

ITALY

Roman Villa del Casale

Brief description

Roman exploitation of the countryside is symbolized by the Villa Romana del Casale (in Sicily), the centre of the large estate upon which the rural economy of the Western Empire was based. The villa is one of the most luxurious of its kind. It is especially noteworthy for the richness and quality of the mosaics which decorate almost every room; they are the finest mosaics *in situ* anywhere in the Roman world.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription

1997

Agency responsible for site management

- Sicilian Regional Authority
Councillorship for Cultural and Environmental Heritage
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94015 Piazza Armerina
Enna, Sicilia, Italy
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Office for World heritage List UNESCO
Via del Collegio Romano 27
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2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria

C (i), (ii), (iii)

Justification provided by the State Party

The Roman Villa del Casale is unique. Other structures that mirror so completely not only an antique life style but a complex economic system, that constitute a moment of union between different cultures of the Mediterranean basin (the North African and the roman), simply do not exist.

The setting has undergone very little changes in the last centuries. Legally, the area is protected by the national law number 1089/1939 because it is an archaeological zone. Such protection is also

remarked by the urban instrument of the city of Piazza Armerina that delimitates the zone. Further protection is ensured by national law n° 431/85 that protects the surroundings of archaeological sites.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

Qualities: The Villa del Casale is indisputably one of the largest and most luxurious Roman villas anywhere in the Roman world. The quality of its wealth of mosaics makes it unique.

Recommendation that this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria (i), (ii), and (iii):

The Villa del Casale at Piazza Armerina is the supreme example of a luxury Roman villa, which graphically illustrates the predominant social and economic structure of its age. The mosaics that decorate it are exceptional for their artistic quality and invention as well as their extent.

Committee Decision

Bureau (June 1997): The Bureau recommended the Committee to inscribe this site on the World Heritage List on the basis of cultural criteria (i), (ii) and (iii). The Villa del Casale at Piazza Armerina is the supreme example of a luxury Roman villa, which graphically illustrates the predominant social and economic structure of its age. The mosaics that decorate it are exceptional for their artistic quality and invention as well as their extent. The Bureau urged the State Party to address concerns expressed in the evaluation of ICOMOS regarding the drainage of the site and the climatic conditions within the cover buildings.

Session (1997): The Committee decided to inscribe this property on the basis of criteria (i), (ii) and (iii), considering that the Villa del Casale at Piazza Armerina is the supreme example of a luxury Roman villa, which graphically illustrates the predominant social and economic structure of its age. The mosaics that decorate it are exceptional for their artistic quality and invention as well as their extent. The Committee asked the State Party to provide a report on the conservation and management of the site and in particular on the monitoring of the climatic conditions within the protective structures and their impact on the archaeological remains.

- Statement of Significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site
- No change required by State Party

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: inadequate
- In order to adequately reflect the Villa's significance, the UNESCO Site's boundary should include the whole area of the ancient "latifundium", which, at present, is still not perfectly identified and extends to privately-owned areas. In the last two years, the Villa's Archaeological Museum, in agreement with the Regional Centre for Planning and Restoration, has implemented a study dedicated to the actions necessary to arrange the state-owned area and to the acquisition and reclamation of the area presently owned by the Province of Enna, who has agreed to sell the property. The funds allocated by the Integrated Territorial Plan for the Province of Enna will be used for the expropriation of the land and for the re-definition of the state-owned territory
- Buffer zone: adequate; the present buffer zone does not appear adequate as it protects only one side of the Villa. For the better protection of the Villa, project for the evaluation of the Villa del Casale's incidence scope aimed at an impact assessment; Within the framework of the land use regulations at the provincial level the main interrelationships between the Villa and natural and landscaping factors of its immediate environment have already been identified. All the above activities will be integrated in the site's management plan that is being prepared by the regional administration.

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

3. Protection**Legislative and Administrative Arrangements**

- The Villa is state-owned, in part by the Sicilian Regional Authority in part by the Municipality of Piazza Armerina; it is protected under the provisions of the basic Italian antiquities protection statute, Legislative Decree "Cultural Heritage and Landscape Code". In particular, the Villa comes under archaeological and landscaping restrictions; the protected area extends on the South, South-West, to an unexcavated area where the more recent archaeological excavations were performed to as it was supposed to be the site of the Villa's pars rustica. Also the non-mandatory provisions of the Province's Territorial Plan indicate the Villa is as an area of outstanding cultural and archaeological interest

- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

Actions taken/proposed:

- Strengthening of protection

4. Management**Use of site/property**

- Visitor attraction

Management /Administrative Body

- A first work group will be set up shortly to conceive a management plan for the site
- Management under protective legislation; Sicily is a region with special autonomy, in particular as regards the management of its cultural heritage. The Region issued a law in 1999 to establish the "Museo Archeologico Regionale della Villa Imperiale del Casale di Piazza Armerina" and grant it full institutional and administrative autonomy. A High Commissioner was appointed by law, who is solely responsible for the coordination of all actions aimed at the safeguard and development of the Villa Romana di Piazza Armerina
- Site manager on full-time basis
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: regional; local
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

Actions proposed:

- Definition of the management autonomy
- Appoint a High Commissioner

5. Management Plan

- Management plan under preparation
- Implementation commence: 12/2007

6. Financial Resources**Financial situation**

- State Budget; Operative Regional Planning; Integrated Territorial Plan of the Provincial Authority of Enna
- European Community Funds, CSF (Community Support Framework)
- Insufficient; Although the Villa was granted administrative autonomy, it does not have its own sources of finance to face safeguard and maintenance requirements; The site's adequate management would require additional funds for the archaeological area's ordinary maintenance

and to cover expenses of additional personnel for guardianship, conservation, development and services; The Villa's extension and its problems would indeed require specialized personnel to guarantee day-to-day maintenance, in particular of the mosaics

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 25
- With staff resources as they are at present, it is extremely difficult to face the property's conservation and safeguard requirements, also on account of the large number of visitors and modality in use for visits. Not access to personnel with conservation skills; as regards research, the presence of one single archaeologist is insufficient, while the presence of an arts historian is not even contemplated. The authorized staff strength as per the relevant decree does not contemplate operators qualified as educational motivators or operators with promotional skills. The staff's professional profile does not comply to ICOM's prescriptions for museums

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Average: conservation, management, interpretation; education
- Bad : promotion; visitor management

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- At present, there are no on-site facilities for training or for other aspects that appear essential in an archaeological area (restoration laboratories etc.). However, as regards conservation issues, the Museum can refer to the Regional Centre for Planning and Restoration, in Palermo, and to the Regional Centre for Inventory, Catalogue and Documentation for cataloguing matters. Also there are several universities and research institutes in Sicily who can satisfy requirements regarding education and specialization
- At present, the most urgent training need concerns visitor management; It would be advisable to train educational motivators and arrange language courses for visitor management personnel. Initiative elementary schools and training educational motivators
- Training available to stakeholders

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 412.000 (ticket counting), 2004;
- At present, no visitor facilities
- Visitor needs: all the facilities and activities connected to visitor management need to be organized and built on the site, from essential services to the more specifically cultural services. It is also necessary to improve the Site's accessibility, through both the development and improvement of facilities and the improvement of public transportation

10. Scientific Studies

- Risk assessment, studies related to the value of the site, monitoring exercises, condition surveys, archaeological surveys, transportation studies
- In the last years, the Regional Centre for Planning and Restoration has implemented, in cooperation with universities and research centres, several preparatory studies for the Villa's conservation plan, namely: a) investigation of mineralogical composition and petrography of the hard material and of the mortars used in the Villa; b) investigation of the chemical and physical deterioration of the mosaics' surfaces, and of the biological deterioration of these same surfaces; c) geomorphology and geognosy; d) evaluation and measurement of the Villa's degree of vulnerability and of the adequacy and efficiency of the existing roofing; e) studies on Project dedicated to protective shelter of archaeological areas; these studies were aimed at monitoring the environmental (air) and micro-climatic conditions under the Villa's roofing; a number of samples of the hard materials were also positioned underneath and outside said roofing in order to observe and monitor the deterioration process; f) Excavations and paleo-environmental and paleo-botanical studies; g) illuminating engineering studies on establishing ideal conditions for appreciating the mosaics. Feasibility Study
- Most of the studies mentioned above were aimed at formulating an integrated plan for the Villa's conservation and re-qualification
- The Site's designation as a World heritage site has certainly raised the level of attention towards the Villa del Casale, thus favouring the allocation of funds and consequently the implementation of archaeological and conservation studies and researches

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- No signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local authorities
- Need for awareness raising: several initiatives have been implemented which may, directly or indirectly, favour an increased awareness in visitors and in the local population: a) institution of an association of friends of the museum; b) involvement of schools in educational programmes aimed at improving understanding, communication and transmission of the cultural heritage's material and immaterial value; c) actions aimed at developing the territory and its products d) action aimed at inducing visitors to prolong their stay and at giving a character of permanence to economical activities connected to the site; e) actions favouring certification of local products processed following local or Mediterranean traditions
- Several educational programmes, involving schools, have been implemented and are aimed at a better understanding of the value of the Villa itself and of its environment
- Heritage days; the site is also included in the "Peregrinous-vision of Rome" project which contemplates links and various initiatives dedicated to World Heritage sites
- Although the designation as a World Heritage site has caused an excessive commercial use of the Site's image and popularity, it has triggered closer ties between the local population of Piazza Armerina and the Site itself and has certainly also positively influenced the educational and promotional activities associated to the Villa. In agreement with UNESCO's Cultural Department, the Site participates in the project "Mosaici mediterranei, reti conoscenza conservazione", aimed at promoting the Site but also at the study and organization of the management of an immaterial heritage associated to cultural landscapes and local resources
- Web site available

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- A number of conservation and re-qualification works will shortly be assigned; The project includes: a) acquisition of the area surrounding the Villa to create a buffer zone along the whole perimeter of the ancient structure; b) actions aimed at the hydro geological protection with the restoration of the ancient drainage and rain water disposal network and tree planting; c) improvement and adaptation of protective shelter; The new roofing, in light compatible material, will entail closing the rooms with walls made of opaque, eco-compatible material, so as to efficiently control micro-climatic conditions and lighting. Artificial lighting will be provided by renewable energy sources. In situ monitoring apparatus will guarantee constant monitoring of micro-climatic conditions under the roofing; d) conservation works on the floor mosaics, on the opus sectile floors and on the plaster of the walls. Works will be graded according to conditions of the decorations in order to guarantee an adequate conservation level; e) restoration of the vegetation in the areas originally left uncovered; f) clearing and arrangement of the surrounding area of the ways of access to the Villa; g) implementation of new fencing, security and supervision systems and updating of the electrical installations
- Other actions will also be carried out to provide the main on-site services as well as those pertaining to visitor management, including parking areas for cars and busses. Community funds were also used for the archaeological researches in the area to the South of the Villa, where the "pars rustica", or production areas was thought to be located. The excavations brought to light a few structures dated 2nd and 4th century AD, the Villa's Byzantine fortifications and the medieval village
- Present state of conservation: Patchy

Threats and Risks to site

- Natural disasters, visitor/tourism pressure, human-caused risk
- Specific issues: the area presents a medium degree of seismic vulnerability and, more importantly, geological instability caused mainly by water flow on the surface and underground. More than once the Villa was involved in floods caused by the over bank flooding of a nearby stream. Over the years, such events favoured by modifications of the surrounding area's environmental conditions and the hydrologic

regimen's impaired efficiency, have brought about the subsidence of the foundations and of the higher structures, causing damages to the floor mosaics. The presence of visitors modifies temperature and humidity of the air beneath the existing roofing, increases the air's carbon dioxide and bacteria content. This situation enhances the roofing's greenhouse effect, causing damages to the Villa's structures and decorations. Occasionally, the floor mosaics have been vandalised

13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring program; monitoring and environmental control networks are included in the Projects now in progress and will be continued in future. Agreements with several universities have been implemented in view of a systematic research on statistical data concerning visitors' flow and associated phenomena

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation; economic
- Strength/Weaknesses of management: at present, the Site's major weaknesses are connected to the existing roofing's inefficiency and to the structure's state of conservation; these issues are now being dealt with and will shortly be solved through the planned measures. At the same time, also the lack of services for visitors will also be addressed. Management problem remains and is due to lack of sources of finances

Future actions:

- Implement integrated conservation and development measures
- Draw up and implement the UNESCO site's management plan; the management plan will have to contemplate the synergic contribution of all the institutions involved in order to optimise the Site's management and ensure the Villa's conservation in the long term