

ITALIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSIONS OF ISMEO

NOTES ON THE CONSERVATION WORKS

We are preparing a report on the restoration methods used by the Italian Archaeological Missions of ISMEO, whose president is Professor G. Tucci, for their work in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is composed of two parts.

- The first concerns the restoration of stone monuments, the method followed mainly in the restoration of the monuments of Persepolis by Archaeologist G. Tilia and Mrs. A.B. Tilia; illustrating every point with precise examples drawn from the publications of Archaeologist G. Zander and Mrs. Tilia on the restoration works at Persepolis.

- The second part concerns the method and techniques employed in the conservation and restoration of artefacts made of unbaked earth or unbaked clay.

- This part is further divided into two sections:

One on plastic arts and objects, in which branch our restorers (Mr. Pagliani and Mr. Eclipse in Afghanistan, and Mr. Regoli in Iran) have achieved a remarkable degree of knowledge and some outstanding results, and another section concerning buildings in unbaked brick.

- In this last section we shall present the results of our researches, mainly undertaken since 1963 in the Islamic Palace of Mas'ud III at Ghazni by Professor U. Scerrato, and the works in progress at the Buddhist temple area of the Tappeh Sardar (Ghazni), under the direction of Professor M. Taddei, and at Sahr-e Suxteh (Sistan), under the direction of Dr. M. Tosi.

It is up to them, rather than me, to speak about these works.

I only wish now to mention briefly some facts of a general nature. Obviously there are basic principles, valid for buildings in very kind of material, principles that have already been enounced by Archaeologist G. Zander and myself in our report to UNESCO on the restoration project for the Sassanian Palace of Ardeshir I at Firuzabad.

1) When we operate on a monument, our only task must be its consolidation.

2) The rebuilding of parts is justified only in terms of the consolidation.

3) Both consolidation and rebuilding are to accord with our understanding of the monument, respecting the monument itself.

4) The new parts must be easily distinguishable. The techniques employed for the rebuilding of new parts are to be based on the examination of the ancient ones, in order to avoid the danger of contamination and confusion.

5) Concept of an aesthetical order must at all times be banished from this work.

In the field, so far as the phases of research and excavation are concerned, the first emphasis must be given to first-aid interventions with the use of provisional protection; subsequently to restoration and to the eventual conservation of the complex.

- While chemistry, physics and other sciences continued their researches into the structure of unbaked bricks, hopefully with good results, it was necessary for us to define and to employ a method of restoration suitable to unbaked bricks. It was in fact the means traditionally used in the region easy to come by and cheap which proved themselves the most useful.

- To rebuild a wall we used bricks, flush with the surface of the old ones, with a clay plaster (kahgel of different kinds mixed with chemical products), flush with old one, underlining the separation between ancient and new. (A device with tooth-shaped protruding elements gives a disturbing effect, and the wall remains incomplete on the facing or on the side). A covering of kahgel on the top of the wall will protect it together with a drainage system for rain water. Another solution has to be found in order to combat rising damp. The decorative elements of the architecture bases, pilasters, cornices, are represented in their simplified volumes. Tags are attached to show the year of restoration.

All this obviously requires continuous maintenance.

- Let us look at another aspect, the integration of a single structure in a complex. When this is a homogeneous building the above mentioned procedure will be satisfactory so far as our understanding of the building itself is concerned.

- Needless to say, the monument must be studied in each of its aspects, wall connections, building phases, etc. in order to keep these elements in full sight, and not to make them ambiguous, confused or totally lost. In fact their restoration is first of all and mainly a problem of an archaeological nature, based on knowledge of the excavations; it must therefore be regarded as one of our chief duties.

- If some parts of the building are very delicate, because of the presence of decoration or for other reasons, and the rebuilding of the walls or other direct interventions are not sufficient for their conservation, the best thing in the present state of knowledge, is the obvious, simple, modest and always valid use of a covering.

- A covering is absolutely necessary, for the preservation of a site in which a range of structures, buildings, rebuildings and so on of various phases and periods overlap, with the different strata vaults and floors left for documentation.

- Delicate interventions for consolidation can also be made with chemical treatment, some effective, some less so, some even harmful as time passes; skilled and accurate reinforcements can be made; but a covering is needed to preserve the thin thread of the documentation of the past and the different alignments and sequences, accurately indicated, must be made visible and understandable.

- In every case a suitable material should be found, depending on the climate, the wind and so on, and a profile which brings out the volumes of the complex and the various levels of the remains.

- The financial implications of this work cannot be left untouched. They should be included in the conservation budget of every mission, but the restoration work can only be done in collaboration with central administrative and technical organisms, collaboration that I am sure will continue to be open, deep, continuous and fruitful as now.

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