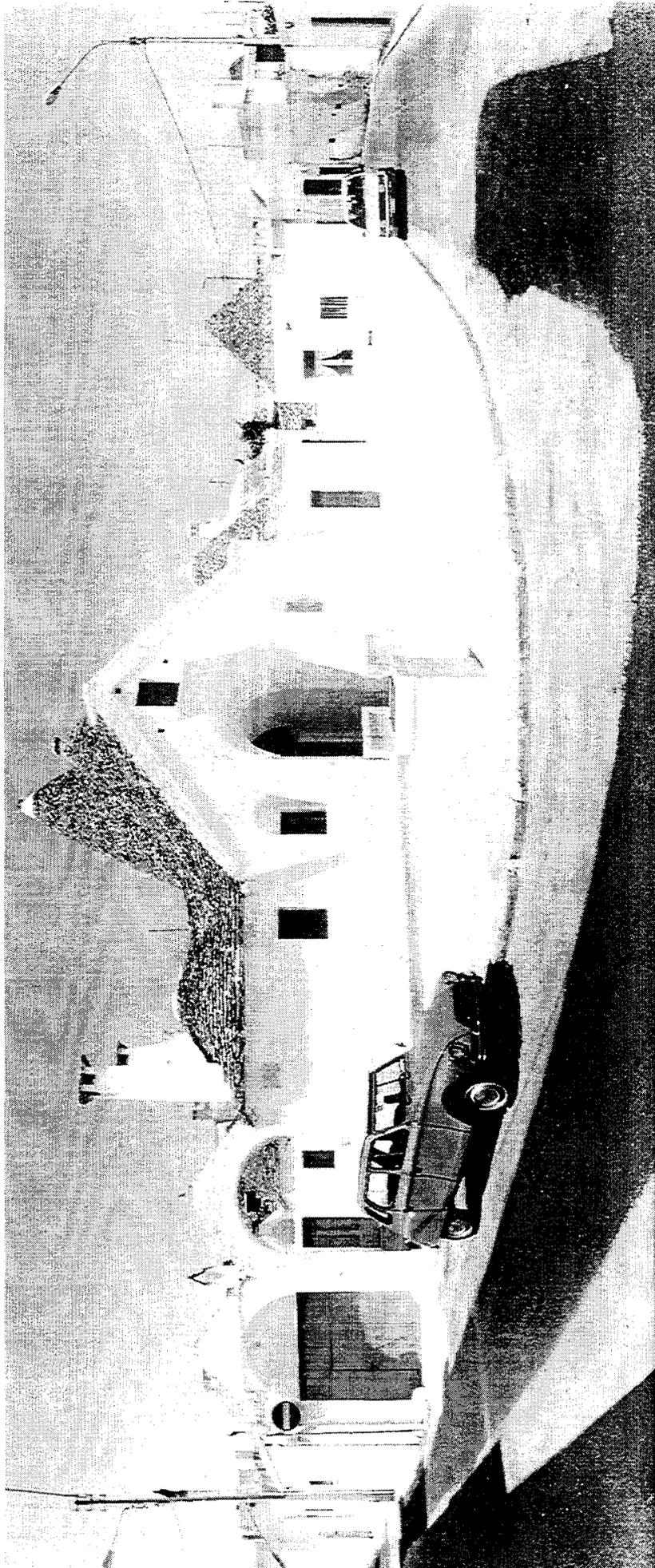
That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii, iv, and v*:

The *trulli* of Alberobello constitute an exceptional example of a form of building construction deriving from prehistoric construction techniques that has survived intact and functioning into the modern world.

ICOMOS, October 1996



Alberobello : plan de délimitation du bien proposé pour inscription
Alberobello : map of the nominated property



Alberobello : trullo Sovrano