

Comments on the Venice Charter with illustrations

M. Jukka Jokilehto

Rome, 1995

Article 1. Cultural Heritage: When the Charter was written, the concept of 'historic monument' was conceived of as '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'. 'Historic site' was understood as the place where monuments were located. With the evolving concepts of cultural heritage, the meaning of 'monuments' and 'sites' has been diversified, and a growing emphasis has been given to conservation management and planning of historic areas as defined in the 1976 UNESCO 'recommendation concerning the safeguarding and contemporary role of historic areas'. Even beyond this, the concept of 'cultural landscape' was introduced in criteria for nomination of World Cultural Heritage Sites, in 1992.



Illustration 1: The historic town of Ouro Preto in Brazil is an historic area with important monuments in the context of residential housing which together form a whole of World Heritage standard.

Article 2. Modern Sciences and Techniques: The use of modern sciences and techniques in the analysis, treatment and monitoring of historic structures has been subject to research for more than a century, and is now recognized as a fundamental discipline in any conservation work. It implies interdisciplinary collaboration by all those involved, and requires the development of a monitoring process for the critical assessment of results in the medium and long term.

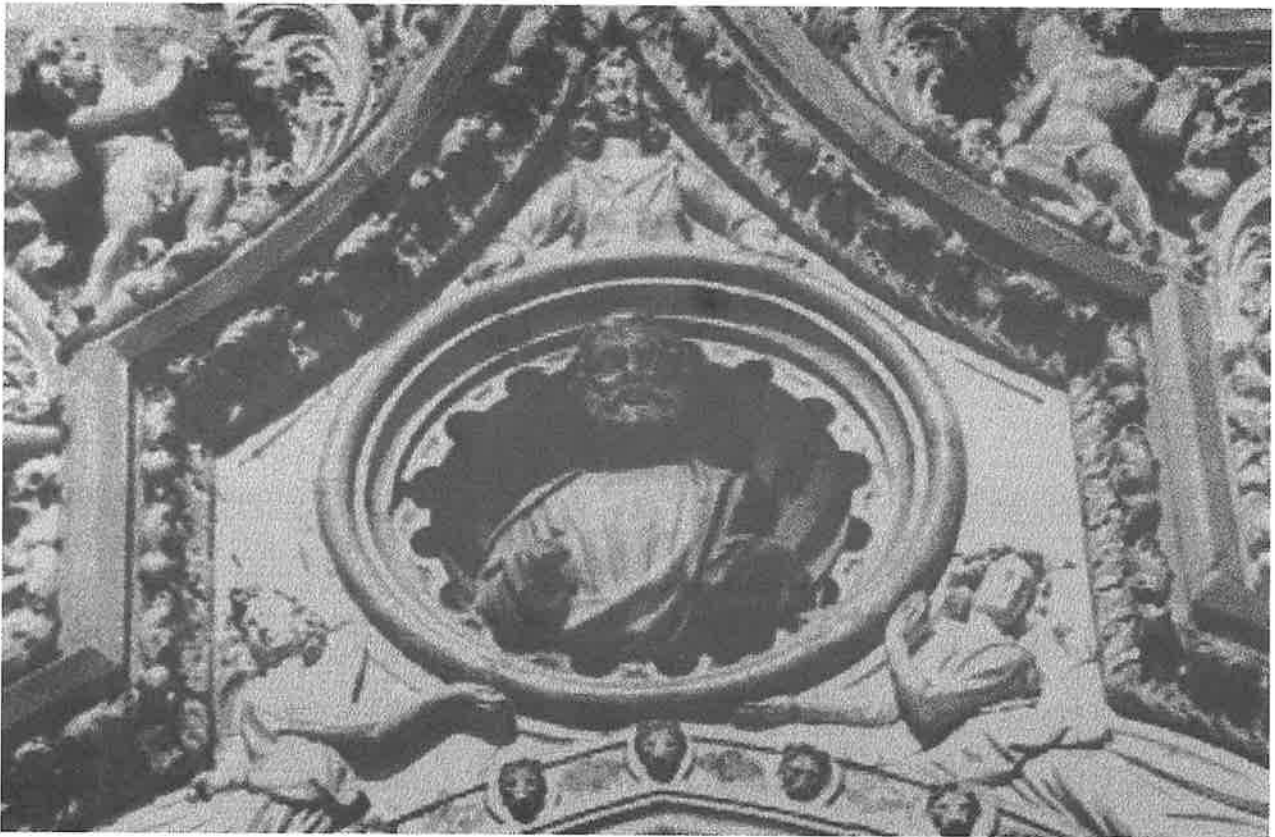


Illustration 2: The treatment of Porta della Carta in Venice is an example of the application of modern scientific methods and technology in restoration.

Article 3. Authenticity: Any conservation and restoration activity needs to be based on a thorough knowledge of the heritage resource and the balanced definition of its artistic, historical and cultural significance. Priorities should be based on value judgements that are measured against the culture concerned, and with due awareness of recognized international guidelines and recommendations. The intention in treatments should be to maintain the authenticity of the resource and the truthfulness of the sources of information in order to guarantee the credibility of its history and cultural context. In fact, the Nara Document on Authenticity (November 1994) emphasizes cultural diversity, and the need to measure authenticity in relation to values inherent to the relevant culture.



Illustration 3: A temple site in the area of Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka, illustrates the question of either keeping the historical, material authenticity, or allowing for some rebuilding according to religious values as conceived by the community.

Article 4. **Maintenance:** Regular inspections and the implementation of a planned maintenance programme are the fundamental requirements for a sound approach to the care of historic buildings and sites. If causes of decay can be removed, or at least reduced, something worthwhile has been achieved. The maintenance programme is aimed at keeping the cultural heritage resources in a manner that will prevent the loss of any part of them. It is a continuous process, not a product.



Illustration 4: Traditional roof repair in the temple of Cyojuji in Japan. Traditional skills are recognized in Japan as part of the national cultural heritage, and their continuation and survival are given special attention.

Article 5. Appropriate use: So long as an historic building or area retains the type of use for which it was originally built, there is also a good chance that its maintenance will be guaranteed. Identification of building typologies and appropriate use categories will be a useful method especially in conservation management and planning of urban or rural historic areas. When an historic building or area is abandoned or misused, there is the choice -subject to relevant values- to propose a new function or to protect and interpret the place as a 'museum'. While a socially useful function generally facilitates the upkeep of historic structures, there are limits within which such new functions are possible. The suitability of a new function needs to be decided taking into account its intrinsic cultural values and the requirements of the site.

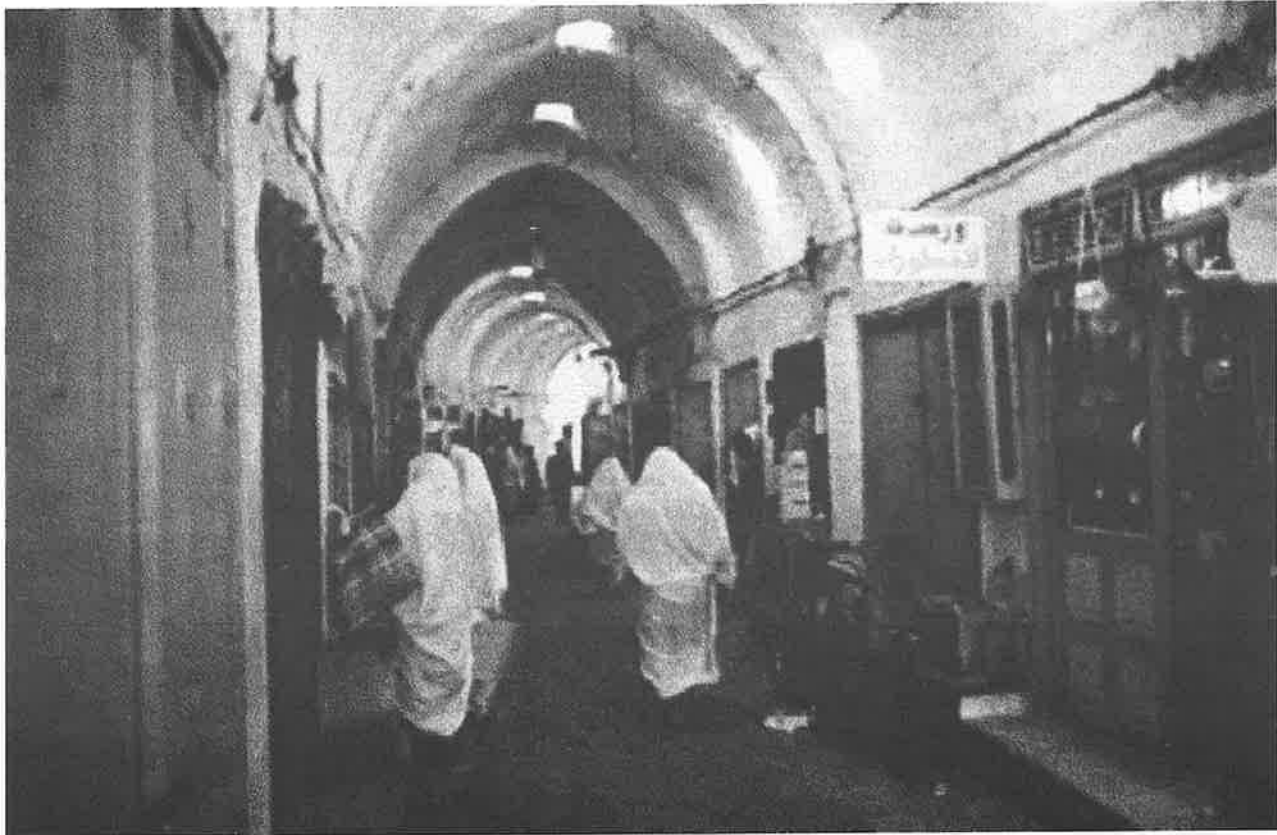


Illustration 5: The historic suk of Kairouan in Tunisia is currently under pressure for change due to commercial development and tourism.

Article 6. Relation with Context: The setting or context of historic monuments is often the most difficult part in a conservation project. Gross mistakes have been made by developers who have wanted to profit from the potential of historic buildings, and have built massive commercial complexes in their surroundings thus undermining the historical character of the site. Attention is also crucial in the case of historic town centres or villages; such areas should be seen as part of a larger context. Sufficiently extensive buffer zones are necessary so that the weight of new developments would not crush them. New constructions need to be designed with due attention to the qualities, dimensions and the typology of the existing historic fabric.

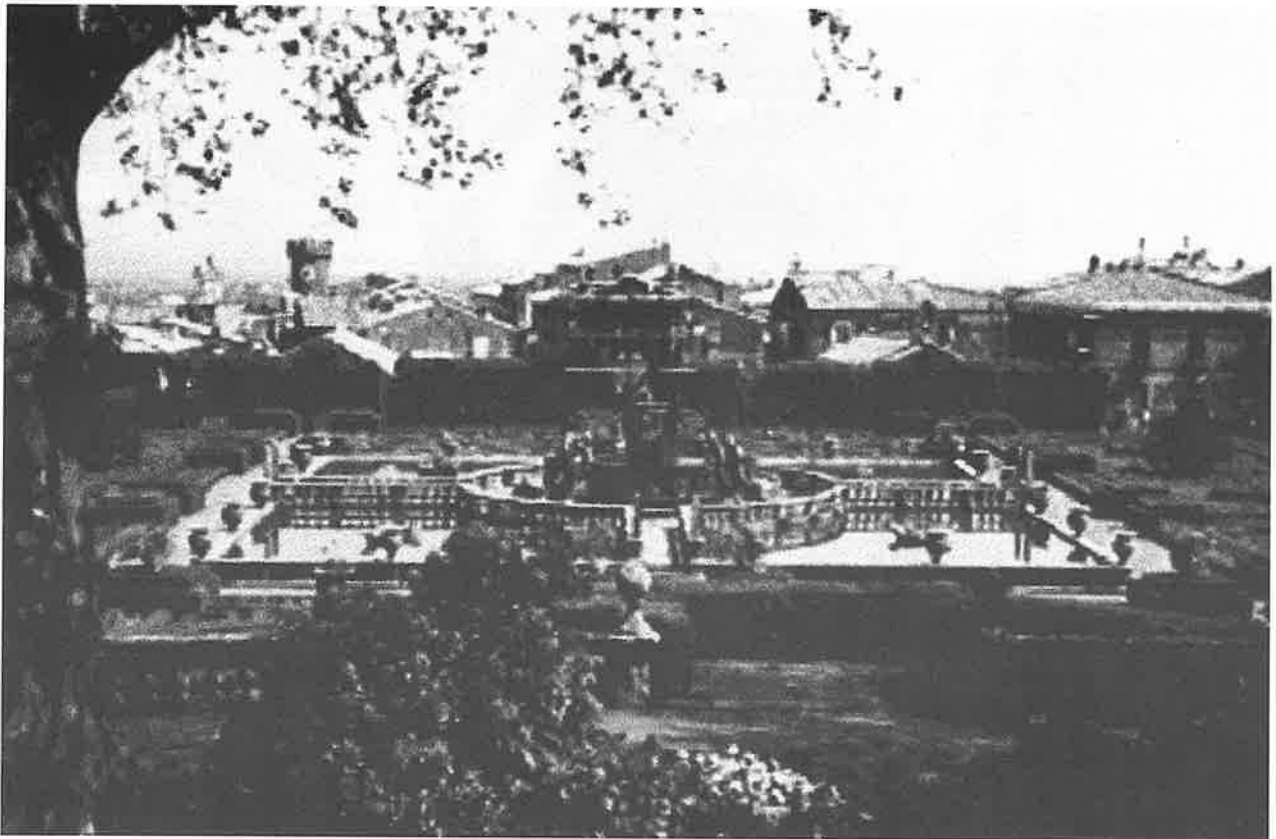


Illustration 6: The garden of the Villa Bagnaia in Italy overlooks the small country town of Bagnaia that forms its historical context. Any changes in the townscape would seriously undermine the setting of the Villa.

Article 7. Keeping in Situ: Already by the end of the eighteenth century, historic buildings and ancient monuments in Rome were seen in relation to each other and to the specific conditions and 'history' of the place; buildings and sculptures had their special meaning in this context, and could not be understood properly if moved elsewhere. Moving of monuments or parts thereof is an extreme measure, which should only be taken when their existence is severely at risk, and where other alternatives are not feasible. Such operations have been justified when sites were to be flooded, or when extensive mining has made the ground too weak to support historic structures.



Illustration 7: The interior of the convent of Piva in Montenegro with precious Byzantine mural paintings after transfer to a new site in 1982. The original site was threatened by dam construction, so the convent was dismantled and rebuilt 300 m higher up in the same valley.

Article 8. **Integrity:** While modern technology has made the removal of wall paintings or sculptural details from their original context relatively easy technically, unnecessary removal will impoverish the integrity of the original historic resource and often expose moved elements to further damage. Although removal may be justified when air pollution or acid rain have caused increasing damage to artistic features, it should always be seen as an exception and should only be considered appropriate if no other means exist to safeguard endangered heritage.

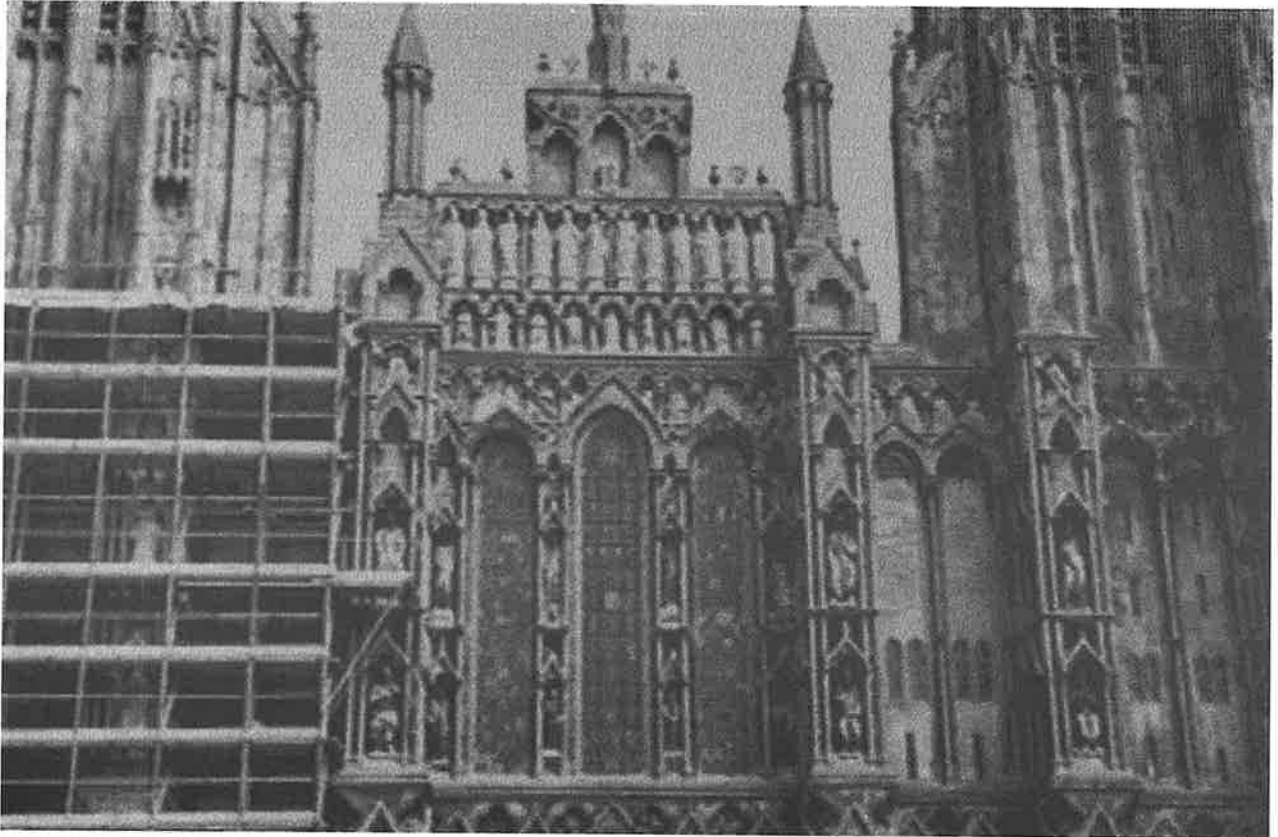


Illustration 8: The sculptures in the evaluation of the medieval cathedral of Wells in England have been subject to debate concerning alternatives for their conservation in situ or removal to a museum and replacement with casts. The decision was taken to apply conservation treatments that would allow keeping the sculptures in situ.

Article 9. Restoration: Considering restoration as a specialized operation, the use of the concept should be limited to appropriate treatments of heritage resources, and should not be confused with other types of activities, such as rehabilitation, reconstruction, etc. Restoration has the double aim of both conserving the existing original historic structure and of improving the legibility of its original form. The French concept of *mise-en-valeur* (enhancement) comes close to explaining the idea. Restoration may involve different types of operations, including cleaning, repair and consolidation of the original fabric, anastylosis of dismembered parts, and eventual reintegration of lost elements (*lacunae*). It is essential that restoration be based on thoroughly documented archaeological research and acknowledgement of the historical structure in all its phases.

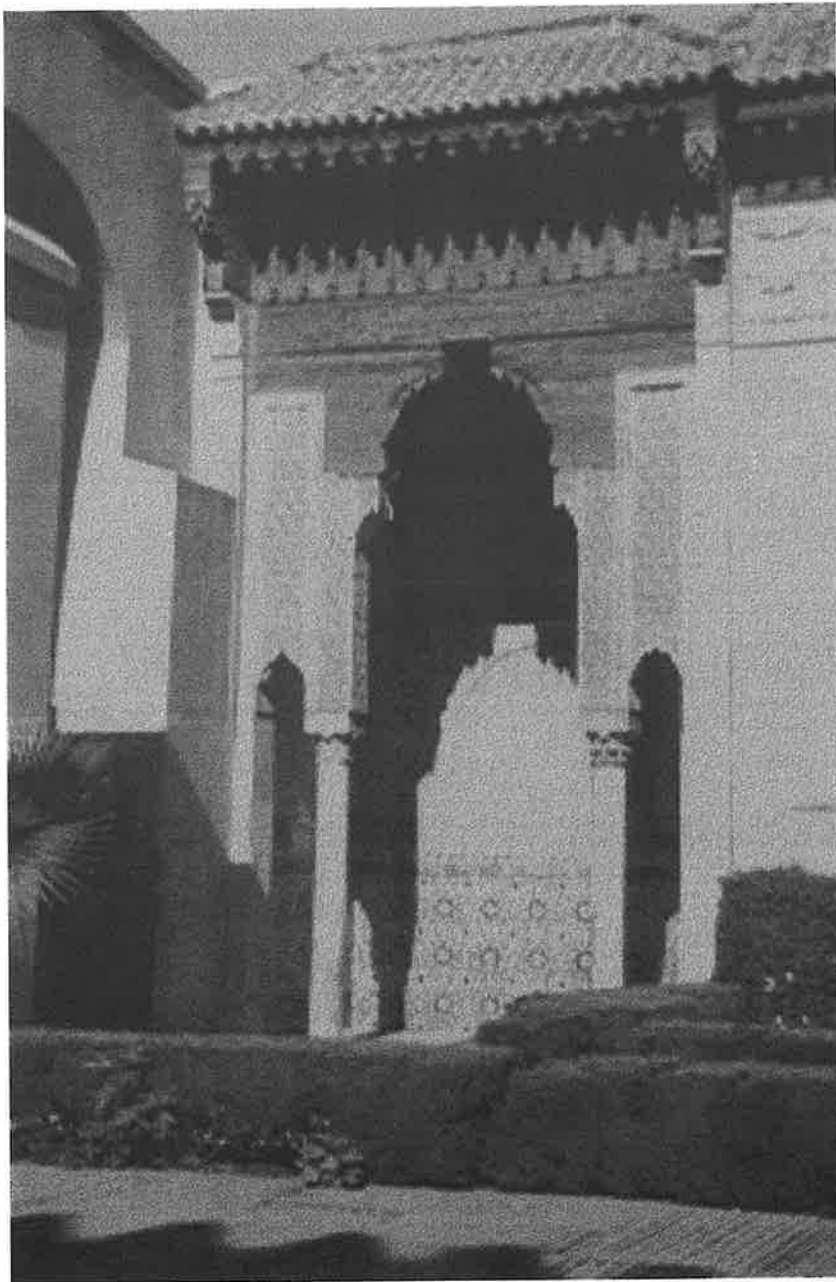


Illustration 9: Detail of the elevation of the Royal Tombs in Marrakech, Morocco, after the restoration of the complex which had an especially fine interior.

Article 10. Compatibility of Treatments: It is the responsibility of each generation to safeguard historic structures that have survived from distant times; therefore, any treatment should be undertaken on an appropriate scale with a view to prolonging their existence. The general principle should be to carry out repair and maintenance works using technology compatible with the historical structure and materials. Where the strength of the original fabric has weakened, consolidation may be carried out using grouting or other methods. Due attention should, however, be given to the physical implications of the treatment and the likelihood of changes in the original object. All precautions should be taken for sufficient reversibility of the treatment in order to allow for necessary rectification and future treatments.

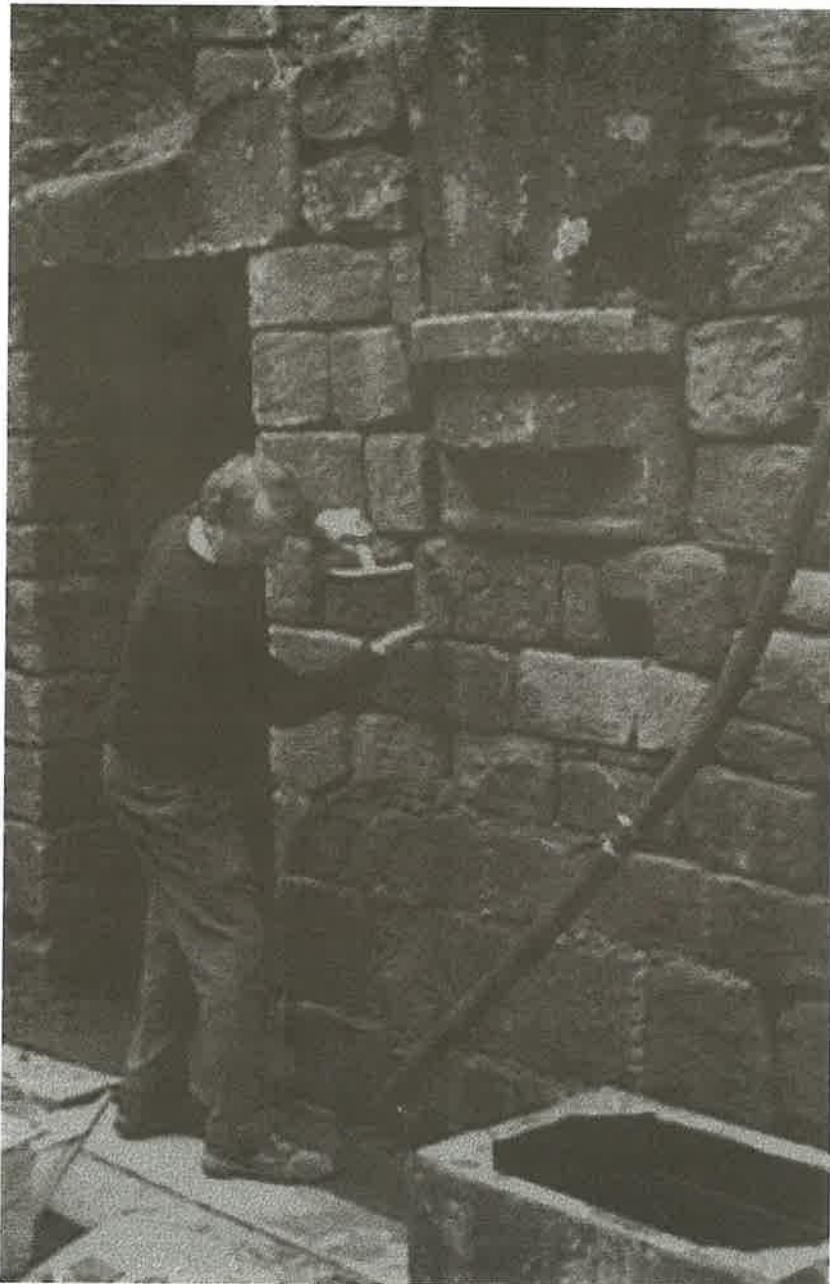


Illustration 10: Careful consolidation of ancient masonry at Fountains Abbey in England.

Article 11. **Historical Stratigraphy:** The cultural-historical importance of an historic building or settlement lies in the significant contributions of all periods; together these embody its present reality, its historical integrity and authenticity. Any restoration or modification should be based on the critical assessment and evaluation of such a complex: its form, function, structure, material and workmanship, as well as its relationship with the socio-cultural context. Value judgements may change over time, as well as from one cultural area to another; therefore priorities need to be established with due attention to cultural values along with social, economic and political considerations. Given the plurality of values, decisions should be taken by a multidisciplinary team in order to guarantee balanced judgement. As each monument has its own historical time line and specific identity, decisions about treatment will necessarily vary from case to case, and therefore models for restoration should not be sought too much in past solutions, but rather in the critical process that produces the justification for treatment.



Illustration 11: The former Imperial palace of Diocletian in Split, Croatia, first became a medieval settlement, and later continued to be built through the Renaissance and Baroque into the present centre of the modern city. All these historical phases are currently visible on the site, and safeguarding them will be one of the objectives of conservation management.

Article 12. **Reintegration of Losses:** A work of art or an historic building, particularly when created following coherent design criteria, has a 'potential unity' in the resulting artistic or architectural whole. When parts of the whole are lost either due to weathering or physical damage, these areas (*lacunae*) may be reintegrated. Such a reintegration must be based on thorough factual knowledge and documentation of lost elements so as to be a faithful representation of the former reality. It does not aim at reproducing forms that have never existed or of which the exact form is not known. In principle, modern reintegration should be distinguishable from the original material of the monument, but not so conspicuous as to disturb its aesthetic or architectural character. Such treatment of *lacunae* should aim at the re-establishment of the potential whole so far as this exists. Technical solutions, and the form and extent of the reintegration, should be decided in each case according to the condition and the values of the cultural property concerned.

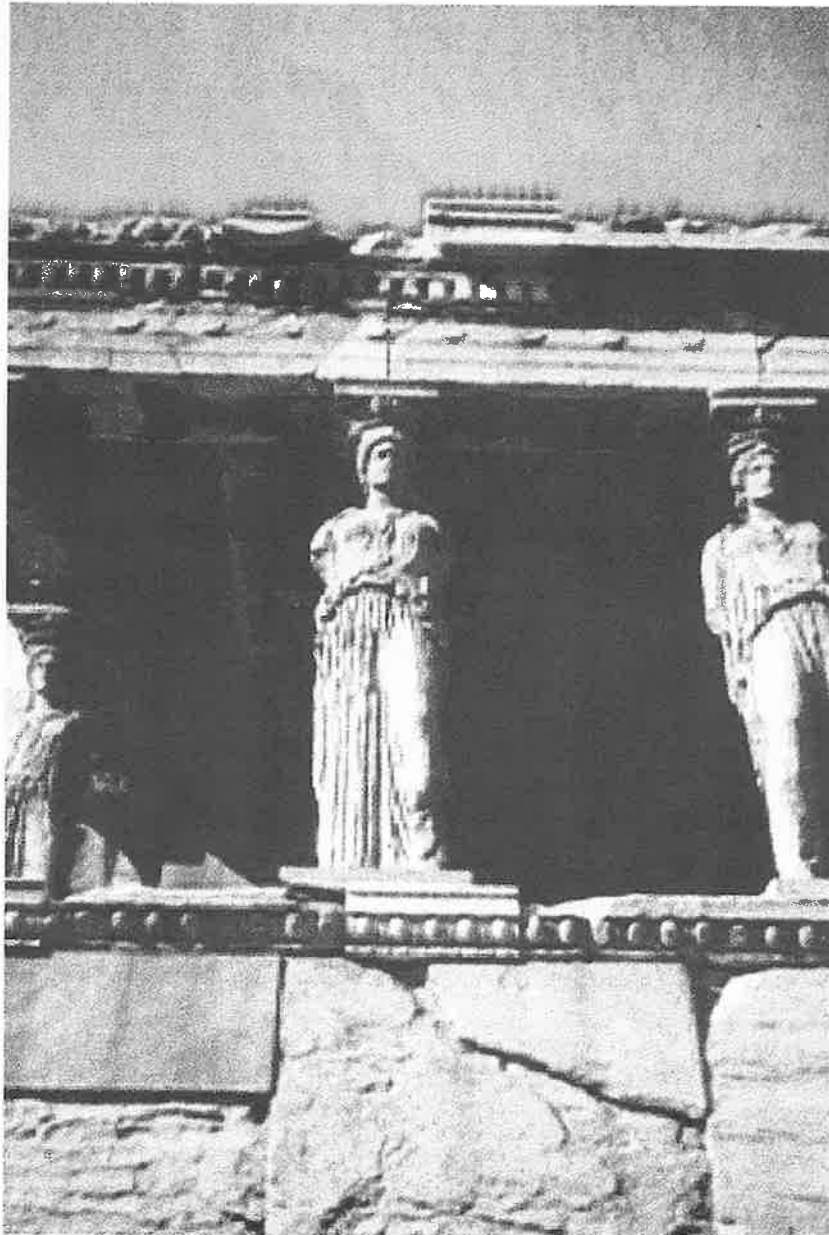


Illustration 12: Examples of treatments of lacunae in the Caryatid porch of the Erechtheion in Athens, Greece. The white elements in the string courses are reintegrations with marble; the caryatids have recently been replaced with casts.

Article 13. **New Additions:** Changing requirements and new uses often necessitate the construction of modern facilities and additional features for historic structures and sites. Such constructions need careful consideration of the qualities and scale of the historic context; it demands a skilled and sensitive designer conversant both with modern architectural language and with historic architecture. The approach and solutions may vary greatly from case to case. New constructions should, in principle, reflect the spirit of their time, but they should also harmonize with the historic context; this can be achieved through sensitive use of technical solutions and materials, as well as with due attention to architectural forms and the overall balance on the site.



Illustration 13: Modern construction in the historic centre of Colmar in France in the immediate surroundings of the cathedral; the addition takes into account the scale of the context while reflecting present-day needs.

Article 14 **Presentation of Historic Sites:** If properly organized tourism may become one of the major sources of financing for the maintenance and care of historic sites. Historic monuments, buildings and ensembles are part areas or sites, that are often subject to large numbers of visitors who require particular facilities as well as some precautions. Good visitor management should aim at a friendly welcome to a safe, clean and well-maintained site with appropriate guidance for an intellectual experience.



Illustration 14: The site of Saint Francis Basilica in Assisi, Italy, seen as approached from the centre. the site is visited by thousands of tourists, and although the town has faced changes due to commercial development, special care has been taken in the presentation.

Article 15. **Archaeological Areas:** Excavations on archaeological sites should be planned in relation to the potential for protection and preservation of the excavated remains. Too often excavators have been carried away with enthusiasm, and archaeological sites have been exposed to weathering and enormous conservation problems. Instead, careful site management will provide for a long-term excavation plan, which not only will guarantee a reasonable amount of excavating areas to be treated and interpreted, but also will allow for future generations of archaeologists to excavate virgin ground for testing the potential of new techniques. Physical remains on the site will provide the basis of reference for interpretation to visitors and scholars. Presentation may often require protection, consolidation, and even some restoration. Reconstructions on archaeological sites should generally be limited to the minimum, i.e., *anastylosis*, 'the re-assembling of existing but dismembered parts'. Any reconstruction tends to unbalance the overall setting by focusing attention on a few individual structures. Therefore, it should, instead, be given to systematic interpretation of the history of the site using a variety of means, such as site museums with scale models, drawings, audio-visual media, as well as various levels of guidebooks to clarify the message to general visitors and to provide in-depth information for specialists.

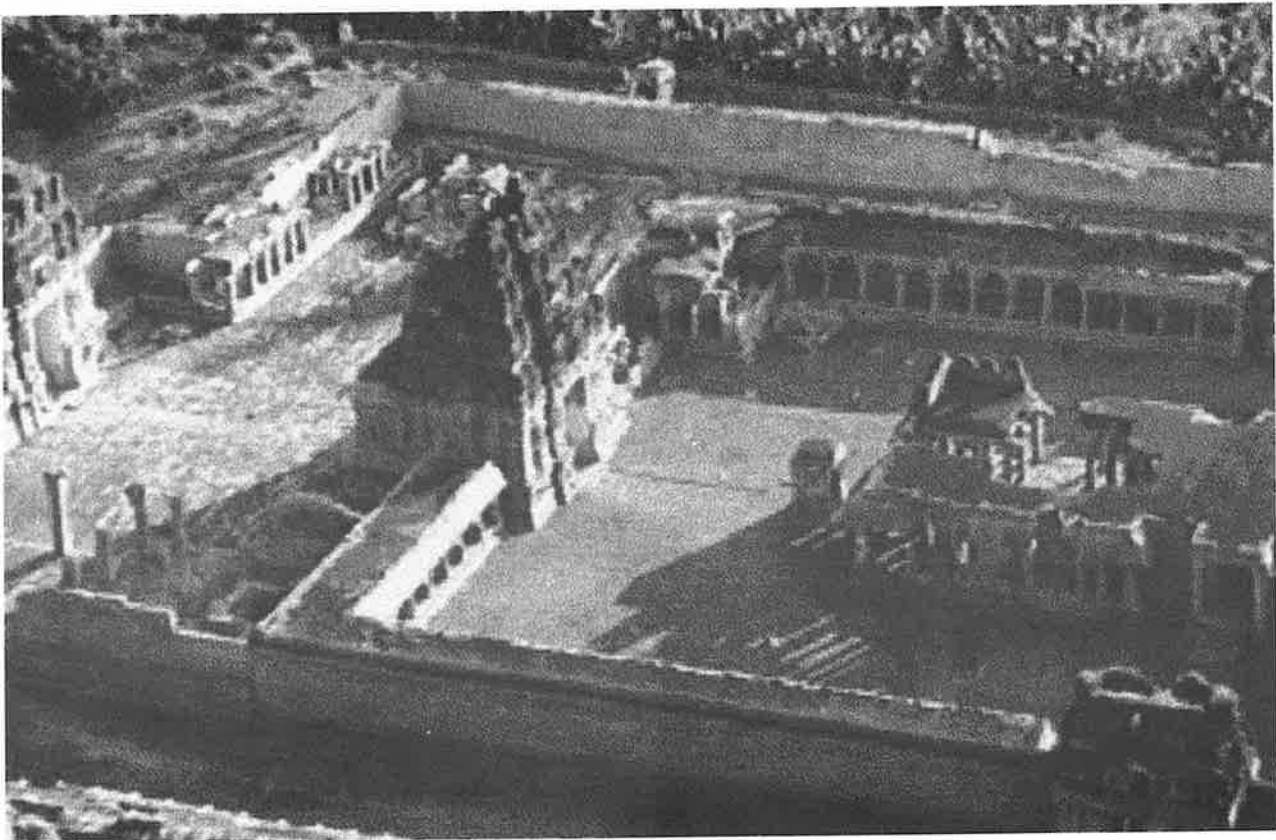


Illustration 15: The archaeological site of Hampi in India with partial reconstructions showing a sensitive presentation of the ancient remains.

Article 16. **Documentation:** Any research and conservation activity requires systematic inventory, recording, documentation and information management. Documentation is the only tangible basis for monitoring the behaviour of historic structures in relation to weathering, conservation treatments, changes and developments with a view to improved forward planning. The practice of presenting regular annual reports on management progress, and having detailed inspection reports prepared by professionals on the condition of historic buildings has considerably reduced the cost of maintenance and 'unforeseen' repairs. Similarly, risk preparedness depends on the availability of relevant documentation and appropriately managed data bases and information.



Illustration 16: ICCROM trainees recording historic fabric with video camera for use in computer applications in an exercise in Rome. Even simple means may reach the required objective if well managed.