

MONUMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY LIFE

A. HALTURIN

There is no need today to prove that cultural treasures are a historical and social phenomenon or that by their very nature they are a living testimony to ancient traditions, and the guardians of the spiritual heritage of the past, as was declared in the resolution of the International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments in Venice in 1964.

The role of the monuments of the past and their importance in the present-day life of a given nation will depend on the attitude of that society or nation towards its history and towards the cultural heritage of its past, which is a part of its spiritual and cultural wealth. The more care and conscientiousness a modern society exercises in the preservation of all that is best in the cultural heritage it has received from the past ages, the richer will be its culture and the vaster its prospects of cultural development. If, on the contrary, it rejects its own past and adopts a negative attitude towards the culture of other peoples, the result will inevitably be the impoverishment and decline of its own culture.

This is confirmed by the historical development of the various civilisations of the past ages.

The organic connection between the treasures of the past — which are a part of the cultural heritage as a whole — and the different aspects of life in society derives from the intrinsic nature of such monuments; it is the consequence of certain essential characteristics of theirs, since:

a) They are the concrete expression of a people's cultural heritage.

They are the incarnation of the historical experience involved in the cultural achievements of the past, the facts, events and processes which must be known if one is to understand the lines along which the nation has developed and its prospects for the future.

b) Monuments of past cultures are products of human activity. While reflecting given sociological trends, they at the same time express the most striking special features of the national character.

c) Historical monuments provide a means of studying the development of the relations between one people and another, the mutual influence of their cultures and the mutual enrichment that has resulted.

d) As an incarnation of the creative activity of mankind, historical monuments are the heritage of the whole of humanity.

The influence and importance of the monuments of the past in the world of today are to be seen in three essential fields, the scientific, the pedagogic and the more generally educational.

There is no need to demonstrate the importance of monuments from a scientific point of view at the present day; it is so obvious as to admit of no discussion, even among non-specialists. What I would like to talk about here are the two other fields, especially as these two uses of historical monuments — the educational and the pedagogic — are directly connected with daily practice and with the conditions under which these monuments have been preserved and exploited, particularly during the period since the Second World War, with the rise of tourism, both local and international.

The last two decades have been marked by very considerable changes in living conditions, owing to the development of means of transport, information media, and so on. All this has necessarily stimulated man's interest in knowing more about the world that surrounds him and has infinitely broadened the horizon of his knowledge.

Tourism, and, in particular, popular tourism, has provided one of the means of satisfying that thirst for knowledge. At our recent symposium at the ICOMOS Second General Assembly in Oxford in 1969, the conclusion was drawn that owing to the scale on which tourism was being practised and the consequent increase in the number of visitors to historical monuments, solutions must be found to special problems which were now arising.

There is no reason to suppose that the factors which are contributing to the development of tourism — means of transport, standards of living, information media, and so on — are going to slow down the pace of their progress or narrow their field. Hence tourism is bound to go on growing and there are bound to be further changes in the conditions under which monuments are used. Such changes may be prejudicial to the monuments if they spontaneously become objects of interest for the tourists without there being due preparation or supervision.

On the other hand, the continually growing interest in the monuments of the past may also become a factor furthering their conservation and their "return to life", if they are adequately adapted for use as objects of study and for educational purposes.

The lightning development of tourism — or rather, the consequences of unsupervised tourist activity — may be just as dangerous for old buildings as, for example, the natural ageing of the stones or dampness in their walls. It is thus natural that the "tourist factor" should be included in

the problems connected with conservation, in the same way as those relating to the physical properties of the buildings.

When a monument is included in a tourist itinerary, there may be more than the optimum number of visitors, undisciplined persons may cause unexpected damage, and so on, all of which will be prejudicial to proper conservation.

When a restoration project is prepared, the principal phases in the operation as planned must include the alterations required to adapt the building for its new use. However, it is also true that the factors which determine the manner in which a historical monument is to serve within the tourist industry can be estimated with a degree of accuracy only in the case of "cultural" tours, where there are standard figures and standard arrangements for the admission of visitors and some preliminary explanations are planned.

The widest sections of the population are now interesting themselves more and more in historical monuments, not only when they travel but also in their daily life, where they treat them as curiosities of their native town, village or area, and the factor behind the growth of this phenomenon is constantly active, for it is nothing other than the progress of civilisation within human society. Hence the process is an irreversible one, and the efficacy of any system for protecting monuments will depend, under present conditions, on an accurate assessment of its influences and its consequences. In practice this means that satisfactory conservation of a monument will depend directly on the manner in which it is to serve as an object of study and a piece of educational equipment.

In our present-day civilisation historical monuments can assume a number of widely differing roles. They form, to begin with, architectural units which give a town its aspect and special character. Then they are objects for study for those who are concerned with the history, civilisation and art of a country. For young people, they provide both an object of study and an opportunity for voluntary activity, since there are associations or teams of restoration workers which they can join. And lastly, they are a stimulant to travel, both local and foreign.

Thus the place of monuments in the life of society, particularly on the level of intellect and feeling, is enormous.

Unfortunately, to judge from the way historical monuments have been dealt with in our country, and also from the way certain other States have been dealing with the same problem, when it comes to restoration and conservation to suit new ends there is a serious want of coordination of the efforts of the various bodies responsible. There are so many different ways in which historical monuments can be used that there exist a large number of organizations using (or owning) such monuments, and yet no general principles governing their satisfactory exploitation have been laid down. In our country, for instance, several different bodies are concerned,

at different levels, with the uses to which monuments are to be put; these are the Ministry of Education, Intourist, the various societies for the protection of monuments, the history and regional museums, the "Znanié" Association, the Committee for Civil Engineering and Architectures in the U.S.S.R., and so on.

It should be remembered that the material upkeep of the monuments given into the care of one body or another for practical use is provided for under conditions laid down in the lease, under which the users provide the administration concerned with the requisite guarantees of proper conservation. Thus their state of conservation remains under the supervision of the administrations responsible for the protection of monuments.

Until quite recently, the very important problems relating to the use of monuments in teaching and education were beyond the control of the organizations responsible for their protection, but three years ago this position was altered. With the enormous growth of tourism and the increased interest in ancient buildings, it became necessary to establish a certain number of tourist itineraries, such as the "Golden Tour" which includes visits to the monuments of Moscow, Rostov, Yaroslav, Vladimir and Suzdal; further, in several other areas there has been an increase in the rate at which ancient buildings are being provided with facilities for the reception of tourists.

It has become a frequent practice to popularize monuments through the press, the radio, and, of course, television. The associations for the protection of monuments in the various Republics have assumed a more important role and have more achievements to their credit, as has the activity of Znanié, whose work consists in making our country's historical monuments better known. We have thus every reason to speak of some very considerable successes in connection with the protection of monuments.

I feel, however, that if the logical stages to be envisaged when deciding on what is to be done with a monument consist in a preliminary study, conservation measures and effective exploitation (each step being directly linked to the preceding one, in an irreversible order), the link between the second and third step has not been made very clear.

In certain cases the administrations in charge of the protection of monuments, though they obtain satisfactory results in the sphere of research and inventorying and carry out restoration work which is competent, do not have a clear picture of the future possibilities for using the monument in an appropriate way once it is restored. The result is that erroneous guiding principles are adopted when the restoration work is done and that difficulties consequently arise when the monument is later used for a variety of purposes.

Such conduct is doubtless, to a greater or lesser degree, typical of the administrations in charge of monuments in a great many countries. This is perfectly logical, as it fairly accurately reflects the attitudes and aims of

national historical monuments departments at a recent period when the masses were less interested in ancient buildings and far less knowledge or data on them was available; in reality there is a radical difference from this latter point of view between the present time and the period immediately preceding it.

There is no need to quote actual examples of the new and enlightened attitude of the public towards historical monuments, which are now generally treated with greater interest and greater respect. It is now up to the departments responsible for the protection of monuments to attune themselves to the new conditions. They must become the central authorities which are to determine the basic standard procedure for the use of monuments of the past, whether for educational or for practical purposes. It is only under such conditions that the procedure mentioned above — preliminary study, conservation measures, choice of user — can be complete and effective as a standard principle.

Preliminary study

This must provide a means not only of discovering the objective merits of a monument, including its artistic and historical value, but also of determining how it can be used in the most effective manner — in other words, determining the role it is to assume in present-day society. The results of such a study should be set out in recommendations on the method and purpose of the restoration work, which will also state the principal rules to be observed in connection with potential uses for the monument.

Conservation Measures

The monument will then be restored by the method thus recommended with a view to its serving a purpose in present-day society. This will involve the actual restoration work, the creation of the necessary tourist facilities, the editing and circulation of literature and information, and so on.

Choice of User

The most rational way of using the monument will be chosen, and it will be entrusted to a user who undertakes to use it with care and look after its maintenance. An inspection will subsequently be carried out to make sure that this user is observing the recommendations adopted in connection with the use of the building.

Such users may be of various types — tourist organizations, schools, museums, local administrations, and so on. They are chosen with a view to reconciling as far as possible the conditions to be observed in respect of conservation — as determined by the administration in charge — with the requirements of the users and the means at their disposal.

This, we feel, is roughly the procedure which is most suited to present-day conditions and which, if adopted by historical monuments administrations, would be most conducive to optimum use and proper conservation.

The Soviet Committee of ICOMOS considers that the problem of how to use historical monuments rationally in present-day life should be made the subject of an exhaustive study; a high level of civilisation has now been reached, and the trends for the future development of culture are various, complex and sometimes contradictory. There could even be a special committee of ICOMOS to examine the question, which could also be the subject of special UNESCO recommendations.

The Soviet Committee of ICOMOS proposes that a special committee be effectively set up. It feels certain that widespread use of monuments for teaching and educational purposes will be one way of giving them new life and helping civilisation to go forward.

A. HALTURIN,

Chairman of the Soviet Committee of ICOMOS,
Assistant Director of Fine Arts and the Protection
of Monuments at the Ministry of Culture of the U.S.S.R.