

**Identification**

<u>Nomination</u>	I Sassi di Matera
<u>Location</u>	Basilicata Region
<u>State Party</u>	Italy
<u>Date</u>	23 October 1992

**Justification by State Party**

The ensemble of I Sassi di Matera and the archaeological and natural park bear unique witness to man's activities. The "outstanding universal value" stems from the symbiosis between its cultural and natural characteristics.

It is proposed for inclusion on the List on the basis of criteria iii, iv, and v.

**History and Description**History

The Matera region has been inhabited by man since the Palaeolithic period. Permanent defended village settlements grew up after the last Ice Age, based on agriculture. Deforestation of the area led to serious erosion and created problems of water management. The gradual invasion of fields by garrigue and maquis led to a change from agriculture to pastoral transhumance. The advent of better tools with the Metal Ages made it easier to dig into the soft calcareous tufa rocks exposed in the gravine (gorges or canyons) and there is evidence from the Bronze Age of the creation of underground cisterns and tombs, and in particular of underground dwellings opening out of a central space (jazzi). The excavated tufa blocks were used for the construction of walls and towers. This process was easiest on the sides of ravines, where the softer strata of tufa were exposed.

Greek colonization led to the introduction of higher technology and political structures, under the influence of the Pythagorean school. The earlier dispersed settlements coalesced into urban centres of government, under their own kings (i Re Pastori), leading eventually to the creation of true towns. The harsh landscape resulted in the growth of a spirit of sturdy independence which was resistant to successive waves of invaders after the Byzantine period. The area was also very attractive to monastic and utopian communities.

Matera's development was due to its geological setting. A belt of soft tufa is located between 350 and 400 m above the valley bed, and this also contains two natural depressions (grabiglioni); in consequence, it was here that the settlement

grew up. The clay plateau above was reserved for agriculture and pastoralism.

This structure remained intact until the 18th century. It was the expansion and interventions of the 19th and 20th centuries that rejected the ancient principle of land management based on water supply and drainage and spread to the clays of the plateau above. The original urban fabric degenerated to the point where Matera, hailed by the 12th century geographer El Idrisi as "magnificent and splendid", was seen by Carlo Levi in his famous novel Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli (Christ stopped at Eboli), published in 1945, as the symbol of the misery of peasant life in southern Italy. As a result of the Italian Government's concern about this situation, legislation passed in 1952 led to the rehousing of the dwellers of the old quarters in new buildings and the desertion of the ancient centre in the 1950s.

### Description

The earliest settlement was based on the two grabiglioni known as Sasso Caveosa and Sasso Barisano (sasso = rock, boulder). The earliest house form was a simple cave in the tufa with a closing wall formed from the excavated blocks. This developed into a vaulted room (lamione) built out into the open space, and was then available for considerable adaptation and extension. Groups of dwellings round a common courtyard evolved into the social structure of the vicinato, with shared facilities such as a cistern.

In between the two sassi was established the fortified centre of the town (cività), within which the cathedral was sited. Workshops and granaries were set up outside the cività, which was connected with the sassi by narrow lanes and steps. The water supply was highly organized, being collected on the plateau above and brought down by gravity for distribution to the community. As the town grew, more houses were excavated and built, climbing the hillside; the roofs of some houses often acted as streets for the houses above them. The houses became more grandiose, and terraces were built out in the Renaissance period for gardens.

### **Management and Protection**

#### Legal status

I Sassi is under the protection of the Italian State under the provisions of Law No 771 of 11 November 1986, which designates it as being of exceptional national interest. Direct responsibility for the management of the historical area is delegated to the Municipality of Matera (which has a special department for I Sassi), in collaboration with the Superintendence of Antiquities for the region. Most of the historical area is in the ownership of the State and leased to the Municipality, which is responsible for the coordination of successive biennial programmes. A wide area surrounding Matera is protected by the Province of Basilicata under the terms of a Regional Law on the

Archaeological, Historical, and Natural Park of Matera; this forms part of the Regional Development Plan for Basilicata.

Both legal instruments institute control over all forms of building and cover their height, demolition, and reconstruction, along with general alterations to the existing urban fabric.

### Management

Management of the ancient quarters is the concern of the Municipality of Matera in collaboration with the regional Superintendence of Antiquities. Funding for management and restoration is provided by the Italian Government under the provisions of Law No 771 of 1986: a sum of 100 milliard lire has been allocated for this purpose. Further funding comes from the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, the general fund for economic and social development of southern Italy, and other sources. The existing management plan provides for the restoration of public buildings by the Municipality, but private owners qualify for financial assistance. Work on the major architectural complexes is contracted out to private individuals and companies. The Centro per la Valorizzazione e Gestione delle Risorse Storico-Ambientali takes special responsibility for research and training activities connected with the rehabilitation programmes.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### Conservation history

In the 1950s the Italian Government addressed itself to the problem of urban degeneration in the Mezzogiorno of southern Italy. In the late 1960s Matera was designated, along with Venice, as a unique urban entity which would benefit from a special law for the protection of the heritage. The rehabilitation of the ancient quarters was begun and has been proceeding slowly ever since. It is planned that some of the buildings shall be occupied by national and international cultural institutions, and some of the dwellings are being updated and reoccupied.

### Authenticity

Since the sassi were evacuated during the period when the authenticity of many comparable historic centres was compromised, they preserve their form of the 1950s, which represents organic growth over more than two millennia. So far most of the work that has been carried out has concerned weatherproofing and repair by the replacement of fallen structures and roofing, to prevent further degradation. The authenticity at the present time can be considered to be irreproachable.

## **Evaluation**

### Qualities

The I Sassi quarter of Matera is the best surviving and most complete example of continuity in the Mediterranean region of this type of settlement, which developed in close harmony with the ecosystem.

### Comparative analysis

The remarkable settlement at Matmata (Tunisia) is the nearest parallel in structural and historical terms, but it followed a different cultural trajectory from the late 1st millennium AD onwards to that of Matera. Similar settlements also exist in Greece and Iran, but these have not preserved their authenticity. In addition, a number of hill towns in southern Italy (such as Gravina, in Apulia) have been built on similar principles, but most of these have lost their integrity over time.

### Additional comments

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Matera in April 1993 to evaluate the site and had meetings with competent authorities at national, regional, and municipal level.

The main concern of ICOMOS is that the restoration and rehabilitation work now in progress should conform with the highest conservation standards, with due respect to traditional materials, building techniques, and colours, avoiding inappropriate uses for old buildings. There also needs to be vigilance in respect of the growth of the buffer zone between I Sassi and the modern town of Matera, so as to avoid development that does not harmonize with the ancient quarters.

Another problem that needs careful attention is tourism, which should be controlled in accordance with a visitor management plan so as to avoid the type of development which has ruined the ambience of Alberobello and its unique trulli.

## **Recommendation**

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria iii, iv, and v:

- Criterion iii Matera's I Sassi and park represent an outstanding example of a rock-cut settlement, adapted perfectly to its geomorphological setting and its ecosystem and exhibiting continuity over more than two millennia.
- Criterion iv The town and park constitute an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble and landscape illustrating a number of significant stages in human history.

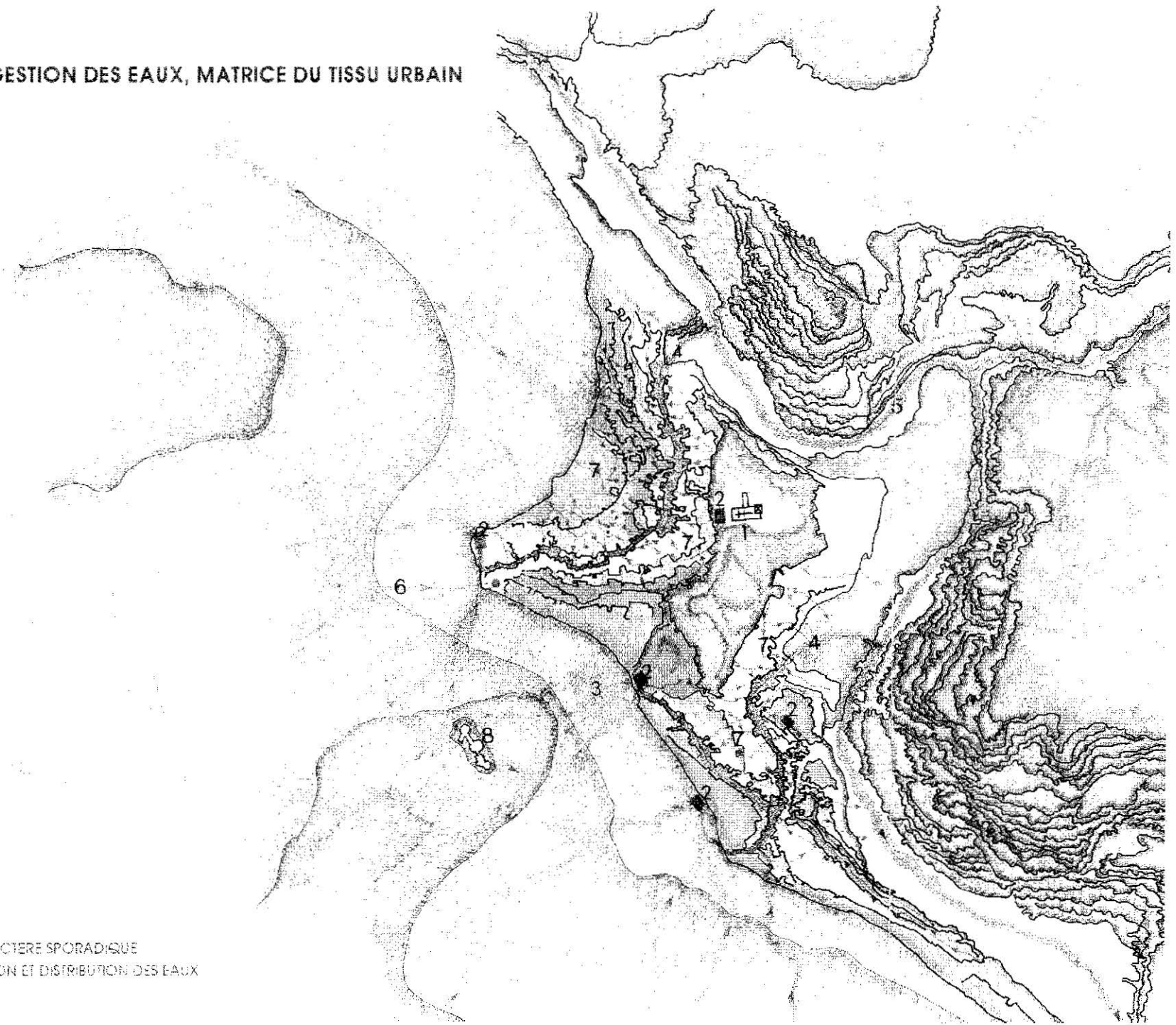
- Criterion v The town and park represent an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement and land-use showing the evolution of a culture which has maintained over time a harmonious relationship with its natural environment.

ICOMOS, October 1993

# LE SYSTEME DE GESTION DES EAUX, MATRICE DU TISSU URBAIN

## Legende

- 1- CIVITA
- 2- GRANDES CITERNES
- 3- LAC DE LA VILLE
- 4- GRABIGNONI
- 5- GRAVINA
- 6- COURS D'EAU A CARACTERE SPORADIQUE
- 7- RESEAUX DE REPARTITION ET DISTRIBUTION DES EAUX
- 8- CHATEAU



Matera : système de gestion des eaux, matrice du tissu urbain /  
system of management of waters, pattern of the urban fabric

# L'EVOLUTION TYPOLOGIQUE



GROTTE



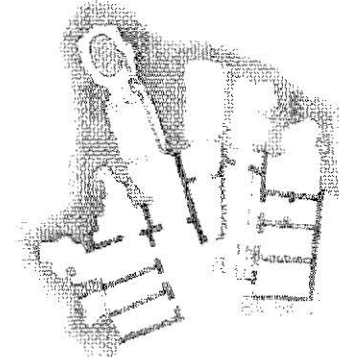
GROTTE CLOISONNEE



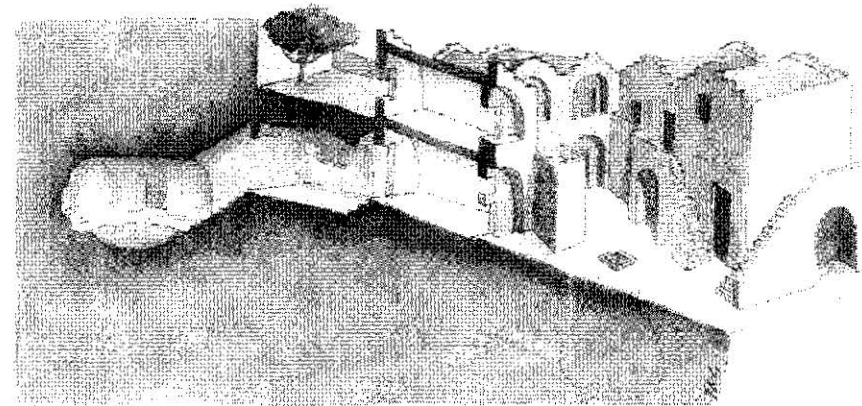
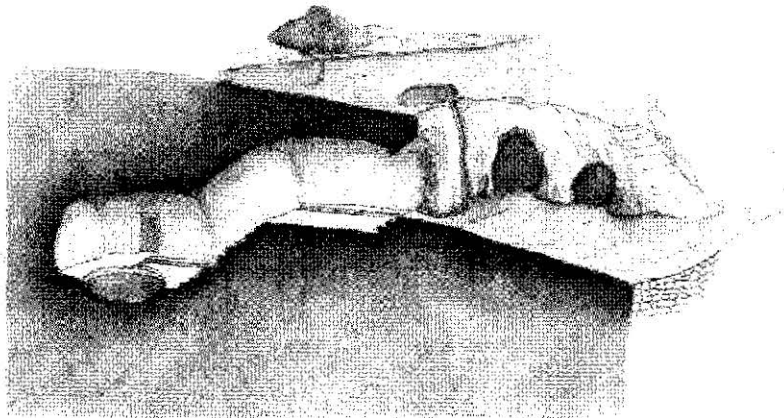
LAMIONE



JAZZO



VICINATO





Matera : Sasso Caveoso