

Address by the President of ICOMOS

Permit me first of all to welcome and thank all those who are to read papers and everyone else who is taking part in this meeting and in particular to express my gratitude and that of the International Council of Monuments and Sites to the German authorities and to our friends of the National Committee of the Federal Republic for the generous way in which they offered to arrange this meeting and for the way they have received us in this magnificent setting. How evocative this place is, and how well-suited to our work, for the message it holds is the expression of our ideal - an ideal of cooperation and friendly agreement. Our most hearty thanks go to our friend Mr. Werner Bornheim gen. Schilling, the distinguished Chairman of the National Committee of the Federal Republic, who has applied himself so generously and intelligently to the task of preparing this meeting on German soil and has spared no effort to make of it a great success.

It is significant that ICOMOS should have accepted the invitation of the National Committee of the Federal Republic to hold in Germany, and precisely in the Baden-Württemberg area, a meeting designed to study the problems facing us at the present time in connection with the conservation of wooden buildings and other structures. By so doing, ICOMOS wishes to pay tribute to the efforts already accomplished in Germany in this field.

The task of ICOMOS will be to coordinate work on the conservation of wood in different parts of the world, so that a clear picture may emerge of the exact progress of research on wooden structures and on methods for their preservation. ICOMOS also — and primarily — proposes to make available to those countries which so request the results of the most satisfactory experiments for the testing of processes designed to prolong the life of such structures. The results it thus provides will have been scientifically verified and will have stood the test of time.

The heritage of wooden buildings which has come down to us — from the Slavonic churches of Norway to the Mediaeval chapels which are a characteristic feature of landscapes in Central Europe, or the mills

or ancient farm-houses which are a typical form of functional architecture — is an extensive one, and it is in danger of disappearing. Our industrial civilisation, which is in constant evolution, is inexorably causing upheavals in the harmonious landscapes left to us by the past, and is guilty of destruction on a tremendous scale.

These buildings, some of which are wholly of wood, while others are partly built of mud, belong to a variety of periods. They are extremely important, too, for the light they cast on primitive ways of life and on the methods used in that folk architecture — which we might qualify as "instinctive" — found among all peoples of the world alike, in Europe, Asia, Africa or America.

They are moving testimonies which number among the most direct embodiments of the architectural expression of man; they range from the mere hut to the primitive temple of archaic Greece, from which the classical architectural orders drew their inspiration.

The contributions of the specialists whom ICOMOS has invited here to help us in our research will serve to clarify the problem and enable us to determine the *status quaestionis*. The primary requirement will be to provide information which will enable subsequent research to be as economically planned as possible, with no danger of duplication. The next task will be to draw up, side by side, a list of the laboratories working on the problem throughout the world and a list of experts on the subject. Lastly, accurate guidance must be provided on points which have not been sufficiently clarified and on which more thorough research must be carried out and results verified. As far as possible the data thus supplied should correspond to concrete requirements.

Today's meeting is in reality part of a wider programme already set out at length at previous meetings and involving the various sectors within the province of ICOMOS, such as the diseases affecting stone, the effects of moisture on ancient buildings, the problems posed by unburnt brick buildings, or the revivification of centres of historical interest. The contribution of ICOMOS to the conservation and protection of the living testimonies to civilisations of the past may not appear to be very spectacular, but it is a very real one and one of which we are proud. We are now in a position to exploit the technological progress of our age and analyse scientifically and seek to remedy the damage industrialization has caused to the cultural heritage. We can thus at the present day make particularly effective means of research and methods of consolidation available to those who are concerned with conservation, and this is a source of comfort, for it means that at least in part we can pay the debt we have contracted to the civilisations of the past by reason of the widespread destruction we have allowed rash and disorderly industrial development to inflict on our everyday surroundings.

Before concluding this brief address I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those specialists from a variety of countries who,

at the invitation of ICOMOS, have demonstrated their spirit of cooperation and their understanding of these problems of ours. I also express the wish that they will be prepared to continue to work with us, so that there may be unification on an international level of the forces involved, and that these may henceforward develop regardless of discipline or sector; we shall thus be able to achieve a harmonious view of the cultural heritage as a necessary and fundamental element in any community, and so discharge the responsibilities of our present age to the generations of the future.

I wish you all every success in your work here, and I have pleasure in declaring open this first international symposium on the conservation of wooden buildings and structures.