

Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage (1990)

INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognized that a knowledge and understanding of the origins and development of human societies is of fundamental importance to humanity in identifying its cultural and social roots.

The archaeological heritage constitutes the basic record of past human activities. Its protection and proper management is therefore essential to enable archaeologists and other scholars to study and interpret it on behalf of and for the benefit of present and future generations.

The protection of this heritage cannot be based upon the application of archaeological techniques alone. It requires a wider basis of professional and scientific knowledge and skills. Some elements of the archaeological heritage are components of architectural structures and in such cases must be protected in accordance with the criteria for the protection of such structures laid down in the 1966 Venice Charter on the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites. Other elements of the archaeological heritage constitute part of the living traditions of indigenous peoples, and for such sites and monuments the participation of local cultural groups is essential for their protection and preservation.

For these and other reasons the protection of the archaeological heritage must be based upon effective collaboration between professionals from many disciplines. It also requires the cooperation of government authorities, academic researchers, private or public enterprise, and the general public. This charter therefore lays down principles relating to the different aspects of archaeological heritage management. These include the responsibilities of public authorities and legislators, principles relating to the professional performance of the processes of inventorization, survey, excavation, documentation, research, maintenance, conservation, preservation, reconstruction, information, presentation, public access and use of the heritage, and the qualification of professionals involved in the protection of the archaeological heritage.

The charter has been inspired by the success of the Venice Charter as guidelines and source of ideas for policies and practice of governments as well as scholars and professionals.

The charter has to reflect very basic principles and guidelines with global validity. For this reason it cannot take into account the specific problems and possibilities of regions or countries. The charter should therefore be supplemented at regional and national levels by further principles and guidelines for these needs.

ARTICLE 1. DEFINITION AND INTRODUCTION

The "archaeological heritage" is that part of the material heritage in respect of which archaeological methods provide primary information. It comprises all vestiges of human existence and consists of places relating to all manifestations of human activity, abandoned structures, and remains of all kinds (including subterranean and underwater sites), together with all the portable cultural material associated with them.

ARTICLE 2. INTEGRATED PROTECTION POLICIES

The archaeological heritage is a fragile and non-renewable cultural resource. Land use must therefore be controlled and developed in order to minimize the destruction of the archaeological heritage.

Policies for the protection of the archaeological heritage should constitute an integral component of policies relating to land use, development, and planning as well as of cultural, environmental and educational policies. The policies for the protection of the archaeological heritage should be kept under continual review, so that they stay up to date. The creation of archaeological reserves should form part of such policies.

The protection of the archaeological heritage should be integrated into planning policies at international, national, regional and local levels.

Active participation by the general public must form part of policies for the protection of the archaeological heritage. This is essential where the heritage of indigenous peoples is involved. Participation must be based upon access to the knowledge necessary for decision-making. The provision of information to the general public is therefore an important element in integrated protection.

ARTICLE 3. LEGISLATION AND ECONOMY

The protection of the archaeological heritage should be considered as a moral obligation upon all human beings; it is also a collective public responsibility. This obligation must be acknowledged through relevant legislation and the provision of adequate funds for the supporting programmes necessary for effective heritage management.

The archaeological heritage is common to all human society and it should therefore be the duty of every country to ensure that adequate funds are available for its protection.

Legislation should afford protection to the archaeological heritage that is appropriate to the needs, history, and traditions of each country and region, providing for in situ protection and research needs.

Legislation should be based on the concept of the archaeological heritage as the heritage of all humanity and of groups of peoples, and not restricted to any individual person or nation.

Legislation should forbid the destruction, degradation or alteration through changes of any archaeological site or monument or to their surroundings without the consent of the relevant archaeological authority.

Legislation should in principle require full archaeological investigation and documentation in cases where the destruction of the archaeological heritage is authorized.

Legislation should require, and make provision for, the proper maintenance, management and conservation of the archaeological heritage. Adequate legal sanctions should be prescribed in respect of violations of archaeological heritage legislation.

If legislation affords protection only to those elements of the archaeological heritage which are registered in a selective statutory inventory, provision should be made for the temporary protection of unprotected or newly discovered sites and monuments until an archaeological evaluation can be carried out.

Development projects constitute one of the greatest physical threats to the archaeological heritage. A duty for developers to ensure that archaeological heritage impact studies are carried out before development schemes are implemented, should therefore be embodied in appropriate legislation, with a stipulation that the costs of such studies are to be included in project costs. The principle should also be established in legislation that development schemes should be designed in such a way as to minimize their impact upon the archaeological heritage.

ARTICLE 4. SURVEY

The protection of the archaeological heritage must be based upon the fullest possible knowledge of its extent and nature. General survey of archaeological resources is therefore an essential working tool in developing strategies for the protection of the archaeological heritage. Consequently archaeological survey should be a basic obligation in the protection and management of the archaeological heritage.

At the same time, inventories constitute primary resource databases for scientific study and research. The compilation of inventories should therefore be regarded as a continuous, dynamic process. It follows that inventories should comprise information at various levels of significance and reliability, since even superficial knowledge can form the starting point for protective measures.

ARTICLE 5. INVESTIGATION

Archaeological knowledge is based principally on the scientific investigation of the archaeological heritage. Such investigation embraces the whole range of methods from non-destructive techniques through sampling to total excavation.

It must be an overriding principle that the gathering of information about the archaeological heritage should not destroy any more archaeological evidence than is necessary for the protectional or scientific objectives of the investigation. Non-destructive techniques, aerial and ground survey, and sampling should therefore be encouraged wherever possible, in preference to total excavation.

As excavation always implies the necessity of making a selection of evidence to be documented and preserved at the cost of losing other information and possibly even the total destruction of the monument, a decision to excavate should only be taken after thorough consideration.

Excavation should be carried out on sites and monuments threatened by development, land-use change, looting, or natural deterioration.

In exceptional cases, unthreatened sites may be excavated to elucidate research problems or to interpret them more effectively for the purpose of presenting them to the public. In such cases excavation must be preceded by thorough scientific evaluation of the significance of the site. Excavation should be partial, leaving a portion undisturbed for future research.

A report conforming to an agreed standard should be made available to the scientific community and should be incorporated in the relevant inventory within a reasonable period after the conclusion of the excavation.

Excavations should be conducted in accordance with the principles embodied in the 1956 UNESCO Recommendations on International Principles Applicable to Archaeological Excavations and with agreed international and national professional standards.

ARTICLE 6. MAINTENANCE AND CONSERVATION

The overall objective of archaeological heritage management should be the preservation of monuments and sites in situ, including proper long-term conservation and curation of all related records and collections etc. Any transfer of elements of the heritage to new locations represents a violation of the principle of preserving the heritage in its original context. This principle stresses the need for proper maintenance, conservation and management. It also asserts the principle that the archaeological heritage should not be exposed by excavation or left exposed after excavation if provision for its proper maintenance and management after excavation cannot be guaranteed.

Local commitment and participation should be actively sought and encouraged as a means of promoting the maintenance of the archaeological heritage. This principle is especially important when dealing with the heritage of indigenous peoples or local cultural groups. In some cases it may be appropriate to entrust responsibility for the protection and management of sites and monuments to indigenous peoples.

Owing to the inevitable limitations of available resources, active maintenance will have to be carried out on a selective basis. It should therefore be applied to a sample of the diversity of sites and monuments, based upon a scientific assessment of their significance and representative character, and not confined to the more notable and visually attractive monuments.

The relevant principles of the 1956 UNESCO Recommendations should be applied in respect of the maintenance and conservation of the archaeological heritage.

ARTICLE 7. PRESENTATION, INFORMATION, RECONSTRUCTION

The presentation of the archaeological heritage to the general public is an essential method of promoting an understanding of the origins and development of modern societies. At the same time it is the most important means of promoting an understanding of the need for its protection.

Presentation and information should be conceived as a popular interpretation of the current state of knowledge, and it must therefore be revised frequently. It should take account of the multifaceted approaches to an understanding of the past.

Reconstructions serve two important functions: experimental research and interpretation. They should, however, be carried out with great caution, so as to avoid disturbing any surviving archaeological evidence, and they should take account of evidence from all sources in order to achieve authenticity. Where possible and appropriate, reconstructions should not be built immediately on the archaeological remains, and should be identifiable as such.

ARTICLE 8. PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

High academic standards in many different disciplines are essential in the management of the archaeological heritage. The training of an adequate number of qualified professionals in the relevant fields of expertise should therefore be an important objective for the educational policies in every country. The need to develop expertise in certain highly specialized fields calls for

international cooperation. Standards of professional training and professional conduct should be established and maintained.

The objective of academic archaeological training should take account of the shift in conservation policies from excavation to in situ preservation. It should also take into account the fact that the study of the history of indigenous peoples is as important in preserving and understanding the archaeological heritage as the study of outstanding monuments and sites.

The protection of the archaeological heritage is a process of continuous dynamic development. Time should therefore be made available to professionals working in this field to enable them to update their knowledge. Postgraduate training programmes should be developed with special emphasis on the protection and management of the archaeological heritage.

ARTICLE 9. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The archaeological heritage is the common heritage of all humanity. International cooperation is therefore essential in developing and maintaining standards in its management.

There is an urgent need to create international mechanisms for the exchange of information and experience among professionals dealing with archaeological heritage management. This requires the organization of conferences, seminars, workshops, etc. at global as well as regional levels, and the establishment of regional centres for postgraduate studies. ICOMOS, through its specialized groups, should promote this aspect in its medium- and long-term planning.

International exchanges of professional staff should also be developed as a means of raising standards of archaeological heritage management.

Technical assistance programmes in the field of archaeological heritage management should be developed under the auspices of ICOMOS.

This Charter, written by the International Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM), a specialized committee of ICOMOS, was approved by the ICOMOS General Assembly, meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland, in October 1990.