

The context of the Venice Charter (1964)

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The Venice Charter has been the benchmark for principles governing architectural conservation/restoration for over thirty years. We asked Jukka Jokilehto to comment on the context in which it was drawn up. Now often referred to simply as the 'Venice Charter', the correct full name of this document (of which we print the text in an appendix) is: 'The International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites', adopted by the IInd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, Venice, 1964.

When the IInd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments met in Venice from 25 to 31 May 1964, and adopted the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, it hardly anticipated the subsequent fortunes of this document. Over three decades later the Venice Charter continues to exercise its validity. Acceptance of the Charter has not been without criticism: immediately after the 1964 meeting it was challenged by Professor Renato Bonelli (Italy), who claimed that it contained nothing new, and even that the concepts expressed in it were contradictory to principles promoted after the Second World War, when aesthetic criteria had gained priority over historical ones [1].

In 1977, in an assessment of the Charter, Cevat Erder (Turkey) identified some of its defects, pointing out that, as it was written mainly by Europeans, there could be difficulties in its application in all cultures. Erder maintained, nevertheless, that the Charter had performed its task, that it was worthy of the respect due to an historic document and should be preserved according to the principles proposed for the preservation of an historic monument [2]. In 1983, Roland Silva (Sri

Lanka) declared that the charter was 'a Magna Carta for the safeguarding of the monumental heritage of mankind for the sake of the generations of the present and the future' [3].

The invitation to the 1964 Venice meeting was issued by the Italian Director General of Antiquities and Fine Arts, Professor G. De Angelis d'Ossat, at the (Ist) International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, which took place in Paris, 6–14 May 1957. The Paris meeting had been organized by the French association of restoration architects in collaboration with national authorities and UNESCO, and it drew particular attention to the need for training programmes for specialists, for specialized agencies, and for interdisciplinary collaboration [4]. There was also a motion addressed to UNESCO calling for the establishment of an international association as a link between restoration architects and technicians – this was eventually to be ICOMOS.

There were other precursors to the Venice Charter, including the conclusions of the international conference organized by the International Museums Office in Athens, 21–30 October 1931, and attended by some 120 professionals from 23

countries, mainly in Europe. These conclusions usually referred to later as the 'Athens Charter', were presented to the League of Nations member states. After the conference, the Italian delegate, Gustavo Giovannoni, drafted a 'Carta del restauro', which was adopted by the Italian Consiglio Superiore delle Belle Arti in December 1931 and published in January 1932 as an official government guideline. (These two documents should not be confused with the recommendations of the CIAM meeting on modern architecture and city planning in Athens in 1933, edited by Le Corbusier in 1941 and published as 'The Charter of Athens' in 1943 [5].)

The 1964 Venice congress was organized by the General Direction of Antiquities and Fine Arts of the Italian Ministry of Education. It was attended by some 600 participants representing 61 countries, as well as UNESCO, the Council of Europe, ICCROM, ICOM and the Istituto Internazionale dei Castelli (I.B.I.). The majority of participants were European, while more than half of the countries represented were from other continents. The congress adopted 13 resolutions, the first of which was the 'international charter' (Venice Charter). Another concerned the creation of ICOMOS, founded in Poland the following year, which came to recognize the Venice Charter as its fundamental doctrinal document – consequently the Charter has often (incorrectly) been published under the ICOMOS name. The Venice meeting also recommended the organization of an international architectural conservation course at ICCROM, the publication of an international magazine on the theory, techniques and legislation relating to the restoration of monuments (ICOMOS's *Monumentum*), as well as proper attention to the protection and rehabilitation of historic city centres [6].

In view of the ravages of the Second World War on cultural monuments, the organizers of the Venice meeting, Piero Gazzola, De Angelis d'Ossat, Carlo Ceschi and Roberto Pane, decided to provide an updated reference document for the international debate on safeguarding the architectural heritage. The idea of a revised charter was presented to the congress by Gazzola and Pane, who took Giovannoni's 'Carta del restauro' as a reference. The first draft was written by

Raymond Lemaire (Belgium), in collaboration with Paul Philippot (ICCROM) and Jean Sonnier (France) [7,8]. The Venice Charter was adopted by the congress almost unanimously – with one abstention. The first version contained 15 articles, but was later edited in collaboration with UNESCO to include Article 8 on integrity, thus making the current total of 16 articles (see Appendix).

There had recently been other meetings with recommendations on the rehabilitation of historic cities, an issue that the Venice Charter does not really address. It is worth noting, however, that the concept of 'historic monument' was extended by the Charter to cover historic urban areas and considered previous references to 'dead' and 'living' monuments no longer relevant. Cesare Brandi had published his theory of restoration the previous year (1963), which was certainly taken into account [9]. The Venice congress gave clear attention to architectural integrity, but it also emphasized the need to respect historical integrity – considering that after the war there had been an overemphasis on stylistic reconstruction. Several speakers stressed the specificity of each cultural heritage site, and the fact that any charter could only provide guidance – it could not be a rule to be applied uncritically.

Over the years, there have been several attempts to revise the Venice Charter, but without success, and the Charter has become a major reference both for national administrations and at the international level. This is proven by the translations of the Charter into at least 28 different languages, and the fact that its principles have found expression in dozens of national and international recommendations, guidelines and charters [10]. Perhaps the best known of these are the Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation in the USA (first published in 1978 [11]) and the Burra Charter in Australia (drawn up in 1979 [12]). The principles of the Venice Charter have also been recognized as the basic policy guidelines for the assessment of cultural heritage sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

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- 2 Erder, C. The Venice Charter under review. In: *ICOMOS Scientific Journal, The Venice Charter - La Charte de Venise 1964-1994*. Paris (1994), 24-31 (article written in 1977).
- 3 Silva, R. The significance of the Venice International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, with special reference to eastern countries. In: *ICOMOS Scientific Journal, The Venice Charter - La Charte de Venise 1964-1994*. Paris (1994), 40-44.
- 4 Verrier, J. Le congrès international des architectes et techniciens des monuments historiques. *Les monuments historiques de la France III* (1957) 65-88.
- 5 On this confusion, see Iamandi, C. The Charters of Athens of 1931 and 1933. Coincidence, controversy and convergence. *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites 2* (1997) 17-28.
- 6 ICOMOS. 'Il monumento per l'uomo'. *Atti del II congresso internazionale del restauro, Venezia, 25-31 maggio 1964*. Marsilio Editore, Padua (1971).
- 7 Gazzola, P. and Pane, R. Proposte per una carta internazionale del restauro. In: ICOMOS. *Il monumento per l'uomo'. Atti del II congresso internazionale del restauro, Venezia, 25-31 maggio 1964*. Marsilio Editore, Padua (1971), 14-19. Reprinted in Gurrieri, F. (ed.), *Teoria e cultura del restauro dei monumenti e dei centri antichi*. Edizioni CLUSF, Florence (1974), 215-224.
- 8 Lemaire, R. A propos de la Charte de Venise. In: *ICOMOS Scientific Journal, The Venice Charter - La Charte de Venise 1964-1994*. Paris (1994), 56-58.
- 9 Brandi, C. *Teoria del restauro*. Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome (1963). Reprinted G. Einaudi, Turin (1977).
- 10 *ICOMOS Scientific Journal, The Venice Charter - La Charte de Venise 1964-1994*, Paris (1994).
- 11 *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. Revised 1983. US Department of the Interior, National Parks Service, Washington DC (1983).
- 12 Australia ICOMOS. *The Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance* (the Burra Charter). Sydney (1981).

APPENDIX

THE VENICE CHARTER (1964): INTERNATIONAL CHARTER FOR THE CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF MONUMENTS AND SITES

Imbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their age-old traditions. People are becoming more and more conscious of the unity of human values and regard ancient monuments as a common heritage. The common responsibility to safeguard them for future generations is recognized. It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity.

It is essential that the principles guiding the preservation and restoration of ancient buildings should be agreed and be laid down on an international basis, with each country being responsible for applying the plan within the framework of its own culture and traditions.

By defining these basic principles for the first time, the Athens Charter of 1931 contributed towards the development of an extensive international movement which has assumed concrete form in national documents, in the work of ICOM and UNESCO and in the establishment by the latter of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property. Increasing awareness and critical study have been brought to bear on problems which have continually become more complex and varied; now the time has come to examine the Charter afresh in order to make a thorough study of the principles involved and to enlarge its scope in a new document.

Accordingly, the IInd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, which met in Venice from May 25th to 31st 1964, approved the following text:

DEFINITIONS

ARTICLE 1. The concept of an historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work

but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development or an historic event. This applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time.

ARTICLE 2. The conservation and restoration of monuments must have recourse to all the sciences and techniques which can contribute to the study and safeguarding of the architectural heritage.

AIM

ARTICLE 3. The intention in conserving and restoring monuments is to safeguard them no less as works of art than as historical evidence.

CONSERVATION

ARTICLE 4. It is essential to the conservation of monuments that they be maintained on a permanent basis.

ARTICLE 5. The conservation of monuments is always facilitated by making use of them for some socially useful purpose. Such use is therefore desirable but it must not change the lay-out or decoration of the building. It is within these limits only that modifications demanded by a change of function should be envisaged and may be permitted.

ARTICLE 6. The conservation of a monument implies preserving a setting which is not out of scale. Wherever the traditional setting exists, it must be kept. No new construction, demolition or modification which would alter the relations of mass and color must be allowed.

ARTICLE 7. A monument is inseparable from the history to which it bears witness and from the setting in which it occurs. The moving of all or part of a monument cannot be allowed except where the safeguarding of that monument demands it or where it is justified by national or international interest of paramount importance.

ARTICLE 8. Items of sculpture, painting or decoration which form an integral part of a monument

may only be removed from it if this is the sole means of ensuring their preservation.

RESTORATION

ARTICLE 9. The process of restoration is a highly specialized operation. Its aim is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents. It must stop at the point where conjecture begins, and in this case moreover any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp. The restoration in any case must be preceded and followed by an archaeological and historical study of the monument.

ARTICLE 10. Where traditional techniques prove inadequate, the consolidation of a monument can be achieved by the use of any modern technique for conservation and construction, the efficacy of which has been shown by scientific data and proved by experience.

ARTICLE 11. The valid contributions of all periods to the building of a monument must be respected, since unity of style is not the aim of a restoration.

When a building includes the superimposed work of different periods, the revealing of the underlying state can only be justified in exceptional circumstances and when what is removed is of little interest and the material which is brought to light is of great historical, archaeological or aesthetic value, and its state of preservation good enough to justify the action. Evaluation of the importance of the elements involved and the decision as to what may be destroyed cannot rest solely on the individual in charge of the work.

ARTICLE 12. Replacements of missing parts must integrate harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence.

ARTICLE 13. Additions cannot be allowed except in so far as they do not detract from the interest-

ing parts of the building, its traditional setting, the balance of its composition and its relation with its surroundings.

HISTORIC SITES

ARTICLE 14. The sites of monuments must be the object of special care in order to safeguard their integrity and ensure that they are cleared and presented in a seemly manner. The work of conservation and restoration carried out in such places should be inspired by the principles set forth in the foregoing articles.

EXCAVATIONS

ARTICLE 15. Excavations should be carried out in accordance with scientific standards and the recommendation defining international principles to be applied in the case of archaeological excavation adopted by UNESCO in 1956.

Ruins must be maintained and measures necessary for the permanent conservation and protection of architectural features and of objects discovered must be taken. Furthermore, every means must be taken to facilitate the understanding of the monument and to reveal it without ever distorting its meaning.

All reconstruction work should however be ruled out *a priori*. Only anastylosis, that is to say, the reassembling of existing but dismembered parts, can be permitted. The material used for integration should always be recognizable and its use should be the least that will ensure the conservation of a monument and the reinstatement of its form.

PUBLICATION

ARTICLE 16. In all works of preservation, restoration or excavation, there should always be precise documentation in the form of analytical and

critical reports, illustrated with drawings and photographs.

Every stage of the work of clearing, consolidation, rearrangement and integration, as well as technical and formal features identified during the course of the work, should be included. This record should be placed in the archives of a public institution and made available to research workers. It is recommended that the report should be published.

The following persons took part in the work of the Committee for drafting the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments:

Piero Gazzola (Italy), Chairman
Raymond Lemaire (Belgium), Reporter

José Bassegoda-Nonell (Spain)

Luis Benavente (Portugal)

Djurdje Boskovic (Yugoslavia)

Hiroshi Daifuku (UNESCO)

P.L. de Vrieze (Netherlands)

Harald Langberg (Denmark)

Mario Matteucci (Italy)

Jean Merlet (France)

Carlos Flores Marini (Mexico)

Roberto Pane (Italy)

S.C.J. Pavel (Czechoslovakia)

Paul Philippot (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property)

Victor Pimentel (Peru)

Harold Plenderleith (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property)

Deoclecio Redig de Campos (Vatican)

Jean Sonnier (France)

François Sorlin (France)

Eustathios Stikas (Greece)

Gertrud Tripp (Austria)

Jan Zachwatowicz (Poland)

Mustafa S. Zbiss (Tunisia)