

The world of conservation

An interview with Raymond Lemaire

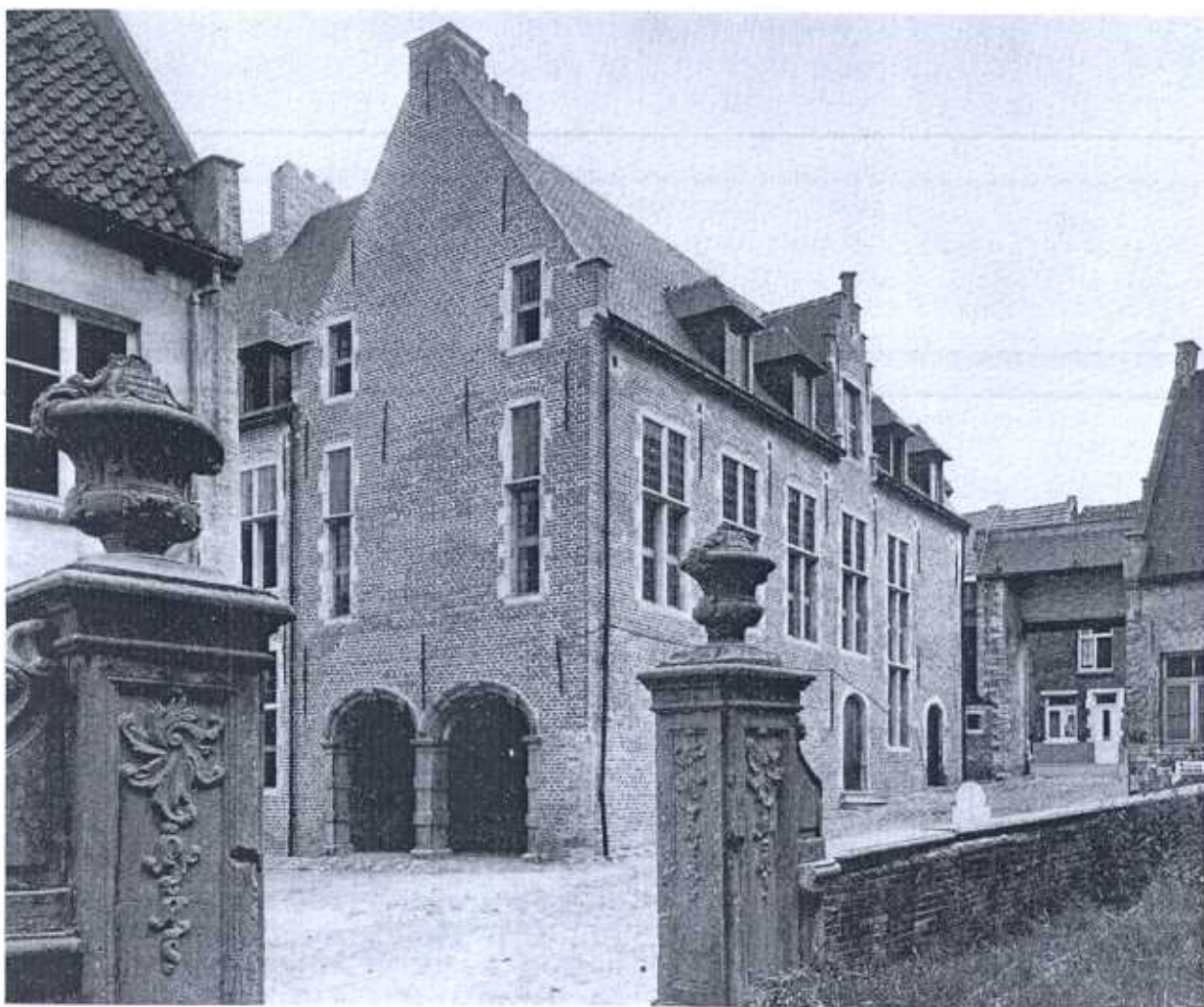


FIG. 1. The Grand Béguinage, Louvain; the group of buildings at the main entrance, including Professor Lemaire's office.



FIG. 2. Raymond Lemaire.

There is an old saying that a man may be judged by the company he keeps; and another that his character may be read by the books he has on his shelves. Both apply to architects as to other men; but in their case there is another indication, and that is the place in which they work.

When we went to visit Raymond Lemaire (Fig. 2) we walked through the gateway to the Grand Béguinage in Louvain and then entered a handsome seventeenth-century house (Fig. 1). In the lofty, brightly-lit entrance hall we found a decapitated stone bishop guarding the lower flight of a wide oak staircase; and then we opened the door into a large but austere room in which there are no curtains to conceal the fine proportions of the windows, no colour to distract our attention from the architectural quality of the room and the noble fireplace, no conscious attempt to furnish in the original style of the room. Everything is harmonious, serene and workmanlike; and in this cool, intellectual room we began to talk to Professor Lemaire about his work.

It was quickly apparent that we were in the presence of two men, or rather two aspects of our host. The first is the professor of architecture at both universities in Louvain, who has studied his native architecture and undertaken many commissions to conserve Belgian monuments. A rough assessment suggests he has been in charge of at least thirty churches, six castles and six major houses; and he has been involved with at least nineteen historic areas, villages and towns.¹ But while these statistics represent the man who has been closely concerned for the preservation of his own national heritage, there is another aspect of his character that will be well known to readers of *Monumentum*. Quite simply, he said, 'ICOMOS has been a part of my life'. As the first Secretary-General until 1973, President until 1981, and now *Président d'Honneur*,² Professor Lemaire is a familiar international figure in the world of conservation in which he has played a leading part for almost twenty years. Quite apart from visits in his official capacity during eight Presidential years, he has undertaken missions for UN, Unesco, ICCROM and the Council of Europe in many countries. He has advised on such monuments as the Temple of Borobudur, the Acropolis at Athens, the prehistoric town of Mohendjo-Daro and the Temple of Zeus at Jerash, the ruined town of Shukothai and the painted churches at Moldavia.³ And so, knowing of this full architectural life, we were surprised to hear that he once had other intentions.

He was born close to Brussels, into a family which had architectural traditions. For a time his father occupied the post of Director-General of Buildings in the Office of Public Works, and his uncle was a professor at the University of Louvain who published in 1938 a pioneering text which discussed the restoration of historic monuments.⁴ With this background he told us he had fought against architecture during his youth but, he added (without any noticeable regret), 'I didn't escape'. However, his first choice of study was law, and in 1938 he enrolled at the University of

Louvain, the third generation of his family to be connected with that famous institution founded in 1425. But after a time he changed to history and architecture. We asked which came first, and received the answer that it was history, especially architectural history. What made him turn to architecture itself? 'I quickly became convinced that it was impossible to understand architecture without practising it'. And when, as might have been predicted, his strong predisposition towards the investigation of the historical and archaeological aspects of architecture led him towards conservation, he soon realised there was something lacking. 'I saw that restoration was a discipline, but one without a scientific base'. At that time the training of architects was, in his opinion, generally poor. It was in reaction against what Professor Lemaire calls 'the richness of tradition and the past', and he counts himself fortunate that his own training had been based on historical investigation and research.

When he was young he worked for a time in the office of Henri Van de Velde, the Art Nouveau architect and designer who had been influenced in the 1890s by reading the works of John Ruskin and William Morris, and by learning about the Arts and Crafts Movement which played a significant part in the development of conservation in England; but it was not until he was about 40 that Professor Lemaire designed any new buildings. At first he was working mainly on the repair and liturgical reorganization of churches. He was critical of many of the decisions taken about the interventions made by the insertion of new furnishings and decorative elements, and he felt it should be possible to make changes (assuming they were necessary) without disrupting the traditional harmony. Furthermore, he believes it is the responsibility of the conservation architect to try to recover harmony in the buildings under his care.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating, as another old expression graphically tells us in looking for practical results rather than abstract theories; and so we left the Grand Béguinage to visit three churches on which Professor Lemaire worked in the late 1950s. He selected them because he thought them representative of different means by which they had been enabled to continue in existence, as well as illustrating different balancing of values.

The first was the Chapel of St. Lambert at Heverlee, now used as a university chapel and standing on a little hillock surrounded by trees (Fig. 3). The ruined, arcaded shell of a Romanesque chapel, attached to a later tower that had been restored in the nineteenth century, presented a design problem which theoretically offered a number of different solutions ranging from consolidation as a ruin to hypothetical restoration to its eleventh-century appearance. Professor Lemaire's solution was to conserve and stabilize the standing fabric, provide a minimal superstructure to support a roof, and glaze the large arched openings with plate glass separated by flexible jointing from the reveals of the stonework.

¹ Professor Lemaire has received two Belgian decorations for his work, Officier de l'Ordre de Léopold (1963) and Commandeur de l'Ordre de la Couronne (1973).

² In addition to undertaking these responsibilities for ICOMOS, he was editor of *Monumentum* from its inception until 1981.

³ He has also acted as the personal representative of the Director-General of Unesco at Jerusalem.

⁴ C. R. Lemaire, *La Restauration des Monuments Anciens*, Anvers 1938.

Damp-proofing, ventilation and the necessary services were installed so that the chapel could regain its function as a place of worship, but otherwise the complete ruin was preserved intact with the necessary additional work expressed in an obviously contemporary manner. Moreover, as Professor Lemaire demonstrated while discussing the detailed design of the glazing and metal ties, all his work is reversible. The result quite clearly expresses two phases of the building in which both are readily distinguishable—the ruin of the eleventh-century chapel and the university chapel of the 1950s—and in hindsight it can be seen as a concept which became incorporated in the recommendations of the 1964 Venice Charter. This solution also represents a reliance on the use of natural materials, the absence of decoration, and the integration of a building with its surroundings (*Fig. 4*).

The second church we visited was St. Médard at Jodoigne, a large Romanesque building which had been altered internally more than once during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (*Fig. 5*). During the necessary investigation before repairing and making liturgical reordering, the original form of the structure became more apparent after the removal of eighteenth-century plasterwork, and in making an assessment



FIG. 3. The Chapel of St. Lambert, Heverlee showing the glazed arched openings.

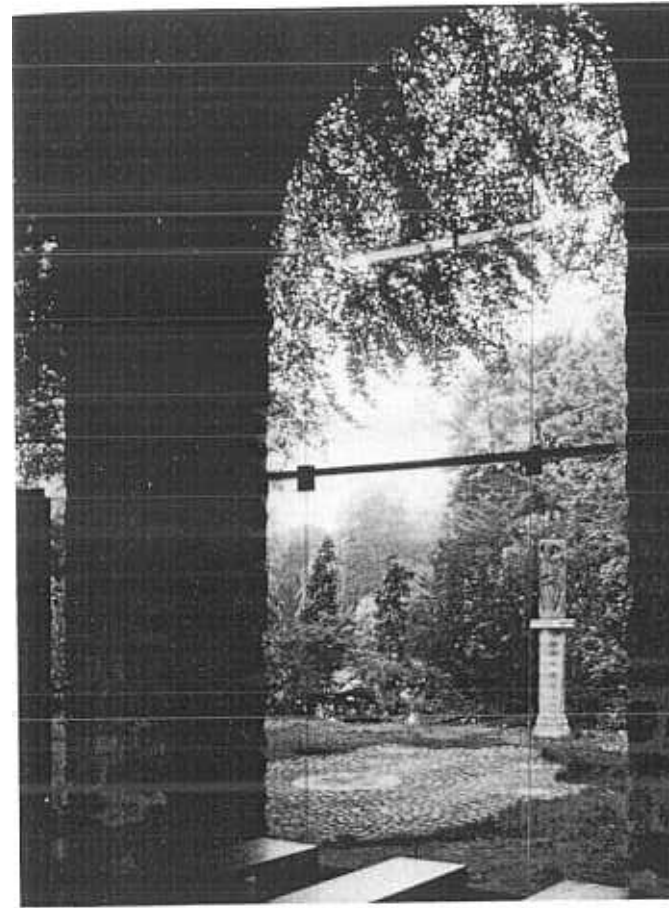


FIG. 4. The view from inside the Chapel of St. Lambert, Heverlee.

of the interior's different values (i.e. historical and aesthetic) the decision was taken to expose the early thirteenth-century limestone walling and corner shafts while retaining the eighteenth-century plastered vaulting (*Fig 6*). Professor Lemaire was the first to comment that this might appear to contradict the recommendation in the Venice Charter that 'the valid contributions of all periods . . . must be respected'; but the same Article 11 does allow the revealing of the underlying state

when what is removed is of little interest and the material which is brought to light is of great historical, archaeological or aesthetic value, and its state of preservation good enough to justify the action.

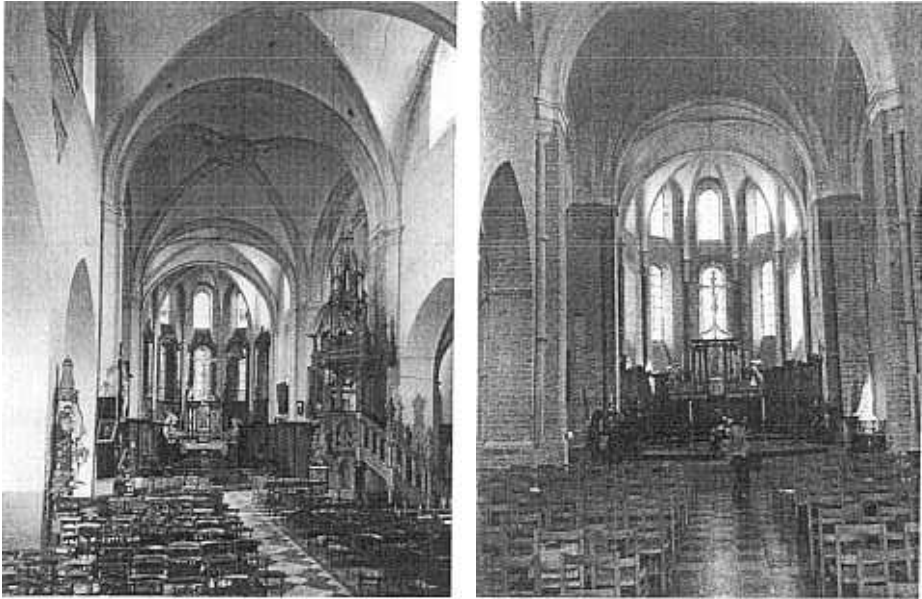


FIG. 5. St. Médard, Jodoigne before reordering and repairs.

FIG. 6. St. Médard, Jodoigne after the completion of the work.

Some of the eighteenth-century furnishings were retained, some were removed but placed elsewhere in the church, and some were taken away. Here, as we discussed in the serene interior, there had been a compromise. Admittedly the church had never before existed in its present form; but quite apart from the historical interest of what has been revealed, the quality and colour of the stonework exposed are a strong factor in defending their retention rather than covering them with undecorated plaster in accordance with the eighteenth-century practice. The two materials and styles are unexpectedly harmonious and complementary. A dogmatic respect for historical values would have dictated preserving the interior exactly as it was and covering the thirteenth-century fabric; but in our discussion on site Professor Lemaire revealed two personal characteristics which recurred frequently. One is his recognition of the natural quality of traditional building materials and his wish to allow this to express itself when it accords with the tradition and spirit of the architecture; the other is his rational, considered solution to each problem.

These two characteristics were discernible when we visited the third church, St. Adèle at Orp-le-Grand. Once again there had been a decision to leave exposed the stonework in the interior (*Fig. 7*), which had

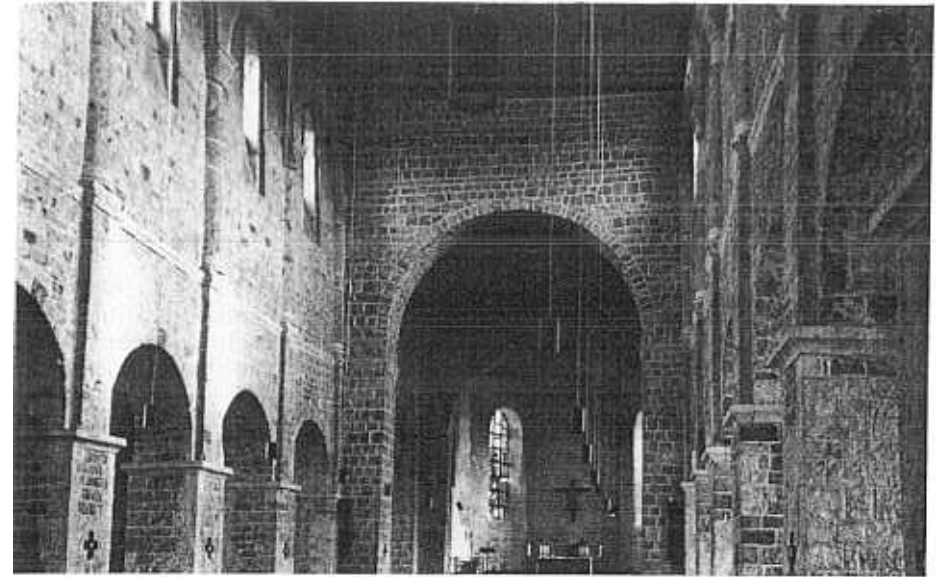


FIG. 7. St. Adèle, Orp-le-Grand after the exposure of the stonework.

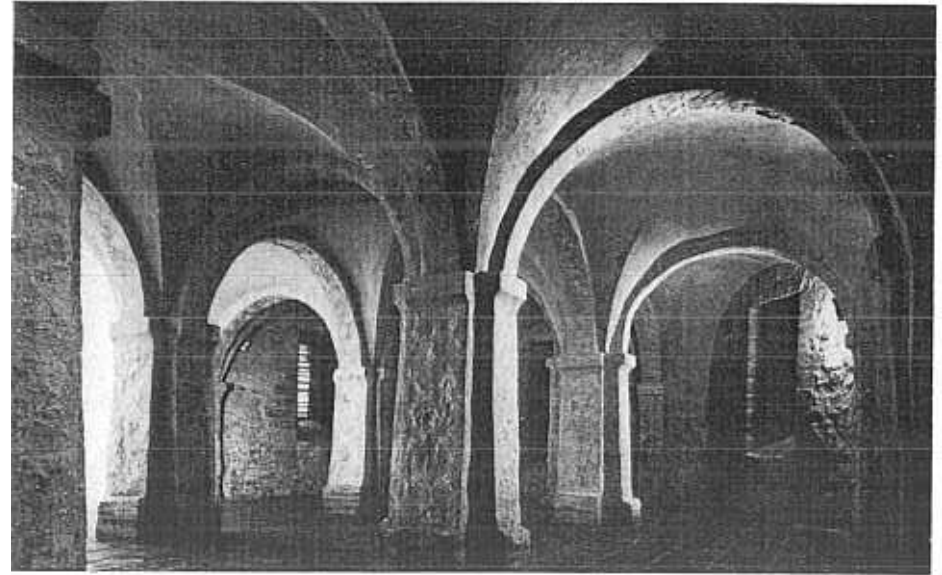


FIG. 8. St. Adèle, Orp-le-Grand; the reconstructed crypt.

obviously been selected and laid by the first builders so carefully that it could be argued they intended it to be seen. Certainly the quality of the natural material in this case is a strong argument in favour, especially as our knowledge of Romanesque churches suggests that even if it had been plastered originally it would also have been decorated in colour. St. Adèle also offers a relatively rare archaeological reconstruction in the crypt (*Fig. 8*), for which Professor Lemaire is confident that there was sufficient evidence in the surviving parts to ensure it was some distance from that point described in Article 9 of the Venice Charter as 'where conjecture begins'.

Our visits to these three churches, and the decisions based on evaluations that they represented, inevitably led us to talk about the Charter of Venice which we had been quoting and the formation of ICOMOS. How had Professor Lemaire become associated with them? He recalled meeting Piero Gazzola in the late 1940s at a meeting organized in Holland to look at recent work by some of our Dutch colleagues; he himself had been invited on the recommendation of his uncle, the author of *La Restauration des Monuments Anciens*. They met again in the early 1950s and became close friends, and he spoke warmly of his admiration for Professor Gazzola who really initiated ICOMOS. In 1964 the decision was taken to found the Council, and Professor Lemaire recalled that the first talk about the need for recognized doctrinal principles on which to base conservation took place that year when he was lecturing in Rome to the students of Guglielmo De Angelis d'Ossat, another of the leading figures in its inception. There was some talk between the two about a possible charter, and when Professor Lemaire arrived in Venice for the second International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments he saw that the charter was on the agenda. But where was the text? Someone had to write it, and the task fell to him. Assisted by Paul Philippot and Jean Sonnier, and basing it on the principles he had been teaching in his lectures to students on the conservation of monuments, they drafted the charter in a day and a night, more or less in its present form. It was, he suggests, a '*moment de grace*'. The draft was well received, although he believes no one at the time realized how extensively it was to be quoted in future or how influential it was to be in those countries in which the idea of conservation was then unborn.

It is significant, he recalled, that when there was an attempt to revise the charter in Moscow in 1978 it was not accepted despite some proposals that were certainly potential improvements. 'The brevity of the text,' said Professor Lemaire, 'is an advantage, since that represents the minimum that can be agreed'; and he stressed that the charter was never intended to be a dogma. It provides some basic principles, which must be allowed to be interpreted, to be changed if necessary through time and circumstances. And the three examples of his own work which we had visited together illustrate how necessary it is to be flexible in balancing the

different values after making a thorough evaluation and coming to know the building, and in respecting those values that seem most important in each particular case.⁵ In his own work Professor Lemaire has always tried to apply the principles he has been teaching. As we have seen, some of these were incorporated in the Venice Charter (as we left the Chapel of St. Lambert he confided that Article 13 had been influenced by that work); and he has consistently advocated that the published principles should be conformed to as the basis of decisions. This led our discussion towards the Grand Béguinage in Louvain, where we were talking; so how had this large-scale exercise in urban conservation begun?

The Grand Béguinage (*Fig. 9*) had been built on fifteen acres (6.07 hectares) of land south-west of the historic centre of Louvain by one of the lay sisterhoods founded in the Low Countries in the twelfth century. The Béguines devoted themselves to a religious life and took up residence in a community; but they took no vows, brought their worldly goods with them, and were free to leave and marry. Consequently, the Béguinage had a character quite different from the religious communities founded on seclusion and vows of poverty. It was, in effect, a small town in which the medieval church and hospital were the main communal buildings. Otherwise it consisted of 120 houses dating from the sixteenth

⁵ Another example of the balancing of values may be seen at Heverlee, where Professor Lemaire has partially restored the castle of the Dukes of Arenberg. The fenestration had been altered several times, and one of the large corner towers in particular presented a confused, unsightly image which, while possessing some historical values because of the manifest changes made during its history, made nonsense of the original concept. The evidence for the restoration of the original fenestration was abundant, and this has been done, not only in the tower but also in the adjacent section of the main elevation; both have now regained their original clarity and harmony.



FIG. 9. The Grand Béguinage, Louvain from the air.

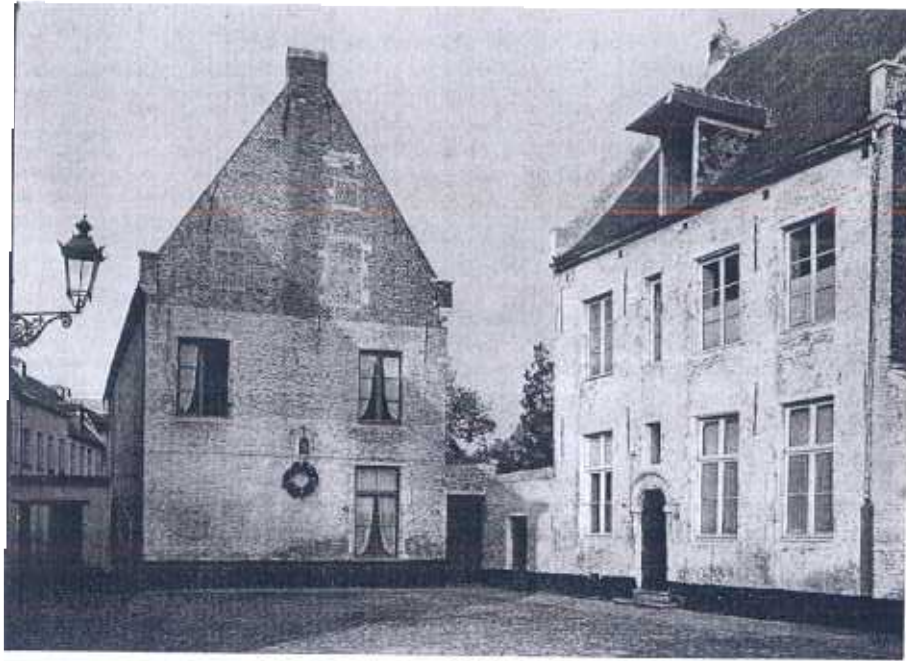


FIG. 10. The Grand Béguinage, Louvain; one of the houses before restoration.

to the eighteenth centuries. They ranged in scale from large detached ones to relatively small ones in terraces, but the almost universal use of brick (sometimes concealing earlier timber structures) with limestone window frames, red pantiled and grey slated roofs, and characteristic stepped dormer gables combined to create a large architectural group possessing a strongly consistent character. The buildings are grouped around various sizes of spaces connected by narrow, irregular streets, all paved with rough stone setts; little bridges cross a stream that flows through the site, and there are trees and gardens to contribute to the picturesque quality and serenity of this unique place.

By the 1950s the Béguinage had become a slum. Maintenance was almost non-existent (although that helped to preserve some of its character), and the low-lying nature of the site was only adding to the general deterioration of the buildings. There was a real danger that the whole area would be cleared and replaced by the currently popular form of high-rise buildings. The owners and the town council both refused to consider investing money in restoring the houses, but fortunately that was the time when universities were relatively prosperous and in an expansive mood. The University of Louvain agreed to purchase the



FIG. 11. The Grand Béguinage, Louvain; one of the houses restored as a staff residence. Note the exposed brickwork and renewed windows.

Béguinage and accepted the obligation to restore the buildings for residential and communal use by staff and students. Professor Lemaire was invited to work out the programme, estimate the cost and organize the work. It was, he recalled, a wonderful time for him and an opportunity to apply the principles he had been teaching.

At first he intended to use building contractors, but when he found the expense would be too great he proposed to form his own organization, training the men to work in the way he wanted. Up to 120 were employed, and at that time Professor Lemaire and three or four assistants were working full time on the project. The success of this organization can be judged by the number of houses that were completed; as many as 24 were handed over for occupation each year, and when conditions were most favourable the cost was 28% cheaper than new student housing.

What had Professor Lemaire found the biggest problem? Undoubtedly it had been the need to recover the quality and sensitivity implicit in the traditional building materials. 'Many restorations', he said, 'may be correct in form, but they are dead, hard and dry because they have not understood the sensitivity and life in the old materials'. He felt he had to

rediscover this himself and then communicate it to the men on the site. He had to become conversant with the traditional tools, mortars, stones and bricks; and at the same time he was working out the different design solutions called for by the condition of the buildings and their new use, while following so far as possible the Venice Charter. One common problem was provided by the windows; many of the original stone cross-windows had been altered during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the mullions and transoms had been removed to allow timber casement windows to be substituted. Should the later ones be retained (or renewed if necessary)? Or should the windows be restored to their original form? The discovery that hundreds of the mullions and transoms were still on site, where they had been used as pavement kerb-stones, led to the decision to replace them in their original position (Figs 10, 11). Where windows which had been bricked up or altered were



FIG. 12. The Grand Béguinage, Louvain; the new windows are clearly distinguishable by the omission of mullions and transoms.

reopened, heads and sills were made of concrete similar in colour to the old limestone but distinguishable to an observant eye from the original windows. Completely new windows were formed without mullions and transoms, but according to traditional proportions (Fig. 12). Throughout the whole group there is an harmonious combination of old and new, based on the principle Professor Lemaire had been evolving in his work since the 1950s that old architecture is a part of new living architecture. The Grand Béguinage enabled him to realize this principle in practice, confirming his belief in the virtues of natural materials and finishes which will only improve with age and require minimal maintenance.⁶

It was during the time he was engaged principally with the Béguinage that he began to design new buildings. But he regards that activity as another facet only of what he had been doing previously.

Any building, even a new one, is a part of an existing environment, and so it too represents the combination of old and new. One can never think of architecture as divorced from history, whether that is represented by the environment or by the materials used in traditional buildings.

Again, when we were discussing the details of architectural conservation he stressed the importance of using the original materials whenever possible; but he would not wish to appear fanatical about this. He recognizes that sometimes they are no longer available, and sometimes the atmosphere has changed so much that the original materials would not be suitable. Does he use substitutes? Sometimes he has used artificial stone at high level, and he has used fibreglass for replacement statues. Does he employ metal reinforcement? 'You have to remember', he commented, 'that a monument is a living body, and it is essential to maintain equilibrium. If the use of metal is a way of achieving this, then do it'. But he referred to the secondary effects that metal reinforcement could produce, as on the Parthenon; and he reverted to his belief that 'the best way to reinforce is to use the same material as the original'.

To what extent can these views be expressed in designing new buildings? We went to look at the lecture room Professor Lemaire added at the side of the old mill close to the sixteenth-century castle of the Dukes of Arenberg at Heverlee, an historic building now a part of the University of Louvain. In the principal view of the total group of the castle and its dependencies, the new building appears simply as a wall partly screened by conifers, which continues the roofline of the mill. The exposed elevation on the opposite side of the building, more positive in character, is subdued nevertheless by the use of natural materials without any applied finishes (Fig. 13). Just as the concrete lintels in the restored houses in the Béguinage are unobtrusively distinguishable from the earlier work, so is this addition to the older buildings. We noted that in one of the publications issued by his office there is a phrase about the search for



FIG. 13. A lecture room closely related to the castle of the Dukes of Arenberg, Heverlee which is now part of the Catholic University of Louvain.

⁶ The Académie d'Architecture de France awarded Professor Lemaire its *Grande médaille d'or* in 1970 for the restoration of the Béguinage.

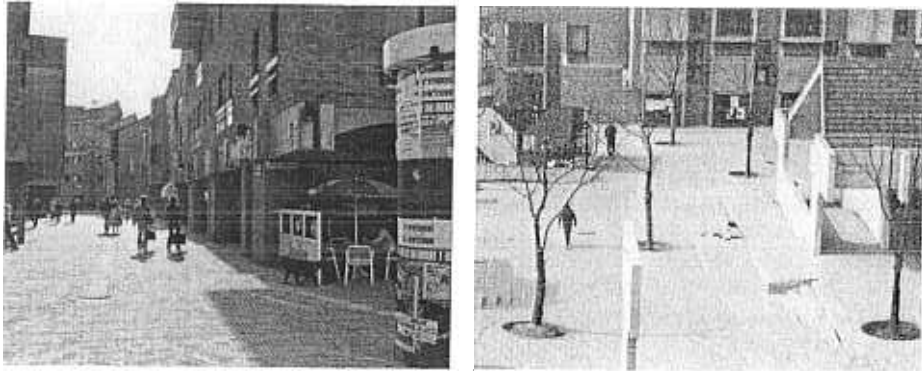


Fig. 14. Louvain-le-Neuve. View of streets and squares.

an architecture which, though it gives expression to our age, is designed to blend gently with its surroundings. The choice of architectural form and method will therefore depend on the purpose the building is to serve within the urban or rural setting for which it is intended. It respects the specific cultural and social values of the population it has to serve.

The culmination of this influence of the old on the new may be seen in the new town of Louvain-le-Neuve (Fig. 14), which is a result of the linguistic battle between French and Flemish in Louvain and the decree that there should be two universities. Half the university had to leave the place it had occupied for centuries, but where should they go? To a new campus isolated from the life of the town? To the sort of environment which had helped to foment student unrest elsewhere? 'The great thing about the old university system', said Professor Lemaire, 'was that the students lived and learnt in the town. They were a part of it. But there was no Walloon town with a history to which half the university could go, and so why not create a new one and transfer the students to it?' The prospect was exciting. It would be the first new town in Belgium since 1669, a fact an historian could savour; but on what principles should it be designed? Professor Lemaire was asked if he would put down his ideas on paper; and then he was invited to take on the job. How did he react? 'I hesitated. I objected that I had no experience of such work, that I had no office team trained for this sort of project'. But finally he was persuaded.

At its maximum, the team included forty-five town planners, architects and engineers. There was one year in which to conceive the overall design, which was based firmly on the principle that in the town centre all the traffic would be subterranean so that the town itself could be completely pedestrian. The natural contours of the site were accepted and exploited to create different levels, sloping and angular streets, spaces of different sizes around which the buildings were informally grouped in a deliberately varied, irregular manner to which the word 'picturesque'

must be applied. It is obvious, as one walks around Louvain-le-Neuve, to what extent the concept is based on Professor Lemaire's experience and perception of the qualities of medieval town centres (including the persuasive form of the Grand Béguinage). And although many different architects were employed to design the individual buildings or groups of them, a consistency and sense of place has been achieved, as might have been foreseen, by the requirement that a limited number of materials (all natural unless one refuses to include concrete in that category) which will weather in a predictable manner, should be used throughout. After an unhappy early use of flat roofs, pitched forms are now obligatory; and despite a lowering of standards in some of the individual designs, Louvain-le-Neuve may be regarded as a completely worked out concept based on an understanding of the virtues identifiable in old towns. But as well as this emphasis on enclosed spaces and their relationship both to one another and to the surrounding human-scale buildings, the concept of the town is carefully related to the surrounding countryside in open views outwards from major public spaces and in the appearance of the town from outside as a piled-up mass of gables and pitched roofs reminiscent of a walled medieval city.⁷

Louvain-le-Neuve offered an unusual opportunity to extend an academic analysis of these perceived traditional values into a new and real living community at the heart of which is a transplanted tradition of learning. In many ways it seems to synthesize the different ideas Raymond Lemaire has evolved in his work as teacher,⁸ historian, conservator and designer. But as we sat talking at the end of the day by the fireside in his own home (from which he admitted he was often reluctantly absent for up to five months in the year), the conversation came round to the subject of ICOMOS, and to the close contact with colleagues in many countries which has greatly enriched his life. What does he see as the future of the organization with which he has been so closely involved since its inception? He still has unrealized ambitions for it.

There is even now a great deal to be done in the promotion of knowledge; that is the pressing task—to spread that knowledge for all who need it. There is a need to stress and stress again that conservation is not just a question of taste and personal likes and dislikes. It should be based on a scientific approach, and that requires a greater collaboration between practitioners, and a greater initiative and sense of responsibility in the national committees. More professional education is needed; more text books are needed to help the less experienced countries avoid mistakes. . . . In short, although ICOMOS has achieved much, there is more to be done, and I am still dreaming of what might be accomplished.

Résumé

En parlant avec Raymond Lemaire, il est vite apparent à son interlocuteur qu'il est en face de deux hommes, ou plutôt que son hôte se montre sous deux aspects. Le

premier est le professeur d'architecture qui enseigne dans les deux universités de Louvain, qui a étudié l'architecture de son pays et dirigé de nombreux

⁷ The International Union of Architects awarded Professor Lemaire the Abercrombie triennial international prize for town planning in 1978 in recognition of his work at Louvain-le-Neuve.

⁸ In 1976 Professor Lemaire founded a post-graduate course at Bruges, sponsored by ICOMOS and set up with financial help from the Belgian Government. This course, which normally takes twenty participants (including five from Belgium), was transferred to the University of Louvain in 1981.

projets de conservation des monuments belges. Le deuxième est l'homme qui a été le premier Secrétaire Général d'ICOMOS jusqu'en 1973, son Président jusqu'en 1981 et qui est maintenant son Président d'Honneur. Le Professeur Lemaire est une personnalité internationale que l'on connaît bien dans le milieu de la conservation où il a joué un rôle de premier plan pendant près de vingt ans.

Il est né près de Bruxelles, dans une famille où l'intérêt pour l'architecture était de tradition mais, quant à lui, son premier choix fut le droit. Puis il étudia l'histoire et l'architecture et lorsqu'il commença à s'intéresser plus particulièrement à la conservation des monuments, il se rendit compte que s'il s'agissait bien là d'une discipline spécifique, il lui manquait cependant une base scientifique. Il travailla quelques temps dans l'agence de Henri Van de Velde mais ce ne fut que vers quarante ans qu'il dessina ses premiers bâtiments neufs. Au début de sa carrière il travailla surtout à la réparation et à la réorganisation d'églises en s'efforçant de mettre en pratique la conviction qu'il avait de pouvoir apporter les modifications nécessaires sans détruire l'harmonie originelle.

Nous avons visité trois églises que le Professeur Lemaire a réparées vers la fin des années cinquante et qu'il a choisies parce qu'elles illustrent trois différents modes d'intervention ainsi qu'un jugement des différentes valeurs à sauvegarder. La première fut la chapelle de Saint-Lambert à Heverlee qui n'était plus qu'une structure d'arcs romans rattachée à une tour plus tardive. Le Professeur Lemaire conserva et stabilisa les ruines de la construction, ajouta une superstructure minime afin de soutenir une toiture et transforma les espaces délimités par les arcs en grandes baies vitrées. La ruine fut préservée telle qu'elle était, les rajouts sont de style visiblement contemporains et totalement réversibles. Puis nous sommes allés voir l'église Saint-Médard à Jodoigne, vaste bâtiment roman dont l'intérieur fut remanié plusieurs fois aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles. Lorsqu'une partie du plâtre du XVIII^e siècle fut enlevée pour permettre l'inspection de la structure, la forme originelle de l'église apparut plus clairement; aussi, après avoir évalué la valeur historique et esthétique des différentes parties de l'intérieur, le Professeur Lemaire décida-t-il de dégager les murs et les colonnes d'angle du XIII^e siècle en pierres calcaires et de conserver le stuc du XVIII^e siècle de la voûte. Ce fut un compromis mais les deux matériaux et les deux styles s'harmonisèrent de façon étonnante. De là nous sommes allés visiter Sainte Adèle à Orp-le-Grand. Là aussi il fut décidé d'exposer les pierres qui avaient été choisies et placées avec tant de soins par les premiers constructeurs que l'on peut admettre qu'ils voulaient qu'elles

fussent visibles. Dans la crypte se trouve une reconstruction archéologique relativement rare que le Professeur Lemaire estime justifiée car elle fut faite à partir d'un nombre suffisant d'indices originaux.

Ces trois églises illustrent deux traits professionnels du Professeur Lemaire qui sont apparus également en d'autres occasions: il est sensible à la qualité intrinsèque du matériau de construction traditionnel et cherche à le montrer à chaque fois que cela est possible; d'autre part il rejette tout préjugé et conçoit rationnellement la solution particulière à chaque problème. Les choix qu'il fit pour ces trois églises nous amenèrent inévitablement à parler de la Charte de Venise et de la création d'ICOMOS. Le Professeur Lemaire rappela sa première rencontre avec Piero Gazzola à la fin des années quarante et la chaleureuse amitié qui se développa entre lui et le véritable créateur d'ICOMOS. Lorsqu'en 1964 la nécessité d'une doctrine de la restauration fut reconnue, c'est au Professeur Lemaire qu'incomba la tâche d'en formuler les principes. Avec l'aide de Paul Philippot et de Jean Sonnier, il rédigea la Charte—en vingt-quatre heures d'affilée—à peu près dans sa forme actuelle. Le fait que le texte est bref est un avantage, dit le Professeur Lemaire, car il s'agit là d'un minimum acceptable par tous. De plus il rappelle que la Charte ne devait jamais faire figure de dogme.

Le Professeur Lemaire a eu l'occasion d'œuvrer selon les principes de la Charte dans sa rénovation du Grand Béguinage de Louvain. Cet important ensemble de bâtiments urbains, menacé de démolition au cours des années cinquante, fut acheté par l'Université de Louvain à charge de rénover les bâtiments en vue d'un usage résidentiel et public. Le Professeur Lemaire créa sa propre organisation pour coordonner l'opération, forma les travailleurs au respect de ses propres normes et fit redécouvrir la qualité et la subtilité impliquées dans les matériaux de construction traditionnels qui s'améliorèrent avec l'âge et ne demandent qu'un minimum d'entretien.

Ce fut en plein travail pour le Béguinage qu'il commença à dessiner des bâtiments neufs; mais il considère que cet aspect de sa carrière n'est qu'une autre facette de son travail de toujours: combiner harmonieusement l'ancien et le neuf. C'est ce qu'il a fait pour la ville nouvelle de Louvain-la-Neuve dont le plan—qui fut achevé en un an—fut centré sur le postulat d'une circulation automobile entièrement souterraine permettant la création d'une cité réservée aux piétons. L'expérience et la connaissance que le Professeur Lemaire a des villes médiévales est évidente dans sa conception de la ville ainsi que dans le nombre restreint de matériaux—qui vieilliront tous de manière prévisible—qu'il s'est autorisé à employer et qui

contribuent au sens de cohésion et d'identité qui émane de cet ensemble. Ce projet fut l'occasion inhabituelle de mettre en pratique—au service d'une communauté nouvelle, bien réelle et vivante et au centre de laquelle est transplanté un foyer traditionnel de pensée—les résultats d'une analyse théorique et savante des valeurs historiques. En somme, Louvain-la-Neuve serait la synthèse des idées que Raymond Lemaire a développées dans son œuvre de professeur, d'historien, de conservateur et d'architecte.

Resumen

Al hablar con Raymond Lemaire, resulta evidente que nos hallamos en presencia de dos hombres; o, mejor dicho, dos aspectos del mismo. El primero es el catedrático de arquitectura de las dos universidades de Lovaina, que ha estudiado su arquitectura nativa y ha sido comisionado muchas veces para la conservación de monumentos belgas. El segundo es el hombre que ha sido el primer Secretario General de ICOMOS, hasta 1973, Presidente hasta 1981, y Presidente Honorífico en la actualidad. El profesor Lemaire es una figura familiar internacional en el mundo de la conservación, en el cual ha desempeñado un papel fundamental durante cerca de veinte años.

Nació cerca de Bruselas, en una familia de tradición arquitectónica; pero su primera elección fue el Derecho. Tiempo después se pasó a la Historia y a la Arquitectura, pero cuando empezó a sentirse especialmente interesado en la conservación arquitectónica en seguida se dio cuenta de que faltaba algo: se trataba de una disciplina que carecía de base científica. Durante algún tiempo trabajó en el despacho de Henri Van de Velde, pero no fue hasta que tenía alrededor de cuarenta años que diseñó edificios nuevos. Al principio trabajaba principalmente en la reparación y reorganización litúrgica de iglesias, tratando de mantener su creencia de que era posible efectuar los cambios necesarios sin alterar la armonía tradicional.

Visitamos tres iglesias en las que había trabajado el profesor Lemaire a fines de la década de los años cincuenta, escogidas porque las consideró representativas de distintos medios por los cuales habían podido continuar existiendo, así como ejemplos de distintos equilibrios de valores. La primera fue la Capilla de San Lambert, en Heverlee, ruina porticada de una capilla románica unida a una torre más tardía. El profesor Lemaire conservó y estabilizó lo que quedaba en pie, añadió la superestructura mínima que aguantase una cubierta, y cubrió los grandes vanos arqueados con luna de cristal. Toda la ruina se conservó intacta, con la obra adicional necesaria expresada de manera

evidentemente contemporánea, y con la posibilidad de deshacer lo hecho. La segunda iglesia que visitamos fue la de San Medardo, en Jodoigne, amplio edificio románico que había sido alterado en su interior más de una vez durante los siglos dieciocho y diecinueve. Después de quitar un enyesado del siglo dieciocho, a fin de investigar los fallos estructurales, la forma original de la iglesia se hizo más evidente, y, después de evaluar los distintos valores histórico y estético del interior, el profesor Lemaire decidió dejar al descubierto la pared caliza del siglo decimotercio y las columnas rinconeras, al tiempo que mantenía la bóveda enyesada del siglo dieciocho. Se había establecido un compromiso, pero los dos materiales y estilos resultan sorprendentemente armoniosos. La tercera iglesia fue Santa Adela, en Orp-le-Grand. Una vez más, se había decidido dejar al descubierto la mampostería del interior, que evidentemente había sido seleccionada y colocada por los primeros constructores tan cuidadosamente que podía mantenerse que la intención había sido que se viera. Santa Adela tiene también una reconstrucción relativamente poco frecuente en la cripta, para la cual el profesor Lemaire opina que había pruebas suficientes en las partes que habían sobrevivido.

Estas tres iglesias demostraron dos características personales que se revelaron también en otras ocasiones. Una de ellas es el reconocimiento por parte del profesor Lemaire de la calidad natural de los materiales de construcción tradicionales y su deseo de que esto quede expresado por sí mismo siempre que sea posible; la otra es la solución racional y considerada de cada problema y el rechazamiento de prejuicios dogmáticos. La decisión basada en la evaluación representada por estas tres iglesias inevitablemente nos llevó a hablar de la Carta de Venecia y la formación de ICOMOS. El profesor Lemaire recordó su primer encuentro con Piero Gazzola a fines de los años cuarenta, y la cálida amistad que surgió entre él y el hombre que verdaderamente inició ICOMOS. En 1964 existía la necesidad reconocida de una doctrina de principios en los que basar la conservación, y el profesor Lemaire se encontró con que le había tocado la tarea de redactar dicha Carta. Con la colaboración de Paul Philippot y Jean Sonnier, la redactó en un día y una noche, aproximadamente en su forma actual. Considera que la brevedad del texto es una ventaja, ya que representa el mínimo aceptable, e insiste en que jamás se pretendió que la Carta fuese ningún dogma.

En su trabajo referente al Grand Béguinage de Lovaina, el profesor Lemaire ha podido incorporar los principios de conservación contenidos en la Carta. Este gran grupo de edificios urbanos estaba en peligro de demolición durante los años cincuenta, pero fue

adquirido por la Universidad de Lovaina con la obligación de restaurar los edificios para usos residenciales y comunitarios. El profesor Lemaire formó su propia organización para llevar a cabo esta obra, capacitando al personal para que trabajase del modo que él quería y volviendo a descubrir la calidad y sensibilidad implícitas en los materiales de construcción tradicionales, que sólo mejoran con el tiempo y necesitan un mantenimiento mínimo.

Fue durante la época en que se dedicaba principalmente al Béguinage cuando empezó a diseñar nuevos edificios, pero considera esta actividad como otra faceta de lo que ya había estado haciendo; es decir, combinar armoniosamente lo viejo y lo nuevo. La culminación de la influencia de lo viejo y lo nuevo puede verse en la ciudad de Nueva Lovaina (Louvain-le-Neuve), que se concibió en un año y se basó en el

principio de que todo el tráfico sería subterráneo a fin de que la ciudad en sí pudiese ser totalmente peatonal. Resulta evidente hasta qué punto la concepción de la ciudad se ha basado en la experiencia y sentido de las ciudades medievales que tiene el profesor Lemaire; y la condición de que se utilizase únicamente un reducido número de materiales, que se adaptarán a la intemperie de manera predecible, contribuye a establecer la consistencia y el sentido local. Presentó la oportunidad desusada de extender el análisis académico de los valores tradicionales notados a una comunidad nueva y viviente, en cuyo corazón existe una tradición cultural transplantada, y, en muchos aspectos, parece sintetizar las distintas ideas que ha desarrollado Raymond Lemaire en su obra como profesor, historiador, conservador y diseñador.