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## TWELVE YEARS ON: A KEY ICOMOS FRANCE EVENT FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF THE VENICE CHARTER'S PRINCIPLES

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**ABSTRACT:** The meeting organized by ICOMOS France in 1976, in response to a request by ICOMOS International, was an inaugural moment in the acclimatization process of the Venice Charter. The conference proceedings should be placed in the context of the late 1970s to highlight considerations relating to a specific way of dealing with principles and concepts. While the twelve years since the Venice Congress may seem a long time, this lag can be explained by the time taken to establish the French national committee of ICOMOS within a highly structured administrative organization. Surprisingly, despite the active presence of French representatives at international meetings, the charter remained confidential for several years. The papers published in 1977 revealed the emergence of new issues: What attitude should we adopt toward the nineteenth- and twentieth-century heritage? How should we deal with the multiplication of techniques? What lessons should we draw from operational experience in urban fabrics?

The presentation will focus on different attitudes proposed by the contributors, most of whom had connections with the Department of Historic Monuments. François Énaud, a specialist in mural paintings, expresses his agreement with the charter, confirming a shared international culture in this field. The concluding text by the famous historian André Chastel shows a move toward interdisciplinarity. Architects such as Yves-Marie Froidevaux and Jean Sonnier develop formulas that continue to shape the current debate, thus confirming their role as the charter's primary exegetes. The time lag between the drafting of the charter and its adoption invites us to reconsider temporal aspects to promote consensus building and reduce frictions in today's changing environment.

**KEY WORDS:** Venice Charter, conservation theory, conservation history, heritage cooperation, ICOMOS

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The meeting organized by ICOMOS France that took place in Paris in October 1976 marked the first step in a process that led to the Venice Charter being adopted by professionals in the field of heritage conservation. Paradoxically, although the French were well represented in May 1964 at the Second International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments in Venice and were among the first signatories of the document, with an active involvement in the creation of ICOMOS, no commentary on the charter was published in France for more than a decade.

This initial lack of interest in the document, which is still rarely mentioned in publications on the subject, highlights the gap between the theoretical framework of the charter and the French context. Recent research on the process leading up to the drafting of the Venice Charter has not yet challenged the narrative, widely circulated in the conservation institutional literature, that French stakeholders adopted the charter's principles and concepts through a linear process. This paper argues that the adoption of the document was, on the contrary, the result of a clash of sometimes contradictory attitudes, with differences that continue to fuel and enrich the current discourse. The existing literature in the field of historic preservation in France consists primarily of institutional publications. Since the interwar period, these publications have offered commentary on institutional conservation practices (administrative developments, protection measures, intervention programs, role of built heritage in preserving memory, etc.) without a critical analysis of the underlying principles, as France is "a country historically averse to explicitly articulating, in this field, the doctrines that underpin its practices." (Goven et al., 2010).

At first glance, the twelve-year gap between the Venice meeting and Paris ICOMOS France meeting is surprising, for it could imply that the country's involvement in international cooperation was on the wane. This was far from being the case, as members of the administration and the Chief Architects for Historic Monuments (ACMH) took on a key role in these discussions during the 1960s and 1970s, in accord with the tradition of French cultural diplomacy (Raymond, 2014). ACMH Jean Sonnier, who was involved in the drafting process during the Venice Congress, joined the ICOMOS France committee at its inception, participated in several expert missions for UNESCO, and gave input on a possible revision of the articles in the document (Guinic, 2021). François Sorlin, Inspector General of Historic Monuments (IGMH)—who was also involved, albeit less directly, in drafting the document—was a member of the ICOMOS France committee and contributed to the work by the Council of Europe (Houbart, 2021b). Their careers are a reminder of the complexity of the networks engendered by the major meetings in Athens (1931), Paris (1957), and Venice (1964), the dynamics of which are better understood today (Houbart, 2017; Houbart, 2021a). These networks did not always reflect the level of engagement at national level. Investigating the example of France confirms the distance between actions carried out on the international level by relatively small groups (Passini, 2018; Caccia Gherardini, 2024) and the timeframe specific to each national context.

This contribution follows an approach that combines art history, construction history and cultural history, in order to describe and contextualise conservation practices. The analysis of texts written by architects, administrators and art historians is based on a knowledge of institutional literature and parallels with intervention works carried out or supported by the authors themselves. The aim is to investigate the link between discourse and practices that characterise the French context of

conservation, and in particular the varying meanings and uses of explicit references to the Venice Charter. The latter seems to operate as a boundary object (Star, 2010; Trompette & Vinck, 2009), whose interpretative flexibility enables broad adherence without prior consensus.

The first objective of this article is therefore to identify the circumstances that led to the inaugural discussion of the Venice Charter. Next, by analysing the views expressed by the experts at the Paris meeting in 1976, this article aims to assess the impact of these initial comments on the use of the international document in France. Finally, the last objective is to examine how and in what ways French conservationists came to engage with concepts and principles they might not be familiar with, depending on their area of expertise.

### **The organizational setting for the 1976 Paris symposium**

There are multiple, interlocking phenomena that may explain why the Venice Charter, the first version of which was in French<sup>1</sup>, remained a relatively niche document for a long time. Although it was drafted in French, which was the lingua franca of international meetings until the middle part of the twentieth century, it is worth pointing out that some of the concepts that it conveys did not come directly from ideas developed in France (Malservisi & Vitale, 2013)<sup>2</sup>. The very format of the charter, and in particular the way it is structured in articles—similar to a normative document—did not strike a chord in a national context that had not produced any major scoping texts since the writings of Viollet-le-Duc. Up until the First Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, organized in Paris in 1957, French experts (architects, officials from the Department of Historic Monuments, historians) did not see any need to draft a set of common guidelines for monument interventions. Rather, these actors asserted the efficacy of the pragmatic approach that had been in place since the mid-nineteenth century (Malservisi & Vitale, 2019). In the two other countries to be represented in the small drafting group, Italy and Belgium (Houbart, 2021a), the usefulness of charters and recommendations in the field of conservation had long been recognized.

To put the situation fully in context, it is important to remember that in the mid-1960s, there had been various innovations in the realm of heritage conservation that galvanized the French administration and experts: notably, the inception in 1962 of so-called *Secteurs sauvegardés* (Protected Sectors), followed by experimental interventions in the first operational blocks, and the reform of the Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques (National Fund for Historic Monuments), which modernized the management of state-owned monuments. These public policies focused the minds of experts on aspects that were primarily operational. Another significant innovation was the establishment in 1964 of the General Inventory of the Monuments

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<sup>1</sup> The Venice Charter, a summary document that was the fruit of skilled mediation, has, over time, acquired the status of a reference text. Its adoption by ICOMOS when the organization was founded was the starting point for its gradual dissemination: it was almost impossible then to imagine the scale of the issues involved. Making versions of the document available in several languages, for example, was a challenge whose implications had most likely not been assessed (Houbart & Dawans, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> One of the most significant issue at the 1976 meeting organized by ICOMOS France - the proceedings of which are analyzed below- was an assessment of the distance between certain phrases in the articles and French intellectual approaches to built heritage.

and Art Treasures of France, which topographical campaigns changed the concept of built heritage. However, the activities of this department, which was supported by historians, would remain separate from the departments responsible for the management and conservation of built heritage. All these aspects characterizing the situation in France may, on various levels, have slowed down the adoption of a prescriptive document that brought abstract categories into play, notwithstanding the inevitable delay that figures in any process of dissemination.

We should not be misled by the interest that exists today for the events that marked the history of the conservation movement and garner a false impression of how they were perceived by contemporaries. Although the meeting in Venice involved five hundred participants from more than fifty countries, it did not make the headlines in professional journals, even in France and Italy that were most heavily represented; in fact, it was the legacy of the congress in Venice (the signing of the charter and the founding of ICOMOS) that, in retrospect, gave the event its status. Creating a structure for ICOMOS and the various forms it assumed at national level was a complex process: it took time to assemble the human resources and to clarify the positioning of these organizations within the institutional environment of each country. In France, which is very active at the European level, senior officials such as Jean Salusse played a significant role in coordinating the initiatives of the Council of Europe with the policies rolled out at national level (Gondran, 2015). The launch of the European Architectural Heritage Year, scheduled for 1975, was an opportunity to promote and develop the expertise assembled in the French section of ICOMOS, which had been organized as an association in 1973. Beyond its success with the general public, the Heritage Year in 1975 was an opportunity to stage meetings and exhibitions to engage local government in the process of assessing the new public policy organizations and tools mentioned above. The ICOMOS France association was very involved in all of the events and emerged stronger as a result: the board of directors was enlarged, a permanent secretariat was established, and membership increased from 70 to around 250. Newly bolstered by being anchored at national and European level, the French section responded to the invitation from the ICOMOS Executive Committee, which asked each section to give their thoughts on updating the Venice Charter. One of the working groups focused on the topic “Examples of various restoration projects in France in response to the principles of the Venice Charter,” facilitated by ACMH Yves Boiret (Fosseyeux, 1977). The 1976 symposium was organized as a result of this process: at the symposium, experts—all of them French—made long presentations to an audience of professionals specialising in heritage conservation.<sup>3</sup>

### **The symposium proceedings and the establishment of a dialogue with the Venice Charter**

The analysis of these initial comments on the charter, informed by an in-depth understanding of the restoration projects discussed, filled a gap in the knowledge regarding the evolution of heritage discourse in the late 20th century in France. The main source is the official publication

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<sup>3</sup> ICOMOS members from other countries were invited to attend the meeting. Their reactions during the debates were put in the summaries that followed each contribution. The symposium was organized with a view to launching a program to expand the debate that would include site visits, meetings, and new partnerships.

issued in 1977 (Salusse et al., 1977), that is frequently cited even though no in-depth analysis has been published linking the texts to the authors' expertise and profession.

The meeting in Paris provided an opportunity to face up to theoretical issues that French experts had hitherto tended to keep at arm's length. Published in a special issue of the journal *Monuments historiques*, the proceedings compiled institutional introductions, reports, and summaries of the debates, with the whole meeting rounded off by a memoranda later sent in by the participants.<sup>4</sup> The status of this inaugural publication is ambiguous. Who is this collection of commentaries designed for, given that the charter itself does not appear there in its entirety? The special issue is positioned somewhere between an internal administrative report and a book intended for a wider readership. An analysis of the publication shows that the minutes included in the text are rather uneven in formal terms, indicating that notes that had not initially been intended for publication were repurposed. We may assume from the summaries of the papers and audience reactions to it that some of the presentations were quite different from the texts that ended up being printed in the 1977 special issue of the journal *Monuments historiques*.

In the journal's preface, Jean Sonnier (1977b) states that the restoration assessment that the working group had initially envisaged could not be completed because the documentation was not properly structured. The centralized conservation of built heritage, entrusting intervention work to a limited number of architects—all of whom have the same training based on direct transmission (Contenay & Mouton, 2012)—did not foster a development of research, studies, and publications that put forward a reflective approach to conservation practices. Studies with any scientific ambition were few and far between, and relations between the world of academic research in art history and the world in which architects operate were mainly developed in institutional commissions and committees. For example, the 1964 French delegation did not include any academics, setting it apart from most of the other delegations.<sup>5</sup> If we consider the structure of the conservation sector in France, the proceedings of the 1976 symposium reveal a remarkable process of evolution over the span of twelve years. Spurred on by external initiatives and calls for action, the French conservation sector had embarked on a new phase of interdisciplinary dialogue that will prove fruitful.

### **The 1976 symposium and papers by non-architects**

The fact that the organizers of the 1976 symposium invited two art historians, François Énaud and André Chastel, and a paleographic archivist, Jean-Pierre Babelon, represented a significant development in opening up the debate on the conservation of architectural heritage. The range of contributions provide an insight into prevailing attitudes toward the charter based on the authors'

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<sup>4</sup> This special issue of *Monuments historiques* (1977), a journal published by the Caisse Nationale des Monuments historiques, was produced in partnership with the French section of ICOMOS.

<sup>5</sup> Without explaining the specifics of the French system, it is important to recall that in 1976, the standard courses for future architects did not include a conservation/restoration component, and that architecture schools were not connected to the university system. Architectural training was still relatively separate from historical disciplines. This did not encourage vigorous theoretical debate or the publication of manuals and books aimed at building knowledge about the history of conservation works and their posited impact on monuments (Cohen, 2015).

profiles.

Art historian and IGMH François Énaud was the only author to begin his contribution by recalling the charter's principles before commenting on them in connection with his subject, the restoration of painted decorations. By proposing a “critical documentary appraisal,” Énaud positioned himself in a community of experts focused on restoring painted elements, an area in which collaboration between art historians, scientific specialists, and restorers was already a matter of course. His use of the concept of criticism in accordance with the methods developed by art historians indicates a familiarity with the international debates being conducted on the basis of the discipline (Jannièrè, 2025). François Énaud's adherence to the “rules, of a philosophical or rather ethical kind” (Énaud, 1977, 85) contained in the charter is evident in his presentation of the complex problems posed by specific cases to comment specific articles: excessive repainting, defining archaeological authenticity, filling in lacunae, removal of past restoration work (“de-restoration”), etc. In doing so, he introduced vocabulary that did not appear in the text of the charter, such as the term “lacuna” and the idea of “reversibility”.<sup>6</sup> Énaud thus assumes the role of a “ferryman” conveying practices and vocabulary from the specific field of painted works into the realm of restoration work. Through a process of transfer, the notions of lacunae and reversibility would ultimately be associated with the Venice Charter in the discourse on restoration, even though they do not figure in either the preamble or the articles.<sup>7</sup> This analysis thus shows that the 1976 meeting marked the beginning of a practice—still alive today—of referring to the Venice Charter as a hypothetical repository for concepts related to the theorization of conservation practices. Since the initial and complex phase of exegesis in the mid-1970s, the international document is still rarely read in its entirety. The practice of misquoting the charter as dictated by the needs of the heritage discourse would be the result of indirect knowledge, consisting in a dissemination through an intermediary interpretation.<sup>8</sup>

Concluding his critical assessment, Énaud focused on the need to define common terminology for a multilingual glossary. In the transnational network of experts specialising in painted decoration, the idea of strictly applying collectively validated methods emerged as a goal that could be realistically attained. This difference in adherence to an internationally shared theoretical framework for conservation practices remains, even today, a significant distinguishing factor between the fields of art restoration (painting, sculpture) and restoration of built heritage.

In his report titled “Restaurations et histoire” (Restorations and History), the paleographic archivist Babelon (1977) revisited a series of projects dating from the nineteenth century and

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<sup>6</sup> After touching on the importance of the reversibility principle in an intervention to remove a mural, François Énaud pointed out that reversibility is a “major rule that does not figure in the Venice Charter but is applied in practice in both Italy and France” (Énaud, 1977, 92).

<sup>7</sup> At a symposium in 1989, Jean Sonnier made a presentation about reconstructing a sculpted decoration on the facade of the Ancienne Comédie d'Avignon. Making reference to the charter, he affirmed that he had applied the principle of reversibility (Sonnier, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Recent debates about the restoration of Notre-Dame Cathedral following the 2019 fire have included references to the Charter regarding the concept of reconstruction to the “last known state,” a concept that does not appear in the document.

after to demonstrate the relevance of the last sentence of article 9: “The restoration in any case must be preceded and followed by an archaeological and historical study of the monument.” By adopting a reflective stance without pronouncing on the appropriateness of the choices made in the restorations cited, Babelon warned against the improper use of archival documents and pointed out that an engraving of a monument is not a plan on which to base the restoration of an element or a building that has disappeared. By focusing on something that seems self-evident to an archivist, his contribution bears out the degree to which an expression like “authentic documents” which likewise appears in article 9 can lend itself to different interpretations depending on the skills and knowledge mobilized. It should be noted here that, under the French system of built heritage management – which is centralised and prioritises operational efficiency – restoration works, including large-scale ones, did not yet necessarily involve in-depth historical studies.

Chastel and Énaud support the same approach and use the comparison with the principles of the charter to consolidate the status of historical studies and documentation. These comments may be considered instrumental in prompting the decision in 1985 to make preliminary studies mandatory in the planning of restoration campaigns. The meeting in 1976, when the three historians enriched the debate by making deft use of the concepts of a work’s authenticity and uniqueness, marked a turning point in the role of historical disciplines, consolidating their place in this type of meeting.<sup>9</sup>

Senior officials (the administrators of museums, monuments, and other institutions) were likewise invited to present reports at the symposium. By virtue of their initial training (in law, political science, or literature) and their experience in the realm of cultural heritage, their relationship to the charter was primarily geared to questions of management and ethical matters. Pierre Dussaule elaborated on the administrative and financial aspects in connection with developments in the legislation.<sup>10</sup> He mentioned the kinds of interventions that can be made on heritage buildings and affirmed that, on the whole, the charter’s principles are respected in this regard. However, he reported one notable exception to this, relating to the treatment of missing elements that have been replaced or reconstructed. Without making direct reference to articles 9 and 12, Dussaule pointed out that the Department of Historic Monuments had adopted the principle of making unrecognizable any element created in the context of restoration work.<sup>11</sup> In fact, there is no document indicating an official position of the Commission des Monuments historiques, even though the more common practice was indeed to conceal the additions. We can argue that by affirming the possibility of sticking to the charter without adhering to everything contained, Dussaule presented

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<sup>9</sup> Following the 1976 symposium in Paris, academics and intellectuals with links to the humanities would have an increasingly important part to play in collective thinking about changes in the concept of heritage and conservation policies, culminating in the celebrated series of “Entretiens du patrimoine” (Heritage Talks) organized by the Ministry of Culture between 1988 and 2001 (Lestienne, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> In 1976, Pierre Dussaule was deputy director of Historic Monuments and National Palaces.

<sup>11</sup> Dussaule maintains that in reconstruction processes, the Department of Historic Monuments “does not go so far as to follow the solution adopted in some countries, whereby the intervention is deliberately highlighted by means of different materials from those used in the original” (Dussaule, 1977, 47).

the opportunity, in instances of international cooperation, of engaging in dialogue on principles and concepts, without the need to disavow firmly established methods of intervention.

A bolder standpoint is evident in the report written by Jacques Houlet (1977), “Les modalités de la restauration des ensembles anciens” (Methods of Restoring Old Ensembles). Armed with his experience as director of Regional Conservation Services and of the Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques (1963–67), Houlet expressed some major reservations about the charter’s theoretical approach, which he did not consider useful in thinking about old town centers. He advocated an interventionist approach to old buildings as the only way to ensure their survival. He made no bones about criticizing the “stellar, theoretical viewpoint of the Venice Charter” as if any theoretical approach were inevitably inadequate and it were impossible to define any general principles to be applied to urban ensembles. Providing an abundance of concrete examples, from the division of private mansions into apartments to the creation of new facades based on a mimetic approach, Houlet urged that the principles of the charter be dispensed with when it was not a matter of restoring “major heritage monuments” (Houlet, 1977, 53). Flying in the face of article 1, he advocated maintaining a radical hierarchical system that would distinguish between historic monuments and vernacular architecture in an urban context, thereby setting a precedent in the management of old town centers and opening up the possibility of conducting drastic experiments with vernacular housing.

Our contextualized reading of the proceedings published in 1977 allows us to analyse the significance of the Paris meeting as the starting point for the role the charter would come to play in the French context. The articles of the Venice Charter, drafted as guidelines, are interpreted by French experts as suggestions for alternative procedures and methods, such as in-depth historical studies to underpin restoration decisions, and the distinction of additions in the restoration of damaged buildings. These suggestions may be adopted, discussed or even rejected.

### **The responses of the chief architects for historic monuments (ACMH) to the charter**

The ACMH brought in complementary approaches, such as commentary on the terms and concepts in the charter, that appears to be a document they have only just discovered. Entrusted with the topic “Restauration et utilisation” (Restoration and Use), Yves Boiret (1977) presented an example of the limits on new usages as defined by article 5. An overview from the nineteenth century of the negative impact of changes in use served as an introduction to the current issues associated with the integration of technical installations in monuments. This consensus-based presentation was a reminder that certain themes, such as those relating to inappropriate uses, have enabled experts in international bodies to come together around shared objectives.

Other reports opened up avenues into topics on which opinion was divided, including that of differentiating the materials and elements implemented. Bertrand Monnet (1977) pondered the “Lisibilité des restaurations” (Legibility of Restorations) without making direct reference to the text of the charter, where the term legibility is anyway not used. The choice of this term made it possible to open up debate on a number of situations pronounced upon by the charter: the result of “extra work” which “must bear a contemporary stamp” (article 9); the “replacements of missing parts,” which, according to article 12, must be distinguishable, while integrating with the whole; and “the material used for integration,”

which article 15, on excavations, says “should always be recognizable.” Monnet was thus able to use the concept of legibility to comment on the restoration of lacunae in a painted decoration or the insertion of a contemporary staircase in a medieval structure. This all-encompassing and flexible use of the idea opens up a range of solutions that architects can put forward without rejecting the firmly established methods of mimetic integration, which are often favored. Through their focus on the legitimacy of new options, the debates surrounding the charter played a significant role in helping develop sensitivity and, notably, in propelling the acceptance of contrasting effects. In the late 1970s, practices started to see some crossover, and contemporary extensions spread to monuments (Jacquin, 2016). Such extensions are sometimes presented as practical applications of the charter, even though this issue is not directly tackled in it. The work of interpreting the articles on restoration has led to the spread of concepts and ideas that have stimulated creative designs that go beyond the objectives of the document.

In a text titled “Problèmes de restauration” (Problems of Restoration), ACMH Yves-Marie Froidevaux (1977) presented the projects for which he is best known: substantial restorations of churches that were severely damaged during World War II.<sup>12</sup> He covered three projects that demonstrate the possibilities for joining together sections that have been recreated, elements that have, to a large extent, been reinstated, and contemporary insertions. The architect highlighted the importance of not being limited to “complete conservation.” While Froidevaux conveyed his mistrust of “doctrines that are dogmatically maintained and often exclusive,” the minutes of the debates record the enthusiastic remarks of Miklós Horler, head of the National Monument Inspectorate in Budapest, for whom “the restorations expounded upon bear witness to the effectiveness of the Venice Charter.”<sup>13</sup> This difference in interpretation confirms, if confirmation were needed, the possibility of aligning a restoration project—involving a complex interlocking of various methods of intervention—to a specific article or sentence in the charter. Due to its complexity, the document consists of sections that, when taken out of context, can easily be associated with practices that are very different—or even contrary—in their approach.

Of particular significance was the paper by Sonnier, the French ACMH most directly associated with the drafting of the document. Twelve years after the congress in Venice, his relationship with the charter did not seem very far removed from that of his colleagues. Referring to Articles 9, 13, and 15, Sonnier (1977a) broadened the scope of the topic announced in the title “Conservation des ruines et traitement des vestiges provenant des fouilles” (Conservation of Ruins and the Treatment of Remains Unearthed by Excavations), citing a number of concrete cases—from the recreation of ruined walls with the integration of new materials to the fate of nineteenth-century restorations of ancient monuments—in order to point up the variety of methods, all of which were potentially relevant. He did not position himself as an intermediary for the charter and the disciplinary setting in which it was drafted. Instead, he proposed an open, reflective approach that did not set out to define restrictive common principles. The case of Ganagobie Abbey, for example, was an illustration of an

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<sup>12</sup> The restoration project for the Church of Saint Malo in Valognes (Normandy) was one of the French projects presented in the exhibition at Palazzo Grassi, which was organized to coincide with the 1964 congress in Venice.

<sup>13</sup> The comment is in the minutes included in the publication, which summarize the discussions, albeit not systematically (Maupeou, 1977).

expanded interpretation of the concept of “reassembling” deriving from article 15, which at the same time frees itself from the constraints imposed by anastylosis and the ruling out of reconstructions.

At the 1976 symposium, architects seized upon the charter as a means to bolster their arguments and expand the range of possible solutions. New methodological options—integrating the “extra work” that “must bear a contemporary stamp” (article 9) and accentuating “the valid contributions of all periods” (article 11)—were adopted to complement firmly established practices. From the late 1970s on, the concepts and intentions of the charter were incorporated in the architectural discourse—which also meant a re-evaluation of them. This intellectual enrichment gave new depth to the collective thinking taking place at both national and international level.

### **The Venice Charter as a starting point for expanding the debate**

Two texts set themselves apart in terms of their scope and their comments on new challenges in heritage conservation. IGMH Michel Parent (1977) presented a long paper, which began by highlighting the ambiguities contained in the charter.<sup>14</sup> Thanks to his eclectic education and experience as a museum curator, Parent, who is also a UNESCO expert, emphasized the new challenges that the charter needs to face: in particular, the heritage status of buildings from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the historicity of nineteenth-century restorations, and the conservation of vernacular architecture.<sup>15</sup> His shrewd observations encouraged a more in-depth exploration of theoretical approaches and continued semantic reflection. He then developed his own categories: long-term or formal transparency, restoration that rejuvenates or creates a sense of unity. These categories would not find the kind of critical favor the author had hoped for, but his remarks on the societal challenges involved in granting heritage status had the effect of opening up the debate to other disciplines. Fittingly, the successive meetings organized by ICOMOS and the Ministry of Culture (Lestienne, 2016) would feature papers entrusted to experts from the field of social studies and philosophy.

The final text, “Restauration et avenir du patrimoine” (Restoration and the Future of Heritage), was authored by art historian André Chastel (1977), who laid the groundwork for a history of the concept of built heritage.<sup>16</sup> Chastel was the only contributor to cite texts by Ruskin, Dehio, Dvorak, and Riegl in support of his observations. His mention of the frailties of urban ensembles that are subject to real estate pressure and new upheavals or his elaboration of the link between restorations and contemporary architectural expressions opened up prospects for getting to grips

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<sup>14</sup> Michel Parent, Inspector General of Historic Monuments, was a prolific figure who left his mark on the field of conservation in the second half of the twentieth century, not only in France but also globally, through his involvement in international bodies (Bercé, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> The conservation of nineteenth-century heritage, industrial heritage, and workers’ housing was still a controversial topic in 1976. In his presentation at the symposium, Jacques Houlet was clearly opposed to the phenomenon of expanding the criteria for the granting of heritage status.

<sup>16</sup> André Chastel was an academic, a professor at the Collège de France, and an internationally renowned historian of architecture. Deeply committed to preserving and fostering a knowledge of France’s cultural heritage, he was behind the creation of the General Inventory of Cultural Heritage in 1964 and started the journal *Revue de l’art* in 1968.

with the principles contained in the charter. In 1980, Chastel published a text with Babelon on the idea of heritage: their *La Notion de patrimoine* would become a reference book.

## Conclusion

Twelve years after the Venice Congress, the time had come for those involved in the conservation sector in France to come together, galvanized by their active participation in the Year of Built Heritage in 1975 and by the impetus provided by the ICOMOS Executive Committee. The publication of the proceedings in 1977 showed that a movement treating the charter not as a prescriptive document but as a text to be debated and with which experts must engage in discourse, had begun. This initial phase laid the foundations for the approaches that would become established by the end of the 20th century: ranging from an adherence to the value of a normative document, as expressed by restorers of pictorial works, to an uninhibited interpretation by many architects and administrators. The history of conservation during the last three decades of the 20th century confirms the coexistence of analogue and stylistic interventions<sup>17</sup> alongside the adoption of new approaches that are more directly linked to the principles of the Venice Charter.

The various ways of engaging with the charter's articles tell us about the genealogy of certain clichés that have been a feature of the debates on conservation issues: an inevitable opposition between the charter's application and the economic viability of projects and an incompatibility between the pragmatism of architects and historical rigor. At the same time, the charter began to carry out, in France, its role as a common frame for mediation between actors who did not share the same knowledge or practices. As a source of linkage, it proved effective at the national level, and discussion of it in 1976 encouraged the cross-fertilization of disciplinary approaches on the basis of novel ways and means. The document implicitly disseminated models of knowledge that would promote significant developments, such as the affirmation of the status of historical study.

Thanks to the interpretive phase of the 1970s, the Venice Charter has emerged as a significant example of a “boundary object” (Star, 2010; Trompette & Vinck, 2009)—an object (text or theory) that can be shared among different groups of actors, each of which develops its own understanding and interpretation. Making reference to the charter—whether in order to invoke it or put it up for discussion—is an expression of commitment to a shared goal on a more ambitious level, that of defending a common heritage that finds itself in jeopardy.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The succession of restoration projects reveals a continuity in stylistic approaches that remained unchanged from the beginning to the end of the 20th century, as demonstrated by an analysis of the restorations carried out on the Château de Saumur (Malservisi, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Following the symposium, Piero Gazzola submitted a text that was published in the proceedings' appendices. Lamenting the dire state of urban settings and landscapes, he pointed to “the demographic explosion, untidy industrial development and the direct and indirect consequences these phenomena have had in polluting the air, water, and natural environment” and called for “effective engagement, with the primary goal of putting an end to the mistakes that have been made—in a word, to the disorder that has characterized all the recent interventions we have made in respect of human habitat” (Salusse et al., 1977, 110).

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