

OPENING ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF ICOMOS

In all the innumerable "renaissances" which have occurred and recurred in the course of history, we constantly find a return to the past. And in reality such an experience of discovery or rediscovery may be termed invention, a creative phenomenon brought about under the influence both of the promptings of the moment and of those imperative necessities which are a driving force behind cultural and social change.

This applies, I believe, to all sectors of culture. For when the humanists explored the libraries of the monasteries and came upon Classical texts which had lain forgotten for centuries, or when Schliemann brought to light the walls and thoroughfares of Homeric times from under the heaps of ash and *débris* beneath which they had been lost to history for thousands of years, both were making discoveries; they were seekers and the aim of their search was to satisfy demands which had converged within their minds under the influence of society and of their times.

In a sense every artist, scholar or research-worker is only the mouthpiece of a feeling as widespread as it is insistent. Even when we explore the past and probe its inmost recesses we can be pioneers of civilisation, numbering ourselves, that is, among those who create the present and lay the foundations for the future.

It is precisely through such activity on the part of individuals that society fully manifests its aspirations and reaches complete self-realization. It may thus be correctly said that the ever more numerous discussions on problems relating to cultural property — which are in fact a sign of the time — are at one and the same time a manifestation on the part of an élite (since they are a conscious and deliberate activity of the latter) and a phenomenon with a broad basis in sociological reality, the whole problem being in fact a social one.

In the relations between the individual and society, while it is the individual who prevails in the vertical direction, as it were, it is society which forms the horizontal platform from which vital movements will take their upward course and on which develop consciousness of the movement of time.

Within this relationship, in which the individual is at once a conditioning and a conditioned factor, the cultural heritage assumes a very special importance, for monuments help the individual and society to recognize the stages of the historical process.

We must not forget that if the Latins gave the name of "monumenti" (*quae monent*) to the tangible testimonies of their past, this was because they valued them for their significance as a warning, an active reminder, providing explanations, suggestions and guidance.

Every individual contains within himself all the past generations which have succeeded one another since the most distant times and carries with him and passes on a molecule of history, whatever his function in society. We perceive this not in moments of excitement, but only when we can meditate with serenity and calm. It is when we take stock of our own selves or of others' selves and compare past ways of living with those of to-day, attempting to discover what stages have been lived through, that we shape the programmes to come; it is then that we carry out the most elementary operation in historical criticism.

The individual can measure himself in the light of the changes wrought in his life by himself and those who are taking a parallel road, and also in the light of his own memories. The memory of society as a whole lies in its historical monuments, without which it would resemble an individual devoid of recollections, without past or future. Historical monuments form that landmark which nothing else can provide, which defines the relationship between the individual consciousness and the collective consciousness.

The monument responds to a poetic demand, which is an essential human requirement, all the more strongly felt as in the feverish life we live we are obliged to perform ever greater feats to adapt ourselves to the artificiality of existence. Through this poetic force of theirs, monuments can have a direct impact on the face of society and give its life an improved rhythm.

A society which under-estimated the capacity of historical monuments to exert this effect, or the potential force that is stored up within them, would reveal a lack of cultural background and a want of intellectual maturity for which no sensational conquest of the present day would be able to compensate.

Any progress, even though it may seem to sweep headlong forward, regardless of any need for breathing-space and project in its rapid course far into the distant future, will recover a logical and a human dimension only if it is viewed in a historical perspective.

The influence historical monuments may exert on a society capable of understanding them and treating them with the consideration they deserve will be far broader and deeper than their influence on the single elements of that society — the individual as opposed to the mass. It will be a decisive influence in the ethical sense, and a lesson for us in humility; it will enjoin on us to act neither selfishly, nor short-sightedly nor narrow-

-mindedly — it will be a call, in short, to measure ourselves against history which there is no eluding.

Their value as an education is not the only factor which convinces us that historical monuments are a sociological necessity. Every country has known — if it does not know at present — some terrible moment of vacuum, when civilisation itself has seemed mute, and it is the monuments of a nation's past which will here provide the surest weapon for carving out a means of defence or reconquest.

Let us recall, with your permission, the interpretation of Roman ruins adopted by the artists of the *Quattrocento* and the value of the message they derived from them and were able to conjure up from the very stones of those ruins. They expressed it as "Art for art's sake"; but they meant the opposite of what Baudelaire meant, for they were referring to art which *creates* art. For a monument has an inexhaustible capacity for setting the intellect to work, it is one of the opportunities that history is continually offering us of putting to the proof man's imagination, his critical sense and his desire for knowledge. A society unable to appreciate all this, or which failed to respond to so generous an offer, would be, deliberately or otherwise, guilty of criminal weakness.

The importance for society of the monuments of the past is shown by the fact that every country which is striving to be in the forefront of civilisation takes care of its monuments and makes every effort to exploit their potentialities to the utmost. The reason is that the monuments will serve as a surety for the sought-for prestige and testify to the fact that it is neither improvised nor accidental.

Respect for historical monuments, and their enhancement, are in themselves the expression of a cultured and clear-sighted society. If our ancestors have sometimes in the past lightly thrown away the testimonies of ancient times, under the influence of the apparent justification provided by changes in philosophical attitudes and political conditions, or else in response to the demands of different aesthetic standards, this is in no way to their credit. The *damnatio memoriae* of history radically achieved through the destruction of monuments is a manifestation not of liberty but of improvident licence.

History cannot be erased merely by cutting the invisible threads which bind man to his past. Despite everything, the past remains active within us, it travels with us from our birth onwards, however much we may imagine ourselves to be the future and the future only. Every time we destroy some tangible evidence of the past we do away with a precious guide and render ourselves guilty of blind theft.

It is precisely their role as teachers and guides which provides the direct relationship between monuments and society, a relationship in which the two terms are at once subject and object, in a dialectical dynamic which is a sign of imperishable vitality.