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Romualdo Del Bianco Foundatione

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Lublin University of Technology

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TOWARDS AN “INTEGRATED CONSERVATION”: THE CONTRIBUTION OF R.M. LEMAIRE AND PIERO GAZZOLA DURING THE FIRST DECADE OF ICOMOS (1965–1975)

Claudine Houbart*

Abstract: This paper focuses on the role of Piero Gazzola (1908–1979) and Raymond M. Lemaire (1921–1997) in the emergence of the “integrated conservation” concept between 1965 and 1975. It is based on some research carried on for my PhD entitled “Raymond M. Lemaire and the conservation of the ancient city: historical and critical approach of his Belgian projects in an international perspective” (Houbart [1]). After addressing the rise of the historic cities issues immediately after the writing of the Venice Charter, which already questioned the validity of the document, it shows how Raymond M. Lemaire’s field experience in Belgium and Lemaire and Gazzola’s action within the Committee of Monuments and Sites of the Council of Europe, from 1971 on, has been essential to the definition of the key principles of the 1975 European Charter and Amsterdam Declaration.

Keywords: Integrated conservation, urban renovation, P. Gazzola, R.M. Lemaire, Amsterdam Declaration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago, following the wish expressed by Guglielmo de Angelis d’Ossat at the end of the Paris conference in 1957 and the recommendation of the 1964 conference in Venice, ICOMOS was founded in Warsaw, and at the first general assembly that followed immediately in Cracow, Piero Gazzola and Raymond M. Lemaire were respectively elected the President and Secretary General of the organisation. The archives of Raymond M. Lemaire, that were handed in to the Central library of the KULeuven in the early nineties, after he became Professor Emeritus, contain indubitably the most comprehensive documentation to understand how ICOMOS was set and grew during the first years of its existence. Correspondence, reports, draft projects allow us to think that Lemaire and Gazzola’s titles were far from being honorary. Both of them were true kingpins of the organisation, and in this respect were sometimes discouraged in front of the huge challenges they were facing, as a letter from Lemaire to Gazzola in 1968 reveals: “If we don’t have active collaboration, we won’t be able to carry on. It is indeed sure that we can’t go on thinking everything, organising everything, and doing everything alone in every field of activity of ICOMOS. We need other Gazzolas and

* Faculty of Architecture, University of Liege, e-mail: c.houbart@ulg.ac.be

other Lemaire's for particular sectors, otherwise, we will very soon suffocate"¹. Indeed, during these first years, both of them didn't only work towards the creation of numerous national committees around the world, but also positioned ICOMOS as a major actor of the international conservation scene, through the organisation of conferences and an active participation in the debates initiated by UNESCO and the Council of Europe, for which ICOMOS was recognised as a consultant thanks to their action.

2. THE RISE OF THE HISTORIC CITIES ISSUE IN THE SIXTIES

Taking a look at the conferences organised by ICOMOS during its first years of existence obviously reveals that reflecting on the future of historic cities was one of the main priorities of the newly born organisation. Besides the congresses on stone conservation that took place in Belgium in the late sixties, most of the first ICOMOS conferences focused on this theme. Between 1966 and 1969, conferences held in Levoča, Caceres, Tunis and Graz respectively focused on the "regeneration of historic urban sites," on "protection and revivification, conservation, restoration or revival of centres" and on "traffic in historic cities". In parallel, following a recommendation adopted by its consultative assembly in 1963, five expert meetings were planned by the Council of Europe between 1965 and 1968, amongst which four addressed the issue of historic cities. As the President and Secretary General of ICOMOS, Lemaire and Gazzola took an active part not only in the ICOMOS events – where they introduced or closed the debates, or helped writing the conclusions or recommendations, but also in the Council of Europe initiatives, as members of the "Technical Advisors Committee". The discussions of this committee, chaired by Hendrik Jan Reinink and composed of ten members amongst which four signatories of the Venice charter – Gazzola, Lemaire, Gertrud Tripp and François Sorlin – were essential to the moving of conservation goals from monuments to ancient cities.

Thinking of the controversial post-war reconstruction projects and the growing implementation of the functionalist CIAM Athens Charter principles to numerous European city centres, it is easy to understand why historic cities became one of the main conservation issues in the 1960's. In Belgium, Lemaire's home country, the capital city even gave its name to the worst form of destructive and haphazard urban development: Brusselization. To face this problem from a conservation point of view, it is also evident that the Charter of Venice's Article 14, simply extending the implementation of articles meant for monuments to the imprecise object of "historic sites" in English, that is "the sites of monuments", and to "monumental sites" in the original French version, didn't stand a chance. Indeed, even if every contributor to the Charter's writing was definitely aware of the rising city centres issue, the conditions in which the document was written and, even more, the lack of significant field experience at the moment when it was written led the articles to address mainly monumental conservation, despite the good intentions of Article 1 extending the scope of the reflection to "urban and rural settings" or "sites" in French. In the mid 1960's, there was without any doubt a great need for international reflection on that topic, and the better way to feed it was to carry on appropriate and innovative field experiences, such as the one Raymond Lemaire had the opportunity to develop for the University of Leuven.

¹ R. M. Lemaire to P. Gazzola, August 1st, 1968. KULeuven, R. M. Lemaire Archives.

3. RAYMOND M. LEMAIRE'S FIELD EXPERIENCE: FROM CONSERVATION AND REHABILITATION TO URBANISM

Knowing each other since 1947, both trained by Ambrogio Annoni in Milano (Houbart [2]) and aware of Gustavo Giovannoni's theories, partially implemented in the 1931 Athens Charter, Piero Gazzola and Raymond M. Lemaire both showed a particular interest in the urban conservation question. As superintendent of Western Venetia in the postwar period, Gazzola had worked, among other projects, on the reconstruction of the city of Verona, and according to him, the city was a "delicate emulsion of elements" (Aveta [3]). As to Lemaire, his experience in the reconstruction context had been mainly drawn towards churches restoration, in the wake of his uncle, Canon Raymond A.G. Lemaire. But in 1962, the University of Leuven gave him a wonderful opportunity to try out urban renovation, with the conversion of Leuven's Great Beguinage, comprising around a hundred buildings, into students and professors' accommodations. The scope of this paper is not to explain in detail this interesting project, but the fact that it was mainly carried on between 1963 and 1972, in parallel with the theoretical reflections in which Lemaire was very much involved for ICOMOS and the Council of Europe, turned it into a pilot project that was discussed internationally.

The most interesting conclusion of the detailed survey of the project I had the opportunity to carry on in the context of my PhD, is that the operation, rather than a mere application of the Venice Charter's principles to an urban site, has been a real challenge for the recently adopted document. In this project indeed, despite the fact that he had been right at the same moment, together with Gazzola, Roberto Pane, Paul Philippot and Jean Sonnier, one of the main writers of the Charter (Houbart [4]), Raymond Lemaire departed from its principles to meet the requirements of urban "reanimation", a concept developed at the same moment by the council of Europe with his active collaboration.

In his contribution to the third expert meeting of the Council of Europe, held in Bath in October 1966, Lemaire praised right away what he called an "active conservation" as the only solution to guarantee the future of monuments and ensembles, what could be understood, at a first glance, as another formulation of the Venice Charter's Article 5 encouraging the use of monuments for "some socially useful purpose." However, in Bath, Lemaire insisted on the fact that beyond their cultural significance, historic cities must "contribute to the fulfilment of human physical but also moral needs." By "moral needs," he meant that the familiar, human atmosphere of the traditional urban fabric, could be an important human balance factor in a period when modernist *tabula rasa* developments were already questioned from a social point of view. For Lemaire, "the message of the monumental ensembles resides as much in its spirit and atmosphere than in the high quality of its components" (Lemaire [5]).

In the case of the Great Beguinage, the will to fulfil at the same time these two kinds of human needs, "physical" and "moral", led to the adoption of distinct principles for the interiors and the envelopes of the houses and other buildings of the ensemble. On the one hand, the interiors were subjected to a drastic modernisation to meet modern comfort standards. Besides the inclusion of new facilities, such as central heating, telephone and bathrooms, the houses layout was in many cases deeply modified in order to convert the available rooms into studios and student rooms, and to position the staircases in a more effective way. On the other hand, the "traditional",

almost “picturesque” character of the whole was emphasised by means of heavy interventions on the houses envelopes. A general removal of the whitewash, followed by a reconstitution of the seventeenth century compositions of the facades, at the expense of later historical transformations, resulted in a coherent image, faithful to the ideal of the ancient city as opposed to the inhuman atmosphere of radical modernist developments in Lemaire’s texts. These distinct approaches explain the many derogations to the principles of the Venice Charter that a careful study of the Great Beguinage project reveals.

The Great Beguinage was of course only one of the projects that were discussed at the international meetings, but the archives as well as the contemporary publications reveal that its outcomes inspired the search for new international principles adapted to the urban issue. What the sources also make clear is that the foundation of ICOMOS allowed the experiences of its members to be more efficiently shared, mainly through conferences and publications in the journal *Monumentum*, and in consequence, the organisation played a crucial part in the renewal of methodologies and practices. In the case of Lemaire, the study of the numerous projects he conceived for some ancient districts of Brussels in the field of urban renovation in the late sixties and seventies, reveals a deep influence of the experiences carried on by Miklos Horler in Budapest and Dobroslav Libal in Prague, both published in the first issue of *Monumentum* in 1967 (Horler [6] and Libal [7]).

However, Lemaire’s field experience at the turn of the seventies was not limited to classical restoration projects and urban rehabilitation. In 1965, in the context of the division of the University of Leuven in a separate French and Flemish section, implying the moving of the French section to the southern part of Belgium, Lemaire, despite the fact that he had been trained as an art historian, was progressively involved in the reflections towards the creation of a new town. In 1968, he became the head of the architects and urbanists team in charge of planning the city, a decision that can be partially explained by the fascination of the board of the University for the Great Beguinage project and its human atmosphere, challenging the modernist project firstly composed by the Austro-American planner and shopping mall specialist Victor Gruen. Inevitably, this large scale project was fed by Lemaire’s rehabilitation contemporary experiences in Leuven and Brussels, but it also had an effect on them in return, especially on the architectural point of view. In the early seventies, the “infill” architecture, promoted by Lemaire’s team in the ancient districts, was very close to the architectural rules imposed to the architects working in the new town of Louvain-la-Neuve.

Moving from the scale of monuments to the scale of the city, from conservation to creation and from rehabilitation to urbanism, Lemaire’s field experience at the turn of the seventies was particularly appropriate to feed the debates on the future of historic cities.

4. THE COMMITTEE OF MONUMENTS AND SITES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

In the early seventies, Raymond Lemaire and Piero Gazzola were associated with two key initiatives towards a new approach of urban renovation. The first, a revision of the Venice Charter, was their own initiative, and didn’t lead to any tangible result.

The second, the Committee of Monuments and Sites of the Council of Europe, was created to implement the reflexions carried on by the expert meetings of the sixties, and played a key role in the definition and promotion of the "integrated conservation" concept, consecrated by the European heritage year in 1975.

Despite its importance and lessons, we still should learn from the initiative. This paper will not describe in detail the twists and turns of the Venice Charter's revision process, initiated in 1971 and finally abandoned ten years later. This has been the subject of a paper published in 2014 at the occasion of the "Venice Charter at Fifty" conference in Philadelphia (Houbart [4]). To keep a long story short, according to Lemaire and Gazzola, in 1971 already, "it appeared from the experience of the last ten years that an outright application of principles relevant for monuments as such, was not always possible, nor desirable for the ensembles." This not only revealed that, despite its Article 1, the Venice Charter was pre-eminently conceived for monuments conservation – something that Paul Philippot, another co-author of the document, confirmed last year in an interview, but it also implied the irrelevance of Article 14, which Lemaire and Gazzola had the intention to replace by more detailed and specific articles. Nevertheless, despite of broad consultation of the national committees, and the organisation of an expert meeting on the invitation of the British committee of ICOMOS in May 1977, the revision process didn't succeed. The experts and the consulted committees failed to agree on a revised text and even on the appropriateness of such a revision. A project, written by Lemaire himself in 1978, didn't convince the general assembly in Moscow in 1978 either. After the next assembly in Rome, the idea was abandoned.

Contrasting with this aborted initiative, Lemaire and Gazzola's active participation in the newly created Committee of Monuments and Sites of the Council of Europe was much more successful. Resulting in the experts meetings of the 1960's and the Ministers conference held in Brussels in 1969, this committee had the particularity of bringing together the representatives from heritage and planning administrations from each member state, something radically new.

The role of Lemaire and Gazzola, in this context, was once again crucial as the President of ICOMOS, Piero Gazzola was an ex-officio member of the committee, and the Secretary General, Lemaire had the right to take part in all its debate as an observer. But the fact that, at the first meeting of the committee, which took place from November 29th until December 3rd, 1971, Lemaire was invited to present a synthesis of all the new aspects of the debate, proves that he was considered as a leading expert in the field and that he took a more than active part in the reflections. In his text, entitled "The signification of the heritage of monuments and sites for the man of today," Lemaire develops the issues he already presented at the Bath expert meeting five years before. Reaffirming that "with its infinite variety, in terms of urbanism and housing as well, the traditional city, and more particularly the city before the second half of the nineteenth century, is the antithesis of the new urban ensemble's monotony and of the big mass-produced housing complexes of which the deficiencies from the human point of view are but too well-known," Lemaire insisted on the importance of preserving, not only the cultural and aesthetic values, but also the social values of historic cities, seen as a rich and varied answer to "moral" human needs. According to him, and the drawing on his combined experiences in Leuven, Brussels and Louvain-la-Neuve, "the great theories era has passed, and every action in the field of environment and more particularly,

in the fields of urbanism and architecture, must be based on an extensive study of the man's individual and collective physical and psychological needs and on the perception of conscious and unconscious needs in terms of living environment" (Lemaire [8]). Moving his focus from mere conservation of ancient heritage to the creation of a living environment capable of fulfilling man's deepest and least quantifiable needs, Lemaire integrated in the same reflexion rehabilitation, architecture and urbanism, in accordance with his own experience and the committee's founding principles.

To address the challenge of integrating conservation in the planning agendas of the member states, the committee had two major objectives: the organisation of a "heritage year," set in 1975, and the writing a new charter. With a view to the year 1975, the committee encouraged, through the national delegates of each member state, the launch or continuation of exemplary or pilot operations, meant not only to test new conservation principles adapted to the objectives of rehabilitation, but also to find new practical and economic means of intervention and to promote this new vision of the historic city in the eyes of the general public and local authorities, considered as key-actors of the new approach. In Belgium, Raymond Lemaire was closely involved in two out of the five operations considered as pilot projects in this context: in Flanders, the "Structure plan" of the city of Bruges, and in Wallonia, the rehabilitation of one of the most ancient streets of the city of Namur, the "rue des Brasseurs." In both cases, the projects tended to address the social and economic stakes of urban rehabilitation, and in the Bruges structure plan, embracing the territorial scale, the renovation of ancient building blocks of the city was presented as one of the components of a more ambitious and global planning approach of the region as a whole.

The fact that Gazzola and Lemaire, together with the French François Sorlin, were the ones to write the report of the committee's works and reflections, make clear that they assumed a leading role in the definition of the guiding lines of the new policy put forward by the committee. Under the title "Rescue operation. The face of Europe," the report – finished in 1973, but already partly written in 1971 – focused on the importance to carry on inventories and, above all, on the shift from a "passive" conservation to the integration of heritage in contemporary life. The chapter dedicated to the historic ensembles, mainly written by Lemaire, developed for the first time the concept of "integral planning." This concept was meant to replace both those of urban renovation and of "layout of urban sites," and was obviously inspired by Gustavo Giovannoni's theories as expressed in 1931 in *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova* (Giovannoni [9]). It was presented as the only acceptable basis of a well-reasoned planning, and interdisciplinary by nature. In parallel with this collective work, Lemaire wrote, in 1973, another text for the committee, entitled "Towards a global policy of architectural heritage conservation" (Lemaire [10]), comprising every essential aspect of the future European Charter and Amsterdam Declaration adopted in 1975, including the necessity to actively involve the local population, demonstrated by contemporary experiences such as the one carried on in Bologna by Pierluigi Cervellati, followed with attention by the Council of Europe.

5. THE KEY ROLE OF ICOMOS

Piero Gazzola and Raymond Lemaire were of course not the only contributors to this new approach of heritage conservation. Encouraged by the Council of Europe initiatives, many pilot projects were carried on all over Europe, and discussed in meetings and

conferences at the local and international scales. However, as the President and Secretary General of ICOMOS, they assumed a particularly crucial role, not only through their own contributions to the debate, but also in provoking discussions, reflections and interest amongst the organisation's committees and partners, such as UNESCO and Europa Nostra. Drawing up the list of their initiatives and contributions would be too long and useless, but to quote only a few, let's mention that an ICOMOS meeting in Bruges in May 1975, of which the resolutions were adopted by the Rothenburg General Assembly, inspired the drafting of the Nairobi declaration (Unesco, 1976), or that many ICOMOS conferences in the first years of the seventies were devoted to themes closely linked to the reflections of the Committee of Monuments and Sites, even outside Europe. Among other examples, Piero Gazzola delivered speeches on urban rehabilitation at conferences in Kyoto and Nara (September 1970), Belgrade (June 1971), Mexico (October 1972), Zurich (July 1973) and Vilnius (September 1973)².

Beyond its historical importance for the evolution of the conservation doctrine, there are at least two lessons we should learn from the action of these two founding fathers of ICOMOS, especially at this key moment when we reflect on the past fifty years and the future of the organisation. First, their continuous effort to adapt existing conservation approaches to the always new challenges of the human environment planning should encourage us to remain open to the revision of our doctrinal documents and principles – they express the state of the reflections and knowledge at a certain moment, in a certain place and their principles ought to be questioned. Second, a dialogue between theory and practice seems to be the only way to progress. Lemaire and Gazzola's work very well illustrates the importance of this reflexive process. Becoming familiar with Gazzola and Lemaire's work and state of mind convinced me that they were often much more daring than we are today. They didn't always succeed, but we can still learn as much from their failures as from their successes.

² Piero Gazzola Archives, San Ciriaco di Negrar.

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