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Restoration in Architecture: First Dialogue

Camillo Boito, Cesare Birignani

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*Al Cav. Arturo Campi
con grande stima e viva amicizia
C. Boito*

1. Camillo Boito (1836–1914) photographed in 1880. Photograph by Studio Artico, Monza.

Restoration in Architecture

First Dialogue

Camillo Boito (1836–1914) was one of the founding figures of modern Italian conservation, yet his writings on conservation were never translated into English and he is little known outside his native country. In this key text, originally titled “I restauri in architettura,” published in *Questioni pratiche di belle arti, restauri, concorsi, legislazione, professione, insegnamento* (1893),¹ Boito lays out a theory of conservation that rejects the dualism between the stylistic restoration school of Viollet-Le-Duc and the pure conservation school of John Ruskin and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. The text is organized as a Socratic dialogue between preservationists, which exposes the absurdity of rigid adherence to either perspective. From the dialectic, Boito’s own approach emerges as a synthesis of elements from both schools. He summarizes his theory in seven points at the conclusion, advocating a critical philological approach that distinguishes between layers of intervention in order to present the historical structuring of buildings in their material authenticity. Boito’s theory recognized that any intervention is necessarily based on value judgments. To that end he asked that preservationists question their own prejudices when handling the material remains of the past. Boito taught architecture at both the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera and the Politecnica di Milano (both in Milan) from the mid-1860s until shortly before his death. Also a figure of some literary renown, Boito was one of the principal authors of the *Carta Italiana del Restauro* (1883), which absorbed his principles into official Italian preservation practice. His influence can also be felt in two major preservation documents of the twentieth century, the Athens Charter (1931) and the Venice Charter (1964).

—We could append, as an epigraph to our dialogue, a Chinese saying: *It is a shame to deceive our contemporaries; it is an even bigger shame to deceive posterity.*

—Really? It seems to me, instead, that the greatest skill in restoring an old monument consists indeed in arranging it so that the new seems ancient, so that ancient and new are indistinguishable. I remember the definition of Viollet-le-Duc . . .

—Let’s leave the French aside.

—And who would you rather quote, if not the great French historian and legislator of architecture, praised as such even

in other countries and above all in Italy? *To restore a building is to reestablish it to a complete state, which may never have existed at any particular moment.*² He followed this maxim in his restorations of the walls of Carcassonne, of the castle of Pierrefonds, and of other famous monuments, and he was much praised.

—Let's leave the French aside, I repeat. In the past ten or twelve years the theory of restoration has changed a lot.

—Is there anything nowadays that enjoys the praise of everybody and does not change a lot? The point is to have so much critical insight and such vast knowledge so as to do as Viollet-le-Duc did when he dealt with a monument: put oneself in the shoes of the old architect and imagine what the gentleman would do if he came back today on our mortal earth and was asked to solve the new problem of completion or restoration of his building. *To suppose what he would do, if he came back to the world . . .*³

—To evoke the spirit of Bramante, of Arnolfo, of the Comacine masters, of the monks of the Middle Ages, of a hundred other craftsmen, does this seem little to you? To relive in their time, in their soul, in their genius! To adopt their virtues, and even their defects! The defects— not really, it seems, since Viollet-le-Duc tended to correct them. You may remember the great architectural battle for the climbing arches, or flying buttresses, as someone calls them, of the cathedral of Evreux. There were two series of arches, superimposed: only one in each crossing was built, changing the form of the buttresses, of the pinnacles, of the spires; and the official report of your revered legislator said: *It would be puerile to reproduce an arrangement so eminently vicious.*⁴ It's natural. In forcedly thrusting the spirit of the ancient architect into the head of the modern architect, the former adapts to the circumlocutions of the new mind, and the resulting work is neither ancient nor modern. Do you want me to say it openly? When the restorations are carried out with the theory of Mr. Viollet-le-Duc, which can be called the romantic theory of restoration, a theory that until the day before yesterday was universal and nevertheless is followed by many, indeed even by most in Italy, I prefer badly made restorations to well-made ones. Whereas those, by virtue of their beneficial ignorance, let me distinguish clearly the ancient from the modern part, these, with admirable science and cunning, by making the new appear ancient, put me in such a fierce perplexity of judgment that the pleasure of contemplating the monument disappears and studying it becomes a most fastidious labor.

—Oh, that's a good one! Better, thus, an ass of a restorer than a learned restorer!

—Listen. Months ago I stopped in a little city where I had never been before to see a church of the thirteenth century, one of those churches with small orders of columns superimposed on the façade, with capitals full of monsters and friezes full of intricacies. I had with me notebook and pencil. The first impression, at a certain distance, was good; but then, as I examined the church, a thousand doubts and suspects began to grow in me. The building had been restored so sublimely that one could not distinguish the old from the new; the same materials, the same sculpture, the same color revered over the centuries. I see a very bizarre corbel and begin to sketch it; my soul was worried; I have someone give me a ladder, and I climb to the top, I touch, hit, scratch, scrape: it was modern stuff. This is the problem I had to confront at each and every moment: do I see a thing of the thirteenth century or one of recent years? There were no old drawings, there were no old photographs. The sacristans, young, hadn't seen anything; the priest, decrepit, didn't remember anything. I put back notebook and pencil, and went straight to the station to take the train that would take me away, cursing his excellence the restorer, and calling him a liar, a cheat, a forger, a . . .

—Calm yourself, please, and let me too say a few words. It is thus the men of the seventeenth century, the baroques, that, as restorers, must be to your liking. When they set out to restore, for example, a Christian basilica, they would make, around the columns of cipolin and eastern granite, by means of mortar and gypsum, the pilasters [*pilastracci*] clumsy, and would smear the delicate Roman capitals by superimposing on them some flowered patterns similar to their wigs, and under the architraves they would build, always in lime mortar and gypsum, squiggle arches, and under the roof made of beautiful supports [*cavalletti*] they would build with timber centering an elliptical vault with lunettes and ribs; then they would cover everything with an indigestible jumble of volutes, curls, cartouches, and contrivances pompous like the frills of their dresses, and with a multitude of statues so boisterous and heavy that one trembles in passing next to them: all things in cement and stucco; and of the old basilica not even a scrap of a cornice is visible.

—But the day in which a sculpture or some piece of an arch or of a vault falls to the ground, the day in which, for love of thy neighbor [*per amore alla vita del prossimo*], one removes gypsum, stucco, and timber, that day the pure Christian temple reappears intact under the mantle that, by concealing for a long time the temple's architectural members, did not damage them. You don't need me to give examples of similar revelations. Even recently, in Milan, one of the oldest churches of

the city, that of San Babila, of which a few years ago Mongeri, in his book *Arte in Milano*, said how it showed only *a few signs of its beauty* and how it had been *redone, indeed falsified by architects of such stature that they managed, all by themselves, to condemn themselves to oblivion*:⁵ the church of San Babila, stripped of its grotesque Baroque mantle [*paludamento*], has become again alive and almost genuine. This is what matters: almost genuine. And in Palermo, you should have seen how graciously did reappear the body of the church of Santa Maria della Catena, a mixture of northern ogival and Italian Renaissance architecture; and, in order to return the church back to human admiration and to history [*per ridonarla all'ammirazione e alla storia*], it was enough, I'd almost say, to take with two fingers the sixteenth-century mantle, shouting, like the Greek lawyer [*avvocato*]: Look here. The most learned and keen Viollet-le-Duc, with the crowd of all his disciples, the clever restorer of the thirteenth-century church of which I spoke earlier, turned and turn the monument into an admirable mummy that challenges the centuries or, if you want, into an embalming such as those of Doctor Brunetti or a petrification such as those of Doctor Segato. The baroques, it is true, buried instead the monument, sometimes within a really sumptuous and magnificent mausoleum, sometimes within a prosopopoeial and funny tomb; but, with the coming of the day of redemption, an architect shouts: "Take out the cover, and you, Lazarus, come out." And the dead peeps out, with bandaged hands and feet and the head covered in a towel. Then the architect starts again: "Untie him and let him go." At this voice, the monument, like the brother of Martha, comes back to life.

— In order to conserve, then, should one bury? Then, why is so much money wasted to dig out of the ground the walls, the temples, the theaters, the palaces, the tombs of antiquity? What a sublime restorer, the gravedigger!

— Let's leave irony aside, and let's not exaggerate. The images and the comparisons have this misfortune, that they lend themselves to distort the arguments and accuse the contradictor of falling into excesses and losing himself in the absurd. I'll try to explain myself clearly. The monument, in my opinion, loses, I repeat, all or almost all its importance when the scholar can reasonably doubt that the restoration has more or less altered its forms or added forms that seem original, which is ultimately another way of altering the antique. Now, between the restorer that in this way damages the monument irreparably, and the restorer that, yes, hides the monument but keeps it intact for the discovery of posterity, I choose the second.

2. Bridge at the Porta Ticinese, Milan, Italy, constructed in 1171, photographed in 1860, before restoration work by Boito and the engineer Emilio Bignami.



—And, what if it occurred as with many books or parts of books that were famous in antiquity and were mislaid or lost forever? That's some reasoning [*Bel costruito!*]

—One thing is a book written on tablets or on parchment, another is a monument of marbles, stones, and bricks. If inside a baroque temple there is a Christian basilica, everybody knows it, in the name of God, or chance sooner or later reveals it. Neither do I approve of the baroque restorers; to the contrary, I maintain that whoever wanted to imitate them today would be crazy. Only I blame and loathe even more the romantic restorers. Let me take up again your comparison: the monument, then, is a book that I intend to read without reductions, additions, or revisions. I want to know with certainty that everything written in the book came out of the pen and the style of the author. I curse Cesarotti's *Ossian*; and in the same way that I would put in prison the counterfeiter of old medals, I would send to rot in prison the counterfeiters of an old building or of a part of an old building. How many were in this last half century the restorers that made in architecture something similar to the deceitful and famous medal of Caesar with the *veni vidi vici*, or to Menelaus with the Trojan horse? It'd be necessary that someone took, for architectural restorations, the same trouble that Sestini, Beauvais, and others took for counterfeited medals. I invoke a treatise on the *Architectural Lie*, that is, on the *Manner of Discerning in Architecture Falsifications and Forgeries of the Antique*.

—In a word, you want to *conserve*, not to *restore*.

—You said it right: conserve, not restore.

[. . .]

—Therefore it all boils down, in your opinion, to keeping the monument standing, guaranteeing it a long life with the reinforcements recommended by science and practice. Every other work would become a forgery of a public monument.⁶

—Sure. With the theory of Viollet-le-Duc, no knowledge, no intelligence can save us from abuses [*arbitrii*]; and an abuse [*arbitrio*] is a lie, a falsification, a trap set to posterity and often to contemporaries. The better the restoration is conducted, the more insidious is the lie, and deceit triumphs. What would you say of an antiquarian that, having discovered, say, a new manuscript of Dante or Petrarch, incomplete and in great part illegible, did his best to shrewdly, skillfully fill in, on his own, the lacunae, so that it would be impossible or very difficult to distinguish the additions from the original? Wouldn't you curse the supreme skill of this forger? And even a few sentences, a few words inserted in a text, don't they fill your soul with disgust [*fastidio*] and your mind with doubts? What seems so reprehensible in Father Piaggio and in *Monsieur* Silvestre, would it be instead reason for praise in the architect restorer?

—Your words, my sir, always give me pleasure; but, with permission, I'd like you to notice that you are singing to me since half an hour the same song, a third above, a sixth below: I know it by heart.

—All the better. My aim is indeed to show you the dangers of the romantic theory.

[. . .]

—You, as a wise man, put your hands forward not to hit your nose on the ground if you stumble. But let me say how, according to your opinions, here it is not a matter of art but only of archaeology, helped not by imagination, since you exclude any development and even any completion or addition, but helped, where need be, by the shrewd science and practice of the modest builder, which contents himself with keeping the building standing and, for the sake of posterity [*per amore dei nepoti*], consolidates the old building.

—And yet art has much to do with it, whether one wants it or not. To look after the conservation of a monument one needs the thousand prompt and delicate cares of burning love or passionate charity, as with the sick the assistance of a spouse or of a nun. Would you find those virtues in the heart of an engineer or a master builder? Doesn't it seem to you that the fervent soul of the artist is necessary? Let me be the pedant.

I will separate, mince, distill, I will use numbers, brackets, parentheses; I will be ineffably boring. And, to begin, I caution how in architectural monuments one or the other of the following three qualities prevails: archaeological importance, picturesque appearance, architectural beauty. Therefore it is legitimate to divide the art of restoration into

- Archaeological restoration (Antiquity)
- Picturesque [*pittorica*] restoration (Middle Ages)
- Architectural restoration (Renaissance, etc.)

I hasten to add how here it is a matter of something similar to the temperaments of the human body. In the lymphatic system, blood and nerves are not missing; in the blood system, nerves and lymph; in the nervous system, lymph: and blood; nevertheless the medical doctors, in studying the disease, in writing the prescriptions and in ordering a diet, take into account temperament.

[. . .]

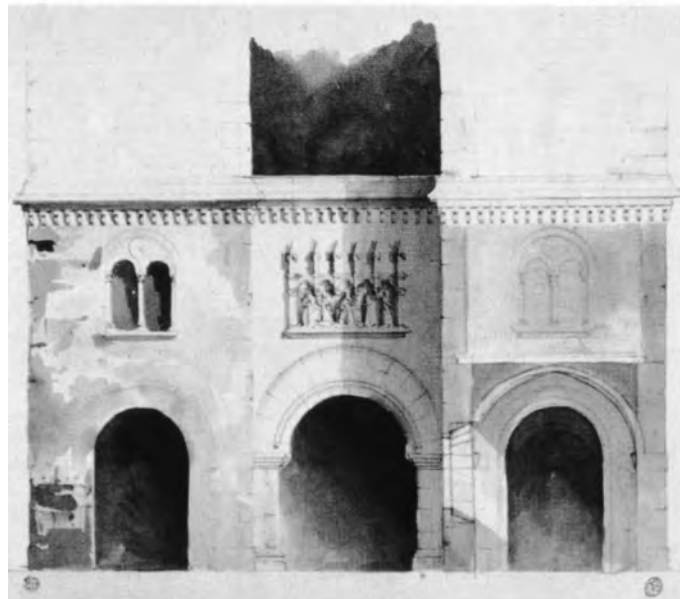
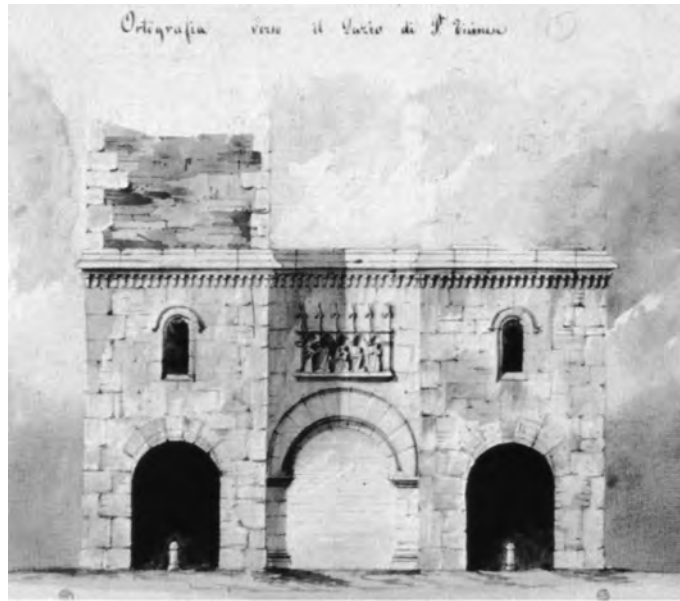
—And which governing rules could one establish in the different cases?

—It is impossible to foresee all of them, to embrace them all in one law. This is not a matter amenable to regulations. One can assert, in general, that the monument has its stratifications, like the Earth's crust, and that all of them, from the deepest to the superficial, have their value and must be respected. One can add, nevertheless, that the oldest things are, always in general, more venerable and important than the less old; but that, when the latter appear more beautiful than the former, beauty may win over age. Now, to measure beauty with respect to age, and age with respect to beauty, is a delicate matter; and one needs good eyes, good judgment, good experience, good balance, and much good will of weighing everything, even the scruples, with a dispassionate and disinterested mind. The vanity and ambition of the restorer become even more ruinous for the monument than greed and avarice.

[. . .]

—It'd be time, indeed, to get some rest, for those that listened to us are already asleep. I take advantage of this to go back to the same singsong: one should not deceive either one's neighbor or posterity. And, in order not to deceive them, that is, in order to show that a work of addition or completion is not ancient, I want to propose to you no less than eight ways to follow depending on the circumstances:

3. Watercolor sketches of the Porta Ticinese, 1858.



1. difference of style between the new and the old;
2. difference of construction materials;
3. suppression of profiles or decorations;
4. exhibition of removed old pieces, installed next to the monument;
5. incision in each restored [*rinnovato*] piece of the date of restoration or of a conventional sign;
6. descriptive epigraph carved on the monument;
7. description and photographs of the different phases of the work, placed within the building or in a place close to it, or description printed in a publication;
8. notoriety.

I'll start from the end to clarify with examples, that is, in the quickest way, some of these points. Number 8: That the façade of Santa Maria del Fiore is not by Arnolfo, Giotto, Orcagna, or any other author of the time there is no need to let be known to anybody; everybody knows and will always know that the façade is an excellent work of the nineteenth century by Emilio De Fabris, as they know and will know that the façade of Santa Croce is an unhappy work of our time by Matas, as they will also know that the façade of the Duomo in Milan will be, when they manage to complete it, by the poor Pippo Brentano. Number 7: That one of the two towers of the basilica of Sant'Abondio in Como has been added in perfect imitation of the other, ancient tower (and this was, at the least, useless work) by my poor friend the abbot Serafino Balestra there is no need to tell to scholars of Comacine things, since all of them must have at hand the work of Dartein, where one can read the old and new history of the building, illustrated in all its parts; but the book would not suffice without the help of some other measure, the number 6 or the number 5. Number 4: That in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice some capitals of the ground floor portico and of the first floor loggia have been redone everyone understands immediately by examining in the nearby gallery the ancient capitals, exposed for those who want to see them; but here too measures 5, 6, or 7 are again necessary.

—For Heaven's sake, let me breathe; and then answer, please, an objection that concerns the first three numbers together. Isn't there perhaps a danger that archaeological sincerity, the meticulous respect of the monument as a document, would end up lessening the impression that a work of art should stir in the soul? For it is a matter, after all, of a work of art, and if, by way of ifs and buts, we stifle the work of art, our office will not be that of surgeons but of gravediggers. Look: for paintings and frescoes, an order of the Ministry establishes that the lacunae and the holes be filled with the same neutral color, so that the viewer cannot be deceived by the skilful restorer; but the sight of a dirty patch [*macchia*] right in the middle of the dear face of a Madonna, or of the snow-white bosom of Maria Maddalena, or of the fleshy thigh of Venus, is like a punch in the face. Never mind if the nostrils or the lips or an ear or a nipple are missing: one would understand that today's painter did not want to forge the old, since it would have to put into it something of his own. But often what is missing is a bit of cheek or forehead or smooth skin; and so, why wouldn't it be legitimate to replace with the same color, with the same care in execution, the part that's missing? And what if what's missing is a piece of mantle, of ground, of background, of air? Why did the old painter paint? In order to stir in my heart a grave or pleasing sensation, in order

to direct my spirit toward devotion, compassion, love, or other sentiments and passions. Now, the damned patches of your neutral color lead me to think that, under the color crust, there is the canvas, the panel, or the plaster: and goodbye moral and aesthetic impression, goodbye art. An analogous reasoning may be appropriate, if I'm not mistaken, even for the restoration in the discipline of the compass and the plumb rule.

—Your observation, my dear sir, seems to me correct up to a certain point. But if, on the other side, a painting, even in its nonessential parts, lets me doubt of its genuineness, delight and emotion turn into bother [*fastidio*]; and then, for a reason different from the one you mentioned, goodbye all the same moral and aesthetic impression, goodbye art. Every theory, we know, wants to be contained in some discrete limits. If, taking up again our numbers, reversed from 3 to 1, I put in a façade in order to match a corresponding gentle capital, a rough-hewed stone; if I leave some clear pieces [*candidi tasselli*] in the middle of a work already all burnished by time; if in a façade of polished marble I replace an old column with a new column quite rough or of a vulgar stone; if to a building in Greek style I attach an addition in the Gothic style, there's no doubt that I am being unreasonable, and in order to save the truthfulness of archaeology I forget the rights of art. In the additions, the mass, the contour, the overall appearance should not clash with the monument; the differences will be in the details. Let's consider the old buildings. Probably there is not even one, among all those that we mentioned today, that is not made of parts of various style or various manner; and yet, does anyone complain that the building lacks unity or harmony? Would you prefer that Santa Maria del Fiore not show the pointed arch next to the round arch, or that the cornices of Brunelleschi be the same of those of the *maestri e dipintori in concordia*?⁷ Would you prefer that Andrea Palladio had completed in the medieval style the Palazzo della Ragione in Vicenza, thus renouncing his most beautiful invention? Where would the great majority of the masterpieces of the past be if the artist had not been able to express himself, following his own genius, absolutely freely? The additions, let this be clear, cannot be called restorations proper, but new bodies of the building, in which the truthful expression of today's art not only helps, as we have repeated, the archaeological seriousness of the building but is also useful for our contemporary art.

—There is a difficulty, pardon me, a great difficulty in your demonstration. Our contemporary art, you say! But where is that art? We are polyglots, or better, *farlingotti*:⁸ we don't know how to speak a language that is a native language of ours and alive.

4. The Porta Ticinese, photographed in 1860, prior to restoration.



—And the present Babel will grow instead of diminishing if we keep putting always new fetters on the genius of the architect, if we won't let him express boldly, with his art, all that is in his mind and in his heart, as, with too much license, in truth, and too much extravagance, do today the young painters, sculptors, men of letters, and poets.

—And here I say *Amen* and shake your hand before going to bed.

—A few more minutes. I don't want to leave out the most boring part, indeed in order to make you sleepy. To discuss restoration and to not mention in its entirety the resolution approved on this subject in Rome nine years ago by the Congress of Italian Engineers and Architects, would be an unforgivable mistake for us who know how such a vote was proposed and supported by that man who found it convenient to make us spell out, by way of a dialogue, what passes through his mind. Nor does the document lack value, since it expresses the opinion of a great number of architects and engineers of all corners of Italy, among whom are some of the most learned experts and best restorers of our monuments:

“Considering that the architectural monuments of the past serve not only to the study of architecture but also, as essential documents, to clarify and illustrate in all its parts the history of the various times and peoples, and thus should

be respected with religious care, precisely as documents in which even a slight alteration, which may appear original, deceives and leads to wrong deductions;

“The first section of the third Congress of Engineers and Architects, after taking cognizance of the letters sent by the Secretary of Public Instruction to the prefects of the reign on the restoration of monumental buildings, recommends the following principles:

“1. Architectural monuments, once the need to intervene on them is indisputably demonstrated, should be *consolidated* rather than *repaired*, and *repaired* rather than *restored*, thus avoiding with every care additions and renovations to them.

“2. In the case that such additions and renovations be absolutely indispensable for the solidity or for other insurmountable causes, and in the case that such additions and renovations concern parts that never existed or no longer exist and for which a sure knowledge of the original form is missing, the additions or renovations should be realized with a character different from the monument’s own, cautioning that, if possible, in the perspectival appearance the new forms do not clash too much with the monument’s artistic aspect.

“3. When, instead, it is a question of completing things destroyed or originally never finished for accidental reasons, or of remaking parts so damaged that they can no longer survive in the building [*durare in opera*], and when nevertheless there remains the old type to be precisely reproduced, then it will be advisable in every way that the added or restored [*rinnovati*] pieces be made with the primitive form but be of an evidently different material or carry a carved sign or, better, the date of the restoration, so that not even on this may the attentive observer be deceived. In the monuments of antiquity or in other monuments notable especially for their archaeological relevance, the parts of completion indispensable for the solidity and conservation of the building should be done with only simple planes and the squaring [*riquadrate*] of the geometric outline, even when they seem nothing but the continuation or the sure counterpart of other molded and decorated ancient parts.

“4. In the monuments that take the beauty, the singularity, the poetry of their appearance from the variety of marbles, of mosaics, of paintings, or from the color of their old age, or from the picturesque circumstances in which they find themselves, or even from the ruinous state in which they are, the works of consolidation, reduced to what is strictly indispensable, should if possible not lessen at all those intrinsic and extrinsic reasons of artistic attraction.

“5. Those additions or alterations that in various times were introduced in the original building will be considered as monuments and treated as such, except in the case when,

5. Bridge at the Porta Ticense, photographed in 1866, after restoration and new construction by Boito's colleague Emilio Bignami.



being of manifestly lesser artistic and historical importance than the building itself and at the same time distorting or masking notable parts of the building, it will be recommended that they be removed or destroyed. In all the cases when it will be possible and when the expenditure is justified, the works in question will be saved either in their entirety or in some essential parts, if possible next to the monument from which they were removed.

“6. It will be necessary to execute, before an even small work of repair and restoration, photographs of the monument, then, step by step, photographs of the primary phases of the work, and finally photographs of the completed work. This series of photographs will be sent to the Ministry of Public Instruction together with the drawings of plans, elevations, and details, and, when needed, with watercolors showing with clarity all the works conserved, consolidated, remade, renewed, altered, removed, or destroyed. A precise and methodical report of the reasons and of the course of the works and of changes of any kind will accompany the drawings and the photographs. A copy of all the documents pointed out above will have to be deposited with the vestry boards of the restored churches or with the office in charge of the care of the monument.

“7. A plaque to be affixed to the building will record the dates and the primary works of restoration.”

—This resolution, no matter how one may think it through and handle it, seems to me a labyrinth of dry bushes. One wanders inside it without finding the exit. How much easier is a document that now comes back to my mind: an important document, indeed, also because, carrying the date 26 February 1849 and the signature Falloux, Secretary of Instruction and Cults, it shows how the Government of France, in such difficult times, did not neglect the archaeological and artistic patrimony of the country, the patrimony that we, in these years of long peace, stingily let decay and die down. The letter of Falloux consists of twenty-nine large, printed pages; it offers precious lessons and subtle advice even on the various works of construction; it is titled *Instruction pour la conservation, l'entretien et la restauration des édifices diocésains*, and begins thus: “The architects assigned to the diocesan buildings and especially to the cathedrals should never forget that the goal of their efforts is the *conservation* of the buildings, and that the best means to reach that goal is the *maintenance* of them. However praiseworthy the restoration of a building may be, restoration should always be considered a sad necessity. An intelligent maintenance should always prevent it. And the conservation of buildings depends also on external causes, which the architect should study: isolation of the constructions, draining of the ground, easy drainage of water, etc.”

—It doesn't seem written in '49. It's no use your saying that we leave the French aside!

—And four years earlier the *Nouveau Manuel complet de l'architecte des monuments religieux* was published in Paris, that is, the “treatise of the practical application of Christian archaeology to the construction, conservation, restoration, and decoration of churches, for the use of the clergy, of the vestry boards, the municipalities, and the artists.” A rather lengthy title.

—How useful would be a similar small treatise nowadays in Italy! How the priests of the little cities, of the little villages, in the artistic richness that is scattered everywhere throughout Italy, could cooperate to keep intact for the nation the treasures of the past! Which schools, which institutes would better serve such a noble goal?

—We will discuss this another day, if we have the desire and the time. Today I will just point out to you another bizarre contradiction. All the sciences, even the moral and philosophical ones, do their best to become experimental and positive; the arts look high and low not so much for truth as for *verism*;⁹ literature and poetry get mixed up with materiality [*s'imbrodolano nella materialità*]; history little by little reduces

itself to chronicles and documents; and yet, in the field of restoration, the school (just to give it a name) of Viollet-le-Duc keeps going on. A young person with a very active mind, a bright art critic, wrote not so long ago, à propos the restoration of a church of the Middle Ages, that, as Cuvier found with the scattered bones of fossils the organisms of a vanished world, so the restorer, with few fragments, must recompose a monument, giving back to it the lively imprint of the epoch to which it belonged. Oh, this architectural paleontology, identical to the one preached and professed by Viollet-le-Duc, to how many abuses, lies, falsifications, artistic frauds, did it give and continues to give cause! And instead in 1849, in 1845, and further back, when Merimée and Vitet were inspectors of historic monuments, when everybody felt the warm influence of romantic and sentimental literature, poetry, and art, the theory of restoration (and only the theory) anticipated positivism and the quite recent experimentalism. Isn't that true?

Endnotes

Translated by Cesare Birignani

¹ Camillo Boito, *Questioni pratiche di belle arti, restauri, concorsi, legislazione, professione, insegnamento* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1893). The article has also been translated into French and appears in Camillo Boito, *Conserver ou restaurer: les dilemmes du patrimoine*, trans. Jean-Marc Mandosio, ed. Françoise Choay (Besançon: Editions de l'Imprimeur, 2000). The only other appearance of Boito's writings on architecture in English is the preface to *The Basilica of S. Mark in Venice, Illustrated from the Points of View of Art and History by Venetian Writers under the Director of Prof. Camillo Boito*, trans. William Scott (Venice: Ferdinand Ongania, 1888). The book was originally published in Italian in four volumes (1881–88) by the same publishers as *La basilica di San Marco in Venezia*.

² Quotation in French in the original. The original French-language text, often quoted, can be found in the entry on *restaurer* [to restore] Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle*, vol. 13 (Paris: B. Bance, 1854–70).

³ Quotation in French in the original.

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⁵ Wordplay: *rifatta* (redone), *contraffatta* (falsified).

⁶ *Falso in monumento pubblico*; wordplay with *falso in atto pubblico*, forgery of a public document.

⁷ From an unidentified source; translates as “masters and painters in harmony/ agreement.”

⁸ A *farlingotto* is someone who mixes and mangles all languages.

⁹ Wordplay: *vero* (truth), *verismo* (verism).