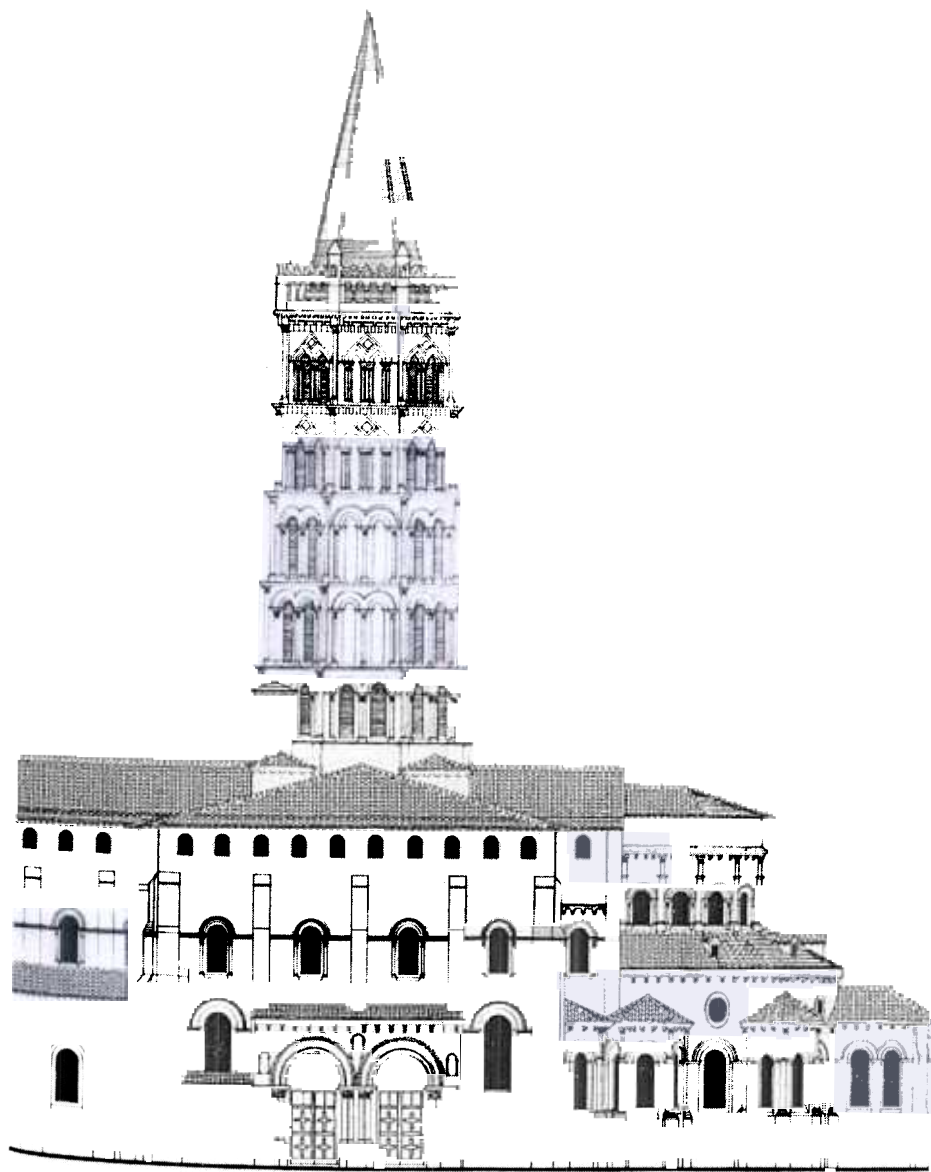


The world of conservation

Yves Boiret



Sernin; drawing of the construction of the Viollet-le Duc basilica



FIG. 2. Yves Boiret.

Il y a deux choses dans un édifice; son usage et sa beauté. Son usage appartient au propriétaire, sa beauté à tout le monde. C'est donc dépasser son droit que le détruire.

Those famous words with which Victor Hugo brought his *Guerre aux Démolisseurs*¹ to an emotional conclusion were written two years after the appointment of the first French *inspecteur des monuments* in 1830. They reflect the romantic spirit of the time, the quickening interest in the Middle Ages and the newly awakened national consciousness which identified historic buildings with the past of a nation or a community. *Il faut qu'un cri universel appelle enfin la nouvelle France au secours de l'ancienne*, proclaimed Hugo; and that spirit initiated the present system which takes responsibility for the protection and treatment of France's architectural heritage. Central to that organization since 1897 has been the corpus of *architectes en chef des monuments historiques*.

The 150th anniversary of the *Inspection des monuments historiques* was celebrated in an appropriate fashion, not least in a commemorative issue of the excellent journal *Monuments historiques*² which discusses various aspects of architectural specialization associated with the profession of *architecte en chef*. The historical background stretches back from today to those seemingly omnipresent figures, Ludovic Vitet, Prosper Mérimée and, above all, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc. Despite this enviable continuity spanning a century and a half, the present organization is more accurately defined as resulting from a decree of 1907. This sets out quite clearly the conditions of appointment of an *architecte en chef* to the title first used 10 years earlier.

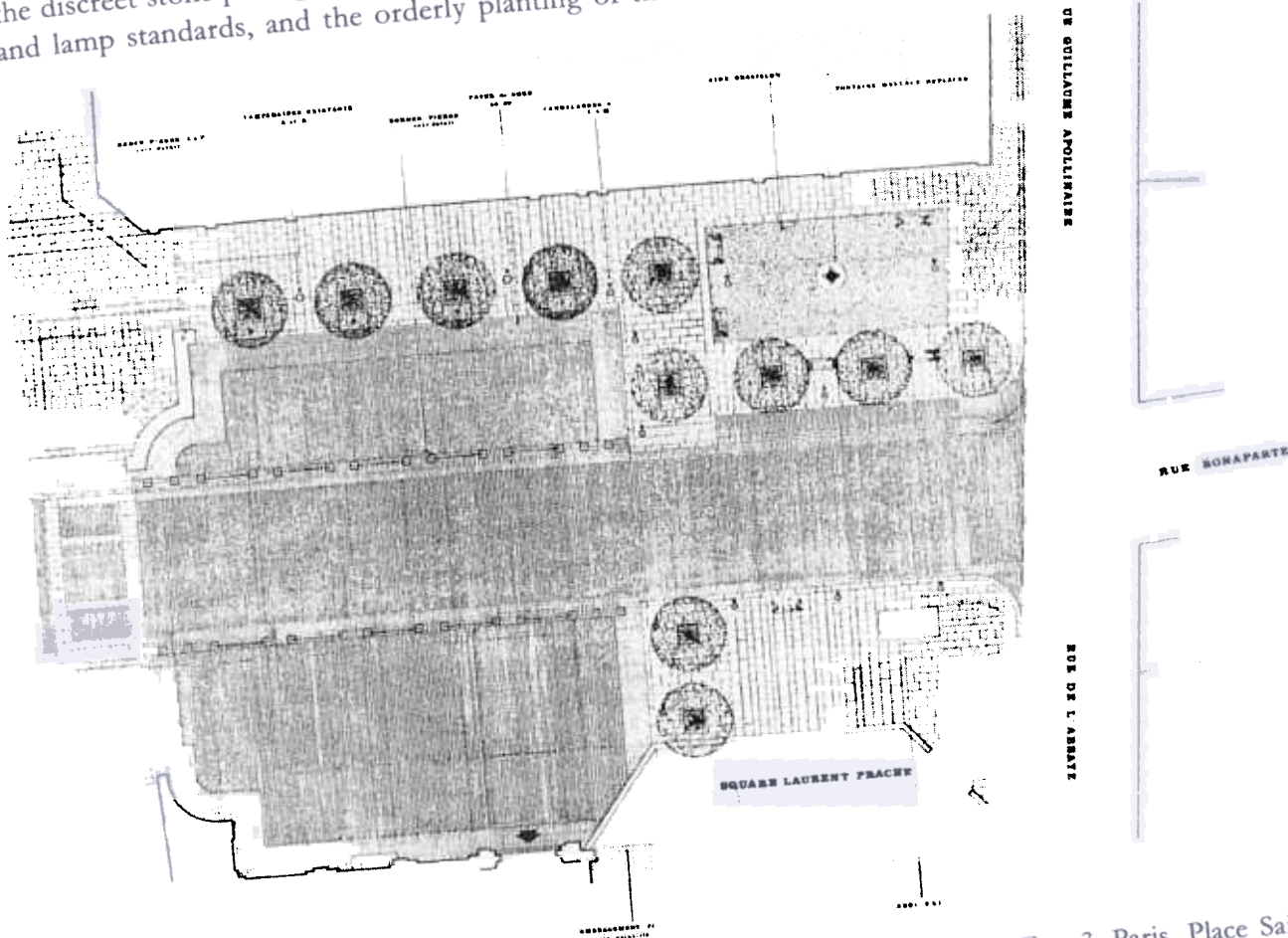
He was to be elected by the competitive system to join a group that had not to exceed 40 in total; he was to be nominated by a government decree and compulsorily retired at the age of 65; he was to be paid by means of fees for his work, which was to include the preparation and execution of repairs and restorations authorized by the administration; and he was to observe, and to see that others observed, the laws protecting historic buildings within the *département* or territorial subdivision of France which became his responsibility according to a government decree. This admirably formulated system, far in advance of other comparable national organizations in the last century, is basically that of today; but there is one major difference between 1908 and the 1980s. In the former year there were 4000 protected monuments in France but now there are more than 31 000 as well as the *secteurs sauvegardés*; the scale of conservation has changed, and so has public interest in the issues involved. Modifications to the 1907 decree, made in 1980, now permit the appointment of more than the original number of *architectes en chef* to match the increased responsibilities; but what are the precise duties of the possessors of this prestigious title, and how are they equipped to undertake them? For the first of our series of meetings with architect-

¹ For the complete text see Réau, L., *Les Monuments détruits de l'art français*, Paris 1959, II, 118 f.

² *Monuments historiques* (1981), no. 113.

conservators we visited the office of M. Yves Boiret (*Fig. 2*), who was elected in 1963.

Unlike some of his colleagues who are privileged to occupy offices in famous historic buildings in or close to Paris, M. Boiret works in a spacious, dignified apartment overlooking Boulevard Saint-Germain, situated to the west of St. Germain-des-Prés and the recently remodelled Place in front of the church, for the design of which he was responsible.³ Although some traffic still passes through the open space, it is far more enjoyable now to take our *apéritif* outside *Aux Deux Magots* and to notice the discreet stone paving and bollards, the rearranged Wallace fountain and lamp standards, and the orderly planting of the trees; all seem to



provide a more civilized setting for the fire-eaters, itinerant musicians and performing animals that make their evening appearance (*Figs 3, 4 and 5*).

Now in his fifties, M. Boiret spoke to us of his inherited architectural background on both paternal and maternal sides. However, he believes his special interest in historical buildings derives from his mother's family, which provided several architects who played their part in the organization of which he is proud to be a member. He was born at Fontenay-aux-Roses, a Parisian suburb overlooking the valley dividing Fontenay from Sceaux; and after studying at the Lycée Condorcet he

FIG. 3. Paris, Place Saint-Germain-des-Prés; plan of the remodelled area.

³ *Monuments* (1976), I, 68 f.

historiques



an Pa
G
4



graduated *Bachelier ès lettres* in 1946. Nine years later, after attending the Atelier Pontremoli Leconte (one of the satellites of the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*), he received his *Diplôme par le Gouvernement* and joined his father, Georges, in practice in his present office. In the same year he was awarded the *Diplôme d'études supérieures pour la conservation des monuments anciens*, the traditional (and indeed obligatory) preparation for qualifying as an eligible candidate in a competition for appointment as *architecte en chef*. This preparatory instruction (now given in the *Centre d'études supérieures d'histoire et de conservation des monuments anciens* in the Palais de Chaillot) was originally associated with the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, and like many other French architects M. Boiret regrets the changes in the system of architectural education which have removed it from the long-established *Section d'architecture*.

The election of *architecte en chef* is by means of competition, the first of which was held in 1893, and only 13 have been held since; when M. Boiret was elected he was one of four successful candidates. After obtaining his diploma in 1955 he had been working with three respected *architectes en chef*, Jean Pierre Paquet, Jean Trouvelot and Jean Creuzot in order to benefit from their experience; but he was also designing new buildings. In our discussion he referred to a number of banks and schools in central and suburban Paris for CNEP and BNP, the Palais de Justice at Versailles,⁴ and a number of residential and ecclesiastical buildings for which he has been responsible. He likes to have a mixture of old and new architecture in his office, although he calculates that 85 per cent of his time is now occupied with work on historic buildings. We talked about the growing number of architects who are now obtaining commissions to rehabilitate old buildings, and the unfamiliar responsibility this is placing on those who have had no preparation for this specialized type of work; M. Boiret would like to see greater attention given to this in early training, and he has noted that in France, as in other countries, the students themselves are asking for more rehabilitation studies to be included in their programmes.

As an *architecte en chef*, M. Boiret has overall responsibility for four *arrondissements* in Paris, the 5th and 6th, 13th and 14th, which together form about two-thirds of the city on the Left Bank of the Seine—a vast area which includes the Quartier Latin and the Faubourg Saint Germain. Within its boundaries are 62 classified buildings (*monuments classés*) and 230 listed (*monuments inscrits*), for all of which he is responsible—yet he remains calm and cheerful. Those in the former category receive Government grants for any building works approved, and the *architecte en chef* is required to prepare and supervise alterations and restorations; at any one time M. Boiret probably has about 20 under active conservation, although naturally the quantity of work on each differs considerably. Owners of *monuments inscrits* may choose their own architects but these are subject to his approval.

⁴ *Mur vivant* (1978), no. 50, 77 ff.

In addition to these *arrondissements* in Paris, M. Boiret's responsibility also extends to the *département* of Oise, which includes Beauvais, Compiègne, Senlis and Chantilly; and the list of his work spreads into other regions, Savoie et Haute-Savoie, Albi, Haute-Garonne, Orne and Rhône. He also has in his care the Château de Vincennes and Hôtel de Sully in Paris, Reims Cathedral and the Château de Maisons-Lafitte, all of which have been under conservation in varying degrees. How many assistants does he employ? At the most, he has had 10 including administrative staff, but these included a number of senior town-planning students. At present he has three qualified architects. He takes personal responsibility for all the decisions on historic buildings, but not necessarily on new work which he feels he can delegate. His appointment as *architecte en chef* places this former duty on him, so perhaps we need to consider briefly M. Boiret's interpretation of these duties.⁵

Several factors combine to make the work of an *architecte en chef* susceptible to criticism. The prestigious nature of the fabric on which he is working, its historical associations, the familiarity of historic buildings as elements in everyday life, and the public concern for them—all these impart a special quality to the work of the architect-conservator. Whatever solution he adopts, it is rarely unquestionable. Nor is it easy for an architect, whose training has been intended to develop sensitivity and imagination, to sublimate his own personality and remain completely objective. Indeed, asks M. Boiret, is it desirable even if possible? What other considerations are there? He must know how to recognize the hidden values of a work of art which have been distorted in the course of time and this requires understanding and perspicacity. He has to consider how to conserve something that cannot be kept alive in any sense unless some changes are permitted, and this may mean a delicate balance in adapting to contemporary life without destroying the building's quality.

In one of his publications,⁶ M. Boiret has enlarged on this theme, noting that an historic building is not only historical evidence and a source of aesthetic pleasure or emotion, nor is it a manuscript or a museum object; but also it is a living organism of which the beauty belongs to everyone (just as Hugo declared 150 years ago). However, it must be of service if it is to survive. And with that comes the architect's responsibility to ensure that the building's individual character is not destroyed during the process of utilization. In brief then, the architect-conservator's task is to retard the process of ageing by all the technical means at his disposal—but with discretion, adds M. Boiret casting his eyes back to some sad experiences in the nineteenth century. And yet, he adds, are there not some occasions when it is permissible to dream of rediscovering the departed spirit of a building? Romanticism is not dead in France.

⁵ *Monuments historiques* (1974), no. 4, 23 ff; (1981), no. 113, 53 ff.

⁶ *Monuments historiques* (1972), no. 1, 27 ff.

Every architect-conservator knows that it is not easy to subdue his personality, and to maintain historical objectivity; but the *architecte en chef*,

unlike his colleagues in some other countries, is not alone. He is part of an organization that has evolved with the intention of preserving the authenticity of monuments while benefiting from the creative skills and sensitivity of its architects; such is its avowed aim. The value of decisions taken in France depends, believes M. Boiret, on the balance that is attainable among the members of the *Commission supérieure des monuments historiques* despite the passionate and sometimes hostile nature of its debates. The incorporation of a permanent corpus of historians and archaeologists is, he claims, a great advantage in establishing an objective approach; and the administrative organization makes its contribution at different stages in the architect-conservator's work.

M. Boiret recalled how criticism in the past has sometimes taken the line that architects' decisions about when and how to make an intervention had been made according to their personal taste. Such criticism, he declared, could only be made by misunderstanding the working of the administration in France. The *architecte en chef's* responsibility is to ensure that the protected monuments within his designated districts are satisfactorily conserved and to assess how this can be achieved. His annual schedule is examined by a working party representing all the branches of the Service under the chairmanship of an *inspecteur-général*; in effect, he said, since 1969 the decisions about priorities have come from regional, not central, administration. Nor are these made solely on an architect's recommendation; other factors, including the degree of urgency, the likely durability of the building, the importance of local participation, etc. are also considered. At this stage, the architect has the advantage of having at his disposal the documentation in the Service's archives. We asked M. Boiret about this facility; but he said that despite the great help this afforded him, he still found it necessary to carry out further research on occasions. Sometimes he worked on this with his archaeologist or historian colleagues, sometimes with local people.

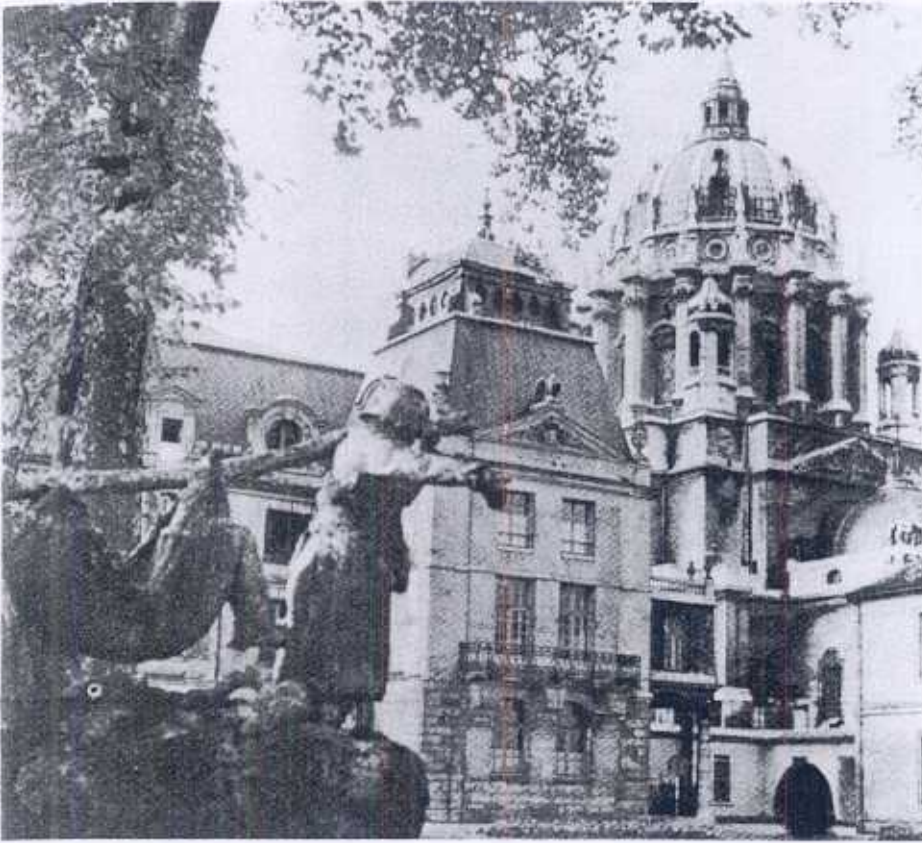
If a project is relevant exclusively to the architectural branch of the Service, the *inspecteur-général (architecture)* is consulted so that he may be satisfied the work will be done according to approved methods. Further consultation with the *Commission supérieure* may be made at discretion if questions of principle are involved, or if the monument is outstandingly important. Similarly, if the project presents problems related to the responsibility of the branch of the Service concerned with works of art (principally furniture, sculpture, paintings, glass or interior design generally) the responsible authority is consulted by the architect. Does all this appear a tedious procedure, we wondered? Possibly, but it was generally thought the nature of the buildings themselves justified such precautions. It is only after this procedure has taken place that work begins and the public becomes aware of the Service's intentions.

We talked about the preservation of facades and the insertion of new structures behind them. M. Boiret said this was an almost automatic

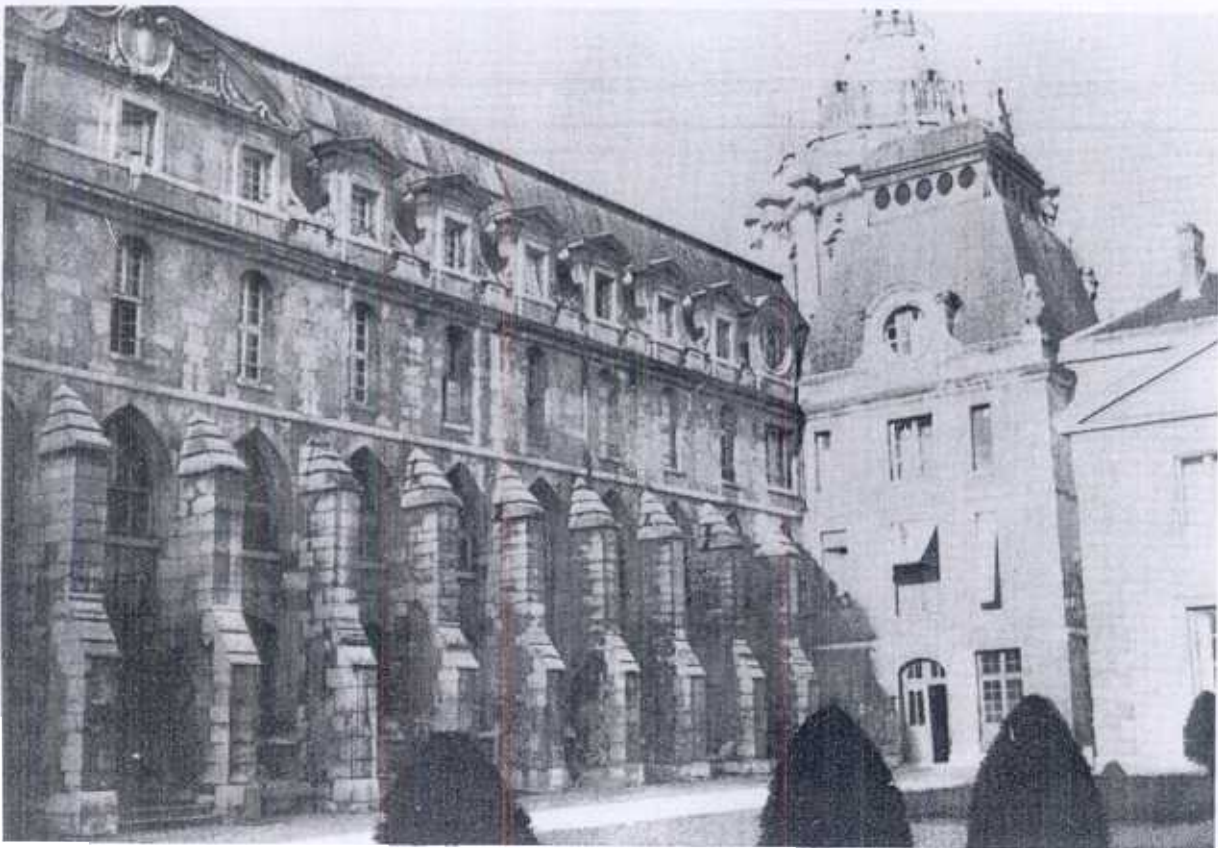


Figs 6 and 7. Chambéry; Place Saint-Léger after rehabilitation





FIGS 8 and 9. Paris, views of the group of buildings forming the church of the Val-de-Grâce and its former monastery. The latter is now being adapted as a school for military doctors.



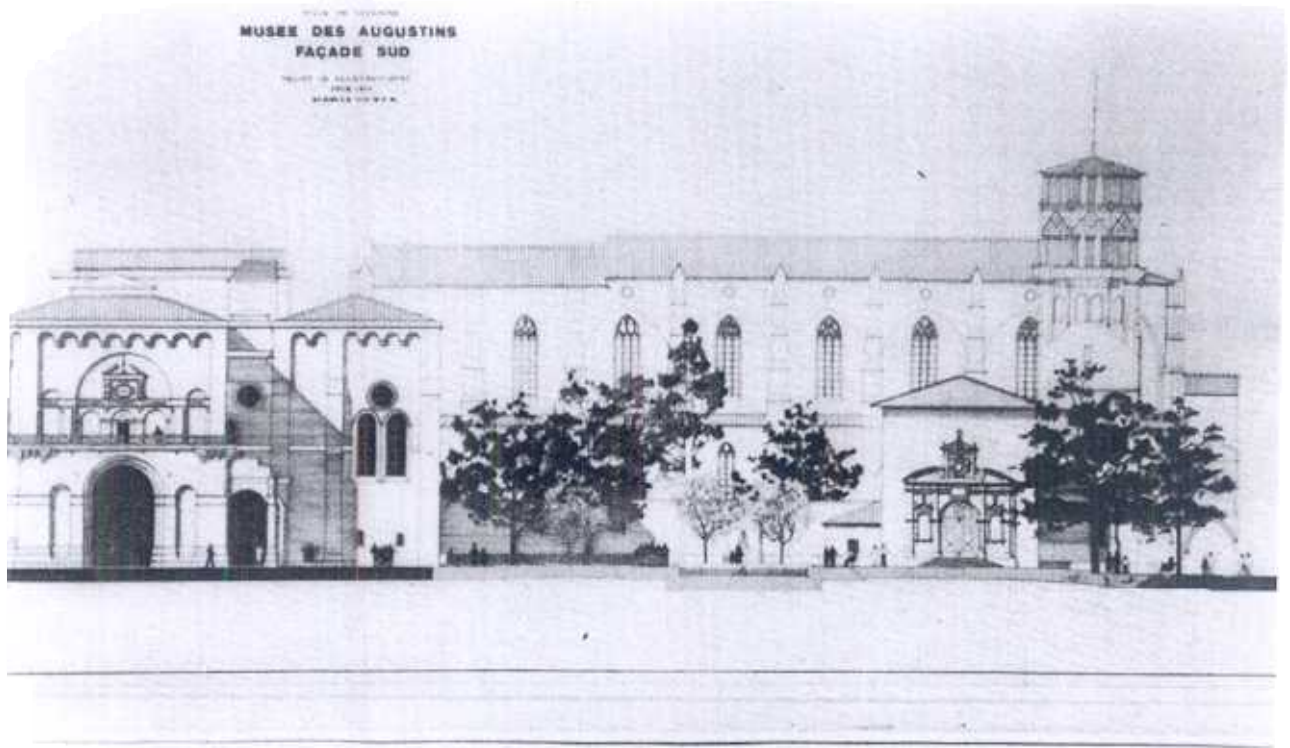


FIG. 10. Toulouse, Musée des Augustins; south elevation of an architectural group of various dates which has recently undergone a major reorganization.

result of the legislation in France which required the preservation of the character of a *secteur sauvegardé*; he has been engaged in varying degrees on such projects at Albi, Versailles and Chambéry (Figs 6 and 7) where there are long-term programmes of rehabilitation of the complex urban fabric.⁷ These studies have demonstrated to him that such projects need detailed surveys, floor by floor, of each building. Each urban situation is different, and there can be no general solutions in practice although he believes all buildings must have a life and purpose if they are to survive. The permissible changes are a matter of degree but he sees reuse as architecturally acceptable only if the relationship between the plan, section and facades is retained and if the spirit of the building remains. This is not easy but it represents the ideal.⁸

Among adaptation works, he referred especially to the present alterations he is making to the former monastery of Val-de-Grâce (Figs 8 and 9). Built in the seventeenth century, it was converted to a military hospital during the Revolution; but as a new building has recently been erected elsewhere for this purpose, the old monastery is once again being put to a new use. In future it will be a school for military doctors. Another reorganization of an old building which we discussed is that in Toulouse which has housed the Musée des Augustins since the end of the eighteenth century. During that time there have been several modifications and additions to the original convent buildings, almost inevitably including work by Viollet-le-Duc in the 1870s (Figs 10, 11 and 12). M. Boiret

⁷ *Monuments historiques* (1976), no. 6, 61 ff.

⁸ *Monuments historiques* (1978), no. 5, 27 ff.

defined his responsibilities here as to conserve and present the works of art in the best conditions (both physical and aesthetic), to rehabilitate an historic building on which successive generations have left their mark, and to ensure that the present work is reversible. 'The old Augustinian convent has undergone many transformations since 1341', he commented 'and there is no reason to think today's will be the last'. The adaptation of buildings and the integration of old and new in historic towns are among M. Boiret's special interests, and subjects on which he lectures at the *Centre d'études supérieures d'histoire et de conservation des monuments anciens*. When designing alterations or additions, he believes that in principle they should be distinguishable immediately from the original. Similarly, in designing new buildings in historic town centres he prefers not to use pastiche solutions; nevertheless, he thinks there are occasions and situations when designs in an historical style are justifiable if a primary objective is to maintain the architectural character of a section of a town. But in general he prefers to respect the principles implied in Article 9 of the Venice Charter when it refers to new work bearing 'a contemporary stamp'; although we must confess to great difficulty in defining exactly what that means.

Nevertheless, there are occasions when M. Boiret believes exceptions should be made to complete obedience to some of the principles in the Charter; and in the work on Saint-Sernin, Toulouse for which he has been responsible there has been a decision which is not in accordance with

FIG. 11. Toulouse, Musée des Augustins; north-south section.

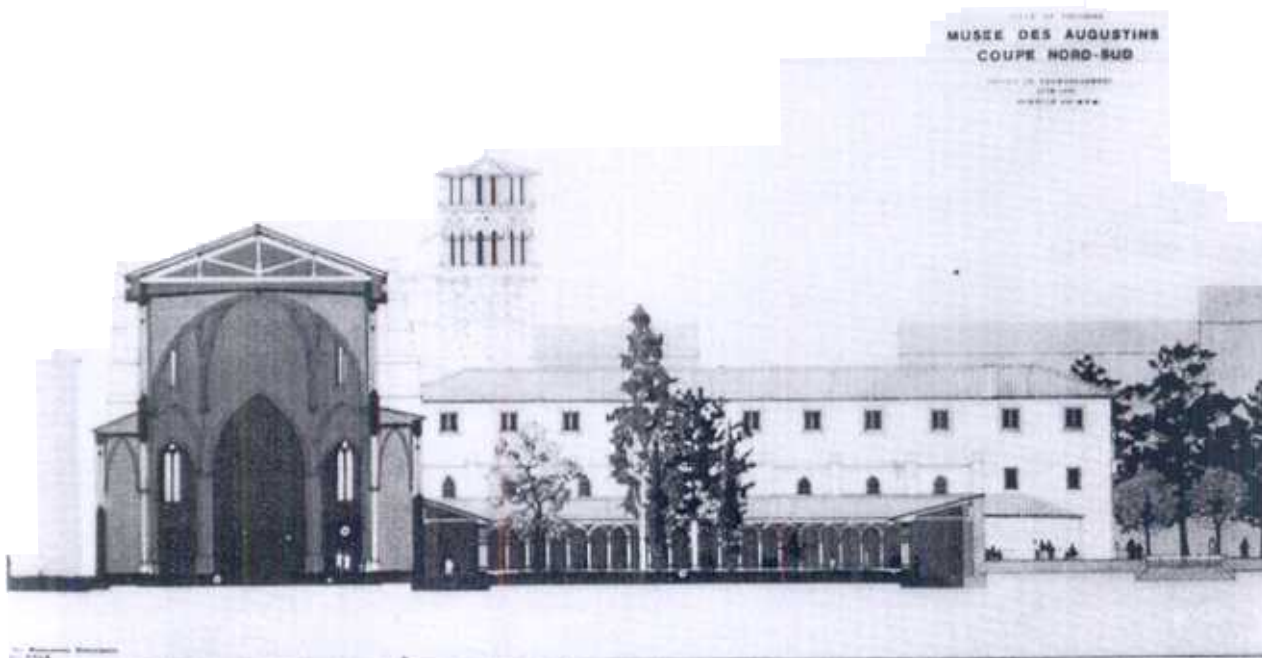


FIG. 12. Toulouse, Musée des Augustins; model of the project.

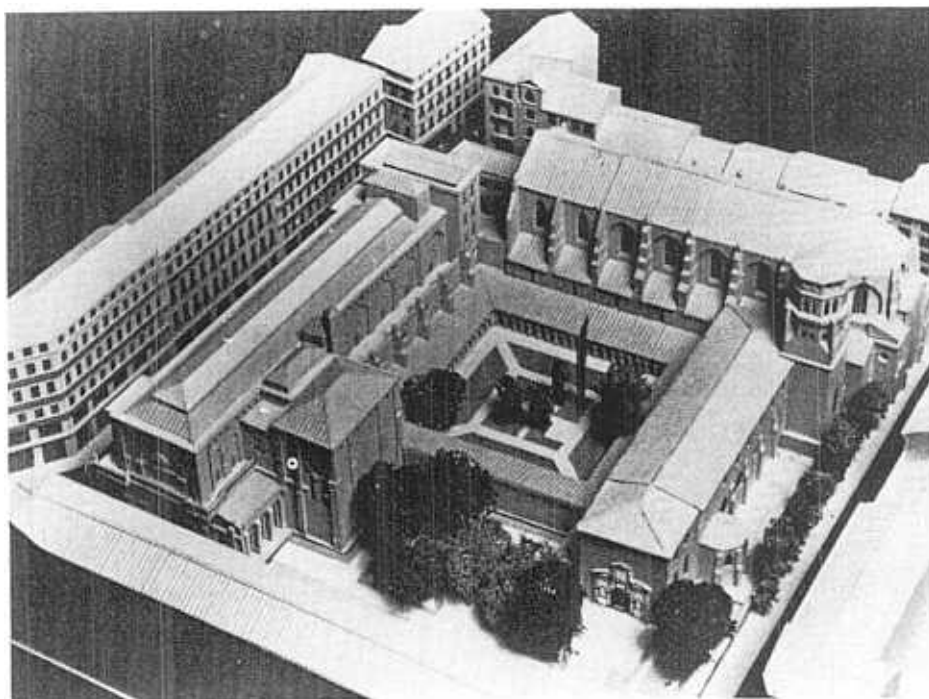


FIG. 13. Toulouse, Saint-Sernin; south elevation of the basilica as restored by Viollet-le-Duc.



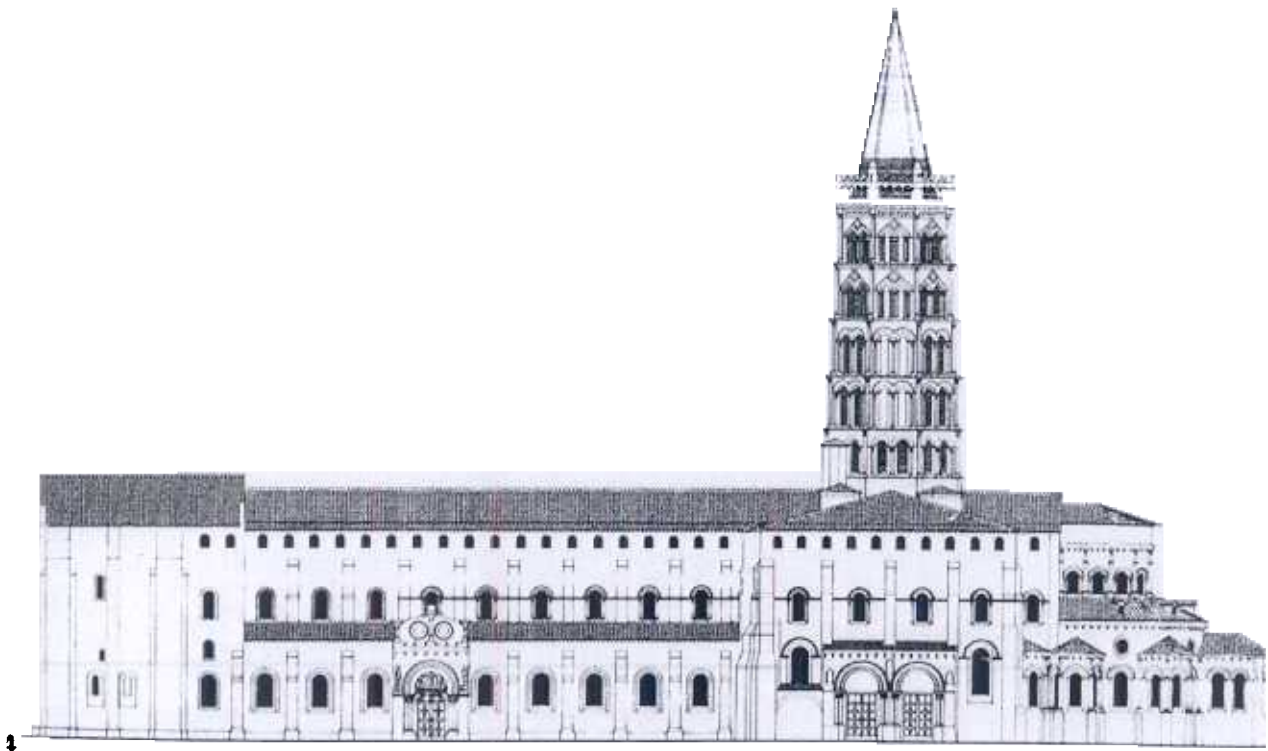


FIG. 14. Toulouse, Saint-Sernin; south elevation of the proposed 'derestoration'.

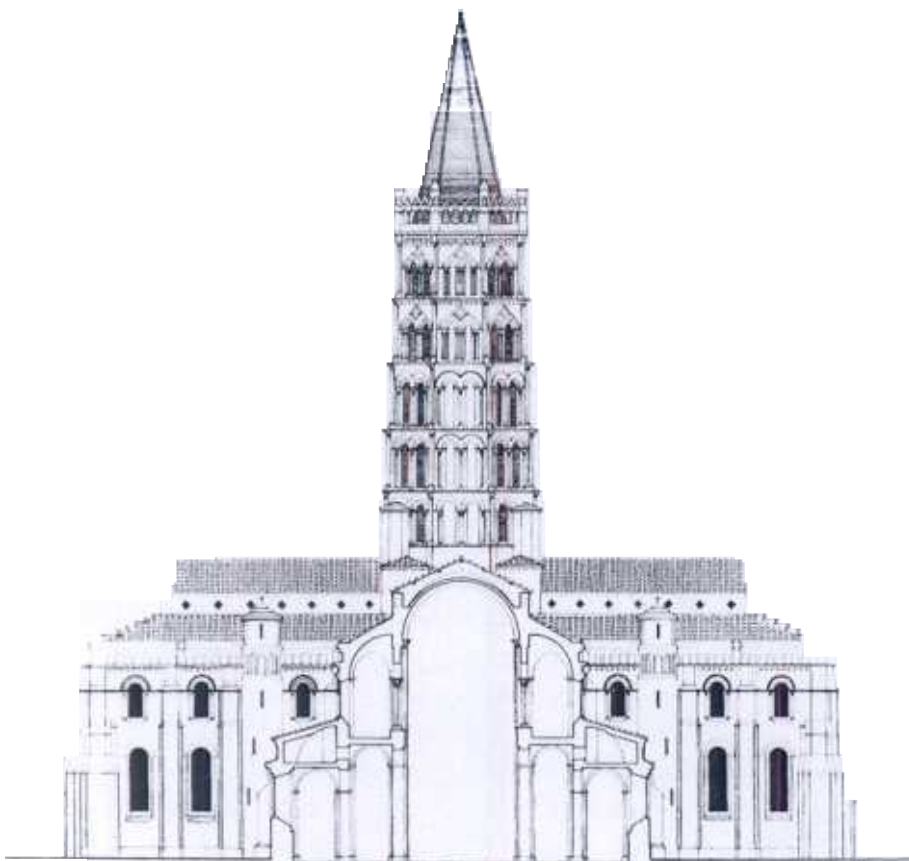


FIG. 15. Toulouse, Saint-Sernin; north-south section as restored by Viollet-le-Duc.

Article 11. As all readers of *Monumentum* will know, Article 11 requires that ‘the valid contributions of all periods to the building of a monument must be respected, since unity of style is not the aim of a restoration’. It is in this definition of one aspect of an architect-conservator’s responsibility that there is, or may be, a conflict with nineteenth-century practice which took the opposite view; and in the Romanesque church of Saint-Sernin there was a confrontation of interpretation of the two philosophies (*Figs 1 and 13 to 18*).

There is no space here to consider in detail what happened to this famous building after the Revolution; those readers who wish to pursue the subject may do so in M. Boiret’s articles,⁹ but in brief there was a removal of monastic accretions around the chevet at the east end which made some form of restoration inevitable. Internally the walls and vaulting had been plastered. In 1845 Viollet-le-Duc was instructed to prepare a report, which was submitted two years later although work was delayed until the 1860s. It was pronounced excellent by Mérimée, who proposed beginning with the east end, *les absides qui sont le plus belle partie du monument*, and then proceeding to the rest of the building when time and money were available. In accordance with his principle of restoring a stylistic unity to a building, even if it had never existed, Viollet-le-Duc rebuilt the roof over the apse and the crowning parapet of the octagonal bell-tower over the crossing, and he added ‘improvements’ to the upper parts of the transept and nave walls in order to make the building conform to his ideal Romanesque model. Photographs taken before work began show how much was added and to what extent Viollet-le-Duc altered the architectural character by ironing out the inconsistencies. Internally he removed the seventeenth-century woodwork and replaced it with neo-Romanesque decoration of his own contriving. As soon as the full extent of his modifications became apparent there was criticism. In 1874 there was a denunciation of his work which afforded ‘proof of how little respect even monuments of the first order inspired in him’ and in time the criticism was extended to his restoration techniques too. The Carcassonne stone which he had used began to show defects and there was severe damage caused by water penetration.

The building was obviously in need of urgent repair and in 1965 an investigation began. Subsequently M. Sylvain Stym-Popper, the *architecte en chef* in charge of the church, began to restore the central tower to which Viollet-le-Duc had made modifications. At this point there emerged a proposal that instead of restoring the nineteenth-century ‘restoration’ which was known to be invented, there should be an attempt to reconstruct the pre-Viollet-le-Duc appearance of the building as revealed in photographs taken before he began work. The proposal made its way through the administrative and consultative process already described, and it was approved by the *Délégation permanente des monuments historiques* in 1969. The work on the tower was completed in 1970, by which time M.

⁹ *Monuments historiques* (1973), no. 1, 35 ff; (1980), no. 112, 49 ff.

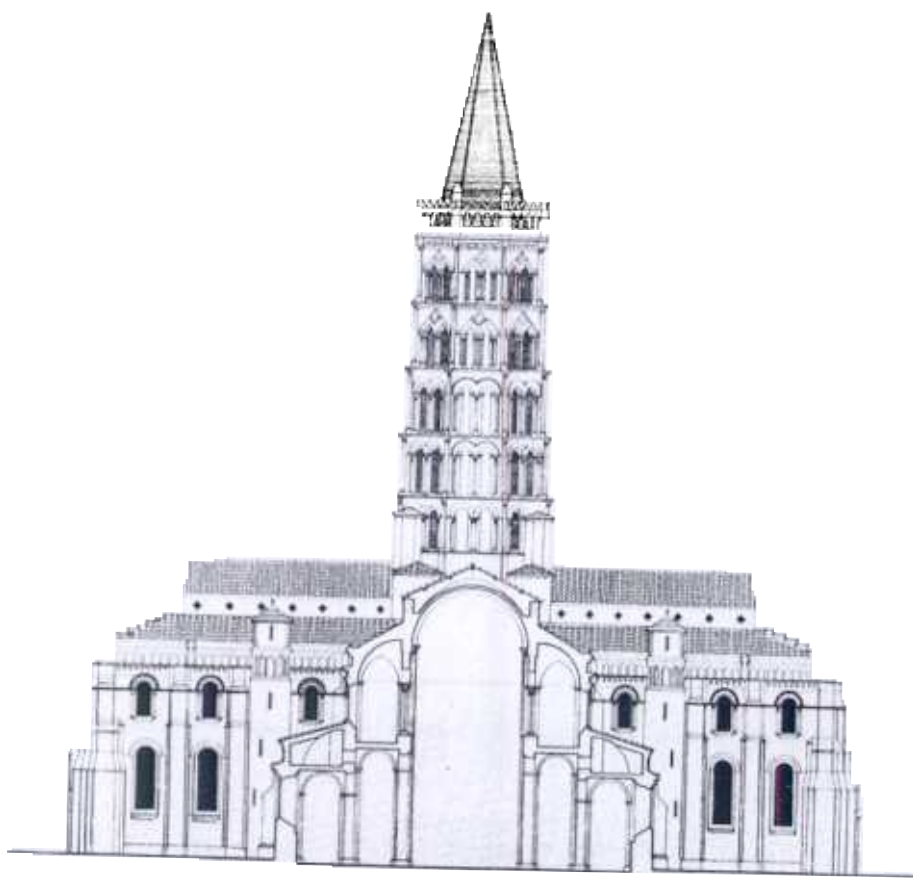


FIG. 16. Toulouse, Saint-Sernin; north-south section of the proposed 'derestoration'.

Stym-Popper had left the scene. Three years later M. Boiret wrote of the result of this first phase of the work as *un clocher consolidé et restitué selon la vérité historique*; and it then became his responsibility to complete the removal of Viollet-le-Duc's additions and restore *la vérité historique* to the rest of the structure.¹⁰ Internally, the recent changes have been the responsibility of M. Georges Costa, who has replaced some of the seventeenth-century woodwork removed by Viollet-le-Duc, while retaining some of the decoration he added.¹¹

In taking such decisions as these, it is easy to appreciate the advantage of working within such a system as that which has evolved in France. The criticism which we had discussed already with M. Boiret that some decisions had been taken in the past by architects who were following their personal tastes can be discounted when we remember the complex procedure already described. All points of view must have been put forward, but the curious result is that the building is now in that state described by Viollet-le-Duc in his famous definition of *restauration* as one that 'could never have existed at any given time'—even if he meant something slightly different when writing those words. The proposal to derestore (which added a new word to our language) was approved by the *Commission des monuments historiques* which also affirmed its allegiance to

Monuments historiques
3), no. 1, 4

Monuments historiques
10), no. 112, 60 ff; C. des
3, 'Le cas de Saint-Sernin
Toulouse', *L'Oeil* (1980),
302, 44 ff.

(a)



(b)



FIG. 17. Toulouse, Saint-Sernin; (a) sketches of the chevet and central tower as restored by Viollet-le-Duc and (b) as proposed for 'derestoration'.

the principles of the Venice Charter, but in the case of Saint-Sernin it decided that the removal of these particular 'contributions . . . to the building of a monument' was permissible because of Viollet-le-Duc's imperfect technique and the unjustifiable expense of reproducing his hypothetical restoration in more durable materials than he himself had chosen.

We may easily surmise the length and depth of the arguments that must have raged before this decision was taken. Had M. Boiret any doubts about its being the correct one? Have we the right to destroy recent work which is part of a building's history, as Viollet-le-Duc himself had done when he removed (but did not destroy) the seventeenth-century woodwork in Saint-Sernin? He has no doubt about the seriousness of the decision or the implication it could have in future but his proposal was based on a critical analysis of Viollet-le-Duc's work, which he describes as 'technically bad and aesthetically mediocre'. In his opinion, which was agreed to by his colleagues, his famous predecessor had been influenced too much by imagination, which had seriously affected the quality of the architectural form, the scale of the facades and the general appearance of Saint-Sernin. In this case all had been distorted; so should these

distortions have been restored? There are some who think they should have been. M. Bruno Foucart of the University of Paris, who was responsible for the great commemorative exhibition devoted to Viollet-le-Duc in 1980 at the Grand Palais, is one who is critical. He has noted the similarity between this attitude and that of Viollet-le-Duc's generation to the mixed fabric of which most historic buildings are composed. Nor does he believe that what existed 'before' was necessarily better than what is there 'after' such an intervention as Viollet-le-Duc made at Saint-Sernin. Is it not strange, he asks, that the contributions of a certain moment in its history seem to cause the destruction of preceding contributions?¹²

The work at Toulouse provoked a conference organized by the French section of ICOMOS, of which M. Boiret is Chairman, on the subject of *Restaurer les restaurations*; the contributions have recently been published,¹³ and there is little doubt that the last word on this subject has not yet been heard. Saint-Sernin has been given a place in the history of conservation as a concept that has been executed and whatever else M. Boiret does in his distinguished professional career, his name will inevitably be associated with this project. But he is confident that the decision was the right one.

The architectural and historical value of this building is of far greater significance than the preservation of the documentary value of the work of one man. Viollet-le-Duc's qualities are sufficiently recognized elsewhere, and they will not be tarnished by the adverse judgment passed on one of his less exemplary achievements.¹⁴

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Restaurer les Restaurations*, Paris, 1981.

¹⁴ *Monuments historiques* (1980), no. 112, 59.

Résumé

Pour inaugurer notre série de rencontres avec des architectes-conservateurs de différents pays, nous avons rendu visite à M. Yves Boiret, élu architecte en chef en 1963. Né à Fontenay-aux-Roses, il a reçu le titre de Diplômé par le Gouvernement en 1955, à l'époque où il a commencé sa profession dans le bureau de son père, M. Georges Boiret, Boulevard Saint-Germain à Paris. Jouissant d'un héritage architectural du côté de son père mais aussi du côté de sa mère, il estime que c'est de celle-ci qu'il a reçu l'intérêt spécial qui l'attire vers les bâtiments historiques. C'est en 1955 également qu'il a reçu son Diplôme d'études supérieures pour la conservation des monuments Anciens, diplôme obligatoire pour devenir candidat au poste d'architecte en chef. Il a collaboré avec trois autres architectes respectés détenteurs de ce titre, Jean Pierre Paquet, Jean Trouvelot et Jean Creuzot, afin de bénéficier de leur expertise; mais cela ne l'a pas empêché de dresser en même temps des plans pour des

bâtiments nouveaux. Il se plaît à mélanger des projets pour des anciens bâtiments avec des projets nouveaux, même si, d'après ses propres chiffres, ce sont les premiers qui occupent 85 per cent de son temps. Nous avons parlé du nombre croissant d'architectes qui prennent en charge la réhabilitation d'anciens bâtiments, et des responsabilités insolites que cela pose sur les épaules de ceux qui n'ont pas fait d'études spécialisées pour ce genre de travail, études auxquelles M. Boiret voudrait accorder plus d'importance dans les études de base.

En tant qu'architecte en chef, M. Boiret a la responsabilité générale pour quatre arrondissements à Paris, les Ve, VIe, XIIIe et XIVe, une vaste superficie qui comprend, entre autres, le Quartier Latin et le Faubourg Saint-Germain, et qui contient 62 monuments classés et 230 monuments inscrits; de tout cela, c'est lui le responsable. Les monuments classés bénéficient de subventions gouvernementales pour tout

travail approuvé, et c'est l'architecte en chef qui doit préparer et surveiller chaque changement ou restauration; à un moment donné il est probable que M. Boiret ait une vingtaine à l'étude ou en progrès. Sa responsabilité dépasse ces limites pour pénétrer dans d'autres départements de la France, et il a la charge de plusieurs autres monuments en plus. Il a combien de professionnels dans son bureau? Au maximum, il en a eu dix, y compris ceux chargés de l'administration, et un certain nombre d'étudiants à la fin de leurs études; en ce moment il y a trois architectes. Pour toutes les décisions qui regardent les bâtiments historiques, c'est lui qui est personnellement responsable, mais pour ce qui concerne les nouveaux, il se sent libre de déléguer certaines des décisions. Nous avons discuté de la conservation des façades et de l'insertion de nouvelles structures à l'intérieur. Pour M. Boiret, c'est le résultat presque inévitable des lois françaises qui exigent la conservation du caractère d'un secteur sauvegardé; il s'est occupé lui-même dans une certaine mesure de projets semblables aussi bien que d'adaptations telles que le projet actuel pour l'ancien monastère de Val-de-Grâce.

Quelle est, selon lui, la qualité particulière qui est exigée de l'architecte-conservateur?

Percevoir la nature des bâtiments eux-mêmes, les associations historiques, leur aspect d'élément familier dans la vie quotidienne, l'affection du public envers eux; la faculté de reconnaître les valeurs cachées d'une oeuvre d'art déformée; l'équilibre qui permettra d'adapter un bâtiment à la vie contemporaine sans en détruire les qualités historiques. Sa tâche, dit-il, est de retarder le vieillissement avec tous les moyens techniques disponibles—mais aussi avec discrétion. Il accepte que ce soit difficile pour un architecte de passer au-delà de sa propre personnalité et d'agir d'une façon objective; mais l'architecte-en-chef français n'agit pas seul, ce qui n'est pas le cas pour ses collègues en d'autres pays. Il fait partie d'une organisation qui a évolué pour permettre une décision équilibrée, objective et collective, ce qui absout finalement l'architecte de la critique qui voudrait voir l'influence de son goût personnel dans ses actions.

Nous avons parlé des travaux dans l'église romane de Saint-Sernin à Toulouse, travaux pour lesquels M. Boiret a été responsable. Restaurée en 1860 par Viollet-le-Duc, l'église avait besoin de réparations urgentes un siècle plus tard. C'est à ce moment-là qu'on a proposé que l'on devrait essayer de rétablir l'église telle qu'elle paraissait dans les vieilles photographies, dans son état pre-Viollet-le-Duc, au lieu de restaurer la restauration du dix-neuvième siècle. On s'imagine facilement combien de débats a suscité cette proposition, avant la décision de l'accepter. M. Boiret

a-t-il des doutes à cet égard? Il n'en a aucun quant à la gravité de cette décision, ni quant aux effets futurs possibles. Le choix s'est fondé sur une critique des travaux de Viollet-le-Duc qui ont, selon lui, faussé les qualités architectoniques et historiques du monument; il est sûr que la décision est bonne, et que les qualités prééminentes de Viollet-le-Duc (que l'on reconnaît de toutes parts) ne souffriront pas de la condamnation apportée à une de ses oeuvres inférieures.

Resumen

En la primera de la serie de entrevistas con arquitectos-conservadores de diversas partes del mundo, visitamos a M. Yves Boiret, elegido como *architecte en chef* en 1963. Nacido en Fontenay-aux-Roses, obtuvo el título de *Diplômé par le gouvernement* en 1955 y se unió a su padre Georges en su despacho actual de París, en el Boulevard Saint-Germain. Con antecedentes arquitectónicos tanto por el lado paterno como por el materno, él cree que su especial interés por los edificios históricos procede de este último, y en 1955 se le concedió también el título de *Diplômé d'études supérieures pour la conservation des monuments anciens*, cualificación indispensable para poder aspirar al cargo de *architecte en chef*. Trabajó al lado de tres respetados poseedores de este título, Jean Pierre Paquet, Jean Trouvelot y Jean Creuzot, a fin de beneficiarse de su experiencia, pero al mismo tiempo diseñaba nuevos edificios. Le gusta poder ocuparse de lo viejo y de lo nuevo, aunque calcula que el 85 per cent del tiempo lo destina ahora al primer aspecto. Conversamos acerca del número creciente de arquitectos comisionados en la actualidad para la rehabilitación de antiguos edificios y de la nueva responsabilidad que esto representa para los que no han recibido preparación en este tipo de trabajo especializado, lo cual le gustaría que recibiese mayor atención a principios de la carrera.

Como *architecte en chef*, M. Boiret es responsable de cuatro *arrondissements* de París, el 5°, 6°, 13° y 14°, vasta zona que incluye el Quartier Latin y el Faubourg Saint-Germain, y que contiene 62 *monuments classés* y 230 *monuments inscrits*, de todos los cuales tiene responsabilidad. Los de la primera categoría reciben subsidios del Gobierno para las obras que se aprueben, y el *architecte en chef* debe preparar y supervisar las alteraciones y las restauraciones; en un momento determinado, M. Boiret suele tener unas veinte en estado activo de conservación. Su responsabilidad se extiende a otros departamentos y también está encargado de otros varios monumentos. ¿Cuántos arquitectos trabajan a sus órdenes? Como máximo, ha tenido diez, incluyendo personal administrativo y

varios estudiantes avanzados: actualmente tiene tres arquitectos de carrera. Asume responsabilidad personal por todas las decisiones referentes a edificios históricos, pero cree que puede delegar parte de ella en las obras nuevas. Hablamos de la conservación de fachadas y de la inserción de nuevas estructuras por detrás de ellas, lo cual considera casi como un resultado automático de la legislación francesa que requiere la conservación del carácter de un *secteur sauvegardé*: ha participado, en diverso grado, en proyectos de este tipo y en adaptaciones como las del trabajo en curso en el antiguo monasterio de Val-de-Grâce.

¿Cómo ve él las cualidades especiales que se requieren del arquitecto-conservador? La naturaleza de los propios edificios, sus asociaciones históricas, la familiaridad que ofrecen como elementos de la vida cotidiana, el interés público que se siente por ellos; la habilidad de reconocer los valores ocultos de una obra de arte que se han visto distorsionados; el sentido de equilibrio necesario para adaptar un edificio a la vida actual sin destruir sus cualidades. Describió su tarea como la de retardar el proceso de envejecimiento por todos los medios técnicos a su alcance, pero con discreción. Reconoce que al arquitecto no le es fácil sublimar su propia personalidad y permanecer totalmente objetivo; pero el *architecte en chef*, a diferencia de

sus colegas en otros países, no está solo. Forma parte de una organización que ha surgido para llegar a una decisión equilibrada, objetiva y colectiva que acaba por absolver al arquitecto de la acusación de que su gusto personal ha influido sobre sus acciones.

Comentamos las obras de la iglesia románica de Saint-Sernin, Toulouse, de las cuales se ha encargado M. Boiret. Restaurada por Viollet-le-Duc en la década de los sesenta del siglo pasado, se hallaba un siglo después en necesidad de urgentes reparaciones cuando se hizo la propuesta de que, en lugar de restaurar la restauración del siglo diecinueve, habría que intentar devolverle el aspecto anterior a Viollet-le-Duc, como aparecía en fotografías antiguas. Fácilmente podemos imaginar el calibre de las discusiones que deben de haber surgido antes de que se decidiese llevar a cabo tal obra. ¿Le queda alguna duda a M. Boiret sobre la propiedad de esta decisión? No siente la menor duda ni de su seriedad ni de las posibles implicaciones de cara al futuro, pero se basó en una inspección crítica del trabajo de Viollet-le-Duc, el cual le parece haber distorsionado las cualidades arquitectónicas e históricas del edificio, y se siente seguro de que la decisión fue acertada y de que las notables cualidades de Viollet-le-Duc (reconocidas de sobras en otros sitios) no se resentirán del juicio negativo manifestado sobre uno de sus logros menos ejemplares.