Aeolian Islands (Italy)
No 908

Identification
Nomination Isole Eolie (Aeolian Islands)
Location Mediterranean Sea - Southern Tyrrhenian Sea
State Party Italy
Date 24 June 1998

Justification by State Party
The Aeolian Islands are situated in the southern Tyrrhenian Sea, off the Sicilian coast. They are of outstanding value because of a combination of cultural properties concentrated in a geographical area of scientific and humanist interest and in particular of natural interest - geodynamic, vulcanological, archaeological, natural, and ethnoanthropological - which has shaped a system of considerable value in the structural landscape.

The archaeological value results from:

- The existence of remarkable evidence of uninterrupted life on the Aeolian Islands from the Middle Neolithic period to the present day, with an earlier exceptional role in the whole ancient world during the obsidian period.
- The perfect state of preservation of stratigraphic layers dating partly to the prehistory, protohistory, and antiquity of the Mediterranean, and the fact that, after the desertion or destruction of the settlements, vestiges of all the cultures were preserved almost intact, trapped in a layer of volcanic dust carried by the wind and generated by the pyroclastic flow produced by volcanic activity.
- The extraordinary wealth and state of preservation of the cemeteries, including the theatre masks of the Dionysiac cult which provide precious information on the history of the theatre.
- The acropolis of Lipari with its uninterrupted life, its character as a "defended town," its architecture, its open spaces, and its thematic and multidisciplinary museums in constant development. Its transformation from a prison into an important centre of civilization for the transmission of knowledge, culture, and the history of science and the humanities. It has become the site for the Regional Museum of Aeolian Archaeology, one of the most important in the world because of its complementary sections on vulcanology and the paleontology of the Quaternary period.

Its ethnoanthropological value is of great interest because of the manmade cultural landscape, which was formed over the centuries and has reached us as an almost intact testimony of the millennial activity of humankind, with specific settlements and cultural features relating to:

- the defence and survival of the inhabitants because of the isolation of the islands, the first settlement being characterized by a productive autarchic system;
- the use of obsidian as an excellent material for making domestic and hunting tools;
- the inclined form of the land and hence the special nature of the steep volcanic cones and the construction of stone embankments which shape the land;
- the soil characteristics which influence different types of cultivation;
- the layouts and architecture of the settlement pattern which have created an urban typology, the evolved matrix of which can be recognized in all the villages of rural origin, and especially in the towns of Alicudi, Filicudi, and Ginostra.

All these manmade landscape values are to be found in this region, now characterized by a steppe-like vegetation, by a native flora, by a cover composed of old cultivations such as olive trees and vines, associated with species of the Mediterranean maquis, particularly broom, lentisk, arbutus, dwarf fan-palms, medicinal plants, and capers. In the Aeolian Islands, nature dominates the inhabited areas. Cultivation is carried out on stone terraces, and the houses are set in areas shaped by the vegetation. Everything is linked in such a way that the human settlements and natural landscape give the islands an important ecological interest.

[Note: The State Party does not make any proposals in the nomination dossier concerning the criteria under which it considers this property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List. Furthermore, this text is an abbreviated version of the one in the nomination dossier in that it only takes the cultural aspects into consideration.]

Category of Property
In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the World Heritage Convention of 1972, the nominated property is a site. It is also a cultural landscape as defined in the Guidelines for the Establishment of the World Heritage Convention (1998), paragraph 39.

History and Description
History
The first known settlements go back to the Middle Neolithic period on the island of Lipari. Trading in
obsidian brought prosperity to the islands for about 2000 years, until the last third of the 2nd millennium BC. The spread of the use of metal and its techniques in the Mediterranean led to a period of economic decline and depopulation until the 2nd millennium BC. Activity revived during the Bronze Age.

The islands experienced different fortunes until the arrival of the Greeks around 580 BC. During this period, the archipelago was very sparsely populated. A cyclopean wall discovered during excavations at the acropolis of Lipari probably belongs to this period.

Lipari remained a Greek colony until 252 BC. It then fell into the hands of the Romans during the first Punic War. This occupation caused a strong recession, which ended with the defeat of Carthage.

Very little is recorded about the period covering the Roman Empire and the early Middle Ages. Christianity was established very early, centred on veneration of the relics of St Bartholomew.

In 836, the Arabs destroyed Lipari and deported its inhabitants. The islands remained deserted until the Norman Conquest. With the creation in 1083 of the first Benedictine monastery on the acropolis of Lipari, activity revived and agriculture was reintroduced.

Between the 13th and 14th centuries, Lipari was the object of struggles to control the Tyrrhenian Sea. The unification of the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily resulted in a period of great prosperity.

In 1544, incursions by Barbary pirates destroyed the town of Lipari. It was rebuilt and encircled by ramparts. Its expansion was limited by these fortifications until the 18th century. Intensified naval and agricultural activities resulted in the population leaving the acropolis to settle in the fertile areas. The island of Salina was divided into three districts at the beginning of the present century.

From 1926 to 1950, the acropolis of Lipari and the old episcopal palace were used as a political prison, which contributed to the economic isolation of Lipari during the first half of this century. Furthermore, in the 19th century the vine monoculture was hit by an outbreak of phylloxera, which badly damaged the vines and generated an economic situation from which the islands did not recover. A long crisis preceded a revival of activity, based mainly on tourism, which emerged after the 1950s.

Although tourism helped to revive the country, it also led to the destruction of its culture. Many traditional houses and buildings linked to agricultural activities were transformed into holiday homes inspired by models foreign to the local culture. Political action, backed by the scientific and cultural sector, is trying to reverse this tendency by developing forms of protection for the most significant monuments and by diversifying activities.

Description

The archipelago is composed of seven islands, the principal one being Lipari; two of the islands, Stromboli and Vulcano, are marked by considerable volcanic activity.

The entire archipelago is an inexhaustible subject of volcanological studies, as well as being an important area for archaeology. The accumulation of volcanic ash has protected numerous ancient Greek and Roman remains from the wear and tear of time and from plundering.

The present morphology of the villages is characteristic of Mediterranean insular settlement and can be compared with that of the Greek islands. The dominant feature of the landscape is its volcanic stratification, which is particularly visible on cliffs.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Aeolian archipelago is part of the Sicilian Region and the Province of Messina. It is organized into four districts: Leni, Malfa, and Santa Marina Salina (all on the Island of Salina), and Lipari. There is one single municipality composed of the islands of Lipari, Vulcano, Ficiludi, Alicudi, Stromboli, and Panarea.

Protection of the landscape and architectural heritage of the archipelago, provided for by Law No 1497 of 29.6.1939, is implemented by the Department of Landscape, Architecture and Town Planning Properties of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Culturali ed Ambientali di Messina.

Management

There is a mixed system of land and property belonging to the State, Region, and town council, and above all, private property.

Given the scale of the region, it is impossible to mention all the properties registered and parcelled out by the cadastral survey.

In addition to common land, there are areas for public use, such as those where pumice can be quarried on Mount Pelato in Lipari, other areas of the Monte della Fossa delle Felci in Salina, and many others.

The acropolis of Lipari is owned by the Demanio Regionale Assessorato dei Beni Culturali ed Ambientali and comes under the authority of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Culturali ed Ambientali di Messina (Department of Archaeological Property).

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation History

Until recently, the Lipari islands had not undergone profound alterations. However, the development of tourism and the conversion of traditional buildings into holiday homes pose a serious threat to conservation.
Authenticity

The main guarantee of authenticity and integrity comes from the fact that 90% of the publications on vulcanology are about the Aeolian Islands.

The headquarters of the GVN for the permanent monitoring of volcanic activity, managed by the CNR and by the Ministry of Civil Protection, is on the island of Vulcano. Lipari Castle is the home of the Aeolian Museum, which contains items collected from 1946 to the present. Together with the adjoining archaeological site, it is one of the most important historical and archaeological museums of the Mediterranean.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS


Qualities

The Aeolian Islands form a volcanic archipelago in the area of influence of ancient Greece.

Comparative analysis

The Aeolian Islands belong to the family of insular arcs with which they can be compared in terms of geometry, morphology, and development of products. However, as already pointed out, the Aeolian Islands have specific features within this family (curvature, incline, energy, flow area, constant activity on Stromboli, etc). With respect to the type of explosive activity, eruptions, etc, the Aeolian Islands can be compared with the Aegean archipelago (Kos, Nysidos, Yali, Santorini, Mylos, Methana).

Certain volcanic shapes typical of the Aeolian Islands (eg the large Fossa crater on Vulcano and Pollara on Salina) show similarities with certain volcanoes of the celebrated Galapagos Islands of Darwin, whilst Stromboli has morphological similarities with the Piton de la Fournaise in the Indian Ocean.

From the archaeological point of view, the Aeolian Islands can be considered as a continuous "Pompeii," with magma eruptions that do not have the same dramatic nature.

For the three millennia in question, this stratigraphy is the most complete, precise, and detailed in the central and western Mediterranean, and it provides a key to understanding other civilizations of the Mediterranean.

This phenomenon has preserved intact the Greek and Roman cemetery (with about 3000 tombs excavated to date), which is almost unique among those of Sicily, Greece, and Etruria.

Nearly twenty shipwrecks, from the early Bronze Age to the 17th century, have been found.

Observations by ICOMOS

The upheavals of history and the relative aridity of the Aeolian Islands, remarkable for their volcanic geology, are at the origin of frequent population movements since prehistoric times. The result is a heritage of great archaeological diversity.

Nevertheless, ICOMOS does not consider that the Aeolian Islands possess the outstanding universal value required to justify inscription on the World Heritage List. There are other volcanic islands that have greater archaeological and historical importance and landscapes that have been less adversely impacted by modern intrusions linked with the growth of tourism.

Recommendation

That this cultural property should not be included in the World Heritage List according to cultural criteria.

ICOMOS, September 1999