**TEXT 5**

**Unesco warns Italy over Pompeii**

*Report says site will be put on “World Heritage in Danger” list if progress is not made—but some*

*experts say findings are overly critical*

The Art Newspaper

Unesco has warned Italy that Pompeii will be placed on its “World Heritage in Danger” list unless urgent steps are taken to preserve the site. This follows a damning report by a group of Unesco appointed international experts, which states that if current initiatives “fail to deliver substantial progress in the next two years, then an ‘In-Danger’ listing would be inevitable”. Other specialists argue, however, that the report is overly critical.

The report provides detailed evidence of continuing damage to the ancient Roman city and to its frescoes and mosaics. The archaeological site attracted around 2.3 million visitors in 2012.

The experts warn that, without considerable progress in the next two years, the conservation backlog in Pompeii could become “disastrous”. Further buildings have collapsed during the past few years, notably the Schola Armaturarum in 2010. Conservation of the remains has not yet begun, so “further decay must have occurred”, the report says. It notes partial collapses at the Casa di Siricus and the Casa delle Nozze d’Argento, and a fallen pillar at the Casa di Octavius Quartio. The report provides details on the most important 13 houses, which are at “a high degree of risk”.

There is particular concern about the “gradual deterioration” of wall paintings and mosaic floors. Rising damp can lead to vegetation growth and the swelling of the ground, which causes small gaps between the tesserae (mosaic fragments). The problem worsens quickly and is difficult to tackle if prompt action is not taken.

**Water, water, everywhere**

Water is a major problem. The houses’ gutters have become clogged with dirt and vegetation has taken root; overflowing water then causes the detachment of wall frescoes and damage to the mosaics. Water has entered the basement and risen up the walls at the Casa delle Nozze d’Argento, and much of the painted plaster of the poorly covered lararium (household shrine) at the Casa delle Pareti Rosse “will not survive the winter” without immediate action.

Sunlight and heat are also damaging. At the Casa di Adone Ferito, the upper part of a large fresco has been relatively well preserved, but the lower half, which is exposed to the sun, has almost completely faded.

Visitor management needs to be improved because wear to pavements and floors is a growing problem, and with poor surveillance, visitors can brush against decorated walls and graffiti the frescoes. There are 138 guards: the authorities say they need 150, but the mission argues that 240 are required.

Around 73% of the site remains closed to visitors, because of the lack of guards and because essential conservation has not been completed (including repairs to areas that suffered bomb damage in 1943). The area open to tourists has been reduced, so visitors are being funnelled into fewer buildings, increasing the likelihood of damage.

Administration remains a problem. After a period of rapid change in the senior management, stability came with the appointment of Teresa Cinquantaquattro as superintendent for Naples and Pompeii in 2010. But the mission fears that her vast responsibilities mean the post “can become overloaded”.

In August, the Italian prime minister, Enrico Letta, announced the creation of a new post: special superintendent for Pompeii. It is hoped that this will speed up decision-making, but it may create another layer of bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, efforts to end corruption and Mafia involvement are delaying conservation work. The report says: “It is essential that all precautions are taken to avoid corruption and links with organised crime, but it is also crucial that staff have access to adequate legal support to do the necessary work.”

**Race to spend €105m**

The most encouraging sign of progress is the €105m “Great Pompeii Project”, funded by the Italian

government (€63m) and the European Union (€42m); €85m is for restoration, with the rest for surveying, visitor services, security and organisational improvements.

The project began last year and will run until the end of 2015, by which time the money has to be spent. The mission welcomes the initiative but is worried by “the speed with which these funds have to be used and the potential impact on the quality of the work”.

The Italian ministry of culture is drafting a management plan, due to be submitted to Unesco by 1 February 2014. Another mission is due to visit in early 2015, and the key question is whether it will

be satisfied with progress.

Francesco Bandarin, Unesco’s assistant director-general for culture, describes the appointment of a special superintendent and the funding as “very encouraging”, but stresses that the task “will take considerable time”.

Some specialists feel that the mission has been overly critical. Jane Thompson, the project manager at Herculaneum, believes that some of the problems result from “maintenance programmes coming to a halt 30 years ago and a wider difficulty in bringing about intelligent institutional reforms”. The University of Cambridge classicist Mary Beard says: “We are dealing with not very well built structures that sustained a volcanic eruption in AD79 and serious bombing during the Second World

War. We can’t expect no deterioration at all.”