

## **Conservation of monuments: where are we going?**

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The end of the millennium offers an occasion to reflect upon the state of our profession: the conservation of cultural patrimony. We will do this, taking as a starting point the experiences which the C.C.A. (Centro di Conservazione Archeologica) has had over the last 15 years in conserving monuments and archaeological sites.

As a private company, the C.C.A. has tried, on one hand, to develop methodological approaches that would lead to qualitative improvement in our work, while responding, on the other hand, to the "demands of the market." Today, in taking stock of the past 15 years, it is these interventions that give us a real picture of the facts.

Perhaps the things I am about to say will seem obvious to some of you; this is because our professional paths have often crossed in the past 15 years. Nevertheless, I feel it is worthwhile to look at these experiences together.

Our professional itinerary began in the late 1970s-early 1980s when the focus was exclusively on "restoration"-- both in training and in daily work. Most of us were trained in some restoration institute, and once we were professionals we became "restorers," with our first jobs being "restoration" treatments. Our culture and professional preparation were characterized by a series of technological certitudes; our tools were infallible formulas, super-modern treatments and magical products.

The relationship between operator and monument was always a one-way street. By and large, the restorer knew what to do before even before encountering the monument; at best there might be an adjustment in the level of treatment or in the application of one slightly different product or another. In the more fortunate cases, the choice of treatment was influenced by the type of material and the state of decay of the artifact's surfaces.

The result was treatments that had a major impact on the monument.

**THE RESTORATION DID NOT CONSERVE, BUT TRANSFORMED.**

Then, in the first half of the 1980s a slow but steady change began to occur. There could be several reasons for this:

- a maturation process linked to the ongoing debate in Italy about restoration versus conservation and to more frequent exchanges on the international level;
- requests coming from the political sector urging increased interventions in the area of the built urban heritage;
- the arrival on the market of new forms of professional organization, such as private companies, mostly composed of recent graduates who were always ready to question a principle or technique;
- the experience of difficulties and failures and, above all, the courage to admit them and talk about them.

At that time, the activity of our center was entirely devoted to restoration, with the use of so-called "modern" techniques and materials which had a significant impact on the original. It is hardly worth giving examples of monuments treated with this approach, as I imagine each of us could supply a long list from personal experience.

Even documentation was not called for, or was not included in the product requested.

The first tangible sign of change arrived after the failures and difficulties encountered during treatment of large-scale monuments, which were in serious states of decay and exposed to a highly polluted urban environment. Under these conditions, the methodologies used up to that time were found totally inadequate, making it necessary to start a new process of study, focused on the monuments themselves. Thus new techniques for reading the monuments were developed, marked

by a technico-conservation style which was also historical and humanistic.

People began to read the signs of decay of materials; a technique for recording these traces was developed; "topographic maps" were created, the study of which helped in interpreting the deterioration of surfaces, understanding the mechanisms of decay and planning the corrective measures needed to prevent the repetition of said mechanisms. At the same time, there was more emphasis on the archaeological and historical study of the monuments in order to understand their materials and construction techniques, to identify the signs of use and maintenance, to study phases of neglect, the stratigraphy of burial and cases of re-use. In short, all this allowed the monument to introduce itself and to suggest the "cures" it would find compatible. The monument came to be treated not like a mute and shapeless mass of degraded materials, but as an intelligent machine having a high cultural content and, above all, having a great desire to convey the message -- historical, spiritual, technological, artistic -- it contained. This was the case of the conservation of the arch of Septimius Severus and the temple of Vespasian in the Roman Forum, the Stadium of Domitian and the Crypta Balbi in Rome. (Nardi 1986 and 1987) These considerations filled the eighties, and definitively entered our treatment methodology. They also appeared in the headings of state budgets, thus being officially recognized and requested by the commissioners. (Photo 1,2)

The above-mentioned relationship between operator and monument is now completely overturned: it is no longer a one-way street, leading from the operator and colliding with the monument -- it now goes both ways.

#### THE INTERVENTION DOES NOT TRANSFORM, BUT CONSERVES

While the themes just described monopolized professional debate and practice in the field, some new objectives timidly appeared on the horizon. These new causes for reflection first seemed to be accidental episodes but slowly gained ground within the dynamics of future interventions. The issues were planning of treatments and post-treatment maintenance of monuments.

Whereas planning was essentially covered by worksite experience, as in the case of the Arch of Septimius Severus and the Stadium of Domitian, and where maintenance was basically a theoretical intuition and not regular praxis, the PROJECT, complete with future protection measures (both active and passive) was at the base of interventions performed from 1990 to 1996, at the atrium of the Capitoline Museum in Rome, at the Bath House in Masada, at the rural church of Sant'Andrea Priu in Sardinia and at the Baths of the Cisiarii in Ostia.(Albini et al. 1996)(Nardi 1992, 1996, 1997)

The above-mentioned relationship between operator and monument has been further modified, or amplified: it is no longer a one-way street, leading from the operator and colliding with the monument, and it no longer focuses exclusively on the conservation of material and cultural values, but extends to FUTURE PROTECTION of the results achieved.

Information comes from the monument, and the conservator studies and processes it in order to produce a treatment plan that returns to the monument in the form of materials that are stabilized, maintained and protected in the years to come.

The result is always interventions with low impact on the monument but with an expectation of lasting in time.(Photo 3, 4, 5)

#### THE TREATMENT DOES NOT TRANSFORM, BUT CONSERVES AND MAINTAINS.

And just when we thought we had finally codified and defined our field of professional activity, new requirements slowly made themselves felt. Until they, too, entered and expanded our field of action. Here, the issues were initiatives organized to foster public information and professional training of conservation personnel.

The first idea goes back to 1984, when we opened the worksite of the Arch of Septimius Severus to delegates of the ICCROM General Assembly. This positive experience was kept on the back burner until 1990 when, during the work on the atrium of the Capitoline Museum, we set up a worksite that was entirely open to the public for three years. Since that time, more than a million visitors have been able to watch C.C.A. operations "live" -- for instance at the Western Palace and the Bath House of Masada, during work in the villas of the Nile and Bird and Fish at Zippori, again in Israel,

or at the Baths of the Cisiarii at Ostia Antica. As to TRAINING, the issue was simply to respond to pressing demands from the field. Inevitably, during and after every intervention, we found ourselves faced with the incapacity on the part of local authorities not only to continue on their own in the direction indicated, but also to maintain what had been accomplished so far. Lack of funds for training, but primarily the lack of appropriate structures, were always the reasons given. We are not talking here about specialized training; to the contrary, we are talking about basic training: the teaching of field practices which are often closer to common sense and to familiarity with the site and the monuments than to techniques of restoration or conservation. We are talking about those simple solutions that, with a good knowledge of traditional techniques and materials, can prevent greater damage in the vast majority of cases. We mean those practices of control and daily care that only personnel in place can carry out, and which almost always are enough to guarantee the future maintenance of monuments and sites. And this is what we have tried to convey in courses organized by UNESCO in Peru, or by the ICCROM PREMA programme in Africa, in Ostia at courses organized by the Regions of Lazio and Sardinia, and in Israel at courses organized by the Antiquities Authority and the National Parks Authority. (Nardi 1995)

Once again, the duties of the conservator expand even further, to include information of the public and training of conservation technicians. Our interventions today are aimed at the CONSERVATION of the monuments, their FUTURE MAINTENANCE, TRANSMISSION TO THE PUBLIC of the cultural and technical values of the monuments, and TRAINING of future generations of conservator-restorers. (Photo 8)

We seem to have reached the moment of conclusions, and I would like to do this by looking at where we are now. What we are doing and -- to return to the original argument -- what the market expects of us. First, a premise is necessary regarding INFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC. (Photo 6,7)

This is currently a highly popular theme: not only has it become an integral part of all our interventions, but it also has been codified in a recent European summit (held in Pavia in February of this year) as a fundamental part of the profession of conservator-restorer.

In particular, Article 6 mentions: "the assurance of an appropriate balance of integrated theoretical and practical teaching, as well as the teaching of strategies for communication in the education and training of the conservator-restorer" and Article 13 states: "the provision of appropriate resources to ensure improved communication between professionals, the public and the decision makers."

At the beginning of this presentation we saw how, 15 years ago, the activity (and budget) of a private company such as ours was entirely dedicated to restoration. Today, things are quite different. Restoration is still present; other activities are present to a significant degree, i.e.: documentation (now at the foundation of every conservation treatment); maintenance; conservation and protection; planning; training.

This last point has assumed such importance in our programs that we have decided to set up new headquarters, dedicated to offering monthly courses at a basic level of specialization, intended for technicians of archaeological sites and monuments. In these courses, the basic elements in preventive conservation are taught: documentation, survey and condition assessment, teamwork, analysis and problem-solving, strategic priorities (building priorities), final reporting, communication, teaching skills, use of traditional techniques and materials, first aid (during excavation and otherwise), maintenance techniques, protection techniques (reburial, wall capping, etc.).

The principal characteristic of restoration, which occupied us full time 15 years ago, is that it is an **ACTIVITY DIRECTED TOWARD THE ARTIFACT WITH A SHORT-TERM IMPACT.**

Instead, the characteristic of all the activities we are engaged in today (conservation, documentation, maintenance, planning, information and training) is that they are: **INDIRECT ACTIVITIES WITH A LONG-TERM IMPACT ON THE ARTIFACTS.**

This means that what we are doing today is more likely to last because it anticipates today and protects tomorrow. This is called **PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION.**(Melucco et al 1990)(La

Rocca et al 1994)

Permit me to close on a note of optimism: if this is what we are being asked to do (and being paid for) today, it means that not only our profession but also the market are finally ripe for PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION.

Captions.

1. Zippori, Israel. Conservation of the floor mosaics of the Building of the Nile. All the technical operations are implemented today on site, using traditional materials and techniques and respecting the entire historical content of the monuments.

2. Zippori, Israel. Conservation of the floor mosaics of the Building of the Nile. Consolidation techniques are mainly based on the use of lime-mortars. Superficial consolidation is made using liquid hydraulic mortar.

3. Rome, Arch of Septimus Severus. A complete check up of the state of conservation of the surfaces of the monument has been made in 1996, 10 years after the previous conservation treatment. The results of the lime wash used as sacrificial layer in 1985 were positive and the validity of the method "soft treatment today but constant maintenance tomorrow" was demonstrated. Obviously now the responsibilities of Administrators are defined and clear.

4. Rome, Atrium of the Capitoline Museum. The Atrium of the museum was conserved during 1990-1993 with an intervention planned on a long term maintenance programme. This project is still going on today and it is demonstrating how efficient constant maintenance is in terms of damages prevention and money saving.

5. Ostia Antica. Piazzale delle Corporazioni. Maintenance of mosaic floors. This operation is capable of keeping fragile monuments always over the "line of safety" using small time and resources.

6. Zippori, Israel. The building of the Nile. Information of the public is the sole, efficient channel to communicate how fragile cultural heritage is and how delicate and energy consuming its conservation can be. We believe that to communicate to the public similar information we will create in the long term new, sensitive generations of "users" of monuments and sites.

7. Masada, Israel. The great bath house. More than half million people visited the conservation work "live". Special structures have been built to welcome and to guide the public into the work-site.

8. Side, Turkey. Training is the activity that permits us to operate in our field investing in long term expectations programmes. Preventive conservation is the main theme to communicate to the conservators today.

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