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THE PRINCIPLES OF THE PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC MONUMENTS DURING THE PAST 25 YEARS[1]

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The scope of the topic of my lecture, as its title reads in the program, far exceeds the limitations of time this occasion allows me to cover. The development of the principles of the preservation of historic monuments, that has happened during the past quarter-century, is global in its dimensions and interconnections: it is a subject that could well fill the pages of a doctoral dissertation. What I am attempting to do here is only a modest meditation, prompted by the fact that this is the 25th anniversary of the Venetian Charter's creation, which inspires and makes my talk timely as well.

In 1964, in Venice, we euphorically welcomed the document, composed and ratified internationally, which promised to bring about a new order in the approach and attitude toward historic preservation, and promised as well, a broad new perspective in the search for spiritual reconstruction of the first decades following the Second World War.

This rejoicing was not long-lived, and it was not long before it was evident that the thoughts and resolutions that seemed to have been universally accepted, would not be realized in the same enthusiastic spirit of concord and harmony that had surrounded their cradle, their genesis, in the Monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore. If we were to write the history of the Venetian Charter, we would have to spend just as much time on, and deal with the arguments and attempts revolving around its interpretation, application, completion, reworking, finalizing, as with the actual realization of its contents.

Since for the past 25 years I myself have been voicing, defending, and employing the resolutions made in Venice, and have unfailingly considered

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every letter to be valid, both here at home and abroad, allow me, based on the experiences, the arguments and negotiations, experimentation, and trials that have broadened considerably my outlook and reflections of the past quarter-centruy, to outline some notions of mine, regarding why the Venetian Charter failed to meet its expectations, and in what directions we should be looking, as we stand on the threshold of the third millenium.

The Charter was conceived in Europe, and of the 23 members of its founding committee, only 3 represented the non-European world: a Tunisian, a Peruvian, and a Mexican. In spite of this fact, it was not universally and positively accepted in Europe, even at the very beginning.The opposing factions were divided in quite clearly definable lines according to differing professional attitudes and approaches found on the Continent. The notion of the preservation of historical monuments originated in the wellspring of European cultural history, with the interest in the monuments of ancient Greece and Rome, and their deliberate, systematic restoration and preservation. The first impulse toward the systematic and professional treatment of historic monuments originated in this way, and lead to the development of the study of the connection of materials and form, the historical authenticity of the remaining portions of the monument, the rejection of the practice of reconstructing, or filling-in of missing or lost portions, without specifically identifying them, and the gathering together of scattered stone elements, and their recomposition.

The re-discovery of the Middle Ages led to further developments partially on the lines of Ruskie's notions regarding ruins, as well as ideas that are still unclarified and superficially identified with Viollet-le-Duc's purist approach.

Perhaps in contradiction, there appeared a certain historicism, which placed great value on the significance of the process of history, and on the appreciation of the various layers of history that had accumulated over time.

Somewhere in this process, is the polarization of the European approach to the preservation of historic monuments, as well: the stricter or more liberal, the preference for authenticity, veracity over that for esthetic appeal, the tendency toward the scholarly as against the more artistic, emotional point of departure, the archaeological or didactic approach, the focusing on the importance of the material as against the form, the acceptance of the process of decay, or its rejection, the different attitudes toward the processes of time which view these in lesser degree or greater degree of threat, — all these notions coexisting, contradicting each other, commingling with each other, all at the same time, and all operating validly alongside of each other.

For civilizations weaned on the remains of the Antique past, the monuments of the Ancient World represented the acme of culture, and they based the notion of their relationship to the past on these monuments. The layers of settlements that had imposed themselves on the ruined remains of historic Mediterranean cultures, and employed these fragments for their own constructions in the medieval and modern eras, literally radiate the richness and multi-dimensionality that comes from just that fragmentation, and layering process over the span of thousands of years. The traditions of home and environment were closely linked to these, and actually no one thought of completing, of supplementing the fragments, nor of separating out of sections that had been built over each other.

This is the reason that sharp criticism was aimed at the excavations in Rome of the medieval parts of the city, and their demolition that had been carried out during the time of Mussolini, as well as at the reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos in Athens, carried out by the Americans during the 1950's.

Until the recent threats of environmental pollution, the climate of the Mediterranean region posed no threat to the materials of buildings, and therefore it is natural that the remains we have preserve the beauty and authenticity of the original material.

The cities of the Northern peoples, which did not have antique foundations, were developed more on the lines of the sober and strict middle-class values of Medieval society, and their residential buildings reflect the orderly nature of this society; thus these cities and towns have become identified with the characteristics of specific national traits. These settlements, which for the person of the Middle Ages, were hardly 5 – 600 years old, became themselves the symbols of the past, embodying the notion of the continuity of the national culture, and which at the end of the 18th century, they hail as the discovery of the expression of national identity.

These Gothic homes (of the middle class), civic buildings, and churches were carefully maintained, repaired, taken care of, their stones which were constantly exposed to the harsh climate were replaced with new ones, over generations, thus preserving the forms but caring little for the slow but sure loss of the original materials over time. This tradition persists today, and they can validly claim, standing in front of one or another Gothic building whose materials have been practically entirely replaced in this way, that what we see today is just as authentic as the building the man of the Middle Ages saw, when it was freshly constructed. In such an environment, all that is dilapidated, in ruins, or fragmentary, has a jarring effect, and the principles governing the preservation of the historic environment are focused on the esthetic quality and impression of authenticity derived from a well-maintained building exterior.

Is it any wonder then that an antithesis has developed between the remains of antiquity, and the purism of Gothic remains? And, — getting back to Venice — how are we to interpret the interesting fact that among the 20 European members of the founding committee of the Venetian Charter, only one Dutch expert, and one Dane represented the countries which fell outside the territory and dominions of the former Roman Empire?

All these are simple remarks, but these are meant to start us thinking about, and perhaps understanding the reasons why attitudes toward historic preservation in Europe did not become uniform, even after Venice. The somewhat sharply defined groups of opposition I outlined above, do not mean that the differing tendencies do not at times intermingle in the different regions of Europe, and that decidedly contrary notions do not coexist side by side in the same region, as well. Venice undoubtedly launched a sort of intellectual activity in the sphere of historic preservation of monuments, whose results are not to be undervalued, but at the same time, it must be acknowledged that the conflicts and differences of approach remain, and still persist today.

Without a doubt the destruction of the Second World War and the resulting traumas contributed to these conditions, especially in the case of the peoples in the affected regions. The Charter of Venice discretely avoided this issue, and contained no directives for the rebuilding of totally destroyed buildings and building complexes, in spite of the fact that this was in practice throughout Europe, and remained an open theoretical problem as well. Although there were courageous and quite touchingly beautiful examples of solutions which preserved the actual state of destruction as historical mementoes, reconstructions went on at the same time, which were discussed only in private, outside the sphere of the Charter. The entire question took on somewhat the same aspect as certain moral offences, which society does not officially accept, but to which it closes its eyes.

At the meeting in 1977 which attempted to revise the Charter, the Polish and English National Committees of ICOMOS presented a motion which would have, in certain exceptional cases, legally allowed the possibility of newly erecting, reconstructing monuments that had been totally destroyed by catastrophes, but the committee would not accept this. The lack of resolution of this issue has left a considerable conflict for the profession, and this conflict is especially apparent and on-going in cases of the didactic development of ancient ruins, and their complete reconstruction. The Stoa of Attalos, which at the Congress of Venice was referred to, verbally, as the shocking stumbling-block, even then, is again becoming an issue of discussion today, even though the Charter clearly permits this type of reconstruction in the case of excavated remains.

Another circumstance, that can be termed historical fact, which since the proceedings were held in Venice, has become an ever-more important, and acceleratedly more threatening issue that (dramatically), and with increasing intensity endangers the monuments of Europe, and thus also affects theories of restoration of monuments: is the catastrophic process of the decay of stone materials. This problem was not as sharply apparent at the time of the Venetian Charter's conception, that the document would have contained any statement of basic principles, or attempted to compose these, and thus this entire issue was transferred to the technological sphere, leaving open theoretical questions. Although it cannot be disputed that the very nature of decay relegates it to the sphere of actual practice, and limits the possibilities here, there is, however, the growing danger that questions of the authenticity of the forms, the relationships of form and materials, and the transmission of the dimension of time, become forgotten or minor considerations, when there is no theoretical basis to guide the processes of treatment and restoration. Since stone materials are being equally affected by destructive elements in the Mediterranean countries as well today, there is the danger that the idea of the original material will no longer be an issue for theoreticians of preservation.

At the Congress of Venice, the creation of the international organization of ICOMOS, launched important, universal activities in the sphere of historic preservation, in spite of the original limitations of the Charter and its genesis. These activities accompanied a broader knowledge of the notion of historic preservation, which, however, became the foundation for newer theoretical and methodological issues with which no one dealt at the time of the creation of the Venetian Charter.

Thus consideration was given in turn to historic gardens, vernacular architecture, and buildings made of impermanent materials subject to quicker decay, brick buildings, industrial buildings, modern architecture, and not least to the theoretical and methodologic questions regarding the approaches to preservation of urban and rural complexes, for which the Venetian Charter hardly had ready answers.

Added to these problems, were the issues presented by the individual civilizations outside Europe, with their particular life-styles, cultural traditions, historical development, and the architectural expression of all these elements, which quickly became obvious, could not be approached in a Eurocentric way.

Professor Kobayashi of Japan brought to the attention of the ICOMOS committee which met at Ditchley Park in 1977, the case of the practice of regularly renewing Shinto shrines and temples, in materials distributed to the Committee. He pointed out that this was a practice that in effect was not reconcilable with the tenents of the Venetian Charter. One

of the most important examples of this is the temple-complex of Ize, where two identical areas, of equal size, are situated side by side, and contain different cultic buildings. One of these is entirely demolished every 20 years, and is completely burned to dust, after which, an identical, exact copy of it is rebuilt, of entirely new materials. As this new complex is initiated and begins to be used, they begin to demolish and destroy the other complex. This process has been regularly repeated for centuries, preserving with ritually kept exactness the historical forms of the original. The belief, and theoretical principle behind this practice is that in the Shinto religion, only the most perfect, best maintained sanctuary is worthy to honor the Godhead, and if this begins to show wear and tear as a result of use and the passage of time, it must be torn down and an entirely new one built, because it would be improper to hold cultic rites in a building that had been patched, and obviously repaired.

This concept is in complete disagreement with the principles of the Charter of Venice, according to which the authenticity of the forms derives strictly from the hand of the artist who made it, and from the original material, and every copy or interference with this decreases its value. The Oriental concept seems to be less materialistic, which distinguishes the material from the form, infusing this latter with a spiritual quality and raising it to a transcendental level, unconcerned with its materialistic or objectified aspects.

All these increasing and new topics resulted in the organization, world-wide, of thematic and regional conferences, colloquia, congresses to confront these problems, mostly within the aegis of ICOMOS, but also outside this organization, seeking answers to the increasingly pressing questions.

The various meetings usually produced one or another concluding document, containing summarized recommendations resulting from the discussions and debates, that sought to answer problems that the Charter of Venice had not dealt with.

It should have been already obvious to ICOMOS at the revisionary conference organized in 1977 in Ditchley Park, that proved to be inconclusive, that the problem could not be solved with some kind of reformation or formulation of supplements to the Charter of Venice. The General Meeting held in 1978 in Moscow recommended the retention of the original Charter, but the issuing of explanatory supplements, which would serve to provide general guidelines in case of the newly arising problems. In addition, it recommended the issuing of a separate document relating to the preservation of historic cities and towns. These recommendations were not realized then.

For some time my own opinion was that, in the face of a constantly changing, developing profession, the thing that would be of most help would

be to constantly bring up the tenents of the Venetian Charter, in the case of each new challenge, and to seek to broaden, adapt the principle in the light of each project, developing the concept, and thus in a way maintaining the progressive development of the theories and methods.

Since by this time ICOMOS had formed 14 professional committees, none of which, however, was responsible for formulating theoretical policy, I made the motion at the annual meeting that met in Rome in 1981, at which I chaired the session on Theory, to create just such a committee, responsible for conceptual, theoretical issues. Although the members at the general meeting approved this motion, the committee on theoretical matters never came into being.

The situation has grown increasingly complicated and confusing during the period since the Rome meeting. On the heels of the ever-increasing conferences that ensued, each with different themes, several dozen documents were born, the consequences of which were the prolific Charters, Declarations, Recommentations, Decisions, in the midst of which the ideologic principles that had been resolved in Venice, and that had seemed so secure and so solid, faded into uncertainty and dissolution. The great profusion of documents further complicated rather than helped the situation, obscuring the issues, and making it ever more difficult to focus clearly on the salient problems: thus, the necessity of arriving at a new synthesis became quite evident.

Twenty-five years following the creation of the Venetian Charter, and ten years preceding the turn of the century 2000, this year's annual meeting of ICOMOS, held in Lausanne would have been the appropriate occasion for us to formulate a new, comprehensive international document: the International Charter for the Protection and Preservation of Heritage of Historic Architecture and Settlements, which would have contained a synthesis of all the concepts of the 20th century regarding those things we today hold to be valid and exemplary. This new Charter would have articulated the values that would insure the preservation in the built environment which expresses and symbolizes the heritage of the built environment that had been developed by each culture over hundreds of years.

This document would not have been a simple revision or supplementation of the Venetian Charter, nor a collection of the documents that had been created since its foundation. This document rather would have been a comprehensive text, embracing all cultures and regions, a sensitively nuanced, and carefully composed text allowing for individual differences between the cultures and architectural traditions of peoples of the different continents, as well as the historic, social, intellectual, moral, technical, and economic development, and which could provide competent answers to the professional problems and questions as they arose.

A new Charter of this kind could well have provided the accountability and mission for the humans of the third millenium, as well as preserved for them all we have inherited from thousands of years of human history and of architectural activity, as well as testifying to all that we have done to make this heritage known, appreciated, preserved, and safe-guarded for posterity; all that we have done to formulate principles and methods regarding them, as well as the dangers, of which we were the cause, and the problems we cannot solve, which we leave behind for the coming generations.

A year and a half before the Lausanne general meeting I made a proposal to the organizers of the conference that they activate the theoretical committee which had been conceptualized in Rome, and call together a working body of professional international experts to draw up the outlines of such a document that would be presented on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of ICOMOS' establishment. The organizers of the meeting — although approving the idea in principle, would not accept the task of preparing this document's initial phase, due to what they claimed was a lack of sufficient time. Thus the General Meeting in Lausanne was able to resolve only that ICOMOS must now after all actualize the motion to bring about the missing theoretical committee, whose task it would be to investigate the possibility of bringing about the eventual creation of such a document.

Perhaps it is not too late to hope that during the remaining decade of this century, this will be realized.