

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The historic centre of the City of Pienza
<i>Location</i>	Province of Siena, Tuscan Region
<i>State Party</i>	Italy
<i>Date</i>	29 September 1995

Justification by State Party

Because of its architectural and town-planning characteristics, Pienza is a unique example of a city designed and constructed according to the canons of the purest Italian Renaissance. Its urban structure, exemplified in particular in the extraordinary creation of the Piazza Pio II, and its architectural monuments represent an incomparable achievement of the creative genius of Bernardo Rossellino, who put into practice the teachings of his master, Leone Battista Alberti, the supreme theorist and architect of Humanist culture with classical antecedents. Although these buildings were inspired by the common denominator of Renaissance architecture, their appearance is very varied, according to the main functions for which they were intended.

One of the most characteristic elements is the widespread use of *sgraffito* decoration on the facades, which confers a certain measure of uniformity on the urban fabric of Pienza, and also indicates the desire to endow a city that was the birthplace of a Pope with a new dignity.

As a planned city Pienza can be compared with other Italian towns, such as Mantua, Ferrara, and Urbino, which were radically transformed in the 15th century. The effect created in Pienza by the creative genius of Rossellino, and in particular the arrangement of the buildings around the square, has echoes in other plans. There are similarities with specific architectural experiments, especially those in Germany that Pius II refers to in his *Commentarii*.

Pienza has preserved its authentic character throughout the centuries, since there have been no radical changes to the buildings or the urban fabric. The historic awareness of the heritage of the city has ensured the preservation of its high cultural qualities.

The natural landscape of the Orcia valley below the hilltop on which Pienza is built is also a unique treasure. It has been greatly admired by poets, artists, and travellers over many centuries.

Note The State Party does not make any proposals concerning the criteria under which the property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List in the nomination dossier.

Category of property

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Pienza is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description*History*

The leading humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405-64), who was elected to the Papal Throne of St Peter in 1458 as Pius II, was born in the village of Corsignano, situated on a hill overlooking the Orcia and Asso valleys some 53 km south-east of Siena. When he returned there in February 1459, a few months after becoming Pope, he was struck by the extreme misery of its inhabitants, which he described in his *Commentarii*. This inspired him to endow his birthplace with new buildings, both public and private, and to make it his summer court. His vision derived to a considerable extent from the German-born philosopher Cardinal Nicola Cusano. The link with the German Gothic tradition is shown by Pienza Cathedral, which the Pope wanted to be in the same style as the Late Gothic *Hallenkirchen* of southern Germany, such as Landshut, Neuötting, Straubing, Nürnberg, Vienna, Mödling,

and Gumpelskirchen, that he had admired in his travels. He was also influenced by Jacob Fugger, banker to Charles V and Leo X, who transformed his native city of Augsburg in the early 16th century.

For the transformation of Corsignano Pius II called upon the services of Bernardo di Matteo Gamberelli, known as Rossellino, who had been *ingegnere di palazzo* to Pope Nicholas V in Rome. There he had worked with and been influenced by Leone Battista Alberti, the great Humanist thinker and architect, who was responsible for the restoration of Rome in 1447-55 and whose *De re aedificatoria* (1452) was the first architectural treatise of the Renaissance.

Rossellino was responsible for the major buildings around the central square (the Cathedral, the Piccolomini Palace, and the Episcopal Palace), work on which began in 1459. He was also responsible for planning the overall layout of the town, which he based on the principles of Renaissance town planning enunciated by Alberti. The walled medieval village of Corsignano consisted of a main street (now the Corso Rossellino) joining the two main gates (Porta al Giglio and Porta al Prato), flanked by smaller perpendicular and parallel streets. Rossellino largely respected this basic structure when siting his ensemble of major buildings around the main square. Pius II's project also required the building of large houses for the cardinals in his retinue, and work on these began in 1463. Two structures with a social function, the hospital and the inn in front of the church of St Francis, were also built on his orders.

Description

The ideal (but not the geographical) centre of Pienza is the Piazza Pio II. Its trapezoid plan is emphasized by the herringbone paving edged with travertine.

On the south side of the square is the *Cathedral* (built 1459-62), designed by Rossellino. The influence of Alberti is strong, in particular in the composition of the triple facade with its wide arches, corresponding with the three-aisled interior. The interior, divided by tall clustered pilasters from which the arches and cross-vaults spring, was inspired by the Late Gothic *Hallenkirchen* that Enea Silvio Piccolomini had admired in Germany. The bell-tower also blends Gothic and Renaissance forms.

On the west side of the Piazza is the *Piccolomini Palace*, built in 1463 on the site of old houses owned by the family. The influence of Alberti is stronger here, since Rossellino based it on his Rucellai Palace in Florence. The front elevations, resting on a travertine plinth, are divided into three bands of sandstone ashlar, interrupted by large wide arched windows. Three of the sides are the same and the fourth, with an imposing triple-tiered loggia, looks out on a raised garden. The fine interior courtyard is decorated with *sgraffito* ornamentation on the second and third floors.

The *Episcopal (or Borgia) Palace* is on the opposite side of the piazza. The old Pretorio Palace was purchased by the Pope in 1463 for Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, who transformed it by adding an extra storey and replacing the Gothic windows. The *Town Hall* (Palazzo Pretorio) of 1462 is on the north side of the square. It is in the conventional Tuscan style for buildings with this function, with an open loggia at ground level and a crenellated tower. In contrast with the other public buildings around the square, it is in stuccoed tufa and brick, decorated with *sgraffito*; only the loggia is in travertine.

The other major buildings in Pienza line the Corso Rossellino; most were built as houses for cardinals and other members of the Papal Court, though some earlier buildings survive. They include the Gothic *Church of St Francis* and its convent (now an hotel); the *Atrebatense Palace*, a Gothic structure with Renaissance decoration; the *Ammanati Palace*, built by Gerolamo Ammanati of Pavia, a favourite of Pius II, in Renaissance style; the brick *Palazzetto*; and the *Gonzaga Palace*, one of the few Renaissance buildings that retains its garden. Some of the modest houses built by Pius II for the people of Pienza in 1463 are still visible in the *Via delle Case Nuove*.

Pienza is provided with many Renaissance fountains and wells. The finest is that designed by Rossellino which stands in the Piazza Pio II in front of the Piccolomini Palace. More than half the circuit of medieval walls still survives.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The entire town is protected under the provisions of Law No 1497/1939 and by a Ministerial Ordinance of 27 February 1970. Over fifty buildings, fountains, and gardens are also protected as monuments according to Laws Nos 364/1909 and 1089/1939. By means of the Italian legal device known as the *vincolo*, any works on the town and on the individual monuments must be authorized by the relevant Government body, in this case the

Soprintendenza per i Beni Ambientali e Architettonici or the Soprintendenze per i Beni Artistici e Storici per le Provincie di Siena e Grosseto.

Management

Ownership of properties making up the nominated historic centre of Pienza is divided between the State, ecclesiastical bodies, local organizations, and private individuals and companies.

The whole municipal area of Pienza has an urban master plan (*Piano Regolatore Generale - PRG*), prepared in conformity with Regional Law No 5/1995; the current version was approved in March 1995. It covers protection of the historic centre and the surrounding landscape. There are protected landscapes around the city, extending up to 2.5 km to the south. No new constructions are allowed in a designated area outside the walls, and an area south-east of the historic centre is protected as an archaeological-monumental area.

The Municipality of Pienza is responsible for implementation of protective measures included in the PRG. This is handled by a planning commission whose members include experts in architecture, geology, and landscape. The Municipality controls traffic within the historic centre, limiting it to residents and providing garage accommodation outside the walls. Financial assistance is provided by the Municipality for restoration and rehabilitation projects.

There is currently a proposal at the provincial level to join the forces of five municipalities to draw up a management plan for the entire area, to be known as the *Parco artistico, naturale e culturale della Val d'Orcia*. Its intentions are to coordinate conservation and visitor management in the region.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

During the 20th century a number of restoration and conservation projects have been carried out since the restoration of the facade of the Town Hall in 1901. In recent years these have included consolidation of the foundations of the Cathedral (1962), restoration of walls, pavements, and sculptures in the Cathedral (1964-65), and rehabilitation of the Case Nuove (1977).

The general state of conservation of buildings in the historic centre is good. Some facades are in need of treatment; these have been documented by the Soprintendenza, which is launching a project to train local builders and technicians in the specialized techniques needed. There are also problems arising from the subsoil, the fissuring of which has caused some subsidence and consequent cracking; further consolidation work is needed at the Cathedral and the Piccolomini Palace.

Authenticity

The ensemble created by Pius II has maintained its authenticity in terms of design, materials, workmanship, and setting. Like other historic towns in the region, Pienza has remained within its historic boundaries and, along with the surrounding agricultural landscape, it has not been subject to adverse industrial or infrastructural developments.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

ICOMOS consulted its International Committee on Historic Towns and Villages. An ICOMOS expert mission visited Pienza in January 1996.

Qualities

Pienza is an excellent example of the small Tuscan hill town, whose roots go back to antiquity. Its special significance lies in the fact that it was the first material realization of the Renaissance "ideal city," as conceived by Alberti and the Humanist circles around the court of Pope Pius II in the mid 15th century. As such it had a profound influence on subsequent developments in Italy and beyond. It also preserves its relationship with its surrounding traditional agricultural landscape to a very high degree.

Comparative analysis

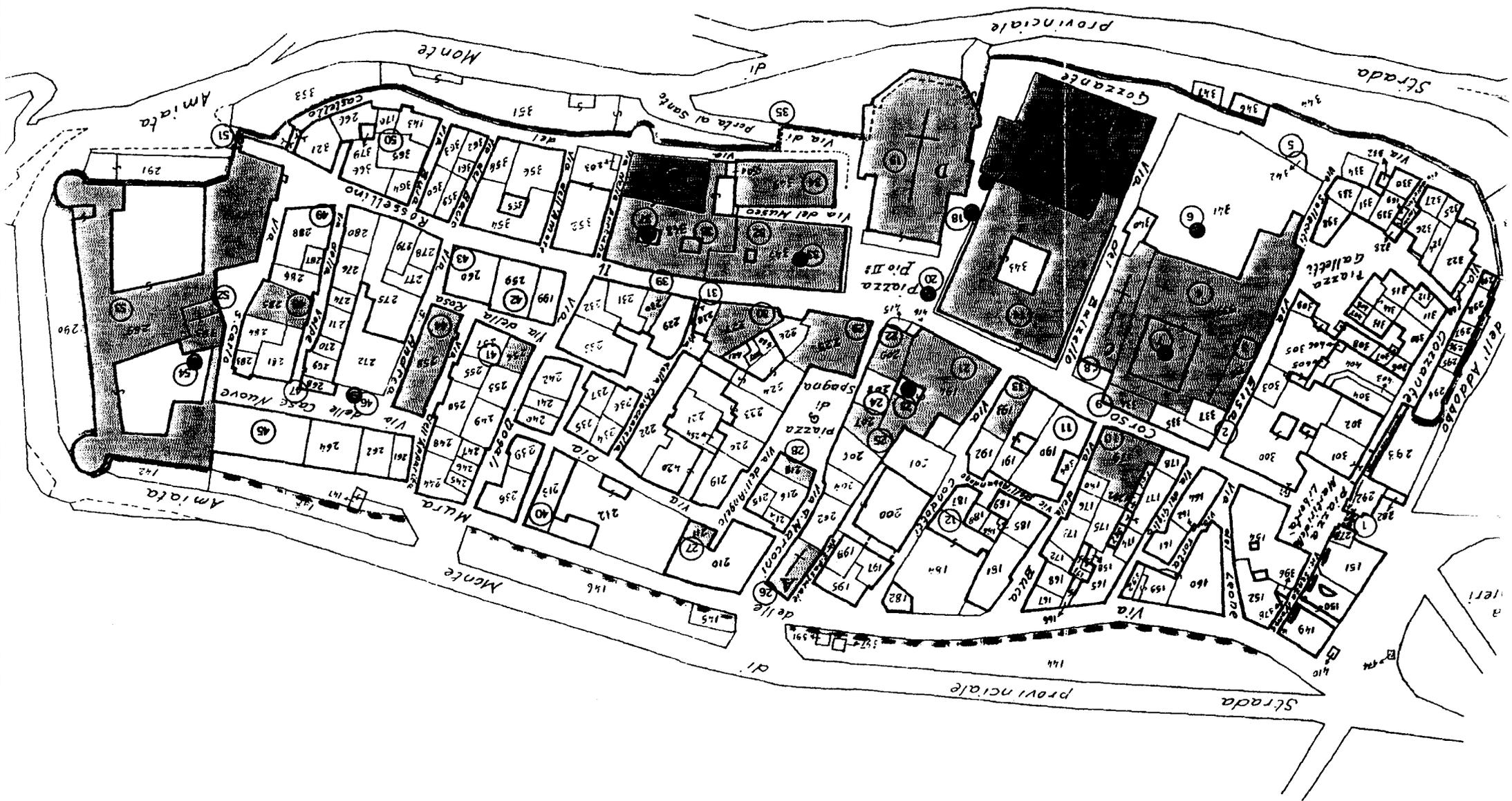
Although there are other important Renaissance urban centres in Italy, they are either different in their evolution (Florence, Rome, Ferrara) or later examples of the "ideal city" (Urbino, Mantua, Sabbioneta). Pienza is unique both as the earliest manifestation of this new urban concept and for the quality of its creative achievement.

Recommendation

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

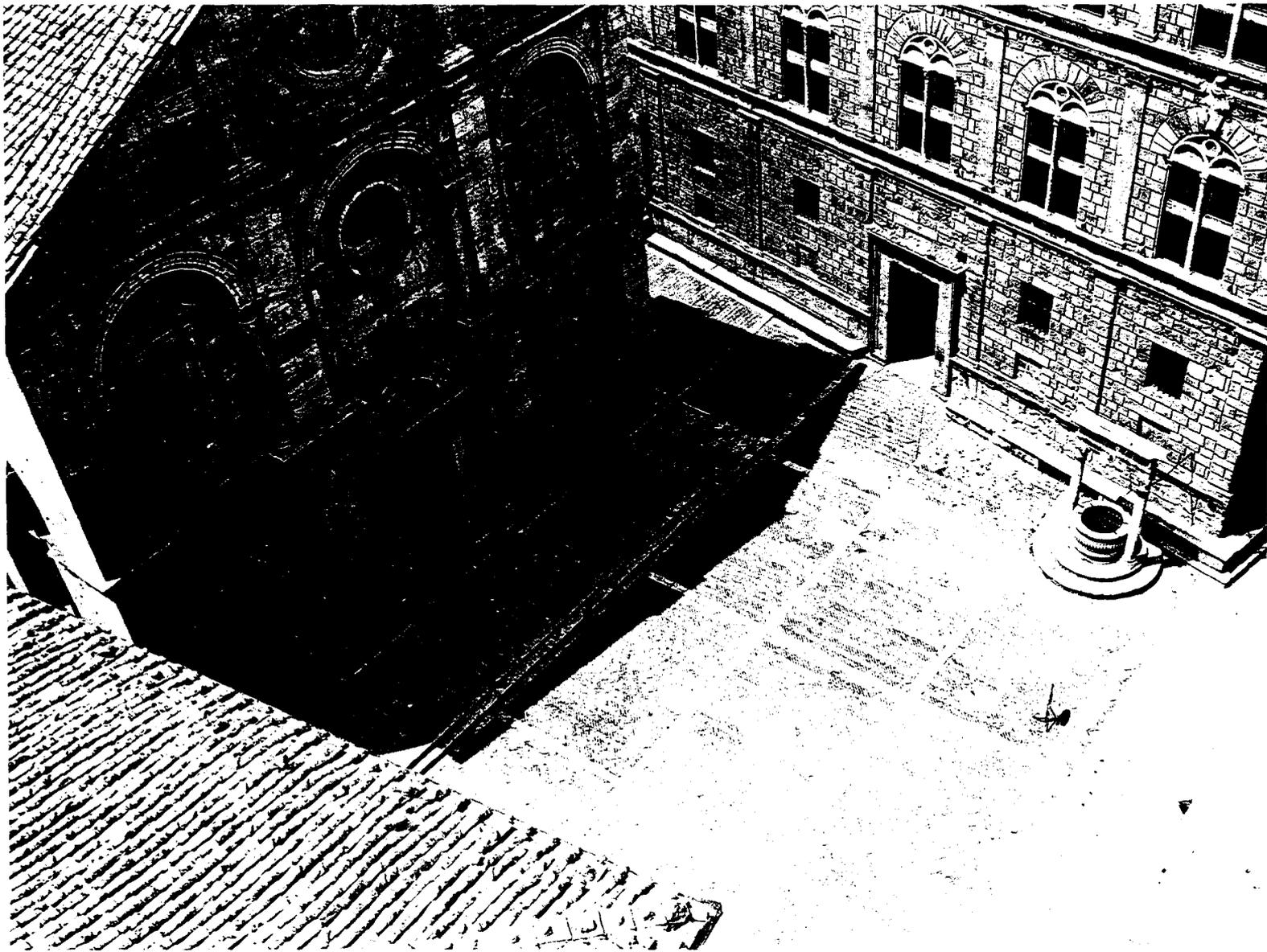
The historic centre of Pienza represents the first application of the Renaissance Humanist concept of urban design, and as such occupies a seminal position in the development of the concept of the planned "ideal town" which was to play a significant role in subsequent urban development in Italy and beyond. The application of this principle in Pienza, and in particular in the group of buildings around the central square, resulted in a masterpiece of human creative genius.

ICOMOS, October 1996



Pienza : plan du centre historique

Pienza : map of the historic centre



Pienza : Piazza Pio II