
AUTHENTICITY BETWEEN PURE THEORY AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION - THE BARRIER OF WORDS

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ABSTRACT: The theory on authenticity can generate disputes depending on the geographical and cultural space of those who define this concept. It seems, however, that this ideological dispute (see the Petzet-Araoz dialogue), tends to remain an abstraction related to the material and immaterial, ignoring some pragmatic elements that are at the root of the cultural misunderstandings related to the authenticity of heritage. I have selected three of them that I consider to be essential.

The first one is a linguistic component, in the context of the present prevalence of the English language over the French language (in which Venice Charter was conceived). The second aspect is related to the analysis criteria applied to the cultural models of today and not to those that were valid at the time when the assessed heritage elements were conceived. The third derives from the distinct character of the assessment of built heritage compared to the assessment of the movable or immaterial one.

The hypothesis of this article is that the word “authenticity” itself is the one at the root of the above mentioned cultural disputes and that it should be more often be replaced by “genuineness”.

KEY WORDS: Language, doctrine, evidence, forgery, misunderstanding

Introduction

The theory on authenticity can generate disputes depending on the geographical and cultural space of those who define this concept. It seems, however, that this ideological dispute (see the Petzet-Araoz argument¹), tends to remain an abstraction about the material and immaterial, ignoring some pragmatic elements that are at the root of the cultural misunderstandings related to the authenticity of heritage. I have selected three of them that I consider to be essential.

The first one is a linguistic component, in the context of the present prevalence of the English language over the French language (in which Venice Charter was conceived). The second aspect is related to the analysis criteria extracted from the cultural models of today and not from those that were valid at the time when the analyzed heritage was conceived. The third derives from the distinct character of the built heritage compared to the movable or immaterial one.

The hypothesis of this article is that the word "authenticity" itself is the main cause of the above mentioned cultural disputes.

The contemporary approach to the concept of authenticity in the Operational Guidelines of World Heritage Convention (WHC) totally avoids involving the substance - that is only part of its "characteristics" - and puts the entire emphasis on information and meanings of that information².

In her work involved in the 1994 Nara Conference, Françoise Choay³ suggested the idea that the origin of the concept of authenticity is linked to the development of the Christian Church and its laws.

The biblical text varies greatly in meaning depending on the language it was translated into – the English of the King James Bible versus the French or the first Romanian ones. What's more, the English text knows a much wider variety of translations, showing that the periods in history when particular forms of the sacred text were used are also important for decoding the different nuances the Bible may have had.

¹ The rather radical argument is published in: *Conservation Turn - Return to conservation: Tolerance for Change, Limits of Change: Proceedings of the International Conferences of the ICOMOS, International Scientific Committee for the Theory and the Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration*, 5-9 May 2010, Prague / Český Krumlov, Czech Republic, 3-6 March 2011, Florence, Italy, Edizioni Polistampa, Firenze, 2012. The antagonistic opinions are expressed in Araoz's article *Protecting Heritage Places under the New Heritage Paradigm & Defining Its Tolerance for Change. A Leadership Challenge for ICOMOS* and in Petzet's one, entitled *Conservation or management of change?*

² The current text of the operational guidelines, article 80: *The ability to understand the value attributed to the heritage depends on the degree to which information sources about this value may be understood as credible or truthful. Knowledge and understanding of these sources of information, in relation to original and subsequent characteristics of the cultural heritage, and their meaning, are the requisite bases for assessing all aspects of authenticity.*

³ Choay F. (1994). *Sept propositions sur le concept d'authenticité et son usage dans les pratiques du patrimoine historique* in Nara Conference on Authenticity, Unesco World Heritage Centre, Agency for Cultural Affairs, Proceedings, Romanian translation by Choay F., Kovács K. (1998). *Alegoria patrimoniului urmată de Șapte propoziții despre conceptul de autenticitate și folosirea acestuia în practica patrimoniului istoric*, Editura Simetria, București, p. 197

For instance, what were Adam's tasks when God placed him in the Garden of Eden according to the verses of the Genesis? Here are the multilingual versions of verse 2.15:

- French⁴: L'Éternel Dieu prit l'homme, et le plaça dans le jardin d'Éden pour le cultiver et pour le garder.
- English⁵: And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.
- Romanian⁶: Și a luat Domnul Dumnezeu pe omul **pe care-l făcuse** și l-a pus în grădina cea din Eden, ca s-o lucreze și s-o păzească.

Let's observe the word "dress" in the King James' version ("to till", in modern ones), which certainly has a completely different nuance than "cultiver" in French. The text of the first Romanian translation has one more emphasis than the others - the fact that the story was not about any man but precisely about The man created by God⁷. According to the Romanian text of the translated Bible, Adam had to work in the garden, which can be much more than cultivating. Neither of these options seem to fully reflect the Latin text though, which says that Adam was to use (*operaretur*) the garden and take care (*custodiret*) of it.

- Latin⁸: Tulit ergo Dominus Deus hominem et posuit eum in paradiso Eden, ut ***operaretur*** et ***custodiret*** illum;

We may deduce from the Latin text that the garden had not been given to Adam for himself as we may understand from the French or the English versions that are using the same words we tend to use when we want to communicate to a taxi driver that we do not need the rest of our money (***keep*** the change! /***gardez*** le reste!). The meaning of "custodian" (derived directly from Latin) implies an activity of taking care of something for someone who owns that thing, in this case for God. These nuances significantly change the fundamental text of the Christian religion and it becomes clear that, depending on the language and the culture from which the believer comes, the differences in interpretation can be quite important.

A good example may be a particular painting by Hyeronimus Bosch describing the Garden of Eden. It reflects one of the most fundamental problems debated at the beginning of the Christian religion. It is about the doctrinal dispute on the divine nature of Jesus, the reason for convening the First Council at Nicaea where the concept of Holy Trinity emerged by the stating that Jesus was of the same essence as God. In the ideological disputes of those times, Thessaloniki played an important role because the edict of Theodosius the Great, issued there in 380, established that only the Nicaea creed was the authentic description of divinity and that any other interpretation of the nature of Jesus was heresy. Therefore, this is a part of the beginnings of the concept of

⁴ <https://bible-en-ligne.net/bible,01O-2,genese.php> , date accessed 2025, April 23.

⁵ <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/k/kjv/kjv-idx?type=DIV1&byte=1477> , date accessed 2025, April 23.

⁶ <https://www.bibliaortodoxa.ro/carte.php?id=25&cap=2> , date accessed 2025, April 23.

⁷ A precision that appears also in the multiple versions of the Vetus Latina.

⁸ https://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/nova_vulgata/documents/nova-vulgata_vt_genesis_lt.html , date accessed 2025, April 23.

authenticity, as an authority stated in an official act what is to be considered true and what is to be identified as false. Being the reflection of the ability to understand the meaning of the text of Genesis in relation to the time and place of its interpretation, Bosch's description can be considered an authentic visual transposition of the biblical text, according to the text of art. 80 of the WHC Operational Guidelines. On the other hand, the image is an obvious distortion of the biblical text because, instead of God, it introduces a “future Jesus” into the picture, who presents Eve to Adam. This vision is consistent with the Nicaea creed (Jesus as equal in essence to God) but not at all with the original Hebrew conception of the Genesis. Therefore, through this painting, Bosch becomes a concrete example of the Italian saying “traduttore-traditore”, as he is presenting an image that is false from the strict point of view of the text of the Old Testament but, at the same time, is also an authentic one in relation to the concept brought by the New Testament interpreted at Nicaea.



Fig.1 Fragment of the left panel of “The Garden of Earthly Delight” triptych by Hieronymus Bosch depicting the presentation of Eve to Adam by Jesus Christ and not by Yahweh/Elohim/Adonai. Source: public domain, Hieronymus Bosch, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Garden_of_earthly_delights.jpg, date accessed 2025, April 23

The need to have a canonical text, a translation unanimously used in the developing Christian world, is also linked to this moment of the search for "universal truth" as the origin of the quest for "authenticity". In this context, Saint Jerome explains in the preface of the translation he coordinated⁹ that authenticity is sought in the fact that the texts he used were from Hebrew and not from Greek sources, the translation from Greek being considered by him as "second hand". The secondary origin was described as "proven", serving him to discern what is authentic ("in the canon") and what is not ("apocryphal texts"). In the end, as Françoise Choay already remarked, authenticity involves three simple things – an authority, an indisputable basis of its assessment and a certification issued by that authority. Finally, some centuries after Saint Jerome's time, this was explicitly expressed on the cover of the first Latin Bible declared to be official – known as the Sixtine Vulgate – by the words "recognita et approbata" inserted in the central cartouche.

This became the basis of any official gazette in the world – the idea that the reference legal texts are those that are published by the legitimate authority of a state in a certified publication. Here appears again the problem of such a text: it must be understood equally by all, considering the conditions of multilingualism encapsulated yet in another biblical story, the theme of the Tower of Babel. It is the case of the European Union and the official journal with versions in all the official languages of the union but it is also the case of all the doctrinal texts of heritage conservation.

1. The language choice concerning official texts used in doctrinal or in administrative arguments

The global cultural context has changed over the last couple of centuries, so that the predominant role among the languages of global circulation is no longer French but English. Most of the time, when we refer to universal and fundamental doctrinal or legal texts, we tend to use English even if, for example, the draft text of Venice Charter was actually conceived in French. Translations can bring different nuances that are capable of generating very different approaches, depending on the cultural space where these fundamental texts are applied. This is the case of the text of the World Heritage Convention, which has official versions in both French and English.

An example of variation is the text of Article 40 of the Operational Guidelines. The English text speaks of "management plans" while the French text uses the term "plans de gestion". Although the meaning may seem clear to those reading in English or French, choosing one of the variants may distort the intended meaning for a reader from another language, such as Romanian, for example. Romanian is a Romance language but its contemporary form also includes the word "management" as a neologism. Therefore, the Romanian reader can use both words, each with a different nuance, reflecting their root languages. Thus, "gestiune" is an activity that involves the implementation of established rules, a simple administration, while "management" is understood as a more complex activity, which involves permanent adaptation, involving both planning and promotion or innovation in the search for a profit. So, what does the article want to produce as a result? Obviously, under these conditions, depending on the choice of the reference language, a person from cultures other than those based on English or French could have different approaches

⁹ <https://www.bible-researcher.com/jerome.html>, date accessed 2025, April 23.

to this article of the normative act. If we return to the theme of the Garden of Eden, we could ask ourselves: what was Adam? Was he a “manager”, who could transform the garden, or just a “gestionnaire”, a simple concierge of the garden, maintaining it in the state in which he received it? After all, the authentic meaning of the word “work” used in the Genesis chapter 2 could clarify the difference between the agricultural work as a divine gift in Paradise and the agricultural work as a divine punishment after Adam was expelled from Eden.

Unfortunately, following translation, Venice Charter goes even further into the area of variation in meaning. The French and English texts simply say distinct things in two of the articles, namely 9 and 15. According to the English version, article 9 communicates the highly specialized nature of restoration. In fact, the fundamental idea of this article is expressed by the French version, which says, as Didron, Ruskin and Camillo Boito already had argued in the 19th century, that restoration should only take place as an exceptional measure. Moreover, according to the English version, it is necessary to document the situation before and after restoration by means of surveys. However, the French text captures better the fundamental idea of documenting the interventions. It becomes much more useful to rely on the French text as, most of the times, restoration also may imply the elimination of some components and, in this respect, this version instructs us that documentation is important not only before and after the works but must be done throughout the process. Unfortunately, in the first Romanian translation of this article in 1967, the issue of documentation was even completely omitted. Also omitted was the possible motivation of a hypothetical reconstruction, which could be justified by aesthetic or technical needs. As a consequence, it is obvious that the reader of article 9 has different duties depending whether one reads the text in English or whether one reads it in Romanian or French.

The problem becomes even more complex not when the texts are different but when they give the impression that they refer to the same concept. One of the major problems facing the topic of authenticity is the use of a word that may seem identical in English and French – “reconstruction”. Current online machine translation technology can easily mislead us. Any attempt to translate “reconstitution” from French to English will lead us to the word “reconstruction”. In reality, French uses the two words – “reconstitution” and “reconstruction” - with significantly different meanings, which is also obvious in the Venice Charter, one being used in Article 9 and the other in Article 15. The English version completely avoids explicitly using the version “reconstitution” in Article 9 but speaks of “reconstruction” in Article 15. Returning to the observation that the English language has become dominant at a global level, it becomes obvious that the differentiation in the French version is completely blurred and that doctrinal discussions regarding authenticity tend to revolve only around the English word “reconstruction”, whose meaning can be quite ambiguous.

The consequences of this ambiguity are quite clear, as shown by the concern arising from the Riga Charter of 2000. The wave of reconstructions in the Baltic states (and throughout Eastern Europe) demonstrates that the notion of “reconstitution” inhibited by the French version of the Venice Charter was abundantly substituted by that of “reconstruction” from the English version, losing over the years the care for avoiding conjecture. What more appropriate example can there be in this sense than one from a Baltic country? A few years after the formulation of the idea that

“replication of cultural heritage is in general a misrepresentation of evidence of the past”¹⁰, the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania was being reconstructed in Vilnius.

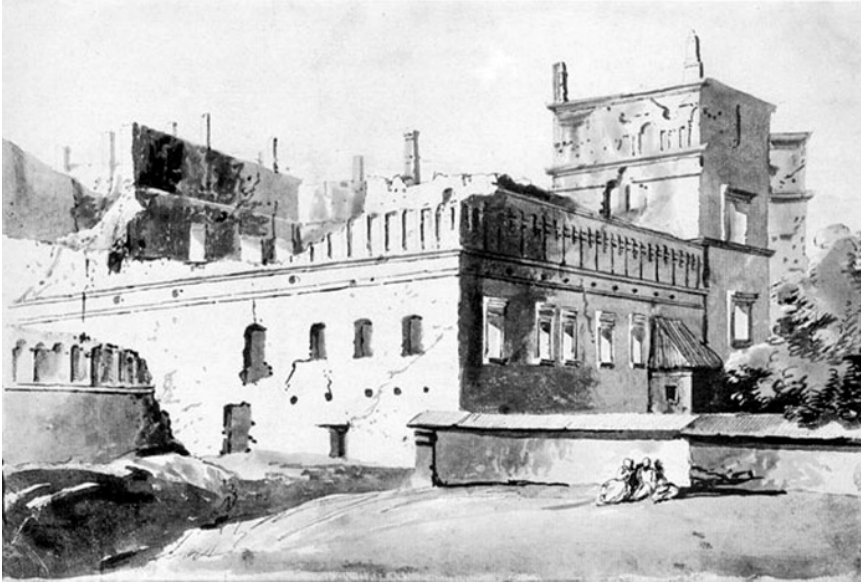


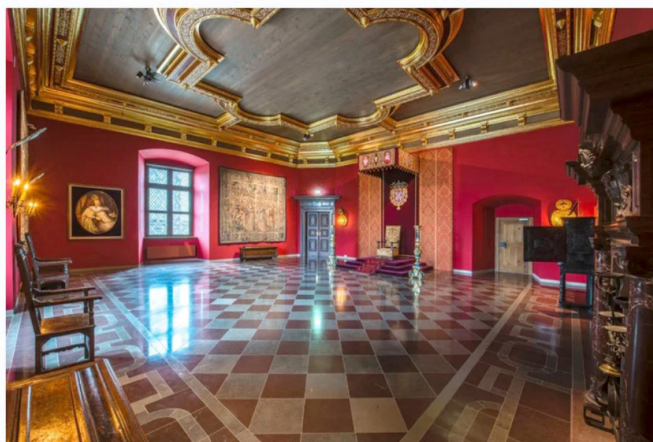
Fig. 2 The latest drawn image of the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania before its demolition at the beginning of the XIXth century. Source: public domain, Franciszek Smuglewicz, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Royal_Palace_of_Vilnius_in_XVIIIc._Lithuania.jpg, date accessed 2025, April 23



Fig 3 The building site of the palace while it was in the process of its total reconstruction in 2006. Photo: Author

¹⁰ *Riga Charter*, 2000, https://www.iccrom.org/sites/default/files/publications/2020-05/convern8_07_rigacharter_ing.pdf, date accessed 2025, April 23

The Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania



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Working hours:
September-May:
II, III: 10:00-18:00
IV: 10:00-20:00
V, VI: 10:00-18:00
VII: 10:00-16:00
I: Closed

Fig. 4 A print screen of a web page promoting cultural tourism in Vilnius. It shows a throne room as it would have been supposed to look like in a certain baroque period. Since there are only a few known paintings and drawings of the palace and all of them are depicting its exteriors, the authenticity of this interior space is quite questionable. Can this be defined as “heritage” or is it just a possible “image of heritage”, a décor usable as a movie set? Source: unknown author, <https://www.govilnius.lt/visit-vilnius/places/the-palace-of-the-grand-dukes-of-lithuania>, date accessed 2025, April 23

This building was, without a doubt, the expression of a national pride linked to the past glory of the Lithuanians but, nevertheless, had been absent from the collective memory for more than 200 years. The reconstruction had only a reference engraving partially illustrating this palace in ruins at the end of the 18th century and the foundations revealed by archaeological research. Obviously, any reconstruction made two centuries after the disappearance of a monument could only be hypothetical. How is it possible that such an insertion could be accepted in a site belonging to the UNESCO world heritage since, because of this label, it should pass the test of authenticity and integrity? This could only be explained by the frequent use of the permissive word “reconstruction” and by the constant avoidance of the restrictive word “reconstitution”.

It is clear that, in the ideological disputes over the concept of authenticity, there is always the risk that, when we use a *lingua franca* that is not our own from a cultural point of view, we could be left with the impression that we may talk about the same thing but referring to aspects with different nuances or, on the contrary, we may consider ourselves in opposition to our partners of discussion but, in fact, affirming the same ideas. It is possible that, just as in the early era of Christianity, when a schism was ultimately stimulated by the use of Latin words that mistranslated Greek ones (which apparently had the same meaning although they differed in sense), the diverse use of only one language that assumes a dominant official status may inevitably lead to nuances that are not common to all cultures, especially in the East-West division. The risk is all the greater as the word “authenticity” has accumulated nuances that are interconnected in a very complex fabric, which offers far too many keys for interpretation.

2. Assessment of significance according to present standards instead of those common to the specific heritage's inception

This cultural mistake may be considered one of the main causes for the “Cancel culture” movement of recent years. *Damnatio memoriae* is, however, a type of reaction of society that can be documented since antiquity. Among the most infamous manifestations of this type of social movement against cultural heritage elements were the acts of vandalism of the French Revolution. The statues of the gallery of kings on the west façade of Notre Dame cathedral in Paris were beheaded by the angry revolutionaries simply because they were anti-monarchists and because they believed that they were destroying effigies of French kings, not of the biblical ones, as they should have been seen. Sometimes, however, the values of society tend to return to the point where they have been annulled in the past, as was the case with the overthrow of the communist regime in Romania. Once communism was established in Romania after the overthrow of the monarchy on December 30th 1947, the equestrian statue of the first king of the Kingdom of Romania (which had been inaugurated in the square of the Royal Palace in Bucharest in 1939) was destroyed. After 6 decades of absence, another equestrian statue of King Carol I was erected on the same site and in a similar form, a few years after the communist regime was overthrown at its own turn and after the idea of monarchy had been strongly fought in the first post-revolutionary years. Should we consider such a cycle of destruction and restoration, which can occur with every change in the mores of society, as something normal? This should not happen because all these evaluations are related to a set of values, most often reflecting some political views of a particular moment, which are valid only in a specific time segment and cannot be associated with those values valid during the time of the emergence of the cultural properties that have acquired heritage value over the years.

History cannot have authentic physical testimonies that we may evaluate as “positive memory” or “negative memory”. These simply may or may not have a memorial relevance. They simply exist and, despite the ancient belief that it is possible to successfully implement a *damnatio memoriae*, the destruction of physical forms of memory cannot erase the historical facts that led to their appearance. Such destruction may only diminish the ability of future generations to correctly understand those historical facts. And the past cannot be correctly understood on the basis of the set of values of the present but through the filter of those of that specific past. This is a statement that can be proven by the savage destruction of “idols” that had an exceptional universal value – the sites of Palmyra or Bamyán. Some religious fanatics destroyed cultural symbols of a past that did not correspond to the narrow values propagated by ISIS or the Taliban, but these destructions could not erase history itself, since the veneration of the Roman gods did once happen in Palmyra just as the veneration of Buddha did once happen in Bamyán, no matter how long or brief the presence of Islamic cultures will be in those territories.

Such abominable acts¹¹ are always committed not against the material but against the significance of some monuments, in the same way that the need to reconstruct lost monuments does not necessarily derive from their artistic or scientific value but arises from their significance. In this case, another doctrinal confusion may occur when the concept of authenticity is debated. I consider that Françoise Choay was wrong when stating that the concept of authenticity could not be associated with a significance. In fact, there is a proof offered by a court ruling in this regard, given in the notorious trial between sculptor Constantin Brâncuși and the US Customs almost a century ago¹². The reason for the trial was that the customs officers had taxed the work "Bird in Space" as an industrial object and the court was to establish whether or not the object produced by Brâncuși was art. Since at that time sculpture was still predominantly figurative, the lawyers of the US Customs constantly emphasized that the sculpture did not resemble a bird at all. In this context, Brâncuși allegedly declared that, in reality, he did not even want to represent a bird but its flight. The fundamental idea of this process is that it proves that the meaning attributed by the US customs officers to Brâncuși's sculpture could be declared wrong by a court decision. In other words, that object had an artistic meaning and, moreover, its author had already identified its authentic significance.

This fact does not invalidate the argument brought by Françoise Choay by quoting the poet Paul Valéry¹³, namely that the meaning of his verses would be opposable only to him, each reader having the freedom to find their own interpretations, as the existence of multiple meanings would be an essential prerequisite of poetry. If the poet's statement quoted by Choay is fundamental to poetry, this does not mean, however, that it should also be applied to the scientific nature of the study of heritage, which is a fundamental component of the exact and non-romanticized knowledge of history. In fact, this is an error that leads to current conceptions regarding the preeminence of intangible aspects, which allow the physical substance of built heritage to be transformed or, worse, "reconstructed" on the basis of variable significances stemming from the technical and moral standards of the present. Such an approach would perpetually place us in the paradigm of Viollet le Duc, for whom the restoration of the monument could mean the production of an object that might have not even ever existed in the proposed form¹⁴. In practice, since it is a scientific process, based on research and the identification of indisputable evidence of the past, the researcher of Brâncuși's art MUST try to discover the authentic meaning of the artist's works. Without limiting the right of ordinary viewers to find their own interpretations of his art, the researcher should first prove whether Brâncuși's claim that he wanted to represent

¹¹ Infamous destructions of Bamyian Budhas by the Talibans took place in March 2001 and those of the site of Palmyra were committed by the Islamic State in multiple actions in August-October 2015 and in January 2017.

¹² Notorious case reflected in: https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2014/07/24/but-is-it-art-constantin-brancusi-vs-the-united-states/, date accessed 2025, April 23.

¹³ Choay F., Kovács K. (1998). *Alegoria patrimoniului urmată de Șapte propoziții despre conceptul de autenticitate și folosirea acestuia în practica patrimoniului istoric*, Editura Simetria, București, (p 199).

¹⁴ The exact quote and examples of his approach are concentrated at: <https://histoiredesarts.culture.gouv.fr/Dossiers-thematiques/Un-artiste-en-son-temps-Eugene-Viollet-le-Duc-1814-1879> , date accessed 2025, April 23.

flight is authentic, in the sense that it can be documented by multiple testimonies, by audio recordings, by written notes from the US Customs trial, and so on. Therefore, when investigating heritage values, the authenticity of a meaning should be about factual historical aspects and not about the variety of aesthetic or moral sensibilities of the present.

From this point of view, it is not the attribution of wrong meanings by ordinary people that can be so disturbing in relation to heritage as it is when such errors are promoted by authorities (whether legal or scientific). Brâncuși offers us another relevant example through his ensemble in Târgu Jiu, recently included in the World Heritage List (WHL) as “Monumental Ensemble of Târgu Jiu”. A “tradition” is often invoked here, that has thus been stimulated to persist by traditional media and social media. Young couples often come to kiss and declare their love at one of the elements of the ensemble – the Gate of the Kiss. Undoubtedly, the confusion is created by the name of this element of the ensemble, believed to be a romantic symbol which, in reality, is a funerary one. The ensemble commemorates the death of some local heroes who fell in October 1916 while defending the bridge over the Jiu River, very close to the place where the monumental axis created by Brâncuși begins. Thus, the gate is the symbol of the kiss of death, of passage from life to eternity. It is completed at the end of the commemorative axis by the Endless Column, symbolizing the ascension to Heaven. Not coincidentally, the Gate schematically represents the theme of the kiss used by Brâncuși as a funerary element at the tomb of Tatiana Rachewskaia in the Montparnasse cemetery, recently classified as a historic monument¹⁵. This representation is multiplied into 40 schematic kisses forming a continuous belt on the architrave, so referring to the number of days that passed from the resurrection of Jesus to his ascension to heaven. Thus, the symbol becomes very clear, despite the fact that Brâncuși never explained the meaning of his work.



Fig. 5 (left) is a still picture from a YouTube video reflecting a so called “tradition” of young couples to kiss under the Gate of Kiss sculpted by Brâncuși. Source: Traveliștii, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-37wgIk_3IM, minute 3:51, date accessed 2025, April 23. In order to gain popularity, the current (as well as the previous) mayor of Târgu Jiu frequently organizes mass weddings in front of the commemorative work of art, as seen in Fig. 6 (right). Source: unknown author, https://www.pandurul.ro/articol/au-spus-da!-la-poarta-sarutului-de-dragobete_87626.html, date accessed 2025, April 23

¹⁵ <https://www.conseil-etat.fr/Pages-internationales/english/news/brancusi-s-the-kiss-must-remain-in-montparnasse-cemetery>, date accessed 2025, April 23.

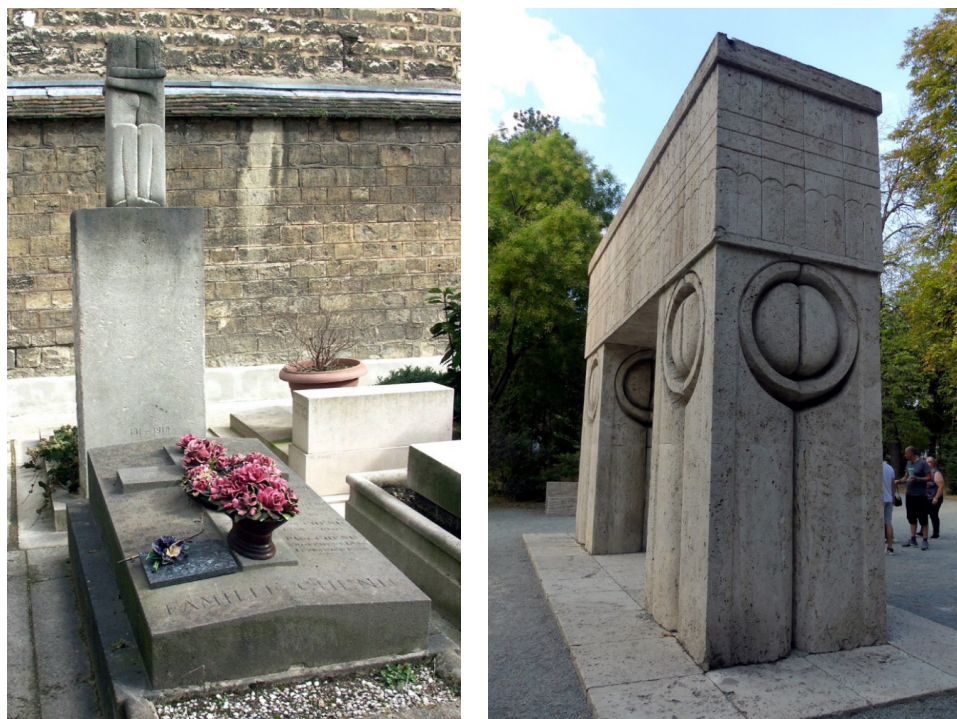


Fig. 7 (left) represents the funerary monument sculpted by Brâncuși for a tomb in the Montparnasse Cemetery. It is the third “Kiss” of his series and the only one to represent the embraced lovers with full bodies. Source: unknown author, <https://infoinsider.ro/2023/02/18/constantin-brancusi-primul-sarut-e-la-craiova-iar-singurul-in-care-trupurile-sunt-reprezentate-in-intregime-la-paris/>, date accessed 2025, April 23 This kiss is also represented 40 times in a schematic form generating a belt all around the lintel of the Gate of Kiss in Târgu Jiu pictured in Fig. 8 (right). Photo: Author

Therefore, the local mayor's practice of periodically celebrating mass weddings at the Gate of the Kiss, accompanied by performances of folk music bands, is unacceptable. This is because, beyond simply mystifying the authentic significance of the ensemble, this ultimately defiles the memory of the heroes to whom the commemorative monument is dedicated, as it represents not a gesture of ignorant people but of the authority that should cultivate and honor this memory of fallen defenders of the city.

3. Double standard in assessing movable versus built heritage

Does “management of change” seem a reasonable concept for art? Is “use value” defined by Alois Riegl¹⁶ so important that it can justify different types of assessment? If an extension motivated by the need to reconstruct something, in part or in whole, is considered acceptable for a historic monument, would anyone imagine reconstructing the missing parts of works of art such as the Belvedere Torso? Michelangelo himself allegedly refused such an option when asked by Pope Julius II to do it.

¹⁶ Riegl A. (1903). *Der moderne Denkmalkultus, sein Wesen, seine Entstehung*, Romanian translation by Nistor, S. (1999), Bucharest, Universul S.A.

In Article 8, the Venice Charter recognizes a clear difference in the practice of evaluating the two types of cultural heritage. Since pieces of movable heritage associated with the built heritage can be replaced by replicas and the originals can be moved to museums (in order to prevent degradation), it becomes clear that in the case of movable heritage the value of the material is considered superior. An example may be considered the Piazza della Signoria in Florence. At the level of built space we can be satisfied with the authenticity offered by a copy of Michelangelo's statue of David but, for the statue itself, it seems mandatory for any art lover to see the original at the Galleria dell' Accademia. No art lover will be satisfied with contemplating just the copy in the square. Then why do we find acceptable to visit fakes like the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania in Vilnius or the so called House of Lucius in Carnuntum¹⁷?

After all, this aspect is natural and confirmed by the market economy because no one can imagine that an art buyer would ever pay millions of dollars for a sculpture made in the "authentic style of Brâncuși" but will want to make sure that the acquired object is indeed sculpted by Brâncuși. On the other hand, in the domain of built heritage operates another rule, also of an economic nature. This was underlined by Alois Riegl, who noted the conflicts between the different types of values associated with built heritage. The use value always negatively affects the commemorative value, the historical value or the artistic value since the reason for the existence of any construction is to generate financial income and, in this respect, built heritage makes no exception. The principle is formulated in Article 5 of the Venice Charter and Article 11 of the Granada Convention, that are both recommending to assign a viable economic use to it in order to perpetuate the existence of such built heritage.

In the case of the two examples, from Vilnius and Carnuntum, the economic purpose is doubled by the claim of scientific precision of the reconstructions which can only be a deception. Do we want young visitors to remain with the impression that there can be an exact replica of Roman furniture when wooden pieces from that era are extremely rare and come from very particular archaeological situations¹⁸? Can we be convinced by the image worthy of an AIRBNB advertisement made for Lucius' House that an authentic Roman dwelling had such large flat rectangular glazed surfaces considering that such windows could not have been preserved as a reference for a replica "true to the original", as this reconstruction is presented to be? By definition, a forgery is a creation that aims to deceive a potential receptor. The presentation made for the "heritage" that is the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Vilnius fits in this definition taking into account the description made on the website dedicated to promoting world heritage visits, from where we learn that this monument stands there for centuries. The palace is not at all described as a hypothetical reconstruction but as building that was merely "revived" or "renewed" - very vague words when assessing authenticity¹⁹.

¹⁷ <https://www.carnuntum.at/en/houseoflucius> , date accessed 2025, April 23.

¹⁸ Mols S. (n.d.). *Ancient Roman Household Furniture and its Use: From Herculaneum to the Rhine*. <https://revistas.um.es/apa/article/view/178081/149581>

¹⁹ <https://visitworldheritage.com/en/eu/palace-of-grand-dukes-of-lithuania/e6e9e9ad-7cf4-4932-b1af-95e9a5f54b18> , date accessed 2025, April 23

There are stricter rules in the field of movable heritage, making forgery a criminal offense. In the field of built heritage, however, there is no such thing. Has anyone heard of an architect being convicted of forgery when reconstructing “heritage”?

4. Proper words

The word “reconstruction” can be linked to a multitude of other words that, with different nuances, express the same thing. We have: copy, facsimile, duplicate, reproduction, replica, reconstitution, clone, imitation. All of these can only be second-hand; in order to have them, an original must have existed at some time. Returning to the wisdom of Saint Jerome, shouldn't we consider these second-hand elements non-canonical? Is it correct to call “heritage” something that we did not actually inherit but we are currently producing ourselves? Shouldn't we call these works “apocryphal heritage”? Naturally, some of these objects may have patrimonial values, to be confirmed only in the future and only for their own characteristics, not because they would be assimilated to their once lost original. The copy of Trajan's Column, cast from the molds taken in 1938 and kept at the National Museum of History of Romania, has a special scientific value today because it preserves details that the original has lost in recent decades of accelerated erosion due to pollution. It is another type of heritage; its value being derived from the historical information it encapsulates. The replica of Laocoon made by Bandinelli became heritage in itself, not because it replaces the original. After all, like Viollet le Duc centuries later, Bandinelli himself claimed that his work was superior to the original, meaning that it has to be different from it.

This article is a plea to focus more on the word “genuine” and less on “authentic”. Having the same root as the word that designates the first part of the Bible – Genesis – at the beginning of this plea, it expresses the direct physical relationship with the moment of any creation. It is obvious today that any genuine object can only be authentic while not every object considered authentic is necessary genuine. A shoe can be presented as having the “authentic smell” or the “authentic texture” of leather but the buyer will always prefer the shoe that bears the “genuine leather” certification. If the archaeological site of Hisarlik can be presented as the authentic site of Troy, only one of its layers can be the genuine one in relation to the war described by Homer.

This problem is highlighted by the changes in the WHC Operational Guidelines regarding the application of criterion VI when inscribing a cultural property in the WHL. If before 2012 the association with immaterial elements was acceptable only exceptionally and only in relation to other cultural or natural criteria, after 2012 this provision became a simple recommendation. This is how we came to inscribe in the WHL sites that “have followed detailed scientific guidelines on forms, structures and materials” and which “follows a clearly identified and scientifically defined tradition of authenticity”. In this context, the respective heritage is, in fact, “ex nihilo reconstructions of long-disappeared buildings”²⁰. That is a heritage that has had a break of over 125 years in its existence, just as the palace in Vilnius came to be after a disappearance of more than two centuries! Isn't this an obvious form of transforming *history* into a simple *story*, even a “docufiction”²¹?

²⁰ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1439> , date accessed 2025, April 23.

²¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Docufiction>, date accessed 2025, April 23.

Let's take a closer look at another archaeological site in Turkey, that of Göbekli Tepe. Still too recent as a discovery, the site seems to be already universally accepted as the first known sanctuary of humanity, because this is the interpretation given by the archaeologists who conducted the research there.

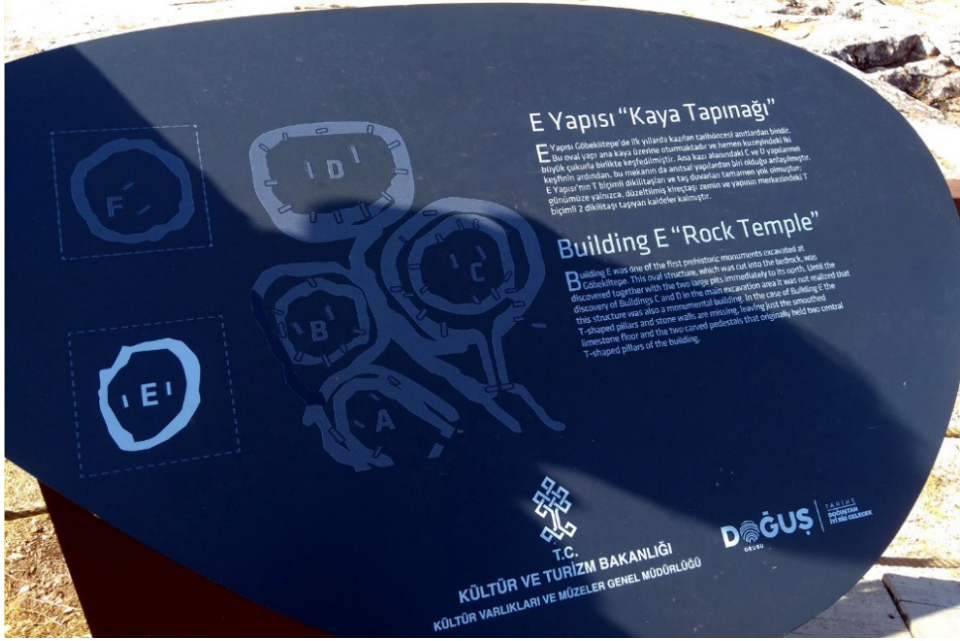


Fig. 9 A site explanation panel at Göbekli Tepe, indicating one of the excavated enclosures as a temple.
Photo: Author

Even in the multimedia space of the local small site museum, the visitor can watch a spectacular immersive sound and light show of the “docufiction” category, which seems to endorse this variant of interpreting prehistory. But what if the discovered structures are just an archetypal form of collective habitation of those ancient tribes and not necessarily a sanctuary?



Fig. 10 A detail of one of the excavated enclosures at Göbekli Tepe, where there is a clear setting of different slab stones placed in-between the peripheral T-shaped pillars that once probably supported a kind of roof. Those stones might represent the private spaces of different members of the clan that may have lived here in prehistoric times, in a large space with a central fire-pit, with a large opening in the central part of the roof supported by the main T-shaped pillars in the center of the enclosure. Photo: Author

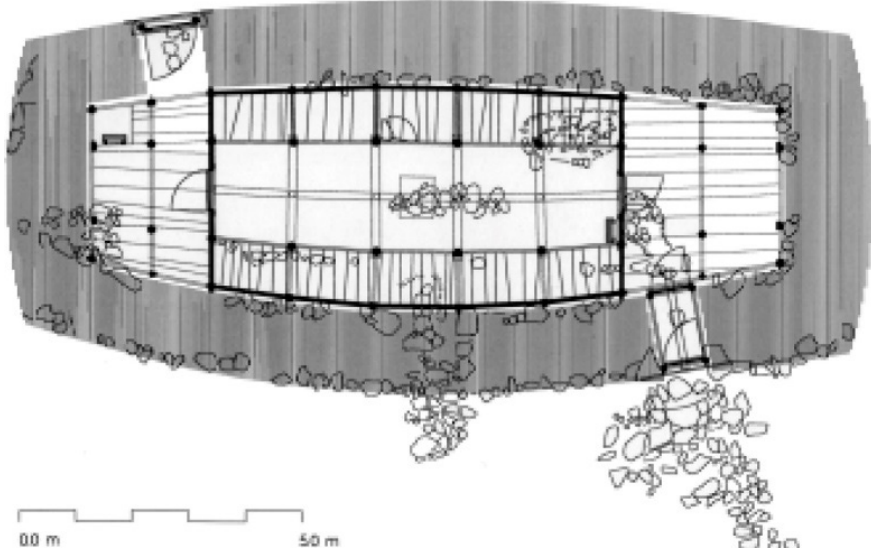


Fig. 11 A schematic reconstructed plan of a Viking long-house based on a site excavation of a Viking site. It is a typical dwelling, either for pit-houses or for above the ground wooden structures Vikings used to build. The space is developed around a fire heart, with a central opening in the roof structure. In-between the vertical structural elements, on the sides, there used to be sleeping platforms and benches, creating a communal living for extended families. Source: – Gretar Markúson, Stefán Örn Stefánsson, <https://www.thjodminjasafn.is/media/rannsoknir/1998-11-Eiriksstadir-i-Haukadal.pdf>, p.29, date accessed 2025, April 23

Observing the arrangement of the stones, I had the strong impression that it could very well have been a distant (in time and space) Viking collective pit house. Why not observe also the similarity with another type of archaic habitation, from the other side of the world, the Mongolian yurt?



Fig. 12 The interior of a Mongolian yurt with striking similarities to the Göbekli Tepe enclosures – a round shaped space around a central opening in the roof, with two T-shaped vertical supports delimitating the cooking and heating space of the stove. Sleeping space is located adjacent to the circular enclosure. Source: - Efrat Nakash, www.EfratNakash.com, date accessed 2025, April 23

Wouldn't this interpretation radically change the framework through which we would understand our evolution as humanity? Such certainty can only be provided by a scrupulous preservation of the genuine material, by meticulously recording the physical relationships in which the various material elements were at the time of their discovery. As in a murder trial, society expects the judge to make a decision based not on a circumstantial story but on physical evidence such as fingerprints or DNA samples that are undoubtedly linked to the place and time of the crime in question. In this sense, the Declaration of San Antonio (1996) is a text with a precision and rigor of formulation²² that deserves better attention among heritage professionals in the debates on authenticity.

To emphasize the preeminence of the genuine character over the authentic one, a concrete case of the utmost notoriety must be evoked – the restoration of the Laocoon statuary group based on the interpretation of its meaning. There is a legend according to which, after the discovery of the famous fractured and incomplete statue, a competition was held to find the way to reconstruct

²² “Only through study, publication and research of the physical evidence can these sites and their objects once again manifest their values and re-establish their links to our present cultural identity. However, the interpretation of the sites can authentically reflect only fluctuating interests and values, and in itself, interpretation is not inherently authentic, only honest and objective. For these reasons, the intactness of the physical evidence in its entirety demands the most thorough documentation, protection and conservation so that objectivity of interpretation may respond to new information derived from that fabric.” – <https://www.icomos.org/en/resources/charters-and-texts/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/188-the-declaration-of-san-antonio> , date accessed 2025, April 23.

parts of the work of art since Laocoon's right arm had not yet been found. It is said that Michelangelo stated that the meaning of the priest's gesture was one of despair because fate was impossible to be changed. The gesture was supposed to be emphasized by an arm bent towards his back, seemingly in a desperate but futile effort to rip the snake apart. The replica of the statue made by Bandinelli presents another solution, with an arm almost outstretched and the restoration of the original statue had an arm even more dramatically outstretched, in a gesture that was interpreted as a heroic sign of defiance of the gods, a completely different meaning than that proposed by Michelangelo. In 1957, half a century after its discovery, the missing arm was reattached to the statue, changing the shape it had since its initial restoration in 1540. The discovered arm was the genuine missing part, matching in every way the original incomplete sculpture, having the shape allegedly anticipated by Michelangelo more than 500 years earlier.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this story, to the extent that the legend would be true. The first conclusion is that there was an original significance that can be considered authentic since, without seeing the shape of the original arm, Michelangelo would have described it accurately, as an element that supported the meaning explained by him. The discovery of the missing piece was thus an indubitable confirmation of the authenticity of this assigned significance. The second conclusion is that, by the reverse of reasoning, only the original substance can serve for correct interpretations or reinterpretations of the significances of heritage, given that the initial restoration proved to be inauthentic in shape.

Another legend must be invoked in this regard. In the fever of the cult for the Charlot character in the 1920s, frequent competitions were held to find the best impersonator, the most "authentic" Charlot. In this context, it is said that, out of amusement and lacking the famous accessories of his character – the mustache, the cane, the shoes and the bowler hat, Charlie Chaplin himself would have entered such a contest. Legend has it that not only did he lose the competition but that he would not have even been ranked among the laureates! Such a legend does not even matter whether it is true or not. The simple fact that it circulated in press articles of the era suggests that society would not be in any way surprised if the "genuine" had lost to the "authentic".

5. Conclusions

Heritage tends to lose the significance of hard evidence of a factual history it used to have and becomes merely the expression of our current “ability to understand its values” and of our current expectations regarding the perception of others about us, as “heritage communities”. And it is not to be forgotten that the economic profit made from this new kind of “apocryphal heritage” produced by “reconstructions” is more and more preferred over the historic truth. Even the word “truth” itself tends to be avoided, as “authenticity” (that used to be synonymous with it) is a term considered to be relative²³. Heritage specialists should go back to the fundamentals of heritage conservation and focus more on preserving the substance in order to maintain a palpable connection with our past that is based not on biased feelings but on facts and material truth, in such a way that “genuine” should always prevail over “authentic”.

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²³ After a scientific meeting that took place in Nara, Japan, between 22 and 24 October 2014, for the evaluation of the Nara Document on Authenticity after 20 years, participants described authenticity as “a culturally **contingent quality** associated with a heritage place”, a concept reused as such in the *Interpretation of Sites of Memory* (2018) study commissioned by World Heritage Center, para 49, p.12 - <https://whc.unesco.org/document/194925>, date accessed 2025, April 23.

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