

## Verona (Italy)

No 797rev

### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	City of Verona (Historic Centre)
<i>Location</i>	Region of Veneto
<i>State Party</i>	Italy
<i>Date</i>	30 June 1999

### Justification by State Party

The historic centre of the city of Verona comprises numerous landmarks, which are outstanding masterpieces of human creativity, such as:

- Roman period (1st century BCE to 5th century CE): the *Arena* amphitheatre; the Roman theatre (*Teatro romano*); the *Ponte Pietra* bridge, an essential element joining the Roman city on the right bank of the River Adige with the *castrum* on the bank; the main city gates (*Porta Borsari* and *Porta dei Leoni*), part of the Roman defence system;
- Scaliger period (1250–1380): the impressive defence walls of Cangrande I, which define the present-day historic centre of Verona and which were complemented in the periods of the Venetian Republic (three gates by M. Sanmicheli, 1550) and of the Austrian Empire (F. v. Scholl, 1848–66); *Castelvecchio*, the residence and personal stronghold of Cangrande II; and the bridge, *Ponte Castelvecchio*, a medieval masterpiece of engineering;
- Other periods: in its 2000 years of history the city of Verona has been enriched by numerous testimonies of great artistic value (palaces, basilicas, towers, bell-towers, etc).

#### Criterion i and iv

The historic centre of Verona can be identified with the entire historic city, which has had considerable influence on the development of European military architecture. The presence of historic stratification from such a long period of time and the works of modernization by the best architects of the different periods have constituted for all the armies a complete and unique example of defensive military architecture.

#### Criterion ii

The historic centre of Verona reflects a remarkable amount of authenticity, and in particular in its original urban conception as a Roman city. Apart from the monuments, the different elements that characterize the grid with the *decumani* and *cardones* and their recurring modules are still

clearly distinguishable in the present urban tissue. The entire historic centre and the proposed buffer zone are already impeccably protected under current legislation, and managed according to planning norms and standards. Furthermore, the urban master plan is currently under the process of updating, and includes important legislative initiatives regarding the safeguarding of heritage resources. It is also noted that the city of Verona has an enormous concentration of eminent religious, administrative, and private ensembles, resulting from the ban on extending construction activities beyond the city walls over a period of nearly 500 years.

#### Criteria iii and 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 a *group of buildings*.

### History and Description

#### History

The city of Verona, today the capital of the province of Verona, is situated in northern Italy at the foot of Monte Lessini on the River Adige. It was founded by ancient tribes and became a Roman colony in the 1st century BCE, rising rapidly in importance. It was occupied by the Ostrogoth Theodoric I (5th century), by the Lombards, and by Charlemagne (774). In the early 12th century, it became an independent commune, suffering during the wars of Guelphs and Ghibellines. It prospered under the rule of the Scaliger family (the period of Romeo and Juliet) and particularly under Cangrande I, who protected the exiled poet Dante. It fell to Venice in 1405, was part of the Austrian Empire from 1797, and joined the Kingdom of Italy in 1866.

In the early period, the hillsides of the region of Verona were inhabited in fortified villages (*castellieri*). The name of Verona has been related to the root *wehr* (a defensive wall); the name could have meant a fortified site on the river. Ancient roads of communication may have crossed here as early as the 6th or 5th century BCE. One road led to the Adriatic, with an important Etruscan settlement, another followed the river in the direction of the vineyards of Valpolicella and the lower Trentino, and a third connected with the flourishing Cisalpine territories of Garda and Brescia (*Via Claudia Augusta*). The construction of the *Via Postumia* around 148–147 BCE opened the way to Genoa and Lombardy (Pavia, Piacenza, Cremona) in the west and to Oderzo and Aquileia in the east.

The construction of the Roman settlement began in the later Republican era, the second half of the 1st century BCE. To this period has been dated the construction of the *decumanus maximus*, which followed the trace of the *Via Postumia*, and the *cardo maximus*, which entered the town from the east. The town was built on a grid plan and surrounded by defensive walls with two gates, *Porta Leoni* and *Porta Iova* (later *Portone Borsari*). Of the walls and gates there are only archaeological remains. The discovery of an inscription has confirmed the date of the foundation of Verona as 49 BCE. The city soon grew in importance and wealth and various public buildings were constructed, including the amphitheatre, the Roman theatre, and the *Ponte Pietra*.

Recent excavations have revealed considerable further remains, including decorated marble paving and prestigious structures and objects. In 265 CE, with the intensification of conflicts with the barbarians in the north, the Emperor Gallienus decided to rebuild the Republican defence walls further out, including also the amphitheatre. The town resisted the various invasions, while other cities were destroyed.

At the end of the Roman period (476 CE), Verona became the second capital of the Italic Kingdom of the Ostrogoths; Theodoric I had Verona as his principal residence. During the following centuries (domination by the Goths until 567, the Lombards until 774, and the Holy Roman Empire until the end of the millennium), Verona continued to play an important role, resulting in the construction of prominent buildings. Amongst the authorities, Bishop Raterio (from Belgium) merits a special mention because he prepared an illustration of the city, the only document surviving from this period. In its urban layout, the city preserved its Roman grid plan.

In the following period of independent communes in northern Italy, the continuous wars and armed conflicts forced Verona to rebuild its fortifications. The arrival of the *Signoria* of the Scaligers (1259–1387) favoured the development of the town, which had already extended its possessions to a large part of the Venetian territories in the north-west. Cangrande I de la Scala (1311–29) decided to further extend the city ramparts, and to reorganize the defence of the city so as to resist even long sieges. The strength of the defences was such that Verona remained a stronghold in the subsequent Venetian and Austrian periods. This decision also had an impact on town planning and the city initiated an active period of construction, especially large basilicas and administrative ensembles. In 1387, Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan conquered Verona for a short period, building new ramparts, as well as a citadel in the southern part of the city.

From 1405 until 1797 Verona was a wealthy and active part of the Venetian Republic. Apart from a conflict in the early 16th century, this was a period of peace. The Venetians commissioned the Veronese military architect Michele Sanmicheli (1484–1559) to reinforce the medieval fortifications. He designed the series of polygonal bastions placed at regular intervals, as well as building three new city gates (*Porta Nuova*, *Porta Palio*, *Porta San Zeno*) of great architectural significance. The position of these gates favoured the development of the city in the area comprised between the communal and the Scaligerian walls further south. The Venetians prohibited extending the city beyond this limit for military reasons and the ban remained in force during the Austrian Empire. This forced all development to remain inside the walled area, thus contributing to unity in the development. For the city, the Venetian period was characterized by considerable economic autonomy, reflected also in administration and in culture. A great number of prestigious palaces of wealthy families and numerous religious and public buildings marked the period.

With the Austrian domination (1814–66), Verona strengthened its military role. Marshal Radetzki and his general-architect Franz von Scholl repaired the damages caused by the Napoleonic wars, and large military complexes were built inside the city, including the impressive Arsenal, close to the medieval bridge of *Castelvecchio*. In 1866, when

the Austrians handed the city over to the Kingdom of Italy, there were 65,000 inhabitants but practically no industry. The city thus entered a period of some difficulty, which was aggravated by the terrible flood of 1882. The river rose some 8m and numerous buildings, watermills, and sawmills were wiped out. While the two main bridges were destroyed, the old bridges resisted the force of the river.

From this time on, the city's development changed. Its military role having come to an end, development now expanded outside the walls and new districts were established. It was also the beginning of industrial development. By 1927 the population had grown to 150,000, and the first competitions for urban plans were organized in 1931–32. World War II was devastating to the city: 40% of the building stock was destroyed, including all the bridges. There followed a long period of intense reconstruction and restoration, with the active participation of the Superintending Architect of Verona, Piero Gazzola (1908–79), founding President of ICOMOS and one of the initiators and principal authors of the Venice Charter. The reconstruction period also led to the approval of the first urban master plan of Verona in 1958, amended in 1975.

#### *Description*

The nominated area of the historic city of Verona covers 452.9ha. This area includes practically the entire walled city to the west and east of the River Adige. The core of the city consists of the Roman town, established in the loop of the river. In the early Middle Ages this area was slightly extended towards the west. The Scaligers rebuilt the walls, embracing a much larger territory in the west and another vast area on the eastern side of the river. This remained the size of the city up to the 20th century. Administratively, it is now divided into four main districts: the *Città antica* in the centre, *Cittadella* in the south, *San Zeno* in the north, and *Veronetta* to the east of the river. The proposed buffer zone has an area of 325ha and it surrounds the nominated area, outside the walled city. The nominated area has 31,000 inhabitants and the buffer zone 19,000. The city of Verona has about 254,000 inhabitants.

In the north of Italy, Verona is one of the richest cities in Roman remains, including the amphitheatre, the theatre, and the gates. It also has an important number of monuments dating from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, such as the Romanesque San Zeno (1117–1227), with a brick and marble façade, a beautiful marble porch, and a triptych by Andrea Mantegna. The heart of Verona is the ensemble consisting of the *Piazza delle Erbe* (with its picturesque vegetable market) and the *Piazza dei Signori*, with their historic buildings, including the *Palazzo del Comune*, *Palazzo del Governo*, *Loggia del Consiglio*, *Arche Scaligere*, and *Domus Nova*. The *Piazza Bra'* has a number of classicist buildings. Antonio Pisanello (Pisa, 1380–1455) created important frescos in Verona. Other painters who influenced the Veronese school were Jacopo Bellini (1396–1470) and Paolo Cagliari, detto Veronese (1528–1588). Verona produced two distinguished architects, Fra Giordano (1433–1513) and Michele Sanmicheli (1484–1559). The modern contribution of the architect Carlo Scarpa (Venice, 1906–78) in Verona is also remarkable.

The following are a selection of the most representative buildings in the different historic epochs of Verona:

- The Roman period

*Porta Borsari* (1st century CE), a city gate at the beginning of the *decumanus maximus*, is built of white stone with two arches at the ground level and two levels of arcaded openings above. *Porta Leoni* (1st century CE) represents one of the most refined archaeological discoveries of Verona; currently only half of the structure remains, attached to a later building. *Arco dei Gavi* (1st century CE) was dismantled in the Napoleonic period and rebuilt next to Castelvechio in the 1930s, using original material. The *Ponte Pietra* (1st century CE) has Roman remains in the first two arches built in stone; the central arch was built in the 13th century and the others in brick in the 16th century. The bridge was destroyed in World War II; it was restored and rebuilt after the war, based on existing measured drawings and documentation and using original material recovered from the river. The *Roman theatre* (1st century CE) was excavated in the mid 19th century under the houses that had been built over it and was restored for the use for spectacles. The *Amphitheatre Arena* (1st century CE) is elliptic in plan (139m x 109m) and is the second largest after the Coliseum in Rome. Originally a wall of three orders surrounded it, but this collapsed in an earthquake in the 12th century. The Arena is regularly used for opera festivals. For some years restorations have been taking place in the parts that have suffered most.

- Romanesque period (8th–12th centuries)

The church of *San Giovanni in Valle* (11th–12th) was built on the ruins of previous buildings. The interior has three aisles and there is pre-Romanesque crypt. The elevations of the church of *S. Lorenzo* (8th–12th) consist of a mixture of materials, tuff in lower parts, and tuff and brick alternating in the upper part. The entrance has a Renaissance porch. The church of *S. Fermo* (11th–12th) was built in tuff and brick on the remains of an earlier basilica of the 8th century. The building consists of two churches, one above the other. The main front, built in alternating tuff and brick, is a good example of medieval art in Verona. The tombs are on the exterior; the church has small arches, tall windows, ample staircases, and a beautiful Romanesque porch. The *Cathedral (Duomo)* was first built in the 6th century but rebuilt in the 12th century after an earthquake. The facade, completed in the 14th century, is in Verona marble and has bas-reliefs representing sacred and profane episodes of different types. There is a fine 12th century cloister with arcades on double colonnades. The church has been recently restored. Other buildings from this period include: Abbey of *SS. Apostoli* (end 12th), the church of *S. Stefano* (11th–12th), and the Abbey of *S. Zeno* (11th–12th). The last-named is an important example of Romanesque architecture and sculpture. The church has been built over a series of previous buildings on the same site.

- Scaliger period (13th–14th centuries)

The church of *S. Anastasia* (13th) was built by the Dominicans; its facade remained incomplete. The *Arche Scaligere* (13th) is the cemetery of the Scaliger family, close to Piazza dei Signori. *Castelvechio* (1354–57) is the fortified residence of the Scaliger family, built at the time of Cangrande II over a previous fortification. The complex was restored and transformed into a museum in the 1930s; Carlo Scarpa restored it a second time, in the 1960s. The *House of Juliet* (13th) is a small genuine medieval palace; a balcony was added in the 1930s, inspired by Shakespeare's drama.

The *House of Romeo* is a medieval complex, greatly transformed in later periods, and relatively little remains from the original building.

- Renaissance to modern period

There are numerous buildings that date from this period in the centre of Verona. The following can be mentioned: the churches of *S. Nazaro* (15th), *S. Maria in Organo* (15th), *S. Giorgio* (15th), *S. Tomaso* (15th), *S. Bernardino* (15th), and *S. Eufemia* (14th–17th). There are the palaces of *Canossa* (architect M. Sanmicheli, 1530–37), *Pompei* (Sanmicheli, 16th), and *Bevilacqua* (Sanmicheli, 1530), the gates of *Porta Palio* (Sanmicheli, 1525), *Porta Nuova* (Sanmicheli, 16th), *Porta Vescovo* (Sanmicheli, 16th), and *Porta S. Zeno* (Sanmicheli, 1541), as well as the *Bishop's Palace* (16th) and the *Giusti Garden and Palace* (16th–17th). From the Austrian period of the 19th century the notable buildings include the *Castel San Pietro* and the *Caserma S. Marta*. Of more recent works, it is worth noting the contribution of the architect Carlo Scarpa (eg the display of the collections and the restoration of the Museum of *Castelvechio* and the building of the *Istituto Bancario*). Also worthy of mention is the striking new bridge of *Ponte Risorgimento*, designed by L. Nervi.

## Management and Protection

### Legal status

Various public and private institutions, which are subject to current legal administrative and planning norms and regulations, own the monumental, architectural, and artistic properties in the historic town of Verona.

Listed buildings and monuments are protected under the national Law for the Protection of Artistic and Historic Properties (1089/1939); the environment is subject to the national Law for the Protection of Natural Beauty (1497/1939). There is local legislation (33/1991) related to the implementation of the general management plan of the city of Verona, establishing detailed norms for the protection of the historic area. The entire municipal area of the city is subject to the Urban Master Plan of 1975, updated by amendments. A revised master plan has been adopted in 1998, in accordance with the regional planning legislation of 1984, and is currently in the process of being approved by the city authorities. This plan will give particular attention to the protection and the rehabilitation of the historic town.

### Management

The State controls all listed buildings, monuments, museums, collections, and archives through the appropriate institutions. These include particularly the superintendencies for the protection of historic buildings and sites (*Soprintendenza ai beni ambientali e architettonici*), archaeological heritage (*Soprintendenza per i beni archeologici del Veneto*), and the artistic and historic objects and collections (*Soprintendenza per i beni artistici e storici del Veneto*). The municipal administration is responsible for the control of the implementation of the planning norms and the protection of the historic town. The city has some 1.5 million visitors, well distributed over the year, and it has a solid structure and facilities for visitor management. Verona is classified as a zone of "lesser seismic risk." In view of the possibility of

flooding, there have been important works to contain the river, undertaken after the 1882 flood.

Owing to the long evolution of the historic city within its defensive walls, the social structure is of very mixed nature, involving all social classes. As a result of wartime destruction in the 1940s and the subsequent reconstruction period, however, many inhabitants of lower social status were obliged to move to the periphery. One of the objectives of the new urban management plan is to rebalance the social and economic structure of the historic town and to redefine the strategies for the rehabilitation of the historic building stock.

The new urban master plan of Verona has been justified as a result of the economic and social changes that have occurred in the past 25 years and the major differences in living standards, communication systems, and mobility. The plan will give particular consideration to two key issues: the strategic elements deriving from the geographical position of the city, and its artistic, historic, and cultural significance of the city. Moreover, the plan provides strategic guidelines for the conservation and valuation of the natural setting of the city, including a park of 850ha south and north along the River Adige, with the aim of achieving a balance in the ecosystem and the use of the rural areas. The entire historic area (consisting of 4500 occupied units) has been surveyed, documented, and analysed in detail, in view of proposed types of treatment, ranging from conservation and restoration to the possibility of making different degrees of modifications according to the historic and cultural significance of the property. Attention is given to new itineraries for visitors, the initiation of a programme for the revaluation of the defence system of the city, reorganization of traffic and parking areas, coordinated relocation of the university faculties in the *Veronetta* area, and the limitation of large service structures in the historic centre and proposal of alternatives outside the walled city.

## Conservation and Authenticity

### *Conservation history*

The historic city of Verona survived intact until the 19th century. The walls surrounding the city of Verona impeded industry, railroads, and other transforming elements of the 19th century from being implemented in the city. The urban structure thus shows exceptional coherence and a large degree of homogeneity. Furthermore, the early 20th century architecture is mainly located outside the walls. The 1882 flood caused destruction, especially along the river. This was also the beginning of industrial development.

The destruction during World War II was very important in Verona, with a high level of damage to buildings (c 40%). This event could have led to a radical change of the nature of the historic town; however, the reconstruction plan, dated 1946, took into account the criteria of maintaining the original structure of the city, and the reconstruction process was carried out with utmost care. The role of Professore Piero Gazzola, first President of ICOMOS and Supervisor of the Heritage of Verona, was crucial in this process, and he was also responsible for the reconstruction of the Roman bridge. The damage resulting from World War II left open spaces where well integrated social housing has been provided. There are also large barracks,

which underline the military nature of the city (at present it houses a NATO headquarters).

### *Authenticity*

The City of Verona retained its historic fabric completely intact until the 1882 flood and World War II, which caused a large amount of damage. Since then, the city has been subject to restoration and reconstruction, which was done with great care and respecting the historic fabric. At the present time, Verona still displays an exceptional amount of Roman remains, and its Roman origins are also reflected in its street pattern. The particular significance of Verona lies in the continuity of its military use, and the defence system has been well preserved. In the 20th century, the urban fabric has expanded beyond the city walls, but the natural setting of the town is still of outstanding quality, and is fully protected. The historic city of Verona can thus be considered to fulfil the requirements of the test of authenticity.

## Evaluation

### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS evaluation mission visited Verona in January 2000. ICOMOS also consulted its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages.

### *Qualities*

The historic city of Verona is an outstanding example of military defensive architecture and shows continuity in its historical stratification from antiquity to the present day. It has always maintained its military significance, which has also helped to maintain an exceptional unity within the walled city as well as avoiding an uncontrolled development outside the walls, as was the case in many other cities in the 19th century.

Verona contains masterpieces of architecture, such as the Roman amphitheatre, theatre, bridge, and gates, the Scaliger walls, the Renaissance bastions by Sanmicheli and the Austrian additions by von Scholl, as well as the palace-museum of *Castelvecchio*, numerous churches, palaces, towers, and monuments. The grid structure of the Roman city has been maintained up to the present day and testifies graphically to the ancient foundation.

Verona is a city of exemplary value due to its historical and architectural heritage. The restoration and reconstruction after World War II was particularly well carried out, and recent interventions such as those designed by Carlo Scarpa in the *Castelvecchio* museum can serve as significant references for the rehabilitation of historic structures and areas.

### *Comparative analysis*

Verona is one of the major historic centres in Italy and in the Mediterranean. Based on a Roman grid plan, still reflected in the urban tissue, it has an important concentration of ancient monuments and historic structures from antiquity up to modern times. It is particularly remarkable as a major military stronghold, where the medieval system of walls has been maintained and complemented in later periods. The other cities in the same region, such as Vicenza and Ferrara, both on the World Heritage List, have different qualities. Vicenza and the Renaissance villas were included especially in respect of the creative contribution of Andrea Palladio.

Ferrara is a highly influential planned city of the Renaissance, closely related to the work of the Este family and their reclamation of the Delta of Po.

*ICOMOS comments*

The perimeter declared for the inclusion in the World Heritage List is correct and the buffer zone was slightly revised during the ICOMOS evaluation mission. Some parts of the buffer zone with no historical significance, such as the railway and industrial areas, were omitted. On the other hand, some late 19th century housing built for industrial workers and the middle class near the railway station was added. It also serves as important testimony to the Liberty architecture. As a result of the mission, complementary information was provided regarding the historic development of the city and current planning and management structures.

**Brief description**

The historic city of Verona was founded in the 1st century CE. It flourished particularly under the rule of the Scaliger family in the 13th and 14th centuries and as part of the Republic of Venice from the 15th to 18th centuries, and it represents an outstanding example of a military stronghold. Verona has preserved a remarkable amount of monuments from antiquity and the medieval and Renaissance periods, as well as being a city of culture and art.

**Recommendation**

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

*Criterion ii* In its urban structure and its architecture, Verona is an outstanding example of a town that has developed progressively and uninterruptedly over two thousand years, incorporating artistic elements of the highest quality from each succeeding period.

*Criterion iv* Verona represents in an exceptional way the concept of the fortified town at several seminal stages of European history.

ICOMOS, September 2000