

INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT OF MONUMENTS AND SITES IN THEIR SETTING

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Abstract

The theoretical basis of the protection of cultural property grew from the philosophical studies of eminent intellectuals of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. These considerations comprised an analysis of the conditions of the protection of cultural property – both external (historical monuments in their physical setting) as well as internal ones (historical monuments in social awareness and perception). A summary of the then state of awareness of these problems was the final statement of the international conference of conservators in Athens in 1931. This constitutes the best expression in existence of conservation theory and international policy, postulating desiderata which have not been achieved even today (Point IV of the conference programme and Resolution VI were concerned with the surroundings of historical monuments). The Venice Charter, though it was based on the Athens resolutions, concentrates entirely on the microscale of individual monuments. But by ignoring the problem of the urban and landscape macroscale, it can be regarded as a step backwards. The recognition by ICOMOS of the Venice Charter as the ‘Ten Commandments’ of conservation led to several decades of stagnation in the theorizing about the protection of cultural property. Instead of theoretical studies, we saw the creation of increasing numbers of “Charters” of varying intellectual value, consisting of bare desiderata, presented to be believed-in and applied, rather than to arouse scientific methodological reflection. Doctrine replaces Philosophy and theory. Only in the last fifteen years, due to impulses from Asia (a pluralistic understanding of the concept of authenticity) and Africa (regarding intangible values), has conservation been aroused from its intellectual torpor.

The acceptance of the dichotomy “monuments and sites – their setting” as the topic of our symposium is artificial and anachronistic. That which was until recently just the troublesome setting of an historical monument, today is also protected cultural property (e.g., historic industry). It is currently necessary to conduct a thorough realignment of our

concepts, and in our investigative methodology to pass from induction to deduction. **The main aim of the protection of cultural property becomes therefore not a monument and site in their setting, but a unit of a cultural/natural landscape with its monuments and sites.** Operating in the macroscale allows us to form a mutual partnership with the natural environmental conservation movement permitting the creation together of a common ‘blue-green ecological programme’. There is a great need for sound multidisciplinary theoretical studies, which comprise the “to be or not to be” of our discipline. Their inspiration and organization is a major task ahead for the newly-formed International Scientific Committee on Theory of Preservation-**ICOMOS TOP IC.**