

## Villa Adriana (Italy)

No 907

### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Villa Adriana
<i>Location</i>	Province of Lazio
<i>State Party</i>	Italy
<i>Date</i>	29 June 1998

### Justification by State Party

The Villa Adriana possesses a universal, exceptional value. It is unique for the type of conception, it is endowed with great intrinsic value, and it conserves the most complete examples of Roman architecture.

#### Criterion i

The Villa Adriana cannot be compared directly with any of the other large aristocratic residences of the Roman Emperors because it is not a villa in the literal sense of the term. It is conceived as an “ideal city,” planned for this purpose by the Emperor Hadrian.

The Villa exerted a considerable influence on Renaissance architecture (Giuliano and Antonio San Gallo, Pirro Ligorio, Dosio, and many others), but above all on Baroque architecture. Bernini, Borromini, Le Brun, and Hildebrand were inspired by the alternation of concave and convex spaces of the Golden Square and Small Thermae for the interiors of many churches and civic buildings. The relationship between the Villa Adriana and modern architecture appears to be fundamental. Architects such as John Ruskin, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn, and John Johansen have reinterpreted the layout of the open organisms of Hadrian’s Tiburtine villa for architectural structures of various types. For example, the points of resemblance between Wright’s Florida Southern College and Johansen’s Mummery Theatre on the one hand and the Villa Adriana on the other are extraordinary - in the circular distributing links between the various “bodies” inspired by the Maritime Theatre and the Three Exedrae and in general in the overall, fairly free distribution of the parts over the building area which intellectually and conceptually recalls the architectural composition of the Villa Adriana.

The Villa Adriana is an exceptional example of Roman civilization. In particular, the multi-ethnic and universal nature of Roman culture should be stressed, and the Villa Adriana represents a synthesis of its most

pregnant values. The Emperor Hadrian, of Roman/Iberian origin, Greek in his culture, lover of the Orient, philosopher, poet, and traveller, is a prototype of the European intellectual who is equally aware of the values of tradition and those of local cultures.

#### Criterion ii

The Villa Adriana is the most complete and best conserved architectural complex of the Roman world, illustrating the most significant period of Roman history in an incomparable natural setting. Since it is a “city/villa” it is made up of a complex of public and private buildings, of pavilions, pathways, and underground passages, and of pools of water which together make up the most innovative solutions of Roman architecture.

#### Criterion iii

The Villa Adriana is a typical and original example of the architectural and engineering genius of the Romans and carries enormous historical importance.

#### Criterion iv

The Villa Adriana is an inimitable example of an ancient human settlement inserted from the 18th century onwards into certain empty spaces alongside buildings that were typical of the Roman countryside and which have now disappeared. The buildings dating from the 18th century are farmhouses, barns, cisterns, wash-houses, and stables, all built to equip the area for an agricultural activity which lasted until 1870.

#### Criterion v

This type of landscape has survived intact from the 18th century, offering the visitor the same fascinating vistas that enchanted travellers on the Grand Tour. In this sense the Villa Adriana still provides an example of that typical “landscape with ruins” which inspired artists and painters (particularly *vedutisti* or painters of views) the world over. For these reasons the Villa Adriana continues to be a source of inspiration for men of letters and artists in the present century, from Marguerite Yourcenar to contemporary painters.

#### Criterion vi

### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

### History and Description

#### History

The area was originally occupied by a Late Republican villa, presumed to have been the property of Hadrian’s wife, Vibia Sabina. The Imperial residence was built over it in two stages, 118-25 and 125-38. It was a symbol of a power that was gradually becoming absolute and which distanced itself from the capital; for this reason it has been compared to the Versailles of Louis XIV.

After Hadrian’s death in 138 his successors preferred to make the city of Rome their permanent residence, but it continued to be enlarged and further embellished.

Constantine the Great is alleged to have removed some of its finer pieces to his new capital, Byzantium.

The Villa was sacked and plundered by successive barbarian invaders, and it fell into neglect. It was used as a quarry by builders and lime-burners in the centuries that followed.

Interest in the ruins was rekindled in the 15th century by Pope Pius II (Aeneas Silvius). Excavations to recover its glories were ordered by Alexander VI at the beginning of the 16th century. When Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este began to construct his nearby Villa d'Este he continued the excavations, supervised by his architect Pirro Ligorio, to obtain works of art to adorn it. Thereafter excavations were carried out sporadically until the Villa Adriana became the property of the newly created Italian State in 1870.

#### *Description*

The complex known as the Villa Adriana covers an area of more than 120ha on the slopes of the Tiburtine Hills.

The many structures are arranged without any overall plan within this area. They fall into four specific groups.

#### 1 *The Greek Theatre and the Temple of Aphrodite Cnidia.*

The theatre, which is in a good state of conservation, although only fragmentary, is of conventional design. Its *cavea* is cut into the hillside and is *c* 36m in diameter. The small circular temple is situated in a large semi-circular exedra. This area was marshy until it was drained in the 16th century.

#### 2 *The Maritime Theatre, the Court of the Libraries, the Latin and Greek Libraries, the Imperial Palace, and the Golden Square.*

This is the core of the complex, aligned with the Vale of Tempe. The various elements are grouped round four peristyles. The Maritime (or Naval) Theatre is a circular structure 43m in diameter; the Ionic marble peristyle encloses a circular moat surrounding a central island on which there is a miniature villa. The so-called Court of the Libraries, the oldest part of the ensemble, is a colonnaded portico with a nymphaeum on its northern side. The two "libraries" are reached by passages on either side of the nymphaeum.

The Palace consists of a complex of rooms around a spacious courtyard. The Golden Square is one of the most impressive buildings in the entire complex. The vast peristyle is surrounded by a two-aisled portico with alternate columns in cipollino marble and Egyptian granite. There is a large pool in the centre, with a garden around it.

#### 3 *The Pecile, the Stadium and its associated buildings, the Small and Large Thermae, the Canopus, the Serapeum, and the Cento Camerelle.*

The Pecile (or Poikile) is a reproduction of an imposing structure in Athens famous for its paintings and its associations with the Stoic philosophers. It consists of a rectangular peristyle, 232m by 97m. Part of its massive walls survive; they had colonnades on either side. In the middle of the enclosure there was a rectangular pool,

enclosed by a free space that may have been used as a race-track.

The two sets of baths are conventional in form. The smaller is considered to have been used exclusively by women.

The Canopus is an elongated canal imitating the famous sanctuary of Serapis near Alexandria. The semi-circular exedra of the Serapeum is located at its southern end.

#### 4 *The Lily Pond, the Roccabruna Tower, and the Academy.*

The Roccabruna Tower, which is a belvedere or *pharos*, is thought to be a copy of the Tower of Timon in Athens. The Academy is a complex of buildings, the purpose of which is not clearly established.

In addition to these structures, there is a complex of underground elements, including cryptoportici and underground galleries, used for internal communications and storage.

A number of the ancient structures are overlaid by a series of farmhouses and other buildings, mostly from the 18th century. They were built directly on the earlier foundations and it is difficult to dissociate them from the ancient structures.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

The entire property is protected under the provisions of the basic Italian Law No 1089 of 1939, which prohibits the carrying out of any works that may affect the monument without authorization.

The entire area (including the buffer zone) is covered by the environmental control regulations set out in Law No 431 of 1985.

### *Management*

The Villa Adriana covers *c* 120ha; an area of 80ha is the property of the Italian Government and the remaining 40ha are in private ownership. Both areas are protected under the 1939 Law. However, those in private ownership are excluded from the nominated area (although they fall within the buffer zone).

Management of the Villa Adriana falls within the responsibility of the Ministry of Cultural Property (*Ministerio per i Beni Culturali*). The Archaeological Superintendence for Latium (*Soprintendenza Archeologica per il Lazio*) is responsible for management at the regional level. The current staff consists of three archaeologists (one of them Director of the Villa), one architect, three restorers, four skilled craftsmen, and 43 guardians.

The Villa is the subject of a great deal of scientific archaeological research in various fields of study. Projects are currently being carried out by specialists from Italian and foreign universities.

The monument receives some 350,000 visitors annually, making it one of the ten most visited sites in Italy. Until recently management has been relatively

low-keyed, covering regular maintenance programmes and selected restoration projects.

However, since 1996 it has benefited from major sources of funding, from the European Community, the National Lottery, and elsewhere, which has permitted the preparation and implementation of a major programme of investigation, restoration, conservation, recuperation of green open spaces, rehabilitation of later structures on ancient foundations, and, in particular, the upgrading of visitor-handling facilities (reception centre, additional car parking, and extension of the site existing museums). A new entrance and reception area is being prepared at a site more closely linked with the modern community of Tivoli. The boundary fence has recently been reconstructed, and is now illuminated at night.

Since 1997 a management plan has been in force relating to infrastructural aspects of the site – drainage, water and electricity supply and distribution, hygienic services, emergency exits, etc.

### **Conservation and Authenticity**

#### *Conservation history*

Scientific conservation work has been carried out at the Villa Adriana since the second half of the 19th century, in conformity with the prevailing techniques and philosophies. These began with the building of buttresses for the consolidation of several of the ancient structures, using the approach prescribed by the Papal Camerlingo Commissions and applied successfully to other ancient structures such as the Colosseum in Rome. Data from scientific excavations around the turn of the century were used for some limited restoration projects.

Consolidation and partial reconstruction measures using clearly differentiated new materials were put into effect from 1913 onwards. This technique was refined from the mid 20th century onwards. At the same time careful analysis made it possible to carry out partial anastylosis on a number of the structures, including the Serapeum, the Maritime Theatre, and the Room of the Doric Columns. This work received international acclaim.

Major conservation projects have been completed recently on the Cento Camerelle complex and the Roccabruna nymphaeum. Currently work is being carried out not only on a number of the structures themselves but also on the decorative elements (stuccoes, mural paintings, mosaics).

#### *Authenticity*

The overall authenticity of the Villa Adriana is high. The original layout of the component structures is perfectly preserved, as is their relationship with the surrounding landscape. Despite centuries of plundering and destruction, the monumental quality has been retained to a very high degree. Restoration and conservation projects over the past century and a half have been sensitive and always fully in accordance with the highest contemporary standards.

### **Evaluation**

#### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the Villa Adriana in February 1999.

#### *Qualities*

The Villa Adriana is an exceptional survival from the Early Roman Empire. The collection of buildings and other structures that it comprises illustrate the taste and erudition of one of the greatest Roman Emperors. Hadrian was a man of immense culture, who travelled the lands of his Empire ceaselessly, bringing back to his palatial complex the best of the varied cultures that it embraced.

#### *Comparative analysis*

It can be stated without any fear of contradiction that the Villa Adriana is unique. It is not a villa in the strict Roman sense, as, for example, represented by the Villa Romana di Casale at Piazza Armerina (Sicily). Nor is it a single integrated palace, like that of Diocletian at Split (Croatia). It is an epitome of the Mediterranean cultures in their highest material form, and as such it is *sui generis*.

#### *ICOMOS comments*

The ICOMOS expert mission gained the impression that there was little, if any, contact between the state agency responsible for the management of the Villa (the Soprintendenza) and the municipal authorities in Tivoli. It is to be hoped that better links will be established when the new entrance and reception centre is in operation and the present interim local government situation in the town comes to an end.

ICOMOS also feels that there is a need for an overall management plan which integrates and coordinates the existing planned maintenance and the numerous restoration and rehabilitation projects.

### **Brief description**

The Villa Adriana is an exceptional complex of classical buildings, created in the 2nd century AD by the Roman Emperor Hadrian, which reproduces the best elements of the material cultures of Egypt, Greece, and Rome in the form of an “ideal city.”

### **Recommendation**

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

**Criteria i and iii** The Villa Adriana is a masterpiece that uniquely brings together the highest expressions of the material cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world.

**Criterion ii** Study of the monuments that make up the Villa Adriana played a crucial role in the rediscovery of the elements of classical architecture by the architects of the Renaissance and the

Baroque period. It also profoundly influenced many 19th and 20th century architects and designers.

ICOMOS, September 1999