

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Aquileia (Italy)

No 825

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Archaeological Area and the Patriarchal Basilica of Aquileia
<i>Location</i>	Commune of Aquileia, Province of Udine, Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region
<i>State Party</i>	Italy
<i>Date</i>	1 July 1996

Justification by State Party

The special quality of Aquileia, which was the fourth city of the Roman Empire in the 4th century AD after Rome, Capua, and Milan according to Ausonius, lies not only in its recognized historical and archaeological importance but also in the conservation of its monuments - the forum, the river port, the streets lined with tombs, and the private houses - which are still visible and open for visitors. In addition, the great Christian basilica, in which the largest stretch of 4th century mosaics surviving in Europe is preserved, continues to be a religious centre of special importance for the countries of central Europe. It continues to the present day the main work of evangelization of the early patriarchate.

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

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

History and Description

History

Aquileia was founded by the Romans as a Latin colony in 181 BC in the north-eastern corner of the plain of the Po at the northern end of the Adriatic. It communicated with the sea by means of the Natissa (*Natiso*) river. Originally conceived as an outpost against Gallic and Iстриan barbarians, it quickly became a major trading

centre, linking central Europe with the Mediterranean. Among the goods that it traded through its great river port were wine, oil, furs, iron, and slaves. It was also the southern terminus of the amber route, dating from prehistory, and this prized product from the Baltic was worked by Aquileian craftsmen for sale throughout the Empire. High-quality glassware became an important manufacture following the establishment of a workshop there in the 1st century AD by the celebrated Phoenician craftsman Ennion.

By 90 BC it had been elevated to the status of *municipium* and its citizens were accorded full rights of Roman citizenship. Its wealth resulted in the town being endowed with many magnificent public buildings, and the private residences of its rich merchants were opulently decorated. It is estimated that its population had reached over 200,000 by the end of the 1st century BC. During the 4th century Imperial residences were built in Aquileia, and it was the seat of an Imperial mint between 284 and 425 AD. Of especial importance was the construction in the second decade of the 4th century of a basilica by Bishop Theodorus, following the sanctioning of public worship by the Edict of Milan in 313.

All this was to come to a violent end in 452, when Aquileia was sacked by the Huns led by Attila. The survivors clustered in a drastically reduced settlement around the Basilica, in the area of the small present-day town, which occupies only a fraction of the Roman city. Its mercantile role was assumed later by Venice, which provided a similar trading link between central Europe and the Mediterranean. However, Aquileia retained its spiritual significance, becoming the seat of a patriarchate whose territory extended westwards as far as Como and embraced a large area of modern Austria, Slovenia, and Croatia. The Patriarchate of Aquileia, which survived until 1751, played a key role in the evangelization of this region and the great Basilican Complex still serves as its spiritual centre.

Description

Most of the Roman city remains unexcavated, beneath the small contemporary town and large areas of agricultural land. Limited excavations carried out for more than a century have revealed details of its layout, and some excavated areas are on public display.

These include part of the forum and its Roman *basilica* (courthouse), the Republican *macellum* (market), one of the sets of baths, and two luxurious residential complexes. Outside the late city walls, the entire course of which has been located and part of which still survives, excavations have also revealed a cemetery with some impressive funerary monuments, the amphitheatre, and the circus.

The most striking remains of the Roman city are those of the port installations, a long row of warehouses and quays that stretch a long distance along the bank of the river. These were incorporated into the 4th century defences, substantial traces of which can be seen. Similar structures are known to survive on the opposite bank, but these have not been excavated.

The dominant feature of Aquileia is the Basilica. Theodorus constructed a horseshoe-shaped complex of

three main halls, but this proved inadequate to house the worshippers and pilgrims and so in 345 a vast structure replaced the northern arm. This was destroyed by the Huns, along with the entire complex, and never rebuilt. When the survivors returned they concentrated on the ruins of the southern hall, which was restored.

After a period of neglect during the Lombard period, work was begun in the 9th century by Bishop Maxentius, with financial support from Charlemagne, on the present structure, which arose on the earlier foundations. Despite severe damage during the Magyar invasions in the 10th century and an earthquake in 988, the work was completed in 1031 under Patriarch Poppo, from whom it takes its name.

The Basilica is 65.6m long, 30.0m wide, and 23.0m high and is cruciform in layout. The three aisles, divided by two sets of ten columns, are intersected by a transept 42.8m long and 9.4m wide. In style the Basilica is essentially Romanesque, although there are some Gothic features resulting from the reconstruction of the upper part following an earthquake in 1348.

The most striking feature of the interior is the huge mosaic floor, laid in the southern hall of the original 4th century structure, which was not revealed until the clay floor inserted by Poppo in the 11th century was removed in 1909. It measures 37m by 20m and is almost intact, apart from sections destroyed by the construction of the southern range of columns of the 11th century structure.

The subjects depicted in the many panels are varied and vivid. They include symbolic subjects such as the struggle between a cock (light/Christianity) and a tortoise (darkness/paganism), many birds, associated with Paradise, portraits of donors, scenes from the Gospels, and dedicatory inscriptions. At the eastern end there is a sea scene with twelve fishermen, representing the Apostles, along with the story of the prophet Jonah. An inscription commemorating Bishop Theodorus was added after his death.

At the east end the crypt of the frescoes, dating from the 6th or 7th century, was constructed to house relics of martyrs. Their tombs are no longer there, but there are fine 12th century frescoes on the walls and vaults illustrating the lives of St Mark and St Hermagora, the death of Christ, and the Dormition of the Virgin.

Above the crypt the sanctuary contains some fine Renaissance features, including a superb pulpit by Bernardino da Bissone and an exquisite high altar dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Hermagora, and St Fortunatus, the work of the brothers Sebastiano and Antonio da Osteno around 1498.

The vault of the apse above the high altar is decorated with 11th century frescoes which were covered with mortar in the early 18th century and only came to light in 1896. They depict the Madonna and Child, saints and martyrs, members of the Imperial family, and Bishop Poppo.

A door at the east end of the Basilica gives access to the Crypt of the Excavations, revealed during the early decades of the 20th century. Here are preserved mosaics from the 1st century AD suburban villa

selected by Bishop Theodorus as the site of his basilica in the 4th century, as well as the foundations of the transverse and north halls of his complex that were not rebuilt after destruction by Attila. The mosaics are enigmatic in subject matter, full of references to esoteric cults.

The entrance to the Basilica from the west is sheltered by a portico built by Bishop Maxentius in the early 9th century, and this gives access to the contemporary baptistery. Both were constructed from the ruins of the earlier structures of the complex. The baptistery is typically octagonal in plan, and it encloses a hexagonal baptismal pool, reproducing the Chi-Rho monogram of Christ. This is surrounded by a colonnade supporting an ambulatory.

The final component of the Complex is the bell-tower, a massive structure that has survived unscathed since it was built in 1031. It rises to a height of 73m, and was constructed using stone quarried from the nearby Roman amphitheatre. It is a geographical and symbolic landmark for the whole of the Friuli plain.

There is a second basilican complex at Monastero, now serving as the Palaeochristian Museum. This equally imposing 4th century structure also houses a remarkable floor mosaic.

Mention should also be made of the Archaeological Museum, which lies within the area proposed for inscription, which contains an outstanding collection of statuary, inscriptions, funerary monuments, glass, gems, and coins from Aquileia and its neighbourhood.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The entire area proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List is protected by the basic Italian Laws No 1089/1939 and 1497/1939 covering the protection of the cultural heritage and the natural and landscape heritage respectively. Any intervention that may have an impact on the qualities for which the area is protected must be submitted to the relevant authorities for examination and authorization. In addition, a number of sites and monuments within the area are individually listed as protected monuments under the 1939 law.

Ownership is shared between the Italian State (excavated areas, museums), the Roman Catholic Church (the Basilican Complex), the Commune of Aquileia, and private individuals.

The *Piano Regolatore Generale* (PRG) for the Commune refers specifically to the cultural importance of the site and reinforces the *vincolo* provided by the legislative protection. This is integrated with the overall structure plan for the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region, which designated the entire surrounding area as being exclusively for agricultural use.

Management

Overall responsibility for supervision of the protection legislation rests with the Soprintendenza Archeologica per i Beni Ambientali, Architettonici, Artistici, e Storici

for Friuli-Venezia Giulia, based in Trieste, which manages the archaeological sites and museums. It has a comprehensive plan for the management of the properties within its care, which provides for regular conservation projects and also special research and restoration activities.

The church authorities manage the Basilican Complex and have a detailed programme of conservation and restoration activities, the latter currently concentrating on the baptistery (with technical assistance from the Soprintendenza).

The Comune actively controls all activities within its competence. It is worthy of comment that it is very supportive of all activities designed to extend the protection and presentation of its heritage.

A proposal by the Province of Udine for the designation of an archaeological park at Aquileia has been under discussion for some years but has made little progress, because of policy differences between the Province and national authorities. However, these are moving towards resolution and the project is likely to reach fruition in the course of the next decade.

A project for the construction of an interpretation centre to the north of the forum, in an area that has been exhaustively excavated, is currently under way and will replace the current provision in the Archaeological Museum.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Archaeological work began in Aquileia in the late 19th century and has continued since that time. This has gone hand in hand with conservation and minimal reconstruction work, associated with meticulous archaeological and art-historical research.

Limited excavation projects in the forum and macellum area have been in progress for some years, carried out by the Soprintendenza and the École Française de Rome.

Authenticity

Overall the level of authenticity is high, not least because most of the area of the Roman city has not been excavated.

Some of the restoration work carried out in the decades immediately preceding and following World War II on excavated archaeological areas would not be considered acceptable by current standards. This has involved the reconstruction of colonnades using brick to fill missing portions of columns and importing stone slabs for paving, which goes beyond the limits of acceptable anastylosis. However, a more rigorous policy is now in operation, involving minimal intervention.

Work at the Basilica has for the most part been acceptable according, although the 1950s restoration of the portico contains some questionable elements. By contrast, the restoration and conservation of the mosaic floors in the interior and the current restoration project on the baptistery are impeccable.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Aquileia in October 1997. A leading British expert on Roman archaeology, with long experience also of the management of antiquities, also assisted ICOMOS in its evaluation.

Qualities

Aquileia was one of the largest and most wealthy cities of the Early Roman Empire. Unlike some of its contemporaries, it has been subject to little excavation. That which has been carried out has amply demonstrated that this is probably the largest unexcavated Roman city in the whole Mediterranean world, and as such its potential for research is enormous, the more so since there is strict control over any form of adverse intervention in the unexcavated areas through legislation and planning regulations.

The Patriarchal Basilican Complex is very well preserved and contains some artistic treasures of great quality, and in particular its mosaics. In addition, its dominant spiritual influence on the evangelization of a large area of central Europe in the early Middle Ages gives it a high associative value.

Comparative analysis

The extent of ancient Aquileia ranks it alongside cities such as Capua and Milan, in a category second only to Rome. However, the failure of the city to recover after its destruction in the mid 5th century by the Huns has ensured that its remains lie virtually untouched beneath the present agricultural landscape. As such it has no parallel as an archaeological reserve of superlative quality.

The only direct comparison for the Basilican Complex is that of Porec (Croatia), inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1997. Whilst the latter is more complete in terms of its components, the Aquileian Complex exerted greater influence over a longer period in the establishment and consolidation of Christianity in a large area of central Europe. It also contains mosaics of superlative quality, comparable only (though significantly different from) those in the palaeo-Christian monuments of Ravenna.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

There is no buffer zone designated in the nomination. Whilst the strict designation under Regional planning regulations of a vast area of its surroundings for agricultural use might be considered to constitute adequate protection, ICOMOS wishes to see a specific area designated as a buffer zone for the potential World Heritage site. Details of this were discussed by the ICOMOS mission and general agreement was reached on an appropriate delineation. Revised maps were subsequently prepared and sent to ICOMOS.

One problem that remains to be resolved is that of the highway, the Via Giulia Augusta, which passes through the centre of the proposed site on the alignment of the main Roman north-south street (*cardo*). Whilst this is not considered by ICOMOS to justify rejection or deferral of further consideration of this nomination, the

attention of the competent authorities should be drawn to the need to give urgent consideration to the diversion of through traffic by means of a bypass road. This has already been discussed by the competent authorities in provisional terms; eventual inscription on the World Heritage List should act as a spur to action with the minimum delay, given the increase in visitor pressure that this would inevitably entail.

Brief description

Aquileia was one of the largest and most wealthy cities of the Early Roman Empire, destroyed by Attila in the mid 5th century. Most of it remains unexcavated beneath fields, and such it constitutes the greatest archaeological reserve of its kind. Its Patriarchal Basilica is an outstanding building that houses an exceptional work of art in its mosaic pavement, and also played a key role in the evangelization of a large region of central Europe.

Recommendation

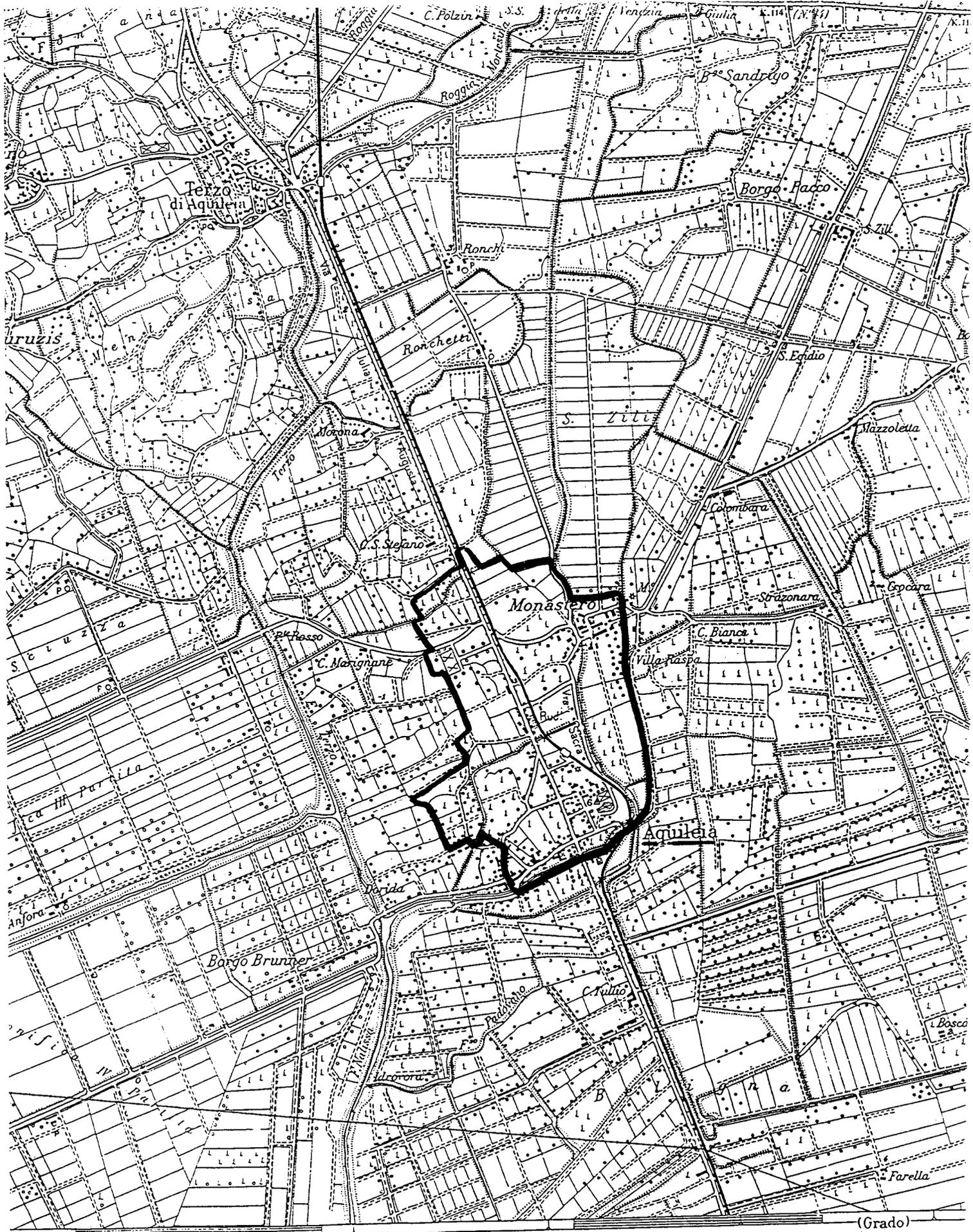
That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii, iv, and vi*:

Criterion iii: Aquileia was one of the largest and most wealthy cities of the Early Roman Empire.

Criterion iv: By virtue of the fact that most of ancient Aquileia survives intact and unexcavated, it is the most complete example of an Early Roman city in the Mediterranean world.

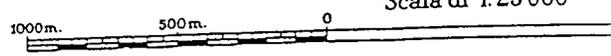
Criterion vi: The Patriarchal Basilican Complex in Aquileia played a decisive role in the spread of Christianity into central Europe in the early Middle Ages.

ICOMOS, October 1998

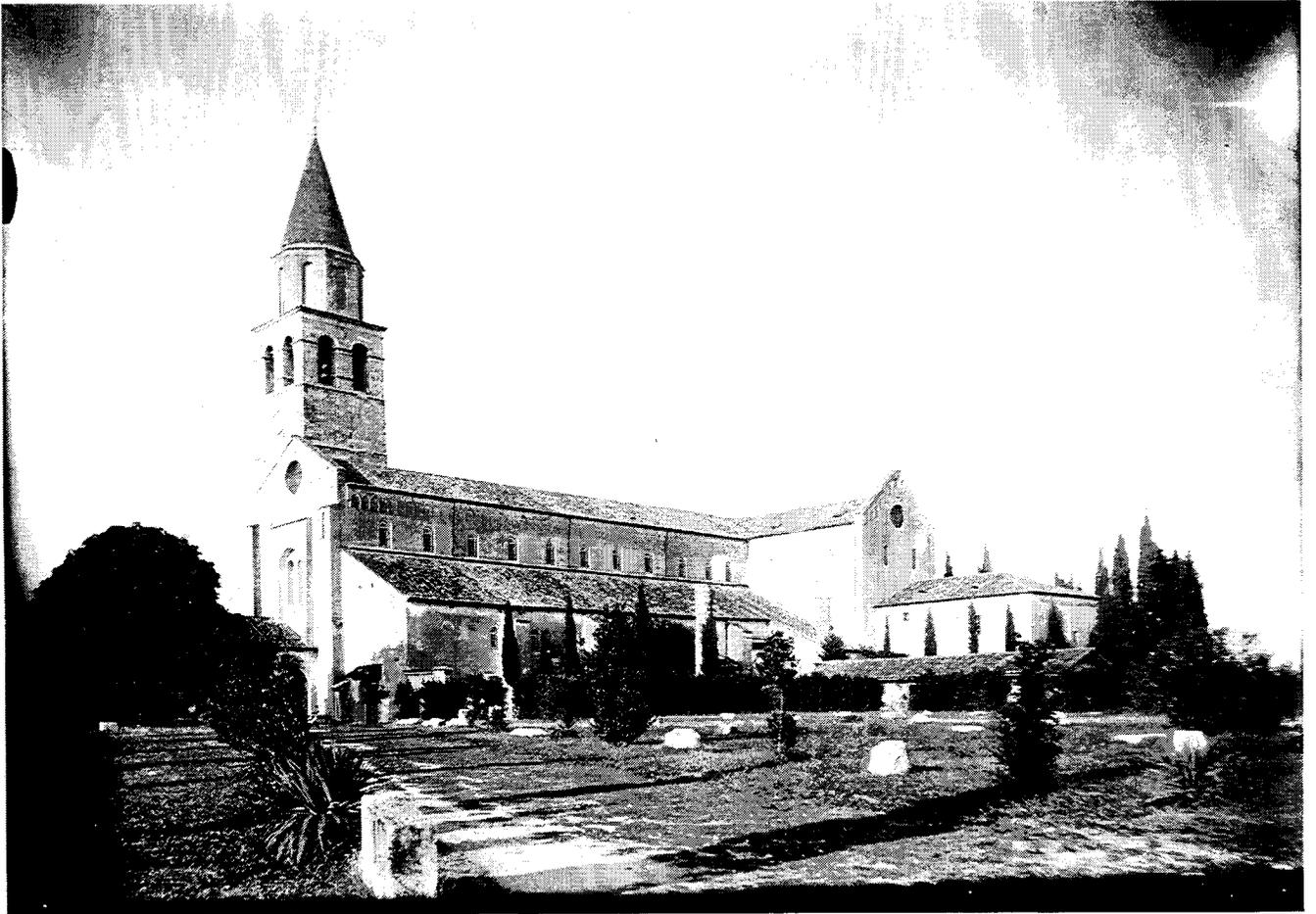


(Grado)

Scala di 1:25 000



La zone archéologique et la basilique patriarcale d'Aquilée /
 The archaeological area and the Patriarchal Basilica of Aquilea :
 Plan du site / Site plan



**La zone archéologique et la basilique patriarcale d'Aquilée /
The archaeological area and the Patriarchal Basilica of Aquilea :
La Basilique de Poppo / The Basilica of Poppo**