

Conversaciones...

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GUSTAVO GIOVANNONI

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Camillo Boito and Gustavo Giovannoni. Editorial

In Europe, the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century was a period of important theoretical proposals for conservation, many of which defined the framework for our current concepts on cultural heritage, as well as for the legislation protecting it. In this fourth volume of *Conversaciones...* we chose two texts from that period, by two important Italian architects, whose impact has been very significant in our approaches to conservation: Camillo Boito and Gustavo Giovannoni. They were both extremely prolific in their writings, with a long list we have tried to gather in this volume, and which was produced by each author over several decades. These texts allow us to perceive the evolution in their way of thinking. Both authors, just as Viollet-le-Duc, whom we presented in the previous volume of *Conversaciones...*, combined both the practice of conservation with the theoretical discussion of its principles.

In the case of Camillo Boito (1836-1914), it is possible to see that his path was not always linear, and does not always seem consistent, although it makes sense to anyone who has faced the challenges of implementing conservation decisions. At the beginning of his career, Boito proposed and undertook restoration projects that seemed to emanate from Viollet-le-Duc's theories; Boito then acquired a more measured and critical approach, which would allow him to formulate what is now recognized as an intermediate way between the antagonistic theses of no-restoration symbolized by John Ruskin and of stylistic restoration idealized by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc. Although Boito was proposing ideas that had already been considered earlier, particularly by Adolphe Napoléon Didron (who was then general secretary of the *Comité historique des arts et monuments* in France) in 1839,¹ the combination of his practical and theoretical experience, and his role as a teacher for nearly four decades, allowed him to develop and define in a much clearer manner those concepts and, above all, to achieve a much broader dissemination of those theoretical approaches.

The context in which Boito was educated, marked by wars which led to the unification of part of the states of the Italian peninsula in 1861, created a context of intellectual effervescence, which was ideal for reflecting on the future of cultural heritage. This would allow Boito to develop a series of principles for a national policy, which he would disseminate during the Congress for Italian engineers and architects in Rome, in 1884. The text we are presenting

¹ In the report of the work undertaken in 1839 by the Historic committee for arts and monuments by Didron, it is worth noting two significant sentences: "Les recommandations ont été diverses selon la diversité des monuments eux-mêmes, ou plutôt selon la diversité de leur état; elles ont été générales et absolues pour le principe de la conservation...", and "En fait de monuments délabrés, il vaut mieux consolider que réparer, mieux réparer que restaurer, mieux restaurer qu'embellir; en aucun cas il ne faut supprimer". (Didron, Adolphe Napoléon (1843) "Bulletin du Comité historique des arts et monuments. Rapport à M. Cousin, ministre de l'instruction publique sur les travaux du comité pendant la session de 1839, Paris, 4 mai 1840", *Bulletin archéologique*, Premier volume, Comité historique des arts et monuments, Imprimerie administrative de Paul Dupont, Paris, pp. 3 y 47).

here, entitled *I restauratori*, dates from that same year, and was derived from a conference held during the international exhibition in Torino. In this text, Boito emphasized the need for sincerity and honesty in restoration treatments, as well as of humility and prudence by those undertaking such treatments.

The second author in this volume is Gustavo Giovannoni (1873-1947), who was trained in civil engineering in Rome, and was a close follower of Boito's ideas. In addition to his research on the history of art and architecture, he also focused his activities on the development of methods and theories for conservation, using the same dialectic approach proposed by Boito. He translated many of Boito's proposals for the writing of the *Athens Charter* (1931), as well as for the creation of the *Carta italiana del restauro* (1932). In addition to the conservation of monuments, he also extended his research interests towards urban heritage, and particularly to the protection of historic centers, in view of the changes caused by modern developments; those ideas are clearly expressed in the text chosen for this number of *Conversaciones...*, entitled *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova*, published in 1913. This text already reveals the importance that Giovannoni attributed to the entire urban fabric, including elements which had been considered as minor architecture; those ideas would be fundamental in the development of the conservation theory for built heritage over the next decades.

These two central texts are accompanied by papers from five conservation professionals, who reflect both on the influence of these authors and their texts, as well as on the relations between Boito and Giovannoni and conservation actors in other countries. The first text is a very interesting article by Andrea Pane, which was originally published in 2009 in *Ananke*, and to whom we are grateful for the opportunity of presenting it again here. Pane offers a detailed description and comparison between Boito and Giovannoni, pointing out their similitudes and differences, as well as their main contributions. Javier Rivera Blanco broadens the panorama initiated by Pane's article, by translating the comparative analysis to Italy and Spain, through the figures of Camillo Boito, Gustavo Giovannoni and Leopoldo Torres Balbás. He particularly focuses on the relation of the two latter characters, through the analysis of their epistolary relation. Luiz Fernando Rhoden critically analyzes a series of restoration projects in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in Brazil. He emphasizes the constant necessity, already mentioned by Boito and Giovannoni, of closely linking theory and praxis, without which decision making in conservation can be confusing. Luis Arnal centers his analysis on *I restauratori* and particularly on the principles developed by Boito, and the examples he used to describe his ideas. He shows the relevance of many of those concepts, and the always prevailing need of exerting conservation with prudence. Finally Isabel Medina-González takes her analysis to the Mexican context, particularly focusing on the influence by Boito and Giovannoni in the ideas and approaches used and developed by Augusto Molina Montes for the conservation of archaeological heritage.

With this fourth volume of *Conversaciones...* we are initiating a new phase for the journal, with the translation of the accompanying texts into English. With this, we hope to contribute to the dissemination of texts originally produced in Spanish, and above all, to continue increasing the possibilities of dialogue and conversation with conservation professionals from different parts of the world. We hope you will enjoy reading it.

Valerie Magar
December 2017