

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ
WORLD HERITAGE LIST No. 394

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination: Insular Venice and its Lagoon

Location: Venetia

State Party: Italy

Date: 22 April 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of Criteria I, II, III, IV, V and VI.

C) JUSTIFICATION

The nomination of Venice to the list preceded by nine years the ratification of the World Heritage Convention by Italy. There was some concern about such a delay, which international opinion deemed inexplicable: on several occasions, notably during the discussions which preceded the elaboration of the tentative lists, the Committee expressed the wish for a short-list presentation of the most prestigious cultural properties and cited how paradoxical it was that Venice had not been included on the World Heritage List.

The initiative finally taken by the Italian government responds to this general expectation, and this is all the more positive in that the nomination concerns not only the historic centre of Venice, but the whole lagoon with its hundreds of small islands, its three "gates," the Lido, Malamocco and Chioggia; its basins and fishing areas. The geographic, historic and aesthetic coherency of this ensemble leaves no doubt.

In this lagoon covering 50,000 square kilometers, nature and history have been so closely linked since the 5th century A.D. when Venetian populations, to escape Barbarian raids, found refuge on the sandy islands of Torcello, Iesolo and Malamocco. These temporary settlements gradually became permanent and the initial refuge of the land-dwelling peasants and fishermen became a maritime power. Several key dates stand in the minds of all: the small island of Rialto was chosen as the headquarters of the new city; in 1000 A.D., Venice controlled the Dalmatian coast; in 1112, a trading market was founded in Sidon; in 1204 Venice allied with the Crusaders to capture Constantinople. The abundant booty brought back on that occasion, including St. Mark's horses,

is only the more spectacular part of the loot from Byzantium that the doge Enrico Dandolo shared with his allies. Under the doge a maritime empire of unequalled power extended over the entire length of shores along the eastern Mediterranean, to the islands of the Ionian Sea, and to Crete.

During the entire period of the expansion of Venice, over the centuries when it defended its trading markets against the business undertakings of the Arabs, the Genoese and the Ottomans, and those of the European monarchs who were envious of its power, Venice never ceased, in the literal sense of the term, to consolidate its position in the lagoon. The marriage with the sea, that "sposalizio" that since 1172 was symbolized by the ring of the doge, who had replaced the dux (elected for the first time in 697 by an assembly of the people), was never called into question. Defense of the site in the face of major dangers, siltings and the destructive assault of the waters' waves, was a matter of constant concern. From the High Middle Ages to the 18th century, the course of the rivers' waters was deviated and controlled; the three channels through which the tide engulfs the lagoon have continuously been rearranged; the thin strip of shore has been protected by fences, stone piles and breakwaters. By the time completion was achieved in 1782 of the fantastic construction of the murazzi, a veritable dam holding back the Adriatic, the Most Serene Republic would survive only 15 years longer.

In this inland sea which has continuously been under threat, rises amidst a tiny archipelago at the very edge of the waves, one of the most extraordinary built-up areas of the Middle Ages. From Torcello to the north to Chioggia to the south, every small island, or nearly, had its own settlement, town, fishing village and artisan village (e.g., Murano), but at the heart of the lagoon, Venice stood as one of the greatest capitals in the medieval world. When a group of tiny islands were consolidated, nothing remained of the primitive topography but canals such as Giudecca Canal, St. Mark's Canal and the Great Canal (according to Comynes, "the most beautiful street in the world"), and a network of small rii that are the veritable arteries of a city on water. In this unreal space, where there is no notion of the concept of terra firma, masterpieces of one of the most extraordinary architectural museums on earth have been accumulated for over 1,000 years. The least palazzetto, which in Venice seems only a minor construction, would constitute the glory of many historic cities.

Everyone is familiar with the dangers threatening the inestimable heritage of Venice: changes in ground level and tides, atmospheric pollution and socio-economic changes are some of the direct or indirect consequences of the industrialization of the zone of Mestre. These factors have posed, in new terms, the problem of the survival of Venice. The action of the Council of

Europe, UNESCO, and of many non-governmental organizations on behalf of Venice has shown the reality of international solidarity which only great causes bring to the forefront.

Without summarizing all the actions undertaken following the flooding of 4 November 1966, ICOMOS stresses that the inclusion of Venice on the World Heritage List will further strengthen the coherency of the cultural policy of UNESCO. Venice meets all the criteria for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

- Criterion I. Venice is a unique artistic achievement. The city is built on 118 small islands and seems to float on the waters of the lagoon, composing an unforgettable landscape whose imponderable beauty inspired Canaletto, Guardi, Turner and many other painters. The city reveals itself instantly. The lagoon of Venice also includes one of the highest concentrations of masterpieces in the world: from Torcello Cathedral to the church of St. Mary of Salvation, all the centuries of an extraordinary Golden Age are represented by monuments of exceptional beauty: San Marco, the Palazzo Ducale, Zanipolo and Scuola di San Marco, the Grari and Scuola di San Rocco, San Giorgio Maggiore, etc.

- Criterion II. The influence of Venice on the development of architecture and monumental arts has been considerable. It first made its impact in all the trading markets and stations of the Most Serene Republic along the shores of Dalmatia, in Asia Minor and in Egypt, in the islands of Ionian Sea, in Euboea, in Peloponnesus, in Crete, and in Cyprus, where the monuments built were inspired by Venetian models. But at the time when this empire of the seas experienced its first defeats, Venice founded a school of a very different type, thanks to its painters. Bellini and Giorgione, then Titien, Tintoret, Veronese and Tiepolo so profoundly changed the perception of space, light and colour that they made a decisive mark on trends in painting and decoration in Europe.

- Criterion III. With the unusualness of an archaeological site which still breathes life, Venice bears testimony unto itself. This mistress of the seas is a link between the East and the West, between Islam and Christianity; she lives on through thousands of monuments and vestiges of a time gone by.

- Criterion IV. Venice possesses an incomparable series of architectural ensembles illustrating the age of its splendor. From great monuments such as Piazza San Marco and Piazzetta (the cathedral, the Palazzo Ducale, Marciana, correr Museum, Procuratie Vecchie), to the more modest residences of calli and campi in its six quarters (Sestieri), and including hospitals and charitable or cooperative institutions which in the 13th century were originally Scuole, medieval Venetian architecture, presents a complete typology whose exemplary value goes hand-in-hand with the outstanding character of an urban setting which had to adapt

to the special requirements of the site.

- Criterion V. In the Mediterranean area, the lagoon of Venice constitutes an outstanding example of a semi-lake settlement which has become vulnerable as a result of irreversible changes. In this coherent ecosystem where the barenes, muddy ground which alternately sinks below water level and then rises again, are as important as the islands, the houses standing on piles, the fishing villages, and the rice-fields need as much protection as the palaces and the churches.

- Criterion VI. Venice symbolizes the victorious struggle of mankind against the elements, and the mastery men and women have imposed upon hostile nature. The city is also directly and tangibly associated with universal history. The "Queen of the Seas," heroically gripping to her tiny islands, did not limit her horizon, either to the lagoon, or to the Adriatic, or to the Mediterranean. It was from Venice that Marco Polo (1254-1324) set out in search of China, Annam, Tonkin, Sumatra, India and Persia. His tomb at San Lorenzo recalls the role assumed by Venetian merchants in the discover of the world- after the Arabs, but well before the Portuguese.

ICOMOS, May 1987