

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

San Millán (Spain)

No 805

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	San Millán Yuso and Suso Monasteries
<i>Location</i>	Province (Comunidad Autónoma) of La Rioja
<i>State Party</i>	Spain
<i>Date</i>	19 July 1996

Justification by State Party

The Spanish language, a principal work of human creativity, was born, in both spoken and written forms and in both prose and verse, within the eremitic communities of San Millán, which were, and remain, in close touch with the people and their natural surroundings, sharing the church at Suso.

Criteria i and ii

The Suso and Yuso monasteries provide unique and exceptional evidence of a cultural tradition which has given rise to the Spanish-speaking civilizations, of great individuality and growing larger and more widely distributed all the time.

Criterion iii

Because of the identification and inter-relationship of the two monasteries, with elements of the Mozarabic, Visigothic, medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque styles, the architecture and the natural landscape bring together periods which are highly significant in the history of Spain. The Spanish language was born in these monasteries and they form an important part of the history of humanity.

Criterion iv

The Suso monastery, with its natural surroundings and archaeological sites, is materially associated with the living tradition that is the Spanish language, which is full of ideas and beliefs. It is also strongly associated with the first works written in the Spanish language, and especially with its earliest popular and lyric poetry, written by Gonzalo de Berceo at Suso.

Criteria v and vi

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the Suso and Yuso Monasteries of San Millán are a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

In the mid 6th century the holy man Millán settled at a site, now known as the Suso ("Upper" or "Above") Monastery, on the flanks of the Cogolla or Distercios hills, where he was joined by other eremitic monks to found the Cogolla Community. During the lifetime of the saint a small monastery was built on the hillside in Visigothic style. This was enlarged in the 7th century by the construction of a porch or hall up against the caves in which to receive pilgrims. The church was rebuilt in 929, during the reign of García Sánchez of Navarre and Castille, in Mozarabic style as a royal donation. King Sancho Abarca and his wife, Doña Urraca, attended its dedication in 984.

The *Codex Emilianensis 60* was written in the Suso scriptorium in the 9th and 10th centuries. One of the monks added marginal notes in Castilian and Basque, along with a prayer in Castilian, to clarify passages in the Latin text. This is the first known example of written Spanish.

After the church was damaged by fire in the early 11th century it was restored by King Sancho the Great. At that time the porch was extended and used as a church, thereby changing the orientation of the sacred building. In the following century one of the caves abutting the nave of the church was converted into a chapel, to house the recumbent statue of San Millán, made by Mozarabic monks. It was in this monastery that Gonzalo de Berceo wrote the first poems in Castilian during the 13th century in one of the porticoes of the church.

King García Sánchez of Nájera ordered the building of the Yuso ("Lower" or "Below") Monastery in 1503, and work began the following year, starting with the church, which was built within sight of the older monastery. This was followed by the two cloisters, sacristy, chapter house, library, gallery, and rooms around the *Patio de la Luna*. The north wall of the church was rebuilt after collapsing in 1595, and in the century that followed the ensemble was extended with the addition of the facade of the church, tower, porter's lodge, main entrance, and abbot's chamber, to the plans of the architect Juan de Raón. Finally, the square in front of the monastery was completed in the 18th century.

Description

The *Suso Monastery* consists of a series of hermits' caves, a church, and an entrance porch or narthex. The caves, originally used by the monks, are cut into the southern slope of the mountain. They form the northern boundary of the church, consisting of twin aisles and five bays. The present unusual form and

orientation date from the 11th century reconstruction, when the 10th century Mozarabic structure was enlarged, the earlier porch being incorporated into the main church. Elements of the 6th century Romanesque building of the Visigothic period are still clearly visible, including some striking capitals. The Mozarabic arches preserve the identity of the earlier structure. On the south facade of the church there is a series of portals added during the 11th century reconstruction, one of which is named after Gonzalo de Berceo, since it was here that he composed his seminal poetry.

Archaeological excavations in advance of consolidation work on the west side of the church have revealed the foundations of a number of the other monastery buildings. Ground survey has also identified the sites of the caves used by the original eremitic monks on the hillside above and around the church.

The main buildings of the *Yuso Monastery*, next to the modern village and below the Suso Monastery, cluster around a small cloister known as the Canons' Cloister (the *Patio de la Luna*) and the main cloister, named after San Millán. The latter is two-storeyed, the lower part being open and roofed with star-ribbed vaulting and the upper closed (now housing the museum).

The main buildings of the monastery are reached from this cloister. To the west lie the imposing Monarch's Chamber (*Salón de los Reyes*) and the great main staircase (*Escala Real*). The well proportioned church, reached through a fine Baroque portal to the north of the cloister, is rectangular in plan, with a central nave and three aisles and six bays separated by cylindrical columns; there is a lofty choir at the east end. This is separated from the nave by two screens, the outer in wrought iron and of superlative workmanship, and the inner an ornate Baroque masterpiece by Francisco Bisou (1767). On the east are the former chapter house (now the sacristy), an elegant Baroque chamber, with the impressive library of the monastery on its upper floor. Finally, the austere but well proportioned refectory, with the more ornate Abbot's Chamber (*Cámara Abacial*) above, lie on the south side.

Access to the monastery is through a monumental gate a spacious courtyard through an ornately decorated archway. The setting is imposing, in the valley of San Millán de la Cogolla.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Both monasteries were declared to be Properties of Cultural Interest (Bienes de Interés Cultural) by Decree in 1931, and are included on the Register of Properties of Cultural Interest. They come within the provisions of Law No 16/1985 on the Spanish Historical Heritage. Under this law there must be public access to the designated monuments, and any proposed changes of ownership must receive official authorization.

Similarly, any interventions for conservation, restoration, or reconstruction must also be authorized by the Government of La Rioja, which is responsible for the protection and preservation of cultural properties on its territory. The byelaws of the Commune of San Millán de la Cogolla also require all proposals for work of this kind to be submitted to it for approval.

Management

The Suso Monastery is the property of the Spanish State and the Yuso Monastery belongs to the Recolletes Augustinian Order.

Direct management is the responsibility of the Government of La Rioja, through its Historical-Artistic Heritage Service, on behalf of the Spanish Government and of the monastic Order respectively.

Part of the Yuso Monastery has been leased by the Augustinian Order to the Government of La Rioja for fifty years. It is currently used as a hotel and as a centre for the study of the Spanish language.

The Yuso Monastery has been the subject of an intensive technical study, and this forms part of the overall management plan being developed by the recently formed Foundation for the Protection of the Suso and Yuso Monasteries of San Millán de la Cogolla (*Patronato para la Protección de los Monasterios de Suso y Yuso de San Millán de la Cogolla*). This independent body has been set up by the Government of La Rioja and comprises representatives of the Municipal Council of San Millán, the Augustinian Community, and the General Directorates within the Government of La Rioja with responsibilities for culture, public works, planning, environment, and other relevant fields. ICOMOS has had the opportunity to study this proposal, which will meet all the requirements of the World Heritage Committee. It is anticipated that the new foundation will come into existence within the next year and will then be empowered to exercise an overall monitoring and advisory role in respect of all management and conservation matters concerning the two monasteries.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The Romanesque Suso Monastery has been the subject of a series of restoration and conservation programmes since 1935. It has been largely brought back to its 13th century appearance, and contains equipment for the control of humidity, which is a potential source of stability problems, owing to its siting on a steep hillside. There are other problems relating to the site: the building is in danger of separating from the rock face in some places. An intensive scientific diagnostic study is in progress and corrective measures will be implemented, either by underpinning the walls or by shoring the slope on which the church is situated.

Having been in religious use for centuries, the Yuso Monastery has been maintained regularly. However,

there is currently a major problem there, also relating to siting. During the building of the monastery in the 16th century and reconstruction and restoration work in the 17th century, pre-existing watercourses and channels running beneath it were blocked or diverted. The resulting humidity caused by ground-water rising through capillary action has resulted in deterioration, most seriously in the church, where there has been slumping of walls, deformation of columns, cracking between arches and vaults, and crumbling of soffits in arches and vaulting.

Similar conditions also apply in the main cloister and elsewhere. This problem has been the subject of studies carried out for the Government of La Rioja by the Department of Applied Physics in the San Sebastián School of Architecture and by a private consultancy in Logroño. Work to counteract this source of deterioration is now under way, with funding from both central and provincial government.

Authenticity

The level of authenticity at both monasteries is high. Work done at the Suso Monastery has been directed solely towards the clearance of debris and removal of later elements so as to restore the church to its 13th century form. It might be argued that this has been to some extent contrary to the provisions of the 1964 Venice Charter. However, a study of photographs from the pre-restoration period shows the later additions to have been of low cultural quality and disfiguring; their impact on the core structure was also superficial.

At the Yuso Monastery conservation and restoration interventions have been minimal, and consonant with the principles of the Charter. Adaptations to use part of the monastery as a hotel and as a centre for the study of the Spanish language have been discreetly and sympathetically handled, and do not detract from the overall appearance or ambience of the complex.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited San Millán in November 1996.

Qualities

The Suso Monastery is of great cultural interest so far as the early development of monasticism in Europe is concerned, since it represents the transition from an eremitic to a cenobitic community vividly in material terms. The continued survival of the community to the present day in the Yuso Monastery gives a very full picture of the trajectory of European monasticism.

Of great universal associative importance is the fact that the Spanish language, one of the most common in the whole world today, was first written down here, first for didactic purposes and then as a medium of artistic expression.

Comparative analysis

There are no direct parallels for the Suso/Yuso ensemble. The early development is illustrated to some extent by the north-western group of monasteries, now represented on the World Heritage List by Skellig Michael (Ireland), but this does not exhibit the continuity down to the present day of San Millán.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

During the course of the ICOMOS expert mission in November 1996, a number of proposals were made to the responsible authorities for modifications and improvements to the nomination, designed to make it conform with the requirements of the World Heritage Committee. These included a revision of the buffer zone around the Suso Monastery and provision for receiving larger numbers of visitors (parking, toilets, information etc) in the event of the property being inscribed on the World Heritage List.

It was also recommended that work began on the preparation of a programme for the research-oriented archaeological exploration and excavation of a considerable area around the church at the Suso Monastery. The work so far, which has been carried out solely in aid of the process of conservation, has revealed much new information, with tantalizing indications of a considerable corpus of material data still to be discovered, especially about the 6th century eremitic establishment. Systematic excavation would not only add considerably to scientific knowledge, but it would also greatly increase the interest of the site for visitors.

Subsequent to the mission, a detailed supplementary dossier was received, with a larger buffer zone including both monuments (approved by the Council for Education, Culture, Youth and Sports of La Rioja on 30 December 1996) which satisfied the reservations expressed by the ICOMOS mission. A resolution of the Government Council of La Rioja on 5 December 1996 was also provided; this contains a number of directives to specialized Councils (Industry, Tourism, Environment, Urban Planning, and Culture) which dealt with other points raised by the ICOMOS mission, including the provision of tourist facilities and the burying of electrical supply lines and removal of pylons.

This dossier also included copies of a number of letters expressing support for the nomination from governmental, academic, and cultural bodies in Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries (Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, The Philippines, the USA (Puerto Rico), and Venezuela).

Recommendation

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

The monasteries of Suso and Yuso at San Millán de la Cogolla are exceptional testimony to the introduction and continuous survival of Christian monasticism, from the 6th century to the present

day. The property is also of outstanding associative significance as the birthplace of the modern written and spoken Spanish language.

ICOMOS, September 1997