

| ICCROM's Contribution to the Ethics of Heritage

by Isabelle Vinson

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The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year. Today the acronym ICCROM is well known in international heritage circles. However, it began life under another name. When the UNESCO member states voted for its creation in 1956, they called it after the city that housed it, the 'Rome Centre'. The original name still held echoes of the geographical origins of heritage conservation science, born two centuries earlier in Europe.¹ With the creation of the centre, Rome succeeded Athens before passing the baton to Venice, in a movement reminiscent of the cultural history of ancient and modern Europe. Retrospectively, and considered from a symbolic perspective, the creation of the Rome Centre could seem to be the institutional and professional extension of the 1931 Athens Charter, the first international measure for conservation practice guidance, and a step towards another measure, the 1964 Venice Charter. Given its progress through the first three-quarters of the twentieth century, the geographical semantics attached to the institutionalization of heritage conservation seemed to reinforce the

Eurocentric origins of the international heritage programme.

The history of the development of heritage conservation certainly confirms that its birth-place shares a common identity with the cultural subjects it handles. Many authors have demonstrated the role of European Classical antiquity in creating the notion of heritage and restoration practice.² It is also certain that the first missions of the Rome Centre, notably in Venice and Florence, seemed to confirm this widely held vision of the primarily European origin and destination of the heritage conservation programme of international organisms.³ Having said this, we now need to explain that the history of the creation of international heritage doesn't duplicate the history of the concept of heritage itself. International heritage is much more concerned with creating an ethic than with giving international scope to the classic concept of heritage and its desire to render cultural productions aesthetically and politically intelligible.⁴ It is in this context that, today, we can reflect on the extent to which the creation of ICCROM has served the interests of non-Europeans by the way it has implemented the international heritage conservation programme. Strongly driven by non-Europeans, the programme content, combining normative instruments and technical activities, has laid the groundwork for the ethical framework that characterizes international heritage. A comparative study of the conditions in which the 1954 Convention was drawn up and those in which ICCROM was invented illustrates the importance of non-Europeans and marks the establishment of this ethical framework.

Geopolitics and genesis of the Rome Centre

The first reference to the preparation of an International Convention for Heritage Protection appears in 1949, in the debates of the UNESCO General Conference, when the delegation of the Netherlands presented a draft resolution 'concerning the defence of cultural property in the case of armed conflict'.⁵ They referred to an initial project that the Netherlands had set up between the two world wars and emphasized 'how important it would be for UNESCO to take up this project'.⁶ This initiative, inspired by Kantian theory, entrusting UNESCO with regulating human relations by law, was supplemented by a specific field of cooperation between countries as a practical example of this *normalization*. A decision commissioning the Director-General 'to report back to the General Conference on the measures needed to ensure cooperation of States interested in protection, conservation and restoration of antiquities, monuments and historic sites, and in the possibility of creating an international fund for subsidising conservation and restoration work'⁷ was indeed adopted during the session.

The following year, in 1950, Italy presented a Convention text aiming to 'conserve historic monuments and movable and immovable cultural property in case of armed conflict'.⁸ At the time, the project was backed by a mixed group of countries, comprising Ecuador, Uruguay, France, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Austria.⁹ During the 6th General Conference, in 1951,¹⁰ a new step was taken with the creation of a special committee of government experts given the remit of finalizing the draft

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Convention.¹¹ Until then, the work of drawing up a text had been left to a single country and the UNESCO Secretariat. Commissioning an inter-governmental group brought to light the importance of adopting a first normative instrument and the place it should occupy in the general objectives of a nascent general international heritage protection programme. From then on, country adherence shifted. During the 1951 debates, a project for a unilateral declaration of principle was presented by Italy. It aimed to reinforce the Convention that was being drawn up but was sponsored only by the Netherlands, Austria, France and Greece, while the two Latin American countries withdrew their support.¹² The smaller number of countries in favour of the declaration suggests that the motivation for and purpose of adopting the Convention were to respond to a European concern.

The 1949 directives for the programme specify that 'UNESCO is concentrating firstly on the needs of war-torn countries, and will gradually broaden the scope of the effort that it is currently applying to rebuilding, with a more general action to raise the level of education, science and culture, as and when it has the possibility'.¹³ The preparation of the Convention was totally in line with this priority, as was shown by the arguments used by European countries to speed up the finalizing of the text.¹⁴ However, in 1952 certain nuances were brought to what had previously been the almost unanimous opinion on the necessity and urgency of the Convention. At first, some countries were reticent about finalizing the document, because it impinged on the prerogatives and the national sovereignty of states in terms of

security. India, for example, would have preferred suggestions being made to countries, and most countries wanted more time to examine the future Convention.

Apart from the consequences of adopting a normative instrument on state prerogatives, portents of other interests at work in drawing up the heritage protection programme began to be seen from 1950. Whereas the US, in line with the UNESCO constitutive Act that focuses on peace and security, considered that 'preventing the destruction of existing monuments is a task that deserves priority', the representative from Afghanistan, backed by India, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Iraq and Mexico, opposed this, affirming that 'in their country, as elsewhere in the Middle East, conservation of historic sites is of the greatest importance', because 'contrary to the situation in Europe, buildings of stone and brick need protecting from the weather more than from man-made destruction'.¹⁵ In the same debate, Egypt stated that age damaged historical monuments more than war, and therefore 'the duty of UNESCO is to make countries understand that monuments that belong to the whole of humanity, although they may be on their territory, must be conserved at all costs'.¹⁶ The Philippines representative added a new argument, stating that 'these monuments and historic sites are not only the cultural heritage of all people, but also that of future generations'.¹⁷ Differences of opinion began to appear even within the group of Second World War allies. France, in particular, although far from being the least affected by the future Convention, given the destruction it had suffered, advocated a broader programme involving other heritage protection actions.

This movement to express other issues and priorities for heritage protection had immediate repercussions on the programmes adopted. The umbrella title for the programmes that had been used until then, Archaeological Sites and Historic Monuments, was replaced by Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of Mankind. With this heading, the missions defined for UNESCO were 'to encourage and help Member States, using *technical or legal* measures, to ensure the conservation and protection of works, monuments or documents that make up the cultural heritage of humanity, and [to] provide those who help maintain and enrich this heritage with the necessary conditions to carry out this task'.¹⁸ In 1951 two additional areas were adjoined to the preparation of the international Convention in UNESCO's programme. One was 'the development of exchanges of experience via an Advisory Committee on Monuments'; the other requested 'an examination of the modalities of setting up an International Fund for the conservation of museums, monuments and collections of worldwide interest – possibly by creating a Convention'.¹⁹

The programme tendencies that began to emerge during the key period of 1950–51 reveal the cultural and geopolitical cleavages appearing in the organization. The specific preoccupation of European countries in the post-world-war context was with protection from destruction caused by war. But the other countries, which were not directly affected, brought pressure to add a further layer, a demand to consider all situations where heritage was in danger, calling on the notion of 'heritage of mankind'.²⁰ As proof that a broad consensus had been reached in the programme,

a single report was produced presenting the draft Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the creation of an International Fund for the Conservation of Museums and Collections of World Interest, when the protection of cultural property was examined in 1952.²¹

The debate on heritage conservation that had begun on the highly symbolic ground of protection against destruction in wartime stimulated non-European countries into an awareness of the international issues of conservation. So a process of negotiation between the two groups and two programmes began. The finalizing of the international Convention draft was accepted on condition that a programme of heritage conservation also be set up, to address the concerns and interests of non-European countries. Its aim was to transfer expertise and funding to these countries, as stated in the two thrusts of the programme adopted. Thus conservation practice was placed at the heart of the missions of UNESCO's international programme. Willing to give conservation equal priority with the Convention, some member states strengthened its legitimacy with a highly effective conceptual construct. The fundamental principles of moral and collective cultural property belonging to the whole world, and the obligation that this creates to hand that property on to future generations, were clearly stated right from the start in 1950 by states outside Europe, in the context of pragmatic negotiations. It should therefore be understood that it was in reaction to the direction, deemed too restrictive, taken by UNESCO, and carried forward by the initiators of the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe, that the ethical

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argument on the reasons for conserving the heritage of mankind was spelt out, and thus became a structural component of the international institution programme. When the debates are analysed, it appears that this argument – which has often been thought to be a transposition to the global level of a typically Eurocentric aesthetic and ideological relationship with the past, smacking of geopolitical domination – was employed on purpose by a group of non-European countries to make heritage conservation part of a process of international cooperation.

Ethical components and perspective

Therefore the legal, moral and technical components making up the overall framework for international conservation of heritage and defining its ethical nature were present in the programme for the preservation of the cultural heritage of mankind adopted in 1952. Four lines of action were laid out: (a) assessment and consultancy work, entrusted to an Advisory Committee on Monuments (Res. 4.22); (b) transfer of expertise, by Missions of Consultants on Conservation of Monuments (Res. 4.22); (c) guaranteed resources, by Establishing an International Fund for the Conservation of Monuments (Res. 4.23); and (d) the establishment of a legal framework, by finalizing the International Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property (Res. 4.24 and 4.241).²²

During the following year work was begun on transforming these measures into programme goals. This was the first step in a process of linking actions with a conceptual construct to justify them and of consolidating the goals professionally and

practically. The programme and budget approved for 1953–54 reflect this formatting stage. The general thread of the programme was changed and from then on explained the motivation and characteristics to be given to international cooperation for conservation. New wording stated that ‘the Director-General is authorized to encourage and help Member States to improve the methods and techniques they were using for conserving museum collections and objects, monuments and historic and archaeological sites’.²³ Under the heading ‘Technical Help for Monuments and Museums’, the project for the creation of a Study Centre for the Conservation of Museum Objects and Monuments appeared for the first time in the organization’s official documents.²⁴ The Centre’s mission was to be ‘collecting and circulating information, encouraging and coordinating research and training researchers and technicians for Member States’.²⁵

The gradual change in the lines of action of UNESCO, focusing on cooperation while insisting on the importance of technical aid, paved the way for the externalization of functions related to conservation expertise. Further reasons for creating a specialized centre were the need to conduct research and the need to develop training programmes to meet the requirements of many countries. The evolution of the programme between 1952 and 1956 demonstrates that, by voting for the creation of the Rome Centre in 1956, UNESCO was moving its conservation expertise away from the organization in order to consolidate it.

So from an institutional point of view it took only four years to produce a response to the

felt needs of member states in terms of conservation of the heritage of mankind. For what could be more significant than the creation of a new inter-governmental organization to ensure that the aims and approaches used in conservation were genuinely international? Endowed with its own funding, the projected centre justified the disappearance of the action line directed to creating an International Conservation Fund from UNESCO's programme in 1953. From a political point of view, when the UNESCO member states drew up a programme for preserving the cultural heritage of mankind between 1949 and 1956, this was a way for non-European countries to claim for themselves a Western theoretical construct, of taking ownership of a legacy in a moment of cultural crisis in the West, and at a time of a worldwide political shifting, which continued with decolonization. It is therefore not surprising that, in 1978, the name of the Rome Centre was changed to ICCROM. The new name marked a semantic shift significant of the new geopolitical context.

There are two reasons for studying the process of negotiation and constitution of the programmes by looking closely at what each country contributed. The first is related to the existence of a tension within an ideological interpretation of the heritage approach attributed to UNESCO. It seems that an approach opposite to that of the West has developed since decolonization. It is non-monumental and non-European, and its most visible effect seems to be a revision of the categories of objects upon which the concept of heritage is founded. Although it is true that the era of decolonization gave birth to a process of cultural reconstruction based on evidence of heritage – a process that is especially

fruitful in producing new objects – the study of how the programme was constructed confirms that this interpretation needs some qualification. As a matter of fact, other strategies have been used for constructing a cultural heritage conservation programme, which, when they are spelt out, highlight the intellectual and professional role played by non-European countries in its early design.

The second reason is connected with prospective issues based on the specificity of the international programme. It is important to grasp and articulate the complementary relationships between the legal and technical components in this process of building the conservation programme, because these movements reveal the ethical nature of the programme and the complexity of its construction. However, the current trend in international heritage studies does not encourage synchronic analyses of this kind. Certain principles for looking at the evolution of the programme, such as the use of instrument categories (normative, deontological, technical) and institutional mechanisms (inter-governmental, non-governmental, private), have become deeply rooted. Studies of the normative framework constitute the best examples of the analytical partitioning of the international heritage conservation programme. These are published by a small number of highly specialized experts and carried out with few explanatory contributions from the professional and social, political and cultural, contexts that produce the texts. The result is a rigid hierarchy between, on the one hand, normative texts that are binding and, as such, over-valued by the international community, and, on the other, texts intended to frame and define heritage conservation practice,

such as the Charters. The latter are thought to be for conservation practitioners only. Another result is a trickle-down logic in implementing the whole programme, moving from normative instruments down to practical measures. Therefore outside the community of conservation practitioners, all the guideline texts for conservation practice are less well known, although they are far more numerous and diverse than the international conventions. This analytical grants only a limited place to the understanding of effects on the conceptual framework of feedback from practice. The study of the role of ICCROM in building the overall framework for protecting heritage should make visible the importance of conservation practices and their cultural and intellectual effects. For example, have we fully realized the role that training courses in conservation techniques for conserving perishable materials played in the genesis of the concept of intangible heritage? As a result of a failure to analyse, we believe that it is a given that the renewal of categories of heritage objects is the consequence of a tension between the two cultural approaches. The lack of an historical perspective limits the establishment of the ethical perspective that UNESCO is seeking to promote. This perspective would not be restricted to the normative dimension of such ethics but would also consider deontological problems.

The underlying ethical framework of international heritage is the result not of the simple development of legal norms for heritage protection, but of the meaningful combination of all the activities and intellectual measures that work to protect it. In the same way, a distinction should be made between the diversity of categories of objects exemplifying international

heritage and the ethical nature of the framework that defines it. This contribution to the anniversary of the founding of ICCROM seeks to suggest avenues for studying in a comprehensive way the global dynamic that takes place between theoretical and conceptual givens, normative instruments and practical and deontological approaches, and their respective effects. Indeed a multiplicity of components and actors have contributed to the building of the ethics of heritage. We therefore need to develop a different methodology from that which is currently used. A first step would be to reintroduce the empirical dimension into the study of the conservation programme. This would enrich its significance. This is also a condition for understanding the founding ethics of international heritage.

| NOTES

1. Cf. the study published by the Getty Foundation on Conservation Science, N. Stanley-Price, M. Kirby Talley Jr and A. Melucco Vaccaro (eds) *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute. Readings in Conservation, 1996. The text presents many writers who inspired the founding fathers of ICCROM, with critical introductions to them. Of particular interest are the writings of Paul Philippot, ICCROM Director-General from 1971 to 1977, and Cesare Brandi. Nicholas Stanley-Price, co-editor of the study, was Director-General of ICCROM from 2000 to 2005.
2. E. Pommier, *L'art de la liberté: doctrines et débats de la Révolution française*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque des Histoires, 1991; A.-F. Laurens and K. Pomian (eds) *L'Anticommanie, la collection d'antiquités aux 18^e et 19^e siècles*. Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1992; D. Poulot, *'Surveiller et s'instruire': la Révolution française et l'intelligence de l'héritage historique*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996.
3. Cf. the summary of the missions of the first ten years in *The First Decade, 1959-1969*. Rome: International Centre for the Study of the

Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property, 1969; available from <http://www.iccrom.org>.

4. Cf. A. Chastel, 'La notion de patrimoine', in P. Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997, pp. 1433–69.

5. Acts of the 4th General Conference: *Actes, 4C/ 1949*, pp. 310–11.

6. Ibid.

7. *Projet de code de directives et modifications au programme de l'UNESCO, soumis à la Conférence générale lors de sa quatrième session*. Paris: UNESCO, 1949; Resolution 6.42 of the 4th General Conference and 4C/5 Rev., point 6.42, of the Sites Archéologiques et Monuments Historiques programme, p. 28.

8. Acts of the 5th General Conference: *Actes, 5C/ 1950*, p. 427.

9. Ibid. The programme text specifies that 'new measures should be envisaged, both to obtain certain guarantees via international regulations, and to help countries to protect their monuments and collections': 5C/6, p. 50. The numbers given to the countries correspond to the order in which they spoke in the debates.

10. UNESCO General Conferences took place every year until 1952, and every two years thereafter.

11. Resolution 4.241 of the 6th General Conference, 6C/1951. The project presented to the General Conference in 1951 was prepared by the UNESCO Secretariat based on the Italian text.

12. *Actes, 6C/ 1951*, pp. 338–39.

13. *Projet de code de directives et modifications au programme de l'UNESCO, soumis à la Conférence générale lors de sa quatrième session*. Paris: UNESCO, 1949, point XII, p. 5.

14. Cf. the transcriptions of the debates in *Actes, 5C/ 1950* and *Actes, 6C/ 1951*.

15. *Actes, 5C/ 1950*, pp. 304–05.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. *Programme de l'UNESCO présenté par le conseil exécutif*. Paris: UNESCO, 1951, 5C/5 (I) Rev., p. 17. Author's emphasis.

19. Resolution 4.2, 6C/ 1951 and *Programme et budget approuvés pour 1952, 6C/5 Approuvé*. Paris, 13 November 1951, pp. 159–61. Most of the World Cultural Heritage Conservation programme budget was given over to helping countries that are having 'particular difficulties in conserving or restoring monuments of archaeological or historic sites'. From then on, and for many years, this title became the thrust of UNESCO's cultural heritage conservation programme.

20. *Plan de travail pour l'exécution du programme pour 1951, 5C/6*, pp. 50–51.

21. *Actes, 7C/1952*, pp. 502 ff. Report 7C/PRG/38 and 7C/PRG/38 (Add.).

22. *Programme et budget approuvés pour 1952, 6C/5 approuvé*. Paris: UNESCO, 13 November 1951, pp. 159–61.

23. *Programme et budget approuvés pour 1953–1954, 7C/5*. Paris: UNESCO, 5 January 1953, point 4.23, p. 221.

24. Ibid., p. 222.

25. *Programme et budget approuvés pour 1955–1956, 8C/5*. Paris: UNESCO, 13 January 1955, point 4.2, p. 191. For the final version of the statutes of the Rome Centre, see *Budget et plans de travail approuvés pour 1957–1958, 9C/Plan de travail*. Paris: UNESCO, point 4.5, pp. 125–26.