

The world of conservation

An interview with Cevat Erder



FIG. 1 Cevat Erder (centre) with Chinese architects in charge of historic monuments in Beijing, Forbidden City.

Where we were sitting talking, in the Director's office at ICCROM, there was a continual reminder that conservation is not simply an academic exercise (Fig. 1). Building site noises provided a workmanlike accompaniment and signified that the extensive task of rehabilitating the huge seventeenth-century hospital of S. Michele has now reached the north end of Pope Innocent XII's grand architectural gesture of concern for the elderly, the sick and the orphaned (Fig. 2). It is not inappropriate that this historic building's future is to be linked with a concern for elderly and sick artifacts, and we noted with interest that the most distinguished occupant at present is the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, who has temporarily left his accustomed place on the Campidoglio. But it is on the training activities in the relatively small north section of S. Michele that we must concentrate, and particularly on the man who directs them.

Cevat Erder (Fig. 3) is the fourth holder of the position of Director of ICCROM. Harold Plenderleith, a Scottish scientist with a long experience of museum conservation, was the first. Paul Philippot, a Belgian art historian, was the second; and it was during his time that the Centre moved from its first home in Via Cavour to S. Michele. Bernard Feilden, an English architect who had introduced modern organizational methods into the conservation of major historic buildings in his own country, was



FIG. 2. ICCROM headquarters at San Michele, Rome

the third. And now Cevat Erder, a classical archaeologist from Turkey, is in charge. We asked him how he came to take on this responsibility.

He replied that he was no stranger to ICCROM, which he had first visited in 1961, and where he had taught on a regular basis since 1974. He knew the place and its staff well, and he admired the work that was being done there. 'It is', he said, 'an international centre that is fulfilling its aim within its stated scope'; and he thinks it is important to emphasize that the word 'study' is the key idea in the Centre's full name.¹ This was a conscious choice, an affirmation that documentation and research are intended to be the central activities from which others stem. 'The first need is to accumulate the results of research, and then use this in an attempt to influence actions to take the right direction. We propagate ideas partly through our training programmes and publications, and partly through our missions which can help to spread a knowledge of recent developments in conservation philosophies and techniques.'

ICCROM's annual training courses are now well established² and participants from many countries have benefited. In addition, a number of courses on special subjects are promoted. These have included six two-to three-week workshops given in 1981 and 1982 by Mr Katsuhiko Masuda, an expert seconded to ICCROM by the Japanese government. The workshops were on the subject of the conservation of oriental art on paper and there had been almost three applications for each place available. But is Professor Erder satisfied with this provision? Not entirely. He thinks there is a need to reach more people and he would like to develop the organization of programmes in many more countries. He would like to encourage ICCROM to provide more workshops and refresher courses and he cited the recent two-week course for French-speaking Africans, which concentrated on administration for conservation, and the courses on preventive conservation in museums held in Brazil, Egypt, England and Thailand and on mural paintings conservation in Turkey and Thailand. Another example is the course on the conservation of adobe structures, which is to take place in Peru.

It must always be an advantage to have such courses *in situ*, surrounded by the real case studies in their physical and climatic environment. Fifteen years ago it was not possible to think in this way. There were not enough technicians available, but now there are groups of experts in most aspects of conservation.

Nevertheless he would like to expand the permanent science and technology staff at ICCROM in order to increase the available results of research; and then he feels the Centre would be in a stronger position to organize more meetings in more countries. He is optimistic that the number of countries supporting ICCROM will continue to increase, enabling this desirable expansion to take place.

We asked Professor Erder about his earlier career. He was born in



FIG. 3. Cevat Erder.

¹ International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property.

² Further details of ICCROM's courses may be obtained from 13 via di S. Michele, 00153 Rome, Italy.

Istanbul, and he is not aware of any family connections with archaeology or architecture; but there were historians in his family and an interest in history had developed early. This had drawn him towards classical archaeology. During his period of military service he had been able to participate in an archaeological expedition, and then he worked for a time in an excavation team at Phoecea, one of the twelve cities of the Ionic League. He believes in physical involvement in archaeology, and he ensured that he took part in an excavation at the end of every academic year during the four years he was a student at Ankara University. After graduation he went to the United States, to Princeton University where he was an Instructor in Near Eastern Studies.³ He continued his studies in classical archaeology, presenting his PhD dissertation at Ankara University on the subject of Anatolian architecture during the Hellenistic period; and it was this study that offered him an opportunity to visit many sites and museums. At the same time it gave him cause to worry about archaeological sites and their protection. In Turkey alone there are about 2000 sites, and the resolution grew that a start had to be made somehow, somewhere on some form of training to improve their protection.

In 1963 Cevat Erder was invited to join the staff at the Middle East Technical University to teach architectural history, and at the same time this provided him with an opportunity to set up a Master's degree course in conservation. In preparing the programme for this course, he sent out a questionnaire to discover what might be happening in other countries. The answer was

very little. There was a course in Rome and a part-time one in Vienna. Of course there was the old-established one in Paris; and at this time James Marston Fitch and Charles Peterson were planning their course at Columbia University. Because there was a close contact between the two Americans and myself in 1963–64, there was a certain similarity between the courses at Ankara and Columbia; but mine was not multi-disciplinary. The University Council decided it should be for architects only, and planned as an extension of their professional training programme. Later this rule was relaxed, and town planners and engineers would be admitted today, partly in recognition of the more recent widening of conservation ideas to include historic town centres. In those early days we confined our studies to buildings alone.

Did he feel it was strange that an archaeologist should be made responsible for a course planned entirely for architects? He certainly felt he was helping to establish a new concept, and he recalls that archaeology was not even included in the course programme. He himself contributed lectures on the history of architecture and the history of conservation: and he was helped by being involved practically in archaeological expeditions and the problems associated with salvage. Would he like to comment on the sometimes difficult relationship between archaeologists and architects? 'I believe an archaeologist should help an architect-

³ He continued his association with Princeton University, being Visiting Fellow 1968–69, and Visiting Professor 1972–73.

conservator to understand, and then leave him to do his work. I have always tried to give an architect the best service I can so that he can perform to the best of his ability.'

Looking back over the last twenty years, what does Cevat Erder regard as an important experience in his own thinking about conservation? He had little hesitation in referring to the Keban Dam Salvage Project, which offered him a chance to test some of his opinions about conservation. His university department was closely involved with the identification of historic monuments in the area of 680 km² that was to be flooded as a result of the construction of the dam (Figs 4, 5) and he acted as director of the team. The investigation was published in 1967,⁴ and in a later article in

⁴ *Doomed by the Dam*, Middle East Technical University, 1967.



FIG. 4. A pre-twelfth-century Syrian church at Korluca, one of the monuments surveyed in the Keban Dam Salvage Project.

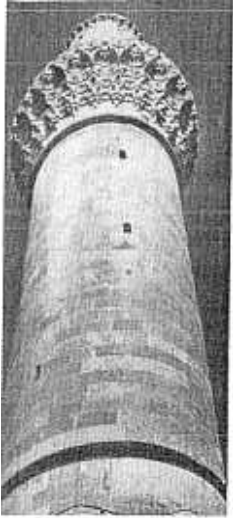


FIG. 5. The minaret of the sixteenth-century mosque of Çelebi Ali at Eski Pertek removed from the lake formed by the Dam.

*Monumentum*⁵ Professor Erder was able to enlarge on the lessons drawn from this experience which 'may serve to point out ways to respond more effectively to the threat that large-scale public works present to historic areas, not only in Turkey but in many other countries as well'.

The magnitude of the project may be gauged by the figures quoted: 212 settlements of different sizes were immersed by the artificial lake 125 kilometres long, and 30,000 inhabitants were forced to leave the area. But in addition there was 'a wealth of unrecorded buildings from the Byzantine, Seljuk and Ottoman periods [which] were photographed and measured'. By the middle of 1968 twelve Turkish and foreign teams were ready to conduct various projects in the area, as a result of which this virtually unknown and unrecorded area had been intensively studied. 'The dam which appeared to be a threat at Keban turned out to be an unusual benefactor for archaeologists and art historians . . . through the innovative use of institutions and skills.'

How did Professor Erder's association with Unesco begin? His first approach was when he was planning the course at the Middle East University, and since then he has worked closely with Unesco on several occasions, particularly in connection with conferences and recommendations about training. He was a founding member of the Turkish National Committee of Icomos, and so it was perhaps inevitable that at one stage in our meeting in Rome we should arrive at the subject of the Venice Charter.

There is no need to provide readers of *Monumentum* with general information about the Charter; and equally it is probably unnecessary to remind them that in the opinion of many members of Icomos the Charter does not completely meet the requirements of society in the 1980s. One of the reasons for this dissatisfaction with the original can be traced to the very success of Icomos itself and its growth and influence far beyond the first 57 member countries. Professor Erder points out that

a range in natural and climatic conditions, cultural, economic and social differences have provoked a variety of issues, applications, results and in short a variety of views. In addition, technical advances and the possibilities for widespread application have led to a new set of circumstances.⁶

And yet there is also a very important point about the Charter which only increases the difficulties in attempting to change or amplify its articles.

One of the necessary features for effective principles is for them to be general guidelines rather than weighed down with details and specifications. This forces principles to remain general and to avoid the cut-and-dried expressions of laws. Those who have wanted to use the Venice Charter as law have run into disillusion. [It] must be evaluated and understood as a whole. Instead each of its articles has often been taken and interpreted separately, and this has led in many cases to contradictory applications. Unlike a law, each article cannot be taken out of context.

⁵ 'Lessons in Archaeological and Monument Salvage: The Keban Experience', *Monumentum* (1978), xvii, 3ff.

⁶ 'The Venice Charter under Review', *Heritage and Civilization*, Baghdad, 1980 pp. 17-48.

Professor Erder has published a perceptive assessment of each article of the Charter, pointing out its strength and its weakness, and in which places it might appear inadequate. His general conclusion is that the Charter's

influence is still prevalent and it should be viewed as an historic document. [It] is worthy of the respect devoted to an historic monument and should be preserved according to the principles proposed for the preservation of an historic monument. When it is necessary to resort to the Charter for implementation, it should be viewed as a reference point. Among current training programmes for the protection of historic monuments it may be employed as a basic educational tool . . . If otherwise left to patching, revision and repair it will eventually resemble little more than a sorely patched sack.

So, rather than attempting to amplify, amend and update what will inevitably quickly be out of date again, Professor Erder proposes a more general view of the professional's responsibilities in the world of conservation. Looking for a good historical precedent, he suggests we might take a leaf out of the revered Hippocratic oath of the medical profession, and appropriately sends out from the seventeenth-century Ospedale di S. Michele the following proposal:

The regimen I adopt shall be for the respect and the benefit of my monuments according to my ability and judgment, and not for their hurt or for any wrong. I will give no deadly treatment to any, though it be asked of me, nor will I counsel such, and especially I will not aid to demolish whatever monument I enter. There I will go for its benefit and the benefit of society, refraining from all wrong-doing and corruption, and especially from any act of seduction. And I will document and publish every step that I take.

Résumé

Cevat Erder est le quatrième titulaire du poste de Directeur de l'ICCROM où il enseigna pour la première fois en 1961 et où il revint plus régulièrement à partir de 1974. Pour lui, il est utile de souligner le fait que le mot 'étude' est le plus important dans le nom du Centre, et le reflet d'un choix délibéré en faveur de la documentation et de la recherche comme activités principales et dont les autres découlent. Les cours de formation annuels d'ICCROM sont maintenant solidement établis mais le Professeur Erder voudrait toucher encore plus de monde et développer ces programmes dans beaucoup d'autres pays. Car, dit-il, il est beaucoup plus utile de donner ces cours *in situ*. Et il est optimiste quant à l'accroissement du nombre de pays membres d'ICCROM, ce qui permettra l'extension souhaitée.

Le Professeur Erder naquit à Istanbul; il s'intéresse d'abord à l'histoire puis à l'archéologie classique

et, parce qu'il apprécie l'importance des tâches physiques de l'archéologie, il participe à de nombreuses fouilles pendant ses années d'étude. Son doctorat sur l'architecture hellénistique en Anatolie le conduisit dans de nombreux musées et sur de nombreux sites ce qui l'amène à réfléchir sur les problèmes de sauvegarde et de formation d'un personnel capable de diriger les travaux nécessaires. En 1964 il devient professeur d'histoire de l'architecture à l'Université Technique du Moyen-Orient ce qui lui donne l'occasion de créer un diplôme de conservation qui ne fut tout d'abord qu'une spécialisation réservée aux architectes. Aujourd'hui, urbanistes et ingénieurs y ont également accès.

Ne trouve-t-il pas étrange que ce soit un archéologue qui soit responsable d'un cours pour les architectes? 'Certainement', répond le Professeur Erder; 'd'ailleurs il est en train d'établir un nouveau concept

de pluri-disciplinarité. Quant aux rapports quelquefois difficiles entre archéologues et architectes, il pense que c'est à l'archéologue de faciliter la compréhension de l'architecte puis de le laisser travailler.'

Le Professeur Erder parle de l'importance qu'a eue, pour sa formation personnelle, sa participation au projet de sauvetage des monuments menacés par la construction du barrage de Keban qui lui permit de vérifier quelques unes de ses idées en matière de conservation. Il fut en effet le directeur de l'équipe chargée d'identifier les monuments historiques dans la zone de 680 km² qui devait être inondée. Au début de l'été 1968, douze équipes turques et étrangères étaient prêtes à entreprendre plusieurs projets dans la région qui formèrent une étude approfondie qui devint un modèle du genre pour tout programme de sauvegarde de grande envergure.

La mention du rôle important du Professeur Erder auprès de l'Unesco et de Icomos amena la conversation sur la Charte de Venise qu'il étudia article par article en soulignant ses points forts et ses faiblesses. Sa conclusion est que ce document doit faire figure de document historique et être préservé en tant que tel. Car la compléter, la réviser, la changer n'aboutirait qu'à en faire un misérable fourre-tout. En dernière analyse, il propose qu'un concept plus général des responsabilités du conservateur soit élaboré sur le modèle du serment hippocratique des médecins.

Resumen

Cevat Erder es el cuarto titular del cargo de Director de ICCROM, donde impartió sus enseñanzas en 1961 y donde efectuó visitas regulares desde 1974. Considera importante recalcar el hecho de que la palabra 'estudio' es la clave del nombre del Centro, ya que se trató de una elección deliberada y de la afirmación de que la documentación y la investigación serán las actividades centrales de las cuales surjan las demás. Los cursos anuales de formación de ICCROM están bien consolidados, pero el profesor Erder cree que es necesario llegar a un público más amplio, y le gustaría promover la organización de programas en muchos más países. Considera que siempre representará una ventaja celebrar dichos cursos *in situ*. Es optimista en el sentido de creer que seguirá aumentando el número de países protectores de ICCROM, lo cual permitirá que se lleve a cabo esta deseable expansión.

El profesor Erder nació en Estambul, donde le llevó a la arqueología clásica un temprano interés en la historia. Cree que hay que integrarse físicamente en la

arqueología, por lo cual participó en muchas excavaciones durante sus años de estudiante. Los estudios para su tesis doctoral sobre el tema de la arquitectura Anatolia durante el período helenístico le dieron la oportunidad de visitar muchas excavaciones y museos, y también despertaron su preocupación por la protección de excavaciones y por la necesidad de formación para este tipo de trabajo y sus responsabilidades.

En 1964 se le invitó a incorporarse a la Universidad Técnica del Oriente Medio para dar clases de historia arquitectónica, lo cual le dio la oportunidad de establecer un curso para la obtención del Master en Conservación. Al principio, era sólo para arquitectos y estaba planeado como extensión del programa de formación profesional. En la actualidad, podrían ingresar planificadores urbanos e ingenieros.

Contestando a la pregunta de si le parecía extraño que un arqueólogo fuese responsable de un curso planeado totalmente para arquitectos, dijo que verdaderamente creía estar contribuyendo a crear un nuevo concepto. Al comentar la a veces difícil relación entre arqueólogos y arquitectos, dijo que 'un arqueólogo debe ayudar a un arquitecto a comprender y dejarle después que haga su trabajo.'

El profesor Erder habló sobre la importancia respecto a sus propias experiencias de su participación en el Proyecto de Salvamiento de la Presa de Keban, el cual le ofreció la oportunidad de poner a prueba algunas de sus opiniones respecto a la conservación. Actuó como director del equipo responsable de la identificación de monumentos históricos en esta zona de 680 km² que iba a ser inundada. A mediados de 1968, doce equipos turcos y extranjeros se hallaban dispuestos para llevar a cabo diversos proyectos en la zona, como resultado de lo cual fue estudiada intensivamente y se convirtió en modelo de reacción eficaz ante amenazas en gran escala.

Su estrecha vinculación a la Unesco y a Icomos hizo que la conversación tocara la Carte de Venecia y a su evaluación de cada uno de los artículos de ella, indicando sus puntos fuertes y sus puntos débiles y en qué sitios puede parecer inadecuada. Su conclusión general es la de que debe verse el documento como monumento histórico y conservarlo según los principios establecidos. Las revisiones, alteraciones y reparaciones sólo harían que tuviese el aspecto de un saco mal remendado. Finalmente, sugirió que una visión más amplia de las responsabilidades profesionales en el mundo de la conservación podría basarse en el reverenciado juramento hipocrático de la profesión médica.