



Nicholas Stanley-Price. Editorial

Conversaciones... offers a new volume dedicated to Nicholas Stanley-Price, an esteemed and admired colleague, who initially worked as an archaeologist in Cyprus and the Middle East, but then changed the course of his career to focus on conservation and management of cultural heritage. He initially specialized in archaeological conservation, but he was soon also dedicated to professional education, working at ICCROM, at the Getty Conservation Institute and later at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. These different places gave him a broad perspective of heritage conservation in different parts of the world, with projects and training activities in which he always aimed for quality above all. In 2000, he returned to ICCROM as Director-General, where he launched a vast programme which allowed gathering a much more diverse team than ever before in the organization, encouraging different approaches to the understanding and caring for heritage to be more clearly formulated.

Nicholas Stanley-Price has also contributed significantly to the dissemination of information and ideas, initially through his well-known book on *Conservation on archaeological excavations*, translated into several languages, but also through the exceptional publication of *Historical and philosophical issues in the conservation of cultural heritage: readings in conservation*, the first of a series produced by the Getty Conservation Institute. He was also the founding editor of the journal *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*. He additionally launched the ICCROM Conservation Studies series, dealing with various relevant topics. A list of his publications on conservation can be found at the end of the volume, kindly compiled by the author.

For this volume of *Conversaciones...* we selected one of Stanley-Price's articles dealing both with archaeological conservation and theory of conservation, around the topic of ruins. "The reconstruction of ruins: principles and practice", published in 2009 in the volume edited by Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker, *Conservation: principles, dilemmas and uncomfortable truths*, brought to light an extremely useful reflection on a topic that has been widely discussed, and that still causes much debate and controversies.

The past and ruins in particular have long had a special force of attraction for people around the world, whether seen as continuum of cultures, as a means to reflect about time and impermanence, or as a means to somehow link oneself with those elements of times that preceded us. How to then act on those ruins has varied greatly in time and space, depending on how they are perceived and the significance attributed to them. Marguerite Yourcenar, with her wonderful insight into the past, spoke of reconstructions through the voice of Emperor Hadrian: "I have done much rebuilding. To reconstruct is to collaborate with time gone by, penetrating or modifying its spirit, and carrying it toward a longer future. Thus beneath the stones we find the secret of the springs". This idea of trying to understand past ruins and

play with time has always been tantalizing. For some, intervening on those ruins would be unnecessary, as ruins are in themselves representations of the past. For others it would be unthinkable, as full respect is due to the authentic evidence of these remains. For others still, some sort of action should be undertaken, to stabilize them and guarantee their existence in the present and future. But for many others somehow reusing those ruins would be a logical extension of traditions, symbols, and a way to incorporate the past into the present, whether for political, sacred, or economic reasons. The latter has been the reason for a number of different approaches to reconstruction, and different levels in those interventions, spanning from stabilization and readability of the ruins, presentation to the public, and re-use for traditional or new purposes.

Accompanying Stanley-Price's central text, six authors have sent us different perspectives for the analysis of ruins and reconstruction. Claudine Houbart takes us back to the *Venice Charter* and particularly to the exhibition produced at the time of the Second International Congress of the Architects and Technicians of Historical Monuments in 1964, in search for possible differences in theory and practice between different conservation professionals working on the conservation of monuments, and more particularly potential variations between architects and archaeologists. Her analysis of examples derived from catalogue of the exhibition shows that clear divisions are not always possible. The motivations –and temptations– for larger scale reconstructions are often motivated by pressures coming from a broader context, and encompass the practice of different conservation professionals.

Hossam Mahdy takes the discussion to the Arab region, where through a series of examples mostly from Egypt he showcases the evolution in the perception of ruins over time, through the lens of different values. Starting from perceptions of ruins in the past, seen essentially as lessons of change and evolution, which are still present in some local communities, the author then also describes the change in the use of ancient ruins, first for tourism purposes, and then as symbols of nationalism.

Elsa Arroyo and Sandra Zetina provide an analysis of the perception of Mexico's colonial past in the early 20th century following the turmoil of the Revolution. Through a series of examples, they show how a series of buildings were transformed or reconstructed to serve new purposes, in line with the idea of a new modern nation, where past heritage had an important symbolic role. Colonial architecture served as inspiration for the so-called neocolonial art, a style that took elements and construction materials to generate a new style in line with the image of the new nation.

Esther Almarcha brings to the fore different examples of reconstructions undertaken in two different periods in the 20th century in Spain. The first one during the early years of Franco's regime was marked by a strong political motivation, using the reconstruction of historic cities destroyed during the Spanish Civil War as symbolic elements. The second period, following the return to a democracy, shows a shift to a more scientific interest in the ruins, particularly those in archaeological sites, and in their value as documents of the past, with a clear didactic importance.

Clara Verazzo finally takes us through a philological reconstruction of the history of a commemorative theatre dedicated to Gabriele d'Annunzio in Pescara. The evolution of this theater, from its design and conception through a national competition in 1955 all the way to its current condition, is patiently retrieved by the author through a historical and archival research. The narrative that derives from it shows that ruins may not only be reconstructed for political reasons, but buildings may also slowly turn into ruins for changing political decisions.

In this complex year of 2020, we are particularly grateful to the authors for their contributions, in less than ideal conditions, with libraries and archives around the world closed and often complicated working conditions. A warm thank you to all of them.

We hope this new volume of *Conversaciones...* will find you all safe, and will bring you interesting materials to reflect further about ruins and their conservation, that may bring on new ideas and solutions that fully respect diversity, traditions, and ethical elements, and make sure we continue having heritage that plays a meaningful role in our communities.

Valerie Magar
Rome, October 2020