http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/newsletters/14_3/feature1_4.html

GCI Publication

Conservation of Monuments and Sites

By Sherban Cantacuzino and Caroline King

Over the years, the definition of a monument has grown broader. This is reflected in UNESCO's World Heritage list, which has accumulated more and more of the numberless wonders of the world. At the same time, the iconic significance of the world's monuments is now often manipulated, as are the monuments themselves. Transplanted or cloned by the urban designers of Las Vegas and Japan, they reappear as sensations within entirely altered landscapes. One has the sense that the concept of monuments is more widely appreciated and more widely associated with more people's lives in more parts of the world than ever before. This is why it is increasingly important to extend an understanding of monuments and their conservation—and to remain clear on the essence of their worth amid the array of mutating images that monuments can acquire.

What is it that makes a monument special? How should its specialness be conserved? First, a function of a monument is commemoration. The essential value communicated by the monument is an evocation of the notions of memory and time. The word monument is from the Latin *monere*, meaning "to remind, to cause to think." Traditionally, it is something that inspires a certain degree of melancholic reflection.

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* more narrowly defines a monument as "a structure, edifice or erection intended to commemorate a notable person, action or event," generally in the singular—an isolated case of brilliance which stands out from the rest of the world and is not to be forgotten. Buildings have tended to express this by taking the form of towering columns, such as London's Monument, a giant Doric column built sixty-two and a half meters high to commemorate the fire of London, or the Washington Monument, an even higher column.

Increasingly now, we have landmark buildings which define the skylines of cities around the world, such as the World Financial Center in Shanghai, which out-towers, overpowers, and contains the image of all the other best-known monuments in the world, from the Eiffel Tower to the Leaning Tower of Pisa. These modern monuments reflect a manifest desire for *monumentality*, and are appropriated for their psychological power.

Memory and time as the dual essence of the monument is a broader concept of the term than that suggested by the dictionary—a tower structure, which in this day and age is doomed to be quickly outreached by the next skyscraper in its vicinity. The dictionary's "monument" is likely to be stillborn in significance at the outset: "erected over the grave or in a church, etc., in memory of the dead," like some would-be Ozymandius's tomb.

Yet there is a more Proustian life and renewal inherent in memory which asks that the monument's built manifestation should live on to perpetuate it—whether in mourning, as the Anglo-Saxon root *mur-nan* suggests, or in celebration. This continuity of life in a monument is recognized by the ICOMOS Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites, where renewal is taken as the natural continuation of "events or actions associated with a building at a specific moment in the history of the building," including its successive alterations. These, more than the "patina of age," express the passage of time over the building and its life as a monument.

It is through conservation that the life of a monument is intended to be renewed. Over the years, conservation has matured from its primitive sense of a necrophile curation of objects to a more profound and far-reaching synthesis of the various values that can associate themselves to a living monument. A monument, with all its values, can make a contribution to the everyday life environments which surround it, and vice-versa, in two senses.

First, there is society, culture, and economy in the abstract sense. These are at the heart of urban renewal initiatives, such as English Heritage's regeneration through conservation program, which advises local authorities on the management of designated conservation areas and offers grants for the regeneration of conservation areas in need. The objective is to protect these areas without

"freezing them in time," accommodating the change that accompanies modern life in a way that preserves local character.

The second sense in which monuments relate to their surroundings is their interaction with their "townscape"—the built urban environment most directly affected by the immediate intervention of conservation work. The relationship of a monument to its contextual environment in its aesthetic sense has more readily been appreciated over the past few decades by the world of architectural criticism than has the more complicated and far-reaching socioeconomic environmental impact of heritage conservation (these issues were discussed at the December 1998 GCI meeting on economics and heritage conservation). In this sense, conservation architects, through their own gestures of relating a monument to its site or surrounding environment, have progressed in a direction as yet underexploited by conservation planners. Planning for the more far-reaching and wider benefits of conservation remains a challenge.

The Khadimain Mosque in Baghdad. In the 1970s, international consultants thought it would increase the visual impact of the mosque to raze the structures immediately around it. Unfortunately, the grace of the building and its rapport with the surrounding buildings were lost when these "detractions" were stripped away. Photo: Sherban Cantacuzino.

An example of this progressive understanding of extended conservation ecology in architecture can be seen in the case of the Khadimain Mosque in Baghdad. This is an example of a monument that has lived through a deepening appreciation by international conservationists of the local significance of a monument in its interactions with the townscape around it. During the 1970s, a group of international consultants thought it would increase the visual impact of the mosque to raze its surroundings, producing a powerful presence in a void. The grace of the building in its scale and proportions and its inherent rapport with its surrounding buildings were lost by the stripping away of its "detractions," and the material imperfections in the surfaces of the walls, not previously exposed to an unfettered scrutiny, were suddenly apparent. The failure of this approach was noted by a more recent scheme to reinstate the life which had surrounded the mosque, and a number of dwellings were designed and built back into the empty space.

For conservation planning, as for conservation architecture, it is necessary to graduate from a preoccupation with the object-form of the monument alone—the isolated shell of a mosque, for example, seen as a material artifact or object to be viewed, lovingly retouched, and set apart from the world—to a dialogue undertaken by conservationists with an animate and accessible diffusion of meanings radiating across whole areas of the city districts around the monuments. That this graduation to conservation planning is clumsily expressed through economics is inevitable, and yet the processes of conservation, like those of any urban project, increasingly require quantification of impacts and benefits which must include the areas of their local environments. The work of the World Bank is fascinating in this respect, since the quest for transparency has resulted in a conservation project's being analyzed for its impacts, and the information made available through the Internet. A tabulation of general assessments is, of course, not exhaustive, but in a cost-benefit context it can make a persuasive argument. The scope for such an assessment is necessarily as wide as possible. In the case of the Bank's project for the rehabilitation of the Medina of Fès, a World Heritage site, the effects of the conservation work extend from the original level of material repair and improvements to creating jobs, giving access to services, and increasing the environment of social and familial stability for residents in the area.

A view of the Grand Canal in Venice from the Accademia Bridge. Area conservation in Europe is embodied in Venice, where UNESCO has developed an international model project that has conservationists working with environmental scientists to control the water level around the city and to reduce air and water pollution. Photo: Sherban Cantacuzino.

It is fitting that the opportunity for organizations specializing in monument conservation should be in area conservation. United Nations Development Program (UNDP) conservationists in Cairo, for example, first produced a framework plan, grouping several monuments, then addressed the economic requirements of a project and sought to build the local capacities for carrying it out. This kind of plan embodies a comprehensive view of the monuments—their significance and conservation—by encompassing both the physical (i.e., townscape) and social (i.e., town life) of the community on which it is focused.

Street scene in the Medina of Fès, Morocco, a World Heritage site. Elements of a recent World Bank project for the rehabilitation of the Medina range from material repair and improvements to job creation, access to services, and increasing social and familial stability for residents. Photo: Sherban Cantacuzino.

Many of the most dramatic examples of the possibilities of this approach are to be found in the ancient world around the southern shores of the Mediterranean, in Cairo, Tunis, Algiers, and further inland in the Medinas of Fès and Marrakech, where urban areas are full of the curiously time-smoothed forms (monuments) that speak of more than a single individual's inspiration. The romance of these swaths of city areas, seen as monuments, has a wide appeal, as was noted over a half century ago by French architect Le Corbusier, who called the Medina of Algiers "the glittering entity." "It is in consonance with nature," he wrote, "because from every house, from the terrace—and these terraces add on to each other like a magic and gigantic staircase descending to the sea—one sees the space, the sea."

There is a universal value in conserving these human civilizations in city form. The recognition of the value of whole areas has led to the inscription of entire quarters as World Heritage sites, and to international projects which take these tracts of everyday life, and throw into relief the wonders around which they revolve. Local consultations are undertaken by conservationists, and local craftsmen are given support and training in the skills of fine building, restoration, and decoration, in the hope that the social effects of the project will be far reaching for them and their communities. The economic dimension of conservation projects has received attention as an essential stimulus to local industries, given the careful management that is necessary to redress the added pressures that tourism can bring to an area if not comprehensively managed. The contributions of these projects to the stabilization of areas of the developing world demonstrate the importance of a broader understanding of monuments, their value, and their conservation.

Area conservation in Europe is embodied in the ancient city of Venice, where the Venice Charter for conservation was produced. UNESCO's work there has since developed a highly publicized international model project which has conservationists working cooperatively with environmental scientists in efforts to control the water level around the city, and to cut down on the pollution of air and water. Yet the slow progress and spectacle of the conservationists' Venice above its emergency subaquatic transformations has also given a reactionary air to conservation in the present-day "old continent," where conservation has sometimes been a way—rightly or wrongly—for rejecting the modernizing currents of the time and slowing development. For example, for more than a decade the area around London's Paternoster Square next to St. Paul's Cathedral continued to deteriorate while controversy over development raged; only recently was a master plan finally approved, but nothing yet has been built. Having recognized the importance of area conservation, we must give life to the processes of renewal in the areas which should become our monuments for the future.

Sherban Cantacuzino is an architect and a writer who specializes in architectural conservation. He is the author of, among other works,* New Uses for Old Buildings *and* What Makes a Good Building? *He has been a practicing architect, executive editor of* The Architectural Review*, and secretary of the Royal Fine Art Commission. He was a member of the architectural conservation grant committee of the Getty Grant Program from 1992 until 1998.

<br< style="margin-bottom: 0px; margin-left: 0px; margin-right: 0px; margin-top: 0px;" p=""> </br<>