

**Charters and the Ethics of Conservation**  
A Cross-Cultural Perspective

Barry Rowney

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The University of Adelaide  
School of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Urban Design  
Centre for Asian and Middle Eastern Architecture (CAMEA)

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## ABSTRACT

The growing realisation of national identity in the face of the threatening envelopment of globalisation has been one major inducement for the increasing practice of conservation of the world's built heritage. This study examines contemporary practices of heritage conservation, analyses their assumptions and theories, and critiques their guiding instruments, the Charters. It adopts a cross-cultural perspective to assess the merits, validity and agency of the most recognised Charters, to discuss their various adaptations, particularly in the Syrian context, and to reveal their Eurocentric focus and indifference to cultural concerns. The study also identifies the inadequacies of the Charters with regard to ethics and morality and proposes a code of ethics for urban conservation.

The study focuses on the notion of authenticity that has been an issue of debate since the Nara Conference on Authenticity in 1994. Although arising from, and specifically aimed at, World Heritage Listing, authenticity is recognised as a complex issue dependent on cultural understandings. The study adopts the view that authenticity judgements are linked to a great variety of sources of information, such as form, design, materials, function, traditions, techniques, use, location and spirit that are context-related. It articulates a wide scope for conservation practices at the architectural, urban and archaeological levels, negotiating the breadth and depth of authenticity issues beyond mere fabric and function. The study promotes a dynamic view of authenticity, one that acknowledges socio-cultural change with its inevitable impact on the conditions and conservation of historic environment. The ethical code this study presents places the responsibility on the conservator to ensure the continued conservation and stewardship by the resident society.

The study argues that both the *Venice* and *Burra Charters*, being the most recognised conservation instruments, are pitched at individual monuments. It critiques the widely held assumption that maintains applicability of these Charters to area and urban conservation. It draws attention to the paradox that while these Charters address the ethics of conservation their scope are limited to individual buildings, whereas the Charters concerned with urban and area conservation, like the *Washington Charter*, are inadequate with regards to ethical and cultural issues. By articulating a code of ethics for urban conservation, the study attempts to bridge a significant gap.

The study draws on, and contextualises its arguments in, the rich and varied archaeological and urban heritage of Syria, a country that is still coming to terms with the practices, implications and problems of heritage conservation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Table of contents	3
List of Illustrations	6
Declaration	9
Abbreviations and Glossary	10
Acknowledgments	11
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
1. Introduction	14
2. Background to the Study	16
3. Aims and Method	18
Sites	20
Charters	22
Authenticity	26
Change	30
Ethics	34
4. Structure of the Thesis	37
<b>PART 1: THE SYRIAN EXPERIENCE</b>	
1.1 Introduction	39
1.2 Legislation Regarding Antiquities	42
1.3 Archaeology and Conservation Practices	44
Ebla	46
Mari	50
Ain Dara	52
Dura Europos	55
Bosra	58
1.4 Present Day Cultures and Urban Conservation	61
Damascus old city	62
The old city of Aleppo	71
Maalula	78
1.5 Summary	82
<b>PART 2: THE CHARTERS</b>	
2.1 Introduction	85
2.2 Building Conservation Charters	91
The Venice Charter	91
The Burra Charter	99
2.3 Urban Conservation Charters	104
UNESCO Recommendation	105
The Washington Charter	107
Australian ICOMOS Urban Conservation Charter	110
Other charters	112
2.4 Social and Cultural Factors	119
2.5 Summary	122
<b>PART 3: AUTHENTICITY</b>	
3.1 Introduction	125

3.2 Definitions of Authenticity	126
3.3 The Charters and Questions of Authenticity	130
3.4 Authenticity: Culture and Identity	132
3.5 Authenticity: Sources of Information	136
Form and design	137
Authenticity and cultural variation	139
Authenticity and continuing local tradition	142
Authenticity and integrity	147
Authenticity and gardens	148
Materials and Substance	150
Authenticity and decay and archaeology	155
Authenticity and harmony	158
Use and function	160
Authenticity and reversibility	163
Traditions and techniques	170
Authenticity and visual finish	174
Authenticity and oral tradition	175
Location and setting	178
Authenticity and relocation	185
Spirit and feeling	187
Authenticity and nineteenth century conservation practices	193
3.6 Summary	196

#### **PART 4: CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT**

4.1 Introduction	199
Authenticity and change	199
4.2 The Charters and the Question of Change	206
4.3 Urban Conservation and the Challenge of Development	213
Change of use and function	220
Urban charters and change	221
Authenticity and dynamic urban change	226
Change and the vernacular	233
4.4 Change and Archaeological Sites	240
4.5 Presentation, Cultural Tourism and Identity	243
4.6 Summary	249

#### **PART 5: ETHICS AND MORALITY**

5.1 Introduction	253
Professional ethics	255
Ethics and cultural plurality	259
5.2 The Charters and the Question of Ethics	261
5.3 Interpretation and Presentation	266
Passive presentation	267
Truth, (mis)representation and credibility	270
5.4 Ethics and the Politics of Conservation	274
5.5 Authenticity and Identity	277
5.6 Archaeological Ethics	279
5.7 Summary	288

<b>PART 6: TOWARDS A CODE OF ETHICS FOR URBAN CONSERVATION</b>	
6.1 Introduction	291
6.2 Draft Code of Ethics for Urban Conservation	293
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	308
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	312

**APPENDICES** (separate volume)

<b>1</b>	<i>Régime Des Antiquités En Syrie</i> DECRET – Loi No 222
<b>2</b>	Bosra: World Heritage Listing Citation
<b>3</b>	Damascus: World Heritage Listing Citation
<b>4</b>	Damascus: Parliamentary Act 826
<b>5</b>	Aleppo: World Heritage Listing Citation
<b>6</b>	3 Tiered Charter System
<b>7</b>	Venice Charter
<b>8</b>	Burra Charter
<b>9</b>	Draft of the New Burra Charter, July 1997
<b>10</b>	UNESCO: Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Rôle of Historic Areas
<b>11</b>	Washington Charter
<b>12</b>	The Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Areas (the Washington Charter) Preface: Michel Parent
<b>13</b>	Draft of the Australian ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Urban Areas
<b>14</b>	Nara Document on Authenticity
<b>15</b>	The Declaration of San Antonio
<b>16</b>	Guidelines for the Restoration and Renovation of the Old City of Aleppo Chapter 3 Principles 3.1.1 Building categories 3.1.2 Permitted scope of construction 3.1.3 Implementation 3.2 General Principles Chapter 4 Floorplans Chapter 5 Building Elements 5.1.1 Outside walls 5.1.4 Kishks Chapter 6 Streets and Public Space 6.1 Pavement 6.2 Drainage 6.3 Electrical installations
<b>17</b>	ICOMOS Resolutions – Conservation of Smaller Historic Towns
<b>18</b>	Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage
<b>19</b>	Cultural Diversity Code: Code of Ethics of Co-existence in Conserving Significant Places
<b>20</b>	Ethical Commitment Statement for ICOMOS Members

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations by the author are shown (Author: date). All redrawn maps are by the author, with alterations illustrating features referred in the text.

- 1 Map of Syria: The Fertile Crescent is based on John Haywood, with Brian Catchpole, Simon Hall, and Edward Barratt, *Atlas of World History*, (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Andromeda Oxford Ltd. 1998)
- 2 Ebla: aerial view. The date given is 2250 BC. Postcard from Aleppo.
- 3 Ebla: Plan redrawn from Ross Burns, *Monuments of Syria*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999). 121.
- 4 Ebla: mud brick ruins. (Author: 1999)
- 5 Ebla: protective roof over the original plastered wall. (Author: 1998)
- 6 Ebla: new protective plaster spalling to reveal original mud brickwork. (Author: 1998)
- 7 Mari: protective plastic roofing over the remaining mud brick walls. (Author: 1998)
- 8 Mari: the usually published plan of the palace of Zimri-Lim, showing the extent of the original rooms – 90% of which no longer exist. André Parrot, *Mari: Collection Des Ides Photographiques 7*, (Paris: Ides et Calendes, 1953). Plan III.
- 9 Mari: excavations, aerial view. The protective plastic roofing can be seen, and covers the only remaining portion of the ruins. The direction of the view is shown in Fig. 8. Postcard from Aleppo – no information given.
- 10 Ain Dara: Plinth of lions and sphinxes. (Author: 1998)
- 11 Ain Dara: the proximity of the new concrete columns to the ruins. (Author: 1998)
- 12 Dura Europos: view of the stoa area. (Author: 1997)
- 13 Dura Europos: view of the stoa area following excavation. Clark Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura Europos*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). 84.
- 14 Bosra: plan of the theatre within the mediaeval fortress. Redrawn from Burns, *Monuments of Syria*. 63.
- 15 Bosra: the *Scaenae Frons* of the theatre. (Author: 1996)
- 16 Bosra: houses built among the ruins. 1996.
- 17 Damascus: the old city within the walls, and some of the surrounding city with Martyr's Square.  
Redrawn from Afif Bahnassi, *Guide to Syria*, (Damascus: Government of Syria 1989). 108-9, and 115. Inset: Stefan Weber, *Damaskus, Margä-Platz (1918)* in "Damaskus: Zeugnisse einer Stadt im Wandel. Ein Survey zur spätoomanischen Baugeschichte (1808-1918)," in *Zehn Jahre Ausgrabungen und Forschungen in Syrien, 1989-1998* (Damascus: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Damaskus, 1999). 94.
- 18 Damascus: the square adjacent to the Umayyad Mosque. (Author: 2001)
- 19 Damascus: the Umayyad Mosque and square, with the fountain in the foreground. (Author: 2001)
- 20 Damascus: the Suk al-Hamidiye restorations. The photo was taken on a Friday and hence few people are present. (Author: 2000)

- 21 Aleppo: an aerial view showing the Citadel and the close-knit fabric of the old city. Postcard from Aleppo, no date.
- 22 Aleppo: plan from Kamal Bitar, Adli Qudsi, and Jens Windelberg, *Old City of Aleppo: A Changing Process Influenced*, (Eschborn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). 1997). 17.
23. Aleppo: plan showing the major roads cut into the old city under the Banshoya scheme, and the demolition of most of the old fabric in the Bab al-Faraj district that alarmed the local population. Stefano Bianca, "Designing Compatibility between New Projects and the Local Urban Tradition" in Margaret Bentley Ševčenko (ed.), *Continuity and Change* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1984). 23.
- 24 Aleppo: one of the entrances of the Banshoya scheme into the old city, as shown in Fig. 23. (Author: 2001)
- 25 Aleppo: plan showing Action Areas, 1, 2, and 3. Copied in part from Bitar, et al. (eds.), *Old City of Aleppo: A Changing Process Influenced*. 18.
- 26 Aleppo: the Great Mosque and the minaret. Postcard from Aleppo, no date.
- 27 Maalula: traditional houses. (Author: 1966)
- 28 Maalula: sketch section through a house. (Author: 1999)
- 29 Idlib: the typical beehive houses of this region; cf. the Maalula and Idlib constructions with the drawing of the house construction in the Hauran region, Fig. 37. (Author: 1999)
- 30 Maalula: the village in 1966. (Author: 1966)
- 31 Maalula: the village in 1999 with the new hotel. (Author: 1999)
- 32 Queensland, Australia: timber "Gothic" church. (Author: 2000)
- 33 Aleppo: a French colonial building from the early twentieth century with "oriental additions". The central arched openings are an "oriental" feature contemporary with the classical façade, while the kishk is a more recent curious mix of an Arabic form in modern materials. (Author: 1995)
- 34 Dahkleh Oasis: example of "Nubian Skew Arch" construction at Ismant el Kharab, a 3-4<sup>th</sup> century CE Roman Site. (Author: 2000)
- 35 Dahkleh Oasis: village of al Bashendi. Today domes are reserved for tombs of the *Shayhk*. (Author: 1998)
- 36 Dahkleh Oasis: village of Qasr. Only the minaret of the Mosque and the small conical dome of the adjacent tomb contrast with the flat roofs of the other buildings. (Author: 2000)
- 37 Hauran Region, Syria: corbelled structural system. I am indebted to Abdal Al Nassan for drawing the structural system and making the written description easier to understand. (Author: 2002)
- 38 Dar'a province near Bosra: new school (1990) claimed to be based on vernacular building traditions. Committee Citation "Stone Building System: Dar'a Province, Syria" in James Steele (ed.), *Architecture for a Changing World* (London: The Aga Khan Award for Architecture and Academy Editions, 1992). 157. But such vaulted structures do not appear in this region.
- 39 Dar'a province near Bosra: a sketch of the construction system based on a description by the architect. Compare this "traditional" construction with that of Fig. 37. (Author: 1998)
- 40 Jerusalem: Dome of the Rock (Internet).
- 41 Aleppo: a courtyard house showing the elaborate interior. (Author: 2000)
- 42 Qalaat Ja'ber: situated near the Assad Dam, the fortress still dominates the newly formed Lake Assad as it did the River Euphrates. (Author: 2000)

- 43 Qalaat Ja'ber: the only information board for the interpretation of the site. (Author: 2000)
- 44 Qalaat Ja'ber: portion of the ruins showing a variety of brickwork. (Author: 2000)
- 45 Aleppo: two Kishks showing the juxtaposition of two steel "I" beams in the same configuration as the adjacent traditional timber beam on a stone corbel. Note the curving of the end of the steel beams to simulate the traditional beams, and that the structure above the beams is traditional. (Author: 2001)
- 46 Aleppo: traditional mode of transport in the *suq*. (Author: 2001)
- 47 Dahkleh Oasis: village of Qasr. Once a thriving village, the deterioration of the fabric can be easily seen. (Author: 2002)
- 48 Aleppo: new development in the old city. Even though situated on the main inroad of the Banshoya scheme, and in proximity to some high-rise buildings following that scheme, the present buildings maintain the general scale of the old city. (Author: 2001)
- 49 Damascus: new development outside the old city walls. The photograph shows one flyover taken from another. Although situated within half a kilometer from the old city, and built on an area developed in the early twentieth century that had retained a close-knit and medium scale built environment, it now stands in stark contrast to the old city in all respects. (Author: 1996)
- 50 Damascus: Martyr's Square, 1918. An enlargement of the square shown in Fig. 17.
- 51 Damascus: Martyr's Square, 1922. The photograph equates with the plan. The notable Martyr's Monument is to the right. The Post and Telegraph Office is in the centre of the picture. The trams indicate the tramline configuration of the plan. Historical postcard, Damascus.
- 52 Damascus: Martyr's Square, c1960. Looking NW, a garden setting now surrounds the monument. The building adjacent to the Post and Telegraph Office remains, but the surrounding area is becoming compact. The tramline has been relocated nearer to the Council "Rathaus." Historical postcard, Damascus.
- 53 Damascus: Martyr's Square, c1960. Looking NE. Historical postcard, Damascus.
- 54 Damascus: Martyr's Square, 2002. Compare with Figs. 51 and 53. The once predominating monument is now becoming dwarfed by the surrounding development. (Author: 2002)
- 55 Damascus: a street in the Old City. The Ottoman building on the right sits comfortably with later buildings in the rest of the street. (Author: 2002)
- 56 Aleppo: the suqs of Aleppo have several finishes to their interior. This section is rendered. (Author: 2001)
- 57 Aleppo: one of the older stone vaulted suqs. (Author: 2001)
- 58 Aleppo: suq vaulting recently "restored," contrasting sharply with adjacent vaulting shown in Fig. 57. (Author: 2001)
- 59 Serjilla: a tree growing inside a Byzantine ruin. (Author: 2000)
- 60 Apamea: portion of a Roman stone arch in danger of collapse. (Author: 2000)

## **DECLARATION**

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I consent to the thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if accepted for the award of the degree.

Barry G Rowney

## ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

**AAA:** Australian Archaeological Association.

**AIATSIS:** Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

**Conservator:** Includes all practitioners that carry out conservation action, including architects, engineers, material conservators, art conservators, landscape conservators, conservation planners and surveyors.

**Conservationist:** A person, not necessarily a practitioner who has an interest in the conservation of heritage places.

**EAA:** European Association of Archaeology.

**ECS:** Ethical Commitment Statement.

**ICOMOS:** International Council of Monuments and Sites. An international non-governmental organisation bringing together people and institutions actively concerned with the conservation of buildings, groups of buildings and larger units of architectural, archaeological and historical interest. It enjoys consultative and associate status with UNESCO, from which it also receives funding. Australia is a member state of ICOMOS, and its members make up Australia ICOMOS.

**Monument:** As used by ICOMOS, means the physical evidence of history, and includes Place, as defined below, archaeological sites, and ruins.

**Practitioner:** means a person, usually a professional conservator and member of a conservation organisation, engaged in conservation work.

**UIA:** International Union of Architects.

**Urban and Area:** Urban usually denotes a built up city or town. Area has a broader meaning, including smaller villages, landscapes, townscapes, groups of buildings, and gardens. Both words are used in this thesis and may be interchangeable.

**WAC:** World Archaeological Congress.

The following terms are taken from the *Burra Charter*:

**Place:** means site, area, land, landscape, building or other work, group of buildings or other works, and may include components, contents, spaces and views.

**Fabric:** means all the physical material of the place including components, fixtures, contents and objects.

**Conservation:** means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance.

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