

Reviews

The Venice Charter Revisited: Modernism, Conservation and Tradition in the 21st century. Edited by MATTHEW HARDY; foreword by HRH The Prince of Wales. Pp. 814, profusely illustrated in black and white, index. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars. 2009. £44.99 (HB). ISBN: 968-1847-186881

The demarcation lines for a precarious form of truce between the conservation and modern movements were epitomized by the coincidence between the 1933 *Charte d'Athènes*, a seminal manifesto of international modernism, and the 1964 *Venice Charter*, the key doctrinal document of international conservation. The 1933 *Charte d'Athènes*, whilst recognizing the protection of highly selected individual buildings and groups as representative examples of 'fine architecture', condemned any attempt at aesthetic assimilation through the use of historical styles for new structures in historic areas. The 1964 *Venice Charter* likewise insisted that new work 'must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp' (article 9), an insistence that is widely interpreted to be inclusive across the historic environment — whether in conservation work or new build.

As the baseline charter of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), formally established in 1965 as an advisory body on cultural heritage to UNESCO, it is hardly surprising that the same demarcation lines should be set out unambiguously in the 2005 *Vienna Memorandum on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture — Managing the Historic Urban Landscape*: 'contemporary architecture and preservation of the historic urban landscape should avoid all forms of pseudo-historical design, as they constitute a denial of both the historical and the contemporary alike' (article 21). Such intolerance makes for discord not concord, both philosophically and in practice.

It is an interesting coincidence that John Betjeman, writing in the *Charte d'Athènes* year of 1933, asserted that 'every style of Architecture lies open to our choice, and there is no *prima facie* reason why one should be preferred to another'. It is an unfortunate juxtaposition, therefore, that the UNESCO *Vienna Memorandum* is contemporaneous with the 2005 UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, a document that articulates and champions diversity both between geo-cultural localities and within them.

The Venice Charter Revisited is a polemic for a pluralist approach to interventions in the historic environment, whether in conservation work to individual buildings or in the design of new buildings in context — one that is not bound by fundamentalist ideologies from whatever source. It emanates from the stable of the International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture and Urbanism (INTBAU), whose secretary, Matthew Hardy, is the editor; the architect Robert Adam is the chairman, and HRH The Prince of Wales is its patron. Unsurprisingly, it provides strong advocacy in support of traditional architecture and urbanism in historic places: harmonious, creative relationships, not confrontational ones.

In this, *The Venice Charter Revisited* is not wholly discordant with ICOMOS, simply with the 1964 *Venice Charter*. Thus, as if to prove that international conservation manifestos, charters, and associated documents are a minefield of inconsistencies and contradictions, the 1999 ICOMOS *Cultural Tourism Charter* prioritized the use of local materials and the recognition of local architectural styles and vernacular traditions in new developments; and the ICOMOS *Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage*, also from 1999, established the principle that 'contemporary work on vernacular buildings, groups and settlements should respect their cultural values and their traditional character'.

The Venice Charter Revisited is an edited collection of sixty-four essays by specialists from around the world that explore the modernist and essentially euro-centric origins and authorship of the 1964 *Venice Charter*, and address the conflictual issues across a variety of geo-cultural frameworks. Thus, whereas the concept of *authenticity* in the UNESCO lexicon is interpreted in fundamentalist terms by specialists in Italy and Lithuania to require that every morsel of new fabric that is inserted as part of a conservation project is clearly identifiable as such, the concept of *integrity* as practised in Asian countries requires that the whole is more important than the parts. Or, as the late Sir Bernard Feilden averred in his seminal *Conservation of Historic Buildings* (Architectural Press, 2003, 3rd edn), ‘the object of restoration [a word with which, unlike the SPAB, he was comfortable] is to revive the original concept or legibility of a building’.

The sixty-four essays, each of which is a self-contained read, record an impressive range of building and urban situations and issues, challenge orthodox perceptions of *pastiche*, *revival*, and *reconstruction* — words that are anathema to hard-line conservationists and modernists alike — and take us on an uninhibited world tour that embraces Iraq and the USA in one of the sixteen themed sections and Nigeria and Romania in another.

Contributors explore Viollet-le-duc’s stylistic restoration of Carcassonne, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997 despite previous objections from ICOMOS; and recently reconstructed monuments in Dresden, within the cultural landscape that was delisted by UNESCO in 2009 for reasons that a colleague has described to me as ‘pedantic in the extreme’.

Authors include Navin Piplani, who challenges the relevance of ‘universal’ principles in the Indian context, where traditional methods and indigenous practices are the norm, not elevated to scientific specialisms for which the training is geo-culturally detached; Amund Sinding-Larsen, writing about Lhasa, who argues that lack of community ownership in the implementation of a coordinated conservation and development programme has, since the 1980s, transformed the character of the townscape ‘from being uniquely traditional and contextual into one of near deafening uniformity’; and Steven Semes, who pleads that the challenge today is to recontextualize our cities not, as hitherto, decontextualize their historic buildings.

The timing of *The Venice Charter Revisited* is significant. The UNESCO World Heritage Centre is currently in the process of drafting a new international standard-setting instrument for the holistic management of historic cities — the UNESCO *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* — with the view to its adoption at the UNESCO General Conference in the autumn of 2011. The 2005 *Vienna Memorandum*, informed in turn by the 1964 *Venice Charter*, is the formative predecessor document in that process; and whereas the contentious word *contemporary* — in the limited definition of conforming to modern ideas in style and fashion — still features, it has become progressively more muted over time.

The Venice Charter Revisited concludes with the 2007 INTBAU Venice Declaration, the aim of which is to encourage a more open and tolerant interpretation of the 1964 text than is evidenced in many of the book’s chapters.

The Venice Charter Revisited is an important reference for all who question inconsiderate dogma — be it conservationist or modernist.

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Archaeology and the Global Economic Crisis: Multiple Impacts, Possible Solutions. Edited by NATHAN SCHLANGER and KENNETH AITCHISON. Pp. 174. Tervuren: ACE/Culture Lab Editions. 2010. Free. Internet publication at <http://ace-archaeology.eu/fichiers/25Archaeology-and-the-crisis.pdf>. ISBN 978-2-9600527-7-0

A recent editorial in the journal *Public Archaeology* suggested that one would ‘look in vain’ for ‘even a modest quantity of good polling data and cultural economic analyses’ on the state

of the archaeological profession.¹ Perhaps the editors of that journal have been looking in the wrong places. The IfA produced its first analysis of the UK archaeological labour market in 1999, followed four years later by a more sophisticated study looking at a wider range of socio-economic variables.² This in turn led to the *Discovering the Archaeologists of Europe* (DISCO) project, funded by the European Commission between 2006 and 2008, which examined archaeological employment in twelve countries between 2006 and 2008. Almost all of the 16,657 archaeologists who were ‘discovered’ are educated to degree level or higher, 46 per cent are female, the average age is 39, and salaries are slightly over the EU average.³ The report also identified training needs and barriers to mobility. The data used in the DISCO project were collected in August 2007, and until then archaeological employment had been rising across Europe. In retrospect, this was a high-water mark. The ripples caused by the rapidly dropping stone of global financial markets began to spread, and by early 2009 nearly 10 per cent of archaeological jobs in the UK had been lost. The IfA convened a ‘recession seminar’ on 16 February of that year, and began monitoring archaeological employment on a quarterly basis.⁴ Similar effects were being felt elsewhere in Europe, although the precise consequences for any given country depended on the ways in which the archaeological profession there was structured. In response the editors of this volume organized a session on the crisis at the EAA conference in Riva del Garda on 17 September 2009.

This book has emerged from that session, and the editors are to be commended both for its speedy appearance (resulting in surprisingly few typographical errors) and for the way in which it reflects the changes which took place in the intervening eleven months. It is regrettable that papers presented at the conference from Germany, Romania, and Africa could not be included; however some additional papers have been recruited. The thirteen papers here cover a lot of ground, both thematically and geographically; the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, Russia, Poland, Spain, Hungary, Ireland, and the United States all provide case studies, sandwiched between an introduction and a postscript. As well as describing economic impacts, this volume also sees the crisis as a ‘prism’ through which ‘wider attitudes of our contemporary societies towards the heritage of the past’ can be understood. Four overlapping themes are identified: changes in heritage management policies and legislation; professional employment, training, and skills; research funding and priorities; and conservation and public outreach. Most of the papers attempt to address most of these themes, although the diversity of authors, institutions, and national systems results in a varied approach — not of itself a bad thing, but in this particular selection the first two themes are more strongly represented than the last two.

Jean-Paul Demoule opens the volume with a characteristic perspective on ‘Anglo-Saxon’ capitalism, arguing that the ‘ideologically promoted commercialization’ of French archaeology was fundamentally flawed even before the crisis. A more nuanced view of the French system is provided by Nathan Schlanger and Kai Salas Rossenbach, who suggest that the crisis has been used by the state to further promote the development of commercial archaeology. It is clear from both French papers that the regulatory system is the Achilles heel, rather than market forces *per se*. A similar problem dogs Polish archaeology, according to Arkadiusz Marciniak and Michał Pawleta. They describe a vibrant and efficient private sector, whose effectiveness is compromised by a ‘malfunctioning’ state system characterized by poor regulation of procurement and professional standards and ‘imprecise laws relating to the protection of cultural heritage’. Nevertheless Poland seems to offer considerable opportunity, as does Russia — at least on the evidence offered by Asya Engovatova — where tax breaks offered to small archaeological businesses appear to have created buoyancy in private-sector archaeology despite the recent downturn. The same cannot be said for Hungary. ‘Cul-de-sac or solution?’ is the question posed by Eszter Banffy and Pal Raczky; their analysis suggests that the opaque, inflexible, and old-fashioned system is going nowhere. In contrast, in countries where commercial archaeology is well developed the effect of the crisis has been more dramatic in terms of employment, but the underlying structures have remained robust. Jeff Altschul discusses

how the downturn in archaeological activity in the United States is closely related to fluctuations in the construction industry. A similar situation prevails in the similarly structured archaeological professions of the UK, the Netherlands, Spain, and Ireland — most dramatically in Ireland, and least consistently in Spain where the federal system has resulted in considerable variation in the effect of the economic crisis. In the Netherlands, the decentralization of archaeological regulation seems to have had positive impacts.

This book is essential reading for all archaeologists. Its stated aim is not to provide the definitive word on archaeology and the global crisis, but to give ‘a sense . . . of the multiple impacts of the crisis on archaeology’. In this it succeeds admirably. It is less successful in offering ‘possible solutions’, but as the crisis — and responses to it — are evolving rapidly, this is perhaps not surprising. There are some gaps in geographical coverage: Scandinavian and more Mediterranean contributions would have provided helpful perspectives, and papers from Africa, Asia, and the southern hemisphere would also be illuminating. However a further volume ‘with updated information and covering new countries, sectors and analyses’ is intended for 2011; this is also likely to include analysis of the longer-term impact of public-sector cuts on outreach, conservation, and higher education. As Nathan Schlanger notes in his postscript, the accumulated evidence of this volume clearly demonstrates that archaeology is ‘a reliable indicator of cultural and social well-being’ which is ‘reflected in the ways communities and stakeholders consider that the heritage of the past is a relevant asset, a source of knowledge and an opportunity for the future’. Free, and at 2.74 MB easily downloadable, even the editors of *Public Archaeology* could afford to read it.

Notes

¹ Tim Schadla-Hall, Gabriel Moshenska and Amara Thornton, ‘Editorial’, *Public Archaeology*, 9, 3 (2010), p. 125.

² Kenneth Aitchison, *Profiling the Profession: A Survey of Archaeological Jobs in the UK* (Council for British Archaeology, English Heritage and the Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1999); Kenneth Aitchison and Rachel Edwards, *Archaeology Labour Market Intelligence: Profiling the Profession*

2002–2003 (Cultural Heritage National Training Organisation, 2003).

³ <http://www.discovering-archaeologists.eu/> [accessed 19 November 2010]; Kenneth Aitchison, *Discovering the Archaeologists of Europe: Transnational Report* (Institute for Archaeologists, 2009).

⁴ These reports are all available on the IfA website at <http://www.archaeologists.net/profession/recession> [accessed 19 November 2010].