

Public awareness and archaeology: a task for the voluntary sector

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Volunteer associations in the field of heritage conservation, and particularly their international platform, the European Forum of Heritage Association, must concentrate on communicating with the general public, to heighten public awareness of the value of the archaeological heritage and the risks of its extinction, more than they have done so far. I will argue for a reinforcement of this lobbyist side of our programme with the help of a number of arguments.

First of all, the economic and political order in Europe is changing rapidly. This will without doubt have an impact on the landscape and, in particular, on that portion of the cultural heritage that still lies in the ground. How great will that impact be and what can we do to prevent irreparable damage?

Secondly, at this very moment new national and international legislation is being drafted which proposes entirely new ways of heritage management. Archaeological volunteers have a role to play in the public and parliamentary debates that will take place everywhere in the course of the next few years.

Thirdly, archaeology itself is rapidly changing. Instead of the traditional preoccupation with objects, sites, and isolated monuments, we now see archaeological research moving towards an integrated approach to the material past, which explicitly includes spatial contexts. It is the spatial relationship between artefacts and the environment, between, within and outside sites, that is a growing concern of archaeologists. Survey, research, heritage management, preservation and education will therefore focus more and more on these complex relationships and with wider perspectives than on isolated objects, sites and monuments. The success of such integrated approaches to history and

preservation depends very much on the public awareness of the values involved.

I shall draw some parallels with the environmental lobby – the 'Green' movement. Legislation is one thing, but public support, which is essential for parliamentary approval and effective implementation of the laws, is something else.

Finally, I will try to explain in some detail the new perspectives for European cultural heritage management, which in my view call for instant action on the part of the volunteer world – not because the new European Convention constitutes a threat to the heritage, but because it will need wide support, public control and continuous feedback, at least from that segment of society which is most closely involved with the heritage: the volunteer movement.

The background to my comments is particular. In trying to convince some major Dutch archaeological volunteer associations to join the Forum, I had no clear answer to their direct question: what use is the Forum to us? It is my belief that unified action by archaeological associations directed at the political side of European cultural heritage is necessitated by external factors, such as the continuing destruction of the heritage and the imminent new legislations. At the same time actions of this kind can have significant positive effects on the internal quality of the various archaeological associations, since discussion and co-ordinated action form a source of inspiration and intellectual stimulation that will benefit all their members.

The present situation in Europe

When one era has ended but the next has not yet begun, to paraphrase the words of the famous Dutch historian Huyzinga, the future appears pregnant with exciting possibilities,

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but also with darkness. European archaeology in the 1990s may well be one such case.

We must all be aware that Europe is in a state of economic, political and cultural upheaval. We must also be convinced, I hope, that in the old world, which we see increasingly burdened by population, industrial development and environmental pressure, the attitude of society towards the common cultural heritage will be one of conflict. We may have to contemplate the wholesale destruction of landscapes in central and eastern Europe in the name of economic revival, and to witness the dismembering of large rural areas in western Europe in order to pave the way for such torch-bearers of progress as international high-speed train networks and new underground megasystems for the transport of oil, gas, traffic and telecommunications. Saddest of all, we are already mourning the human and cultural casualties of civil war in southeastern Europe, which we have good reason to fear may not to be confined to Yugoslavia alone.

On the other hand, there is already some light at the end of the tunnel. European governments seem increasingly willing to create grandiose legislative frameworks aimed at the proper safeguarding of the cultural heritage.

Early last year, 26 Ministers of Culture or their equivalents met at Valletta and signed the revised European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (see O'Keefe, this volume: 406-13; Trotzig, this volume: 414-15). Its purpose is to ensure an intelligent, comprehensive approach to heritage management that is based on a new set of concepts and definitions of the very heart of the field of archaeology.

At the national level, too, new ways of dealing with the cultural heritage are coming into being. In 1991, for example, the Italian Government approved a law which allows volunteers to share to some extent in the responsibilities of cultural management in museums, excavations, and public participation projects.

The European Stage Project of the Forum at Tolfa is a good example of this. Starting in the autumn of 1992, it includes volunteer research, assessment, consolidation, restoration and presentation projects for a series of historical and archaeological monuments,

including their contexts, in a medium-scale region. It is to be hoped that it will mark the beginning of a new tradition of responsible co-operation between governments and volunteer organizations.

In the Netherlands, new cultural legislation aims at integrating heritage conservation with the whole field of existing policies on such diverse areas as wildlife, environment, urban and rural development, tourism, academic research and public education. The idea underlying this integrated approach is that the cultural heritage cannot be preserved in isolation, in strongly protected ghettos, but that it should be an integral part of the living, everyday culture. The function of the cultural heritage for society as a whole should be to create a sense of continuity and identity, which the Dutch Government deems indispensable for the general well-being of the country.

What has all this to do with the many and various archaeological volunteer associations in Europe and with their international co-operative body, the Forum? Is the definition of an archaeological volunteer organization not that it should unite its members in helping them pursue their passion for antiquarian and archaeological research? Is not the primary practical goal of the Forum merely to encourage joint bilateral and multilateral activities through which volunteers may participate in a number of archaeological activities?

It is my firm belief that the most telling argument for a European organization of archaeological associations should be that it will further the interests of all the parties involved: governments and their agencies, academic researchers, museums and the volunteer world. It can do so only, in my view, if the common interest of all the different parties that are concerned with the cultural heritage is selected as a major policy for any European volunteer action. That common interest, shared by all members, is not comparable with stamp-collecting, which has no social imperative behind it, or with speculating about the origins of the universe, which is highly relevant and exciting but hardly affects the way road networks are planned.

All archaeologists, whether heritage managers, professional excavators, university

teachers or volunteers, must each in their own way cope with the general public, since the cultural heritage is not their property but that of society as a whole, whereas studying, protecting and enjoying the heritage can only be done at the expense of other interests. As it is, the various archaeological sectors have all, though to different extents, to take account of such conflicting interests as private enterprise, urban planning, economic development, the allocation of public funds, and so on. It is here that a new task may be found for archaeological volunteer associations and their European Forum: that of attracting and heightening public awareness of the cultural heritage, in the same way that the Green movement has been doing during the last 20 years, and with considerable success, for the environment.

Without going in detail into the history of archaeology, I must call to mind the first stirrings, during the Renaissance, of concern for the physical past. In most areas of Europe, this began with the discovery and recognition of the historical roots of many new nations, greatly helped, if not exclusively inspired, by the rediscovery of ancient literary accounts of the barbaric regions inside and outside the former Roman Empire. It is not surprising that in those days national identities were defined in terms of the Greco-Roman cultures. This popular antiquarianism, which in a sense was the cradle of the archaeological volunteer movement, was succeeded, in northwestern Europe during the enlightened 19th century, by a double innovation. On the one hand, archaeology was recognized as an academic discipline (starting in Leiden in 1818 with the appointment of Professor Reuvsen to the first university chair in archaeology in the world). At the same time, popular antiquarianism turned from the classical legacy to folklore, *Heimatkunde* or regional history, as the result of a remarkable shift in cultural paradigms. Prehistory and the early middle ages, being no longer connected with the Roman presence in Europe, began to provide historical models for the emerging western nations. This probably explains the early and unusually strong archaeological volunteer movements in the Scandinavian countries, which lacked any Roman tradition, and also the relative weakness of prehistoric archaeology in the classical Mediterranean countries. It is only

since World War II that volunteer archaeologists have sought any significant role in the field of archaeology (with the exception, perhaps, of Denmark, France and the United Kingdom). Volunteers, formerly mistrusted by professional and academic specialists, now seem generally to fill the semi-official role of the 'eyes and ears' of institutional archaeology: everywhere in Europe, they are now involved in field survey, monitoring, assistance on excavations and post-excavational activities.

This survey may help in understanding the division of roles in the field of cultural heritage. It is the state and its agencies that are primarily responsible for the management of the cultural heritage, which includes survey and, in particular, preservation. Secondly, scientific study, interpretation and assessment are almost exclusively delegated to university specialists, even though many of them are secondarily employed in state heritage organizations. Their work, however, does not include preservation or public education.

Archaeological volunteer associations form a third party. They represent society, constituting as it were a consumer organization, and are characterized by the freedom of their members to interest themselves in the whole field of cultural heritage, without, however, any explicit responsibility for the study, management or preservation of it. Museums may perhaps be identified as a fourth party, concerned with presenting an image of the past through selected objects, and communicating with a broader public through their collections. The cultural preservation tasks of museums are nowadays more often than not derivative, since their collections tend to be increasingly subordinated to their communication functions. Finally, any state government has, in addition to its survey and preservation roles, a basic obligation to create and guarantee the conditions for all the other parties to carry out their roles effectively.

What is missing in this picture of the various tasks and responsibilities is a clear statement about to whom the cultural heritage really belongs. Certainly not to Governments, which in a strict sense are no more than administrators, nor to scientists, who are the professional intermediaries for discovery and interpretation, nor to the committed minority,

whose status is basically that of a highly interested audience which may from time to time actively participate: none of these groups can claim exclusive rights. It is society as a whole that holds these proprietary rights, as the sole heir to the past. Proper management of this common cultural heritage, which governments are invited to administer on behalf of society, should be the result of consensus following public debate, which includes friction, opposition, and the resolution of conflicts of interest.

Yet since volunteer associations are, in my view, of all the possible parties the most natural representatives of society, it should be their role to act as spokesmen, lobbyists and opinion makers on behalf of that society whenever the survival of the past is at stake. Volunteers are exceptionally well equipped for that task in so far as they, and they alone, will be less influenced by the demands of personal, institutional or career betterment, as might be the case with scientists and civil servants.

The analogy with the environmental movement comes readily to mind. Twenty years ago scientists, led by Dennis Meadows' Club of Rome, protested against the excessive pressure being exerted by the growing world economy on natural resources. At first they were dismissed as unrealistic pessimists. Gradually, however, governments began to heed their warnings, but found themselves frustrated by their own bureaucracies and thwarted in their positive attitudes by the pressure of powerful lobbying by other interests. Popular feeling, aroused by ceaseless volunteer action, brought about a slow 180° turn, which took two decades. Even today, however, as demonstrated by the precarious raw-materials situation in the developing countries, short-term economic interests and the professional lobbies of industrial cartels, as well as a lack of international co-operation, may still succeed in doing irreparable damage to the planet's natural resources, despite continuing worldwide public protest.

I see it, therefore, as the role of the cultural volunteer world publicly to vindicate the rights of our common past. It should be the champion of the cultural heritage, as public relations officer for the mute remnants of history, as advocate for something which

cannot defend itself, which does not show up well on prime-time television, which cannot be advertised on emotive billboards like baby seals being clubbed to death on the ice for their white fur. Do governments always act simply and exclusively for the benefit of society? Do cultural management instruments, such as policies, rules, institutions, implementation bureaux and what have you, effectively rescue what little there is left from the past? Or might legislation not at the same be a tool to allow legislators and civil servants to assert themselves? Where in our state bureaucracies are the criteria being formulated according to which historical objects, monuments, sites, and landscapes are regarded of primary, secondary or of no value at all? Why was the volunteer world not a party to the Malta conference, or at least heard when the revised European Convention was prepared? Why should the text of that Convention, which may have an impact comparable to that of the first Report for the Club of Rome Project on the environmental issue, be available only after unrelenting efforts?

There are, of course, considerable differences between the environmental movement and a cultural heritage lobby. Not only do we lack the means for direct emotional appeal, like images of the vanishing rain-forests or the archetypal baby seal, we are also greatly hindered by the fact that most of the heritage we are trying to defend is invisible, and still largely undiscovered, as well as by the fact that, once it is properly protected, it offers little for a mass public to enjoy. Yet the need for heritage survival is even more pressing in our field than elsewhere. The historical archives hidden in the ground can never be regenerated or replanted; it is a one-way process. Once removed, they are like photographs lost from a family album.

We are living, as far as the survival of the cultural heritage is concerned, in a historical epoch. The need for a strong, educated and visionary public movement in this field, acting as the guilty conscience of society, is highlighted by the recent or imminent European developments that I have already referred to. I will not dwell on the disasters that the so-called 'economic liberation' of central Europe still may cause, nor on the

wholesale renewal of the infrastructure of central and northwestern Europe with equally destructive potential effects on the landscape and on what is still hidden in the ground.

Instead, I would like to draw your attention to two positive developments that are of incalculable future importance, and with which the volunteer world should be intimately engaged, since they directly and dramatically affect all of Europe's cultural heritage. These are the integration of cultural management into every form of planning and development in both rural and urban contexts, and one particular part of this, the stricter control of excavations, which will only be permitted as a last resort on sites which cannot otherwise be protected. Part of this strategy will be the obligatory implementation of a strict system of state authorization for the use of metal detectors by private individuals. The whole set of regulations was signed during the Malta conference in January last year.

The former, and more important, development has already been foreshadowed by current practices in a number of European countries. The university researchers' approach to archaeology has over the last decade been steadily moving towards an integrated vision of landscape, soil, historical environment and objects and other traces of men's presence in the past. Archaeology, in other words, can no longer be equated with objects, with excavations or with isolated sites; instead, it addresses the entire set of all possible evidence in as broad a spatial context as possible. The European Ministers have therefore set out to define future archaeological management in terms of integration with every single instance of town and country planning, commercial development and public works and with the relevant legislation, including that relating to the environment. As a result, existing environmental impact assessments will have to involve full consideration of archaeological sites and their settings, whilst 'cultural impact assessments' will be a prerequisite for any planning activity that has no predictable environmental impact.

By adopting the Convention, governments have taken it upon themselves to create legislation for financial funding, either from public or private sources, to pay for

preliminary archaeological study and protection, rescue archaeology and scientific records, as well as for the full publication and recording of the finds. Underlying this policy is the rule that obliteration of the common cultural property should not be paid for by the community but by the party that benefits from its destruction for 'development'. In other words, the costs of salvage and rescue fall upon the destroyer - 'the polluter pays'.

It is obvious that, as in the case of environmental legislation, the threatened interests of building contractors and of urban and rural planners will lead them to try to strike deals with governments by means of a system of exemptions and reliefs. 'Maintenance of competitiveness' will no doubt be the justification put forward. But who will monitor the authorities? Furthermore, as is already the case in Spain and Great Britain, much serious archaeological research will be made impossible by the sheer volume of technical assistance required by cultural impact assessment procedures. In Spain this has led to the uncontrolled growth of commercial archaeological bureaux, which carry out archaeological risk assessments without proper investigation (as was the case in the USA in the 1970s). I see an important monitoring and controlling task here for archaeological volunteers. The first battle, however, will be in the press and in the lobbies of parliament. No-one is against culture and history, just as no-one is against life, tax-paying and against the pollution of the seas. Yet the moment I realize that it will cost me 1 or 2% of my income, or a still larger amount of the net profit of my business, I will find ways to escape my moral responsibilities. Only by bringing the issues out in the open, influencing public opinion and providing our members of parliament with the proper weapons, can we give legislation any chance of success.

This is even more urgent so far as the regulation of metal-detector owners is concerned. Regrettably, the possession of such instruments will not be made illegal under the Convention, only the use of a metal detector with the purpose of carrying out archaeological investigation without an official permit. Welcome though the proposed legislation may be, it will create considerable

difficulties in the volunteer world itself. Recently a group of Dutch commercial importers of metal detection equipment founded a union of detection amateurs with the express purpose of co-operating both with the authorities and with the country's largest and oldest volunteer association. After a short preliminary talk with the State Archaeological Service, who resisted all the overtures from the commercial sector, and with the Dutch Archaeologists Association, who were willing to talk only on the condition that the new organization should join their Association and subscribe their code of conduct, which it refused to do, the detector union went on to advertise in newspapers and through press releases that they were co-operating closely with both bodies! This is another important public relations task for the archaeological associations, especially since metal detecting directly affects the public image of the volunteer world.

The last issue I want to raise is closely related to the whole Malta process. The European Ministers publicly declare that there is an all-important prerequisite for the success of their new integrated archaeological heritage management and of their fair and visionary philosophy that salvage, rescue and publication are to be paid by the destroyer. That is that there must be a heightened awareness on the part of the general public of the value of the archaeological heritage and of the threats to this heritage. To this end, the governments will undertake educational actions, promote public access to selected sites and encourage the presentation of the heritage – or so they declared in the Malta Convention. This provision is particularly relevant for the archaeological associations. It is already recognized in national legislation, for instance in Italy and the Netherlands. In my country, the notion of 'participation' is seen as an all-important means to reinforce the preservation of the national cultural heritage and as such is a key-word in what may well be called a 'Cultural New Deal'. In order to have a broad public participate actively in the heritage field, the major archaeological associations, such as the AWN, are to be used as key instruments for what is called 'a functioning infrastructure'. It is expressed in the following terms in the Culture Bill passed by the Netherlands Parliament last spring:

In order best to preserve the archaeological heritage and to let it flower, an effective infrastructure is required.

(and what now follows is particularly interesting):

As it is, government alone cannot bear the responsibility for the preservation of the cultural heritage. In the next four years, I [the Minister] shall therefore increase my financial support of the National Archaeological Association. This volunteer organization is active in all the fields that I regard as the main points of my present policy, such as participation, education, and promotion of professionalism, and it does so on a truly national scale.

To sum up:

- 1 We are standing at the threshold of a new era in European cultural management.
- 2 The growing new political and economic order in central and southeastern Europe, and a wholesale restructuring of the west, calls for special attention for the salvage of the cultural heritage.
- 3 Within archaeology itself, there is a growing tendency towards 'holistic' approaches, in which the material culture forms part of large spatial contexts that include environment and landscape monuments as well as the archive still beneath the ground.
- 4 In new legislations the archaeological heritage will potentially be very well defended at the cost of the destroyer of it. However, such legislation will only work on condition that there is wide-spread public support for it.
- 5 The volunteer movement is the only possible spokesman, lobbyist, advocate and champion of the cultural heritage, since it best represents the rightful heir to it, society as a whole.
- 6 What is needed is a set of Greenpeace-like strategies to ensure the reasonable survival of the heritage, which will be under heavy attack from all sides of the community, since it will cost a great deal of money.
- 7 The means to achieve this is heightening public awareness through education, lobbying and openly addressing the issue wherever it is at stake.
- 8 This is not a secondary task of the European Forum of Heritage Associations,

but a primary one. The scale of the new developments is truly European; the national activities of member associations are for the most part well looked after and can gain little by internationalization, but the strength of the Forum lies in its imaginative power, the courage to stand up, mutual inspiration, vision and learning from one another's experiences.

The 500-year history of the archaeological movement in Europe can give Forum members the self-assurance to convince others.

Archaeology is too important a matter to be left to civil servants, politicians and scientists. Its management and preservation form a challenge to the community as a whole, and its interests are perhaps best represented by the volunteer world.

Note. This is a slightly up-dated text of a public address given at the 2nd General Assembly of the European Forum of Heritage Associations, held at Alden Biesen (B), 23-24 April 1992.