

Experts from the  
APT College of  
Fellows debate the  
appropriateness of  
reconstruction in  
historic preservation.

ON SEPTEMBER 26, 2018, at the APT Buffalo-Niagara Conference, the College of Fellows held a roundtable discussion entitled “Reconstruction in Preservation.” The event that led to this conversation was the second fire at The Glasgow School of Art in June 2018. The roundtable was held less than six months before the world stood aghast watching the wooden flèche of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris burn and collapse. This catastrophic event, as well as numerous others discussed below, have reopened the important issue of reconstruction as a part of the preservation dialogue.

Four distinct and not always congruent opinions were presented, some of which may foster a more favorable attitude towards reconstruction. They also remind us that within the dynamic societal landscape, doctrinal texts should be continually revisited. Imposing rules on reconstruction may deprive cultures of their heritage. In other cases, saving existing historic structures is better than reconstructing inauthentic replicas.

It was clear from these contrary views that such a discussion could be held every year, and it would only further define this divergence. It is apparent that reconstructions continue to take place despite the orthodox position, expressed or implied by doctrinal texts, that it would be better to not do so. The topic for the roundtable, as presented, was vague enough that there was room to consider the truths in each position. Can Notre-Dame be weighed with the same scale as a neighborhood historic spiritual center? Can the Polish be faulted for reconstructing Warsaw Old Town following its wanton destruction in World War II? Must reconstruction always entail authentic materials and building techniques (in many cases they do not)? Conversely, should the motives for reconstruction be questioned, and do we have a responsibility to do so?

In reflecting on preservation’s doctrinal texts, it is apparent that they consider neither social and political upheaval nor climate change. Reconstruction in preservation is clearly a dialogue that must continue.



Fig. 1. Mostar Bridge, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, built 1557–1566, reconstructed 2004, photograph 2009. Photograph by Stephen J. Kelley.

reconstruction and its perceived flip side, the nebulous term “authenticity.”

Reconstruction can take place under the right circumstances. For example, historical reconstructions have been a driver in the reclamation of national identity of states following war and in the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. Other examples in the twentieth century include medieval Leuven, Belgium, which was destroyed first in World War I and again in World War II, then reconstructed under the Marshall Plan.<sup>1</sup> Numerous Gothic cathedrals were reconstructed, including Notre-Dame Cathedral in Reims. We have the same story following World War II with the reconstruction of Warsaw Old Town and old Gdańsk. The reconstruction of the Dresden Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady), completely devastated in World War II, has only recently been completed. This reconstruction occurred after the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc and the reunification of Germany. These reconstructions were essential to reclaiming an identity.

Seoul, South Korea, is a twenty-first-century city with numerous medieval monuments, such as the Gyeongbokgung Palace, that are replacements of those lost during the Japanese occupation, which had included demolitions and new constructions that could be described as architectural dictatorship. Similar examples abound throughout South Korea, where monasteries were decimated during the Korean War.

In Macedonia, the Church of Saints Clement and Panteleimon (893 CE) in Ohrid was demolished under Ottoman rule. The mosque built in its place fell to ruin, and the reconstructed church was consecrated in 2000. The Šišman

Ibrahim-Pasha Mosque (mid-sixteenth century) in Počitelj, Bosnia and Herzegovina, was destroyed during the Bosnian War and rebuilt in 2002. A powerful symbol of peace, the Mostar Bridge (1557–1566) in Bosnia and Herzegovina was also destroyed during the Bosnian War and reconstructed in 2004 (Fig. 1). The iconic Sarajevo City Hall (1891) was destroyed during the 1992 siege, and its reconstruction was only recently completed.

The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour (1839–1880), near the Moscow Kremlin, was blown up in 1931 to make way for an unrealized Palace of the Soviets (Fig. 2). Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the cathedral was reconstructed. Kazan Cathedral on Red Square (1636), demolished to facilitate military parades, was rebuilt in 1993. Reconstructions such as these abound throughout the former Soviet states from Vilnius, Lithuania, to Ulaanbaator, Mongolia, where religious monuments had been erased during the Great Purge in 1937.

Such examples are sometimes difficult to fathom when viewed through a North American prism. Authenticity can have intangible qualities and cannot always be measured objectively. Buildings and sites provide identity, and to impose orthodox rules on their reconstruction is to rob cultures of their heritage when they already have been ravaged by war or by failed ideological movements. It is not possible to define authenticity as a “one size fits all” understanding. Whose authenticity is it, anyway?

## Whose Authenticity Is It, Anyway?

Stephen J. Kelley

My colleagues will no doubt cite the *Venice Charter* (1964), *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, the *Nara Document on Authenticity* (1994), and the revised *Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance*, *The Burra Charter* (2013) in this discussion, so I will not have to. I would posit that there is a reason why we continually amend these standards: in a dynamic societal landscape, we must frequently reflect upon authenticity and why we might consider reconstruction to be appropriate. As Gustavo Araoz, former president of ICOMOS, wrote in an email exchange following the Notre-Dame fire, these charters “are not the Ten Commandments.” Let us consider

## Reconstructing Buildings Is a Mistake

Donald Friedman

Any building is an artifact of its context, specifically including the technology used in its construction. If we reconstruct a building, with few exceptions, we are not actually reconstructing it. Rather, we are building a modern simulacrum. At best, and this is quite rare, we can copy the old methods

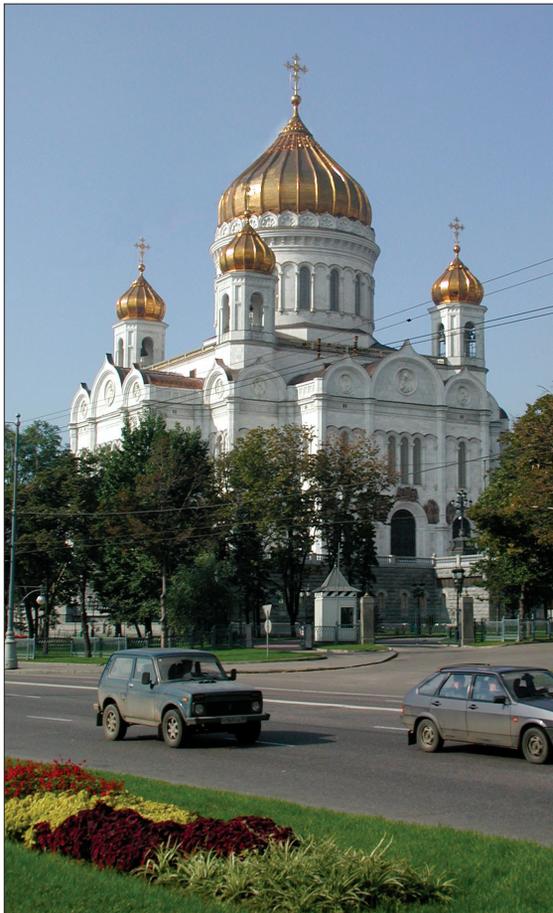


Fig. 2. Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Moscow, Russia, built 1839–1880, reconstructed 1995–2000, photograph 2004. Photograph by Stephen J. Kelley.

tion, then we lose the physical presence of our past. Professionals in the field of preservation have, as part of our field of work, a say in deciding what is and what is not saved. Our decisions are based on the condition of the buildings we see, on their cultural value, and on the economic and technical resources available for their restoration. The second and third factors are obviously influenced by our beliefs about what is important: we react differently to the fire damage at Notre-Dame in Paris or the Mackintosh Building at The Glasgow School of Art than we do to similar damage at less famous and less beautiful buildings. The difference between carefully restored row houses that are designated as landmarks and those that are demolished may be nothing more than the economic status of the city or neighborhood in which they are located.

and maybe copy the original materials, making our reconstruction a deliberate act of anachronism. At worst, we will create a stage set that visually resembles the old building but incorporates modern materials and systems and is designed to modern standards for light, ventilation, universal access, fire egress, seismic resilience, and so on. Rather than putting our efforts toward context-free copies of the past, we are better off saving actual historic structures that still exist and otherwise creating new buildings that are truly products of our current era. Ruins and non-building structures of antiquity are different, since they are not expected to be usable buildings.

Almost anything taken to an extreme is bad. If we say every building is worthy of preservation, then we condemn the centers of our cities to obsolescence as all development is forced elsewhere; if we say nothing is worthy of preserva-

There may be something wrong with how we look at abandoned and decaying buildings. Buildings are inanimate objects and cannot have their feelings hurt or be disrespected. But historic preservation is based on the idea that those objects are cultural focal points and therefore can represent a great deal to people in terms of memories, emotions, and a sense of their society. But if a building is gone or is so badly damaged that repair means reconstruction, then we are not doing justice to people's memories. This is the criticism that many in the field have aimed at Colonial Williamsburg: whether or not it is instructive, it is both inauthentic and misleading. While the reconstruction at that site took place so long ago that it itself is now of some historic interest, it should not be a model for how we approach lost buildings.

## Reconstruction as a Tool for Regeneration

Kyle Normandin

Preservation professionals have often pondered the question of whether reconstruction can be used after a historic place is damaged or destroyed. Some assert that this approach can create places that never existed and thus misrepresent history.<sup>2</sup>

The *Venice Charter*, adopted in 1964, “rules out reconstruction and insists that restoration must stop where conjecture begins.”<sup>3</sup> *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards* provide more leniency, establishing guidelines that

Fig. 3. Mackintosh Building, The Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, Scotland, built late 1890s, photograph date unknown. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.



include documentary, archeological, and physical investigations; preservation of remaining elements; accurate duplications; and a clear delineation of the reconstruction as a contemporary recreation. Other standards and guidelines developed over the past 50 years have also “consistently expressed caution” about the reconstruction of historical places. However, the 1979 *Burra Charter* allows for the consideration of “reconstruction if it reflects a pattern of use or cultural practice that sustains cultural value.”<sup>4</sup>

The recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction of damaged sites are complex activities. It is a given that such sites often involve questions and challenges that go beyond authenticity and integrity. In some cases, where natural disasters and terrorist attacks have resulted in losses to cultural heritage, the loss has led to an attitude encouraged by heritage professionals to allow reconstruction of those places, even if met with conventional opposition.<sup>5</sup>

For example, in 2018, fire destroyed nearly 50 percent of The Glasgow School of Art, designed by the Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh and built in phases between 1897 and 1909 (Fig. 3). The building was renowned “because, together with works by Victor Horta, Henry Van de Velde, Adolf Loos and the American Louis Sullivan, it represented a peak of that style that marked the passage from nineteenth-century eclecticism to modernity, functionalism and even twentieth century rationalism.”<sup>6</sup> In 2014, when the building suffered another serious fire, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service nevertheless estimated that 90 percent of the building and approximately 70 percent of its contents had been saved. The 2018 fire occurred while the building was undergoing a £32 million renovation. The fire damage and losses in 2018 were heavier than those in 2014, partly because of the reconstruction work underway. A new sprinkler system was reportedly not yet in operation, and the interiors were destroyed. However, much of the exterior stonework survived; and officials determined that the building could

be saved. The reconstruction is estimated to cost at least £100 million.

Currently, Historic Environment Scotland is working with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service on customized protocols that will deal with identifying fire risks in order to advance adequate protection and safety measures for heritage places. There is a need to develop protocol measures that not only assist with mitigation measures directly after catastrophic events but also evaluate which protective measures can be integrated into regeneration or reconstruction to prevent further damage in the future. Not only has Historic Environment Scotland advocated for development of specialized capacity-building to train a range of professionals on post-fire disaster-mitigation measures; it is also working on the development of guidelines that can be shared and implemented by authorities in response to these events.

## Reconstruction and Cultural Identity

**Pamela Jerome**

As heritage experts, we tend to back away from reconstructions because of their impact on authenticity. But when traumatic events occur, reconstruction can be a tool for recovering cultural identity, or it can be used as an expression of defiance and bravery, particularly when the destruction of cultural heritage is deliberate. Take, for example, the Fantoft Stave Church in Bergen, Norway, a reconstruction completed in 1995 (Fig. 4). The original church dated to 1150 and was moved to Bergen from Fortun in 1882. It was burned to the ground by Satanists in 1992. However, there was meticulous documentation, and the community decided to rebuild the church as it was of great significance to them.<sup>7</sup>

Fig. 4. Fantoft Stave Church, Bergen, Norway, built 1150, before moving to Bergen in 1882, reconstructed 1995, photograph 2004. Photograph by Pamela Jerome.



Or we can look at the recent deliberate demolition of ancient structures in Palmyra, Syria, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, by extremists in 2015 and 2016.<sup>8</sup> Considering the destruction of the built environment that Syria has experienced over the past seven years and the total disruption of the lives of people there, many of whom have been forced to flee and become refugees, would reconstruction of antiquities be considered a priority? If we evaluate them not just as ruins but as part of Syria's cultural identity, then it makes sense that their re-erection, which will involve both anastylosis and reconstruction, would serve the role of tying returning Syrians to artifacts in a landscape with which they are familiar.

In Mali, Timbuktu also suffered destruction at the hands of religious extremists purportedly linked to an international terrorist organization.<sup>9</sup> Tombs of Sufi saints were desecrated and demolished. Timbuktu is a World Heritage Site whose designation protects three great fourteenth-century mosques along with 16 cemeteries and mausoleums. Despite the *Venice Charter's* Article 15 mandate ("All reconstruction work should however be ruled out 'a priori.' Only anastylosis, that is to say the reassembling of existing but dismembered parts, can be permitted."), UNESCO sanctioned the reconstruction of the tombs.<sup>10</sup> One might argue that monuments made of mud bricks are ephemeral, requiring constant maintenance, and that authenticity is present in the craftsmanship and intangible heritage, not in the material fabric. In addition, this approach could again be considered a case of recovery of cultural identity. It is also the first time that a perpetrator of deliberate cultural destruction was convicted in the International Criminal Court in The Hague, imprisoned, and made liable for €2.7 million in damages.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, we should consider a byproduct of reconstruction that is positive: it trains future generations in the traditional skills necessary for maintaining cultural heritage. There is a need for guidelines that assist in decision-making and the evaluation of when reconstruc-

tion is appropriate and under what circumstances. In fact, UNESCO has requested that ICOMOS debate this topic and develop doctrinal text pertaining to it.

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## Notes

1. The first reconstruction took place in the interwar period, and portions were again burned in World War II and reconstructed under the Marshall Plan.
2. Christina Cameron, "Reconstruction: Changing Attitudes," *The UNESCO Courier* (July–Sept. 2017): <https://en.unesco.org/courier/2017-july-september/reconstruction-changing-attitudes>.
3. Cameron.
4. Cameron.
5. Cameron.
6. Scientific Department, "Second Fire almost Destroys the Glasgow School of Art," *Fire Risk Heritage* (blog), June 22, 2018, <http://www.fire-risk-heritage.net/tag/roof-fire/>.

7. Pamela Jerome, "An Introduction to Authenticity," *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology* 39, nos. 2–3 (2008): 5.

8. Brigit Katz, "Ancient City of Palmyra, Gravely Damaged by ISIS, May Reopen Next Year," *Smithsonian*, Aug. 29, 2018, accessed May 31, 2019, <https://www.smithsonian-mag.com/smart-news/ancient-city-palmyra-gravely-damaged-isis-may-reopen-next-year-1-180970160/>.

9. "Mali Islamist Militants 'Destroy' Timbuktu Saint's Tomb," *BBC News*, May 6, 2012, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17973545>.

10. *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The Venice Charter, 1964)*, Second International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, accessed May 30, 2019, [https://www.icomos.org/charters/venice\\_e.pdf](https://www.icomos.org/charters/venice_e.pdf). UNESCO, "Reconstruction of World Heritage Mausoleums Starts in Timbuktu (Mali)," accessed May 31, 2019, <https://en.unesco.org/news/reconstruction-world-heritage-mausoleums-starts-timbuktu-mali-0>.

11. Camila Domonoske, "For the First Time, Destruction of Cultural Sites Leads to War Crime Conviction," *NPR*, Sept. 27, 2016, accessed May 31, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/09/27/495606932/for-first-time-destruction-of-cultural-sites-leads-to-war-crime-conviction?t=1559312017384>. "War Crimes Court Orders Mali Radical to Pay €2.7M for Timbuktu Rampage," *The Guardian*, Aug. 17, 2017, accessed May 31, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/17/war-crimes-court-icc-orders-mali-radical-pay-damages-timbuktu-rampage-ahmad-al-faqi-al-mahdi>.



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