

# Max Dvořák: *Catechism of Conservation* for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?\*

Martin Horáček

## I. Introduction

*Catechism of Conservation* [*Katechismus der Denkmalpflege*] by Max Dvořák (1874–1921), Czech-Austrian art historian and conservationist, is considered one of the milestones in the history of cultural heritage conservation. The book was published as part of the political agenda of Archduke Franz Ferdinand d'Este, heir to the Austrian imperial throne. Franz Ferdinand's influence on Dvořák's conservation activities logically stemmed from his position as Protector of the Vienna Central Commission for Conservation. It took thorough archival research to gain full understanding of Archduke's contribution to the final draft of the *Catechism*. The book came out in Vienna in 1916 and the unconventional aristocrat did not live to see it published. Dvořák himself died at a relatively young age five years later and, as far as is known, his comments on the story of the book's creation were sporadic and evasive.<sup>1</sup>

The Archduke wanted the book to be as readable, popular and influential as possible and so he persuaded Dvořák to leave out some of the possibly uninteresting passages and concentrate on a combination of compelling interpretation and convincing illustrations. The 'boring discussions' concerning the history and organization of heritage conservation, were indeed missing from the final draft.<sup>2</sup> Dvořák likely regretted it. However, none of the existing sources suggest that opinions expressed in the book were those of the Archduke rather than Dvořák's own. Recommendations and conclusions from Dvořák's other texts on conservation do not contradict the *Catechism* although to some extent they reflect the different periods in which they were written (between 1905 and 1921) or the specific cases they dealt with.

It is therefore entirely justified to consider the *Catechism* the essence of Dvořák's conservationist message.<sup>3</sup> It can simultaneously serve as a summary of

\* For illustrations to this paper [click here](#).

<sup>1</sup> Dvořák's letter to Josef Šusta, 19 February 1917, quoted in Max Dvořák, *Listy o životě a umění: Dopisy Jaroslavu Gollovi, Josefu Pekařovi a Josefu Šustovi*, edited by Jaromír Pečírka, Praha: Vyšehrad, 1943, 190.

<sup>2</sup> '( ... ) langweilige Abhandlungen' – Quoted in Theodor Brückler, *Thronfolger Franz Ferdinand als Denkmalpfleger: Die 'Kunstakten' der Militärkanzlei im Österreichischen Staatsarchiv (Kriegsarchiv)*, Wien, Köln and Weimar: Böhlau, 2009, 350.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. another opinion of Sandro Scarrocchia, who regards Dvořák's essay on Borromini from 1907 as more epitomising his ideals of conservation. Sandro Scarrocchia, 'Dvořák and the Trend in Monument Care', *Ars*, 44: 1, 2011, (45–67) 51. – Sandro Scarrocchia, 'Denkmalpflege

problems that conservationists struggled with more than a hundred years ago and that, in their view, deserved the reader's attention. Few such comprehensive summaries have been written in the history of heritage conservation, and certainly none which are as authoritative and as frequently cited. But the legend is difficult to distinguish from the *Catechism's* actual effect on conservation discourse.<sup>4</sup> In the Czech lands, which separated from Austria in 1918, Dvořák has traditionally been regarded as an authority; paradoxically more so in heritage conservation than in art history, despite the fact that an unabridged Czech translation of *Catechism* (not the author's) was not published until 1991, and his other texts have been rarely discussed in the later conservationists' discourse.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the relatively recent unravelling of Dvořák's relationship toward Franz Ferdinand d'Este fuelled the tendency to deconstruct the Dvořák myth. Dvořák's attitudes, already suspiciously unprogressive for some scholars because of their evident closeness to the goals of the movement for homeland protection,<sup>6</sup> were labelled 'outmoded patriotism', an inclination he supposedly shared with the Mephistophelian, 'radically-conservative' Franz Ferdinand.<sup>7</sup>

However, this text does not aim to argue with celebratory or critical interpretations of the *Catechism* and its author, neither does it want to attach the label 'modern' or 'conservative' to this or that statement in the book. Heritage conservation and aristocratic culture have something in common by nature; the relationship between the Austrian heir presumptive and Dvořák can be compared with the concurrent and even more productive relationship between the Viceroy of India Lord Curzon of Kedleston and the archaeologist John Marshall<sup>8</sup> or the present-day collaboration of Charles, Prince of Wales with the sympathizing circle of conservationists, architects and art historians. Whether these efforts and attitudes are modern or conservative is open to interpretation. This text aims to examine the *Catechism* from the perspective of contemporary conservationists (not necessarily professional employees of heritage organizations). In 2021, can the *Catechism* offer more than historical information? Are Dvořák's examples obsolete and his problems unequivocally resolved? Which of Dvořák's recommendations remained relevant? What has changed? How did Dvořák's ideals translate into reality after his death? To what extent do today's conservationists face the same concerns as Dvořák's contemporaries, and to what extent do they struggle with complications he could not have foreseen?

---

und Moderne: Die Lehre Max Dvořáks', in Max Dvořák, *Schriften zur Denkmalpflege*, edited by Sandro Scarrocchia, Wien, Köln and Weimar: Böhlau, 2012, 23–210.

<sup>4</sup> Géza Hajós, 'Max Dvořák und die Heimatschutzbewegung', *Ars*, 44: 1, 2011, (68–91) 70.

<sup>5</sup> Max Dvořák, *Katechismus památkové péče*, translated by Jaroslav Petruš, Praha: Státní ústav památkové péče a ochrany přírody, 1991. – Jakub Pavel, 'Max Dvořák – ochránce památek', *Monumentorum tutela / Ochrana pamiatok*, 10, 1973, 223–402.

<sup>6</sup> Hajós, 'Max Dvořák und die Heimatschutzbewegung', 77–90.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Blower, 'Max Dvořák, Franz Ferdinand and the *Katechismus der Denkmalpflege*', *Umění / Art*, 58: 5–6, 2010, (433–444) 440, 442.

<sup>8</sup> Sourindranath Roy, *The Story of Indian Archaeology 1784–1947*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 2011.

To address these questions, this text will use the following method: it will outline the content of the *Catechism* and emphasize some of the most relevant passages. These citations will not be accompanied by illustrations from Dvořák's book but by current-day photographs and examples from the decades following Dvořák's death. This material will address the question of whether the problems named by Dvořák disappeared with him and his contemporaries. Further on, the text will highlight those of Dvořák's arguments that are still relevant today, while also discussing parts of the *Catechism* that appear weaker from today's point of view. The result could help readers to better distinguish the antiquated and 'timeless' aspects of Dvořák's conservationist thinking and simultaneously identify some of the temporary and long-lasting themes in the debate on cultural heritage. In addition to using visual material, this text refers to selected doctrinal documents (charters and declarations) and concepts through which the professional conservationist community reaches out to the public to communicate its values, interest and methods, particularly from the 1960s on. It is not important which of these documents were penned by Dvořák's followers, nor is the paper concerned with the impact of the *Catechism* on the issues of the time. This paper does not aim to reconstruct the history of the book's influence on heritage conservation. Rather, it wants to 're-read' it in light of current issues in the mainstream conservation movement. Each of the articles in this issue of *Journal of Art Historiography* obviously calls, in its own way, for a 're-reading' of Max Dvořák; here, however, Dvořák's views will largely be seen as entities separate from the personal story of their author. This deliberate 'softening' of historiographic rigorousness will help shed more light on those aspects of Max Dvořák as a conservationist which resonate with the generation of his great-grandchildren, thus constituting his reputation of a great scholar whose books are still worth reading.

## II. Six chapters of the *Catechism*

The *Catechism* is divided into six chapters followed by an illustrated section consisting of 140 photographs. Dvořák named the first chapter *The Dangers Threatening Old Monuments*: in his view these dangers were (1) ignorance, (2) greed, (3) misguided progressivism, (4) bad taste and artistic arrogance.

As for ignorance, he admitted that 'art-historical knowledge ( ... ) cannot be expected from everyone'. However, 'what anyone can learn without special studies and special knowledge, if only he has a good will, is the piety toward all that was created by history'.<sup>9</sup> Piety means respect or consideration and its object, 'alles historisch Gewordene', comprises tangible heritage, and 'artworks in particular'. Examples from the illustrated section of the *Catechism* refer exclusively to artworks and art-historically valuable buildings, albeit of regional importance, and they are all from the territory of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, particularly from today's Austria, Bohemia and Moravia. However, Dvořák does not say that his text should

<sup>9</sup> 'Kunsthistorisches Wissen ( ... ) Man kann es nicht bei jeden Menschen voraussetzen ( ... ) Doch ( ... ) was sich jedermann ohne besondere Studien und Spezialkenntnisse aneignen kann, wenn er nur guten Willen hat, ist Pietät für alles historisch Gewordene.' – Max Dvořák, *Katechismus der Denkmalpflege*, Wien: Julius Bard, 1918, second edition, 8.

only apply to the monarchy – except for a few practical details concerning the Central Commission or the non-existent domestic conservation laws, the book speaks to readers across time and space.

In the decades following the book's publication, there was a broadening sense for what constitutes a heritage monument and a greater appreciation for a monument's artistic value, which Dvořák emphasized. However, this new appreciation has not been particularly stable, given the extensive waves of destruction due to the three other dangers that Dvořák listed as well as some flagrant events from the recent past: in 2019, the medieval bridge Pont des Trouis in the Belgian city of Tournai was rebuilt to increase shipping capacity underneath, while in Mecca, the holiest place for Muslims, demolition of old buildings accelerated after 2000 in an effort to upgrade the infrastructure around the Great Mosque. Intangible heritage is thus caught here in a paradoxical collision with tangible monuments.<sup>10</sup>

There is no need to elaborate on the role of greed. The trade in stolen artworks, with which Dvořák struggled in the former monarchy, especially in Tyrol, continues to flourish worldwide. Archaeological sites in politically unstable regions (the Middle East) are at particular risk. The Czech lands experienced an episode of mass looting of ecclesiastic monuments after 1989, when the local communist regime collapsed. However, even the legal art trade was problematic for Dvořák: he was concerned about the export of artworks from southern and central Europe to western and northern Europe and the USA. This, in his view, depleted the local treasury of artworks still located in their original places. The topic must have been bothersome for Dvořák as he returned to it once more in the *Catechism*.

Misguided progressivism, defined by Dvořák as 'the destruction of old works of art by misunderstood ideas about progress and contemporary needs',<sup>11</sup> presents a particularly relevant point. Dvořák says: 'Old works of art are still being destroyed simply because they are old and supposedly unworthy of the "new era".'<sup>12</sup> Since the time of the *Catechism's* publication, humanity has experienced cultural revolutions and the associated ideologically motivated devastation of unwanted heritage – most recently on the territory of the so-called Islamic State between 2014 and 2019. These tendencies are not limited to non-Western societies. After 1945, the politically motivated aversion toward heritage monuments came together with what Dvořák called 'a false desire for beautification' (point four above). Its bearers included, on the one hand, modernist architects and artists proclaiming an almost mystical duty to express the spirit of the times through non-traditional morphology and, on the other hand, politicians and profiteers of all sorts

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Hasquenoph, 'Le Pont des Trouts, histoire d'un fake patrimonial', *Louvre pour tous*, 6 April 2020, <http://www.louvrepour tous.fr/Le-Pont-des-Trouis-histoire-d-un,872.html>, accessed on 24 August 2021. – Carla Power, 'Saudi Arabia bulldozes over its heritage', *Time*, 14 November 2014, <https://time.com/3584585/saudi-arabia-bulldozes-over-its-heritage/>, accessed on 24 August 2021.

<sup>11</sup> 'Zerstörung alter Kunstwerke durch miszverstandene Fortschrittsideen und Forderungen der Gegenwart' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 13.

<sup>12</sup> 'Man vernichtet noch immer alte Kunstwerke oft nur deshalb, weil sie alt sind und weil man sie für unwürdig der "neuen Zeit" hält.' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 13.

who hoped to increase their popularity by removing the perceived anachronisms.<sup>13</sup> These trends mostly targeted the Beaux-Arts architecture regarded as an expression of decadent taste (in the West) and an attribute of the decadent bourgeois society (in the communist countries). Some of the best structures built in this style disappeared: New York's old Pennsylvania Station by McKim, Mead and White was demolished in 1963 and the gigantic, war-damaged Neudeck chateau in Silesia (today's Świerklaniec, Poland) by the Parisian architect Hector Lefuel [figs 1, 2\*] perished one year earlier. The contrasting juxtapositions of new modernist landmarks alongside historic monuments present another form of 'artistic arrogance' – this is best exemplified by the new Acropolis Museum, opened at the foot of the famous hill in 2009 [fig. 3].<sup>14</sup>

Dvořák himself did not have much appreciation for Beaux-Arts architecture. When he wrote about 'bad taste' and 'false desire for beautification',<sup>15</sup> he meant precisely the tendency at the time to replace buildings, artworks and applied arts objects from pre-industrial era with then-contemporary production which used traditional morphology but applied it to industrial products and large-scale urban development. On the other hand, the experience with the so-called stylistic wars in the nineteenth century made him cautious not to frame the discord between the old and the new as a debate on which style is more 'appropriate' or 'authentic'. In conservation circles, Dvořák's invectives against nineteenth-century art were later interpreted as an encouragement to remove nineteenth-century layers from protected buildings or urban ensembles. But Dvořák never explicitly formulated any such encouragement – this would endorse the purist method, with which he in fact clashed [fig. 4], and simultaneously open the floodgates for reconstructions of perished structures, a practice he regarded as absolutely arbitrary and in its own way arrogant.

Chapter II and III of *Catechism* are devoted to defining heritage value and determining the scope of protection. Because *Catechism* is basically a guidebook for the general public, Dvořák did not delve into a thorough analysis of values commensurate with Riegl's *Modern Cult of Monuments*.<sup>16</sup> Leaving aside the private material benefit and art-historical interest, he focused on values which he saw as universal and which he thought could justify heritage protection in the eyes of anyone encountering a heritage monument. These values include the pleasure of looking at beautiful objects, individual memories and associations, 'escape from mundane worries' and the acceptance of the cycle of life and death (here, Dvořák

\* For illustrations to this paper click [here](#).

<sup>13</sup> Henry Hope Reed, *The Golden City*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1971. – Martin Horáček, *Za krásnější svět: Tradicionalismus v architektuře 20. a 21. století / Toward a More Beautiful World: Traditionalism in Architecture of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries*, Brno: Barrister & Principal and VUTIUM, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Horáček, 'Museum of art versus the city as a work of art: A case of the new Acropolis Museum in Athens', *Archnet-IJAR: International Journal of Architectural Research*, 8: 2, July 2014, 47–61.

<sup>15</sup> 'Geschmacklosigkeit', 'falsche Verschönerungssucht' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 17–18.

<sup>16</sup> Alois Riegl, *Der moderne Denkmalkultus, sein Wesen und seine Entstehung*, Wien and Leipzig: W. Braumüller, 1903.

sums up Riegl's 'age value').<sup>17</sup> No building type or style should be prioritized: '( ... ) heritage conservation ( ... ) must encompass everything that can be considered ( ... ) as common artistic property.'<sup>18</sup> 'The effect of old monuments on imagination and the mind does not stem from the stylistic canon but arises from a particular phenomenon comprised of general artistic forms, local specificities and the whole environment ...'<sup>19</sup>

But what if a well-intentioned conservation effort fundamentally changes the monument's appearance? Dvořák did not foresee this problem. Later on, however, ambivalent interventions, such as protective shelters over archaeological sites, began to crop up [figs 5, 6].

Chapter IV criticizes 'incorrect restoration'. Dvořák writes: 'When monuments are arbitrarily changed, they lose their historical significance and turn into very unreliable witnesses of the artistic will of the past ...'<sup>20</sup> He pays special attention to castle ruins, which had been 'rebuilt and turned into fake castles' in the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> This practice still exists: in the second half of the twentieth century, Neo-Romanesque and Neo-Gothic castle renovations gave way to brutalist and minimalist interventions [figs 7, 8, 9].

Chapter V defines society's 'general obligations' toward monuments. The last, sixth chapter offers 'some advice' concerning the protection of specific types of monuments. 'The general principles of conservation ( ... ) can be summarized in two requirements: (1) if possible, keep the monument in its original location and let it serve its original purpose, (2) do not change its appearance.'<sup>22</sup> Monuments should not be moved: '( ... ) museums are ( ... ) mere emergency harbours ( ... )'<sup>23</sup> Dvořák lived in the era when great museum collections were assembled and exhibited in iconic buildings. Moreover, the Vienna School linked academic research with museum practice: in this context, Dvořák's reserved attitude toward museums appears innovative and even unexpected. But his predictions of the future were not

<sup>17</sup> 'Zu den neuen Idealgütern gehört aber auch als eines der wichtigsten der alte Kunstbesitz, als Quelle solcher Eindrücke, welche ähnlich wie Naturschönheiten im Beschauer eine über den Alltag und dessen materielle Sorgen und Bestrebungen sich erhebende Stimmung auszulösen vermögen.' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> '( ... ) der Denkmalschutz ( ... ) alles umfassen muß, was als künstlerisches Gemeingut ( ... ) angesehen werden kann.' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 24.

<sup>19</sup> 'Die Wirkung der alten Denkmäler auf die Phantasie und das Gemüt beruht nicht auf einem Stilgesetz, sie wird hervorgerufen durch die konkrete Erscheinung, die sich aus einer Verbindung allgemeiner Kunstformen mit lokaler und persönlicher Eigenart, mit der ganzen Umgebung ( ... ) zusammensetzt.' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 27–28.

<sup>20</sup> '( ... ) alte Denkmäler ( ... ) verlieren, wenn man sie willkürlich verändert, ihre historische Bedeutung und verwandeln sich in sehr unzuverlässliche Zeugnisse von dem künstlerischen Wollen und Können der Vergangenheit ( ... )' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> 'Burgruinen wurden wieder aufgebaut und in falsche Burgen verwandelt.' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 31.

<sup>22</sup> 'Die allgemeinen Grundsätze der Denkmalpflege ( ... ) lassen sich ( ... ) in zwei Postulate zusammenfassen: 1. Die möglichste Erhaltung der Denkmäler in ihrer alten Bestimmung und Umgebung, 2. in ihrer unverfälschten Gestalt und Erscheinung.' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> 'Und doch sind die Museen ( ... ) nur ein Nothafen ( ... )' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 34.

correct. After 1918, following the postwar property transfers in many European countries, the impoverished aristocracy began to sell the furnishings of their palaces to private and public collections. Complete interiors and even entire buildings were sold, dismantled, transported and reassembled: medieval Spanish churches, French monastic ambits, as well as vernacular architecture [figs 10, 11].<sup>24</sup>

Who should be responsible for fulfilling the obligations toward heritage? In the most general sense, says Dvořák, preservation of heritage monuments is 'the duty of all educated humans',<sup>25</sup> and an attribute of their 'level of civilization'. As part of the system, 'municipalities, nations, clergy and state authorities' should take their respective share of responsibility. It is advisable to introduce legal protection: Austria received it shortly after Dvořák's death, in 1923, Czechoslovakia only in 1958, but the Philippines, for example, only in 2009.<sup>26</sup>

In terms of practical instructions, Dvořák recommends that ruins be maintained in the state of what is now called a stabilized torso – they should not be completed. 'A completed ruin is not a ruin, but a new, mostly mediocre building.'<sup>27</sup> He understands ruins as 'picturesque phenomena in the landscape' and does not consider ruins created suddenly as a result of a natural disaster or destructive human activity. *Catechism* does not show examples of cities destroyed by war and offers no advice about what should be done with their ruins [fig. 12]. If possible, says Dvořák, standing buildings should be kept in use, ideally through ongoing maintenance and gentle repairs which must 'respect the monument's material and form to maintain its old character'.<sup>28</sup> If specialized restoration is required, it should be consulted with the 'state conservation authorities' and entrusted to specialists, which also applies to building extensions or adaptations. Since Dvořák's times, restoration of artworks has become a university program in many countries, including the then Czechoslovakia and today's Czech Republic, where one needs a license to become a restorer. Some countries, such as France, also introduced the profession of authorized heritage architect. Common practices include the supervision by a professional body; in some countries, NGOs or international heritage initiatives step in where the local institutional support is weak.<sup>29</sup>

Dvořák places special emphasis on 'village and urban image' – 'Ortsbild' and 'Stadtbild'. He advises that each type of settlement should keep its distinctive

<sup>24</sup> John P. O'Neill, ed, *Period Rooms in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art – New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996. – Timothy B. Husband, *Creating the Cloisters*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> 'Pflichtenkreise eines jeden gebildeten Menschen' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 33.

<sup>26</sup> *National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009*, <https://ncca.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/RA-10066-Heritage-Law.pdf>, accessed on 24 August 2021.

<sup>27</sup> 'Eine ausgebaute Ruine ist keine Ruine mehr, sondern ein neues, zumeist mittelmäßiges Bauwerk.' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 39.

<sup>28</sup> 'Die Ausbesserungen sind jedoch immer so auszuführen, daß sie nicht störend wirken, sondern sich pietätvoll dem alten Charakter des Baues in Material und Form anpassen.' – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 41.

<sup>29</sup> John H. Stubbs and Emily Gunzburger Makaš, *Architectural Conservation in Europe and the Americas*, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2011. – John H. Stubbs and Robert H. Thomson, *Architectural Conservation in Asia*, Milton Park: Routledge, 2017.

character: villages and small towns should not try to imitate the architecture of large cities. However, the transformation of ‘urban image’ inevitable in large cities, should also be subject to aesthetic regulation and take account of ‘conservation requirements’.<sup>30</sup> In the following periods, these requirements were largely ignored. Cities worldwide grew spontaneously, following only a formally regulated mix of village and city patterns which urban theorists termed sprawl.

### III. *Catechism* from the 2021 perspective

In 2021, a well-informed reader may see *Catechism of Conservation* as:

- (1) **Timeless** – pointing to phenomena that are still relevant;
- (2) **Democratic** – demanding that all monuments regardless of age, style and genre be protected for the benefit of all people;
- (3) **Contextual** – suggesting that new additions adjust to the monument’s existing condition and not the other way around;
- (4) **Ecological** – appreciating the connection with nature and landscape, and highlighting the maintenance of existing built tissue instead of new construction;
- (5) **Pragmatic** – emphasizing profits from cultural tourism: ‘( ... ) for purely economic reasons, it is socially harmful to demolish old monuments, as modernized, homogenized places with no cultural heritage will not be popular.’<sup>31</sup>

These points have been elaborated on in various doctrinal conservation documents such as

- (ad 1) *Venice Charter, 1964*;
- (ad 2) *ICOMOS Delhi Declaration on Heritage and Democracy, 2017*;
- (ad 3) *European Quality Principles for EU-funded Interventions with Potential Impact upon Cultural Heritage, 2020*;
- (ad 4) *World Heritage Convention, 1972, and following guidelines; Warsaw-Nairobi UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas, 1976; ICOMOS Florence Declaration on Heritage and Landscape as Human Values (2014)*;
- (ad 5) *ICOMOS Paris Declaration on Heritage as a Driver of Development, 2011*.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 50.

<sup>31</sup> ‘( ... ) es ist schon deshalb aus rein wirtschaftlichen Gründen gemeinschädlich, alte Denkmäler zu zerstören, da modernisierte, schablonenhaft umgebaute, ihrer Denkmäler beraubte Orte und Länder niemand aufsuchen wird.’ – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Bogusław Szmygin, ed, *Conservation Officer’s Handbook: International Standards in Cultural Heritage Protection*, Warsaw: ICOMOS Polska, 2015, <http://bc.pollub.pl/Content/12726/PDF/conservation.pdf>. – *ICOMOS Paris Declaration on Heritage as a Driver of Development*, [https://www.icomos.org/Paris2011/GA2011\\_Declaration\\_de\\_Paris\\_EN\\_20120109.pdf](https://www.icomos.org/Paris2011/GA2011_Declaration_de_Paris_EN_20120109.pdf). – *ICOMOS Delhi Declaration on Heritage and Democracy*, [https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/GA2017\\_Delhi-Declaration\\_20180117\\_EN.pdf](https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/GA2017_Delhi-Declaration_20180117_EN.pdf). – *European Quality Principles for EU-funded Interventions with Potential Impact upon Cultural Heritage*, <http://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/2436/>, all mentioned documents accessed on 24 August 2021.

On the other hand, the same well-informed 2021 reader may also see the *Catechism* as:

(1) **Backward-looking** – battling ‘restorers’ and stylistic revivalists instead of focusing on the approaching twentieth-century threats (world wars and mass destruction, overpopulation, consumerism, environmental disasters, prefabricated building industry);

(2) **Elitist** – writing about ‘monuments’ instead of ‘heritage’ and, in the name of false universalism, underestimating various intangible aspects of this heritage, including different concepts of heritage value;

(3) **Selective** – concentrating on ‘works of art’ and leaving out archaeological, industrial and other kinds of heritage [fig. 13];

(4) **Dogmatic** – *a priori* prohibiting reconstructions and copies;

(5) **Contradictory** – proclaiming that all artistic styles and all vestiges of different periods are equal yet flatly condemning all late-nineteenth-century art.

These problematic points become clearly evident when compared with the following more or less authoritative documents (in order of the year of publication):

*Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance)*, 1979;

*ICOMOS Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage*, Lausanne 1990;

*Nara Document on Authenticity*, 1994;

*ICCROM Riga Charter on Authenticity and Historical Reconstruction in Relationship to Cultural Heritage*, 2000;

*The INTBAU Venice Declaration On the Conservation of Monuments and Sites in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 2007;

*Dublin Principles for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage Sites, Structures, Areas and Landscapes*, 2011.<sup>33</sup>

When read together, the *Catechism* and these documents reveal, in addition to the parallels and differences mentioned above, one striking difference in language that is worthy of a detailed analysis. Dvořák’s *Catechism* abounds with words such as ‘beauty’ and ‘picturesque’. A few quotes from the Preface should suffice: ‘Those who visited the town of N thirty years ago could enjoy the **charming character** of this **beautiful place**. [Since then] **The cozy townhouses** have had to give way to **hideous** ( ... ) tenement and commercial buildings ( ... ) Little of the **town’s former beauty** has remained and no **artistic alternative** has been created to

<sup>33</sup> Bogusław Szmygin, ed, *Conservation Officer’s Handbook*. – ICCROM Riga Charter on Authenticity and Historical Reconstruction in Relationship to Cultural Heritage, [https://www.iccrom.org/sites/default/files/publications/2020-05/convern8\\_07\\_rigacharter\\_ing.pdf](https://www.iccrom.org/sites/default/files/publications/2020-05/convern8_07_rigacharter_ing.pdf). – *The INTBAU Venice Declaration On the Conservation of Monuments and Sites in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, <https://www.intbau.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/INTBAU-Venice-Charter.pdf>, all mentioned documents accessed on 24 August 2021.

replace it. Heritage conservation must set it as its goal to prevent such loss and destruction.’ (highlights by Martin Horáček)<sup>34</sup>

By emphasizing psychological-aesthetic values, Dvořák diverged from the academic approach of the Vienna School, coming closer to the rhetoric of the movement for homeland protection.<sup>35</sup> Although this approach made sense in a popular publication like *Catechism*, it was not necessarily purely pragmatic. Around 1900, art-historical and aesthetic discourses were not as strictly separated as Dvořák’s predecessor, Moriz Thausing (1838–84) and, after all, Dvořák himself wished them to be.<sup>36</sup>

It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that terms such as ‘beauty’, ‘character’ or ‘ugly’ disappeared from discussions on heritage values, apparently under the influence of modernist-minded architects and intellectuals. But these words were also absent from the first international document of heritage conservation, the 1931 *Athens Charter (Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments)*, and the 1964 *Venice Charter*. The only important (or rather, not completely forgotten) international conservation document to emphasize ‘beauty’ was the *Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding of Beauty and Character of Landscapes and Sites*, ratified by the UNESCO in Paris in 1962. Here, beauty is even featured in the title.<sup>37</sup> Current Central-European conservation manuals and methodologies avoid the words ‘beauty’ and ‘ugliness’,<sup>38</sup> although texts occasionally voice the requirement for the

<sup>34</sup> ‘Wer das Städtchen N. vor dreißig Jahren besuchte, konnte sich nicht wenig an dem anmutigen Bilde des alten schönen Ortes erfreuen. ( ... ) Die trauten Bürgerhäuser mußten abscheulichen, schwindelhaft aus billigem Material und nach Vorlagebüchern ohne geringste Spur einer künstlerischen Empfindung ausgeführten Miets- und Warenhäusern weichen. ( ... ) So blieb aber von der einstigen Schönheit des Städtchens nur wenig übrig, ohne daß irgendein künstlerischer Ersatz geschaffen worden wäre. Solche Verluste und Verwüstungen zu verhindern, ist die Aufgabe der Denkmalpflege.’ – Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 1–3.

<sup>35</sup> Hajós, ‘Max Dvořák und die Heimatschutzbewegung’. – Reinhard Jöhler, Herbert Nikitsch and Bernhard Tschöfen, eds, *Schönes Österreich: Heimatschutz zwischen Ästhetik und Ideologie*, Wien: Österreichisches Museum für Volkskunde, 1995. – Andreas Gottsmann, *Staatskunst oder Kulturstaat? Staatliche Kunstpolitik in Österreich 1848–1914*, Wien, Köln and Weimar: Böhlau, 2017, 206–222. – Martha Fingernagel-Grüll, *Zur Geschichte der österreichischen Denkmalpflege: Die Ära Helfert II, 1892 bis 1910*, Wien, Köln and Weimar: Böhlau, 2020, 657–665.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew Rampley, *The Vienna School of Art History: Empire and the Politics of Scholarship, 1847–1918*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013. – Cf. period plea for an interdisciplinary approach by Moritz Hoernes, discussed in Martin Horáček, ‘Vocel – Hostinský – Hoernes: Central-European contributions to the discussion about the beginnings of art’, forthcoming.

<sup>37</sup> *Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding of Beauty and Character of Landscapes and Sites*, [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13067&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13067&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html), accessed on 24 August 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Karel Kuča and Věra Kučová, *Metodika identifikace a klasifikace území s urbanistickými hodnotami*, Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2015. – Karel Kuča and Věra Kučová, *Metodika klasifikace staveb podle památkové hodnoty*, Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2015. – Markus Harzenetter, Jörg Haspel, Frank Pieter Hesse and Detlef Karg, *Leitbild Denkmalpflege: Zur*

preservation of ‘harmony’ or ‘aesthetically valuable ensembles’.<sup>39</sup> The 2015 *Standards of Heritage Conservation* issued by the Austrian Federal Monuments Authority (Bundesdenkmalamt) identifies ‘historical and aesthetic’ values as key to any monument, specifying that ‘the monument’s aesthetic aspect represents perceptible traces of historical tradition and does not necessarily correspond with the usual idea of beauty’.<sup>40</sup> The document then mentions unspecified Austrian regulations for the preservation of the landscape and city character (‘Ortsbildpflege’ and ‘Stadtbildpflege’).<sup>41</sup> The 2016 Denkmal Leipzig heritage fair used the slogan ‘Monuments do not need to be beautiful!’ (‘Denkmale sind keine Schönmale!’) encouraging visitors to support the preservation of postwar modernist architecture (‘Nachkriegsmoderne’).<sup>42</sup>

The question of ‘beauty’ or ‘ugliness’ in brutalist architecture presents only one part of a more complex phenomenon that the *Catechism* does not discuss, namely ‘dissonant heritage’ as the German ICOMOS has called it in its project from 2021.<sup>43</sup> This umbrella term refers to various controversial remnants of the past: structures built by the communist regime, statues of dictators, vestiges of war crimes, monuments associated with suppressed minorities, etc. [figs 14, 15, 16, 17] To be fair to Dvořák: every heritage monument is uncomfortable in its own way for some audiences, and there can never be absolute consensus across society on the need to preserve it. If he wanted to defend dissonant heritage of 1916 – rural dwellings for instance – Dvořák could have cited their ‘beauty’. But what would his reaction be, if some of the monarchy’s disadvantaged groups, such as Slovaks or workers, spoke up and demanded the right to preserve ‘their’ heritage? Dvořák – in line with Alois Riegl’s beliefs and certainly with Franz Ferdinand d’Este in mind – made sure to exclude political arguments from the debate on heritage values.<sup>44</sup> In this respect, his approach is very different from today’s conservation practices.

Similarly, transfers and reconstructions of monuments can hardly be avoided in real life. What if it is simply impossible to preserve the monument in its original place, or only at the cost of severely disturbing its integrity?<sup>45</sup> [fig. 18] What if a reconstruction of a perished structure is more than a mere tourist attraction, serving

*Standortsbestimmung der Denkmalpflege heute / Conservation in Germany: The Principles of Conservation in Today’s World*, Wiesbaden: Vereinigung der Landesdenkmalpfleger, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Karel Kuča and Věra Kučová, *Metodika identifikace a klasifikace území s urbanistickými hodnotami*, 14, 84, 143.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Die ästhetische Seite eines Denkmals bedeutet das Wahrnehmbare an der historischen Überlieferung und hat nicht unbedingt etwas mit dem landläufigen Begriff der Schönheit zu tun.’ – Beatrix Hoche-Donaubauer and Hanna A. Liebich, eds, *ABC Standards der Baudenkmalpflege*, Wien: Bundesdenkmalamt, 2015, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Beatrix Hoche-Donaubauer and Hanna A. Liebich, eds, *ABC Standards der Baudenkmalpflege*, 8, 395.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.restauro.de/messe-denkmal-leipzig/>, accessed on 24 August 2021.

<sup>43</sup> [https://www.icomos.de/icomos/pdf/in-restauro\\_en.pdf](https://www.icomos.de/icomos/pdf/in-restauro_en.pdf), accessed on 24 August 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Dvořák’s letter to Vincenc Kramář, 20 April 1920, quoted in Marek Krejčí, ed, ‘Dopisy Maxe Dvořáka Vincenci Kramářovi’, *Umění / Art*, 52: 4, 2004, (353–369) 366.

<sup>45</sup> Sten Rentzhog, *Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea*, Stockholm: Carlssons, and Östersund: Jamtli, 2007.

science and public education like archaeological open air museums do?<sup>46</sup> [fig. 19] And what if the re-construction is an act of atonement for vandalism, crime or the misguided progressivism of the previous generations? [fig. 20]

#### IV. Conclusion

How can *Catechism* contribute to the 2021 conservation debate? Max Dvořák's historical authority can offer a foothold, where appropriate, in the current pluralism of ideas. The book's strongest, timeless aspects include the emphasis on conservation, that is, maintaining the authentic material and form wherever possible and on all levels of scale. Each individual element is important but even more important is the coherent structure of the entire environment, created over the course of history [fig. 21].

Competition of styles has no place in conservation. Dvořák emphasizes harmony. Where a new element is about to join the older urban fabric, heritage sets the rules. This does not exclude innovative stylistic solutions but it does exclude contrasting arrangements or the dominance of the new over the old [fig. 22].

What to do today with Dvořák's 'beauty'? 'Beauty' remained among the four selection criteria (No. vii-x) for inclusion of natural properties on the *World Heritage List*. The seventh criterion says that the site must 'contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance' [fig. 23].<sup>47</sup> The previous six criteria concerning cultural sites do not contain the 'beauty' requirement. Does this mean that the 'usual idea of beauty', as the above-cited Austrian *Standards of Heritage Conservation* put it, deserves to be excluded from the debates on values of cultural heritage?

The fact that conservationists rarely speak about beauty does not mean that it is a fantastic construct and that it cannot be used to describe qualities which may be among heritage values.<sup>48</sup> 'Beauty' is a universally understandable concept: a large number of monuments and heritage ensembles are *de facto* protected because they are beautiful, although *de jure* other words are used to describe their heritage values. The beauty of these monuments evokes the sympathy of and attracts visitors, for whom the documentary qualities of these protected buildings and sites are not of primary interest. As a modern thinker, Dvořák would have understood that a society that wants to protect remnants of concentration camps does not require such monuments to be beautiful. However, he would have likely been surprised to see that beauty is not required from architecture, not even from the most ambitious kind, considered the ultimate creative achievement and therefore protected. Yet, a number of later high-quality buildings and urban ensembles would meet Dvořák's criteria, including the requirement of the harmonious 'Stadtbild' or 'Ortsbild' [fig. 24]. Dvořák does not offer a definition of beauty. But today's readers should not be looking for it in the *Catechism* anyway, just as they should not consult Dvořák on

<sup>46</sup> Hartwig Schmidt, *Archäologische Denkmäler in Deutschland: Rekonstruiert und wieder aufgebaut*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000.

<sup>47</sup> *The criteria for selection*, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>, accessed on 24 August 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme, eds, *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008.

techniques for the restoration of medieval wall paintings. A substantial body of recent research examines the seemingly obvious concepts of 'beauty' and 'picturesqueness', using instruments of contemporary science. If conservationists take its results into account, they will undoubtedly gain a powerful argument in favour of their conservation efforts.<sup>49</sup>

*Catechism of Conservation* was published at a time when there were about four times fewer people on earth than today. Its author did not consider what people on the other side of the world thought about cultural heritage. Yet, in his own way, he did have an experience with a global audience; as a conglomerate of nations, denominations and social classes, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy was a microcosm of sorts, a world in a concentrated form. And Dvořák also experienced environmental crises: urbanization and industrialization in Central Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century reflected the concurrent phenomena in the rest of the old continent and North America and simultaneously anticipated later developments in the rest of the world. Many of the problems that Dvořák wanted to solve have persisted to this day, as evident from the overview in this article. This is a valuable lesson that the *Catechism* offers to today's readers, however pessimistic it may sound. These problems are universal, stemming from human nature and collective factors which are not specific to Austrian society in the early twentieth century. And this is another valuable lesson that justifies looking for inspiration in the *Catechism* – with caution, of course – even in the case of, say, the preservation of an abandoned village in present-day China [fig. 25].

In one respect, however, the *Catechism* is very much at odds with the current mainstream conservation debate, which is why it in fact surpasses it. Dvořák never blames nature for causing damage to monuments: if a building is damaged by 'dampness', it is not because water is harmful but because the owner does not let enough air in the building.<sup>50</sup> Humans, rather than natural processes, damage monuments and valuable environments by being negligent, careless, ignorant or malicious. Even though natural forces can gradually decompose a building, it does not lose its heritage value in the process. Today, major topics in conservation include climate change and the efforts to increase the monuments' resilience to it, but nature is often treated as an unpredictable enemy which humans must (once again) fight in order to protect their heritage. However, such a view is misleading. Dvořák's invectives against uneducated priests and arrogant architects clearly lack tact and correctness – but they go straight to the heart of the matter. Heritage conservation is based on the conflict between different groups of humans adhering to different values. These people persuade, help, hinder or harm each other. Ideally, they seek consensus. And sometimes they fail to find it, as evident from the condition of

<sup>49</sup> Martin Horáček, 'Protecting life: The common goals of nature reserves and architectural heritage sites', *Journal of Traditional Building, Architecture and Urbanism*, 1, 2020, 369–382. – Nikos A. Salinger, 'Neuroscience and preservation: Measuring the healing properties of places',

*Preservation Leadership Forum*, 24 October 2017, <https://forum.savingplaces.org/blogs/special-contributor/2017/10/24/neuroscience-and-preservation-measuring-the-healing-properties-of-places>, accessed on 24 August 2021.

<sup>50</sup> Max Dvořák, *Katechismus*, 40.

world heritage. Yet, it is necessary to take the risk and understand that as a conservationist, one may sometimes end up being unpopular even with those whose interests one protects. Max Dvořák was not afraid to take such a risk.

The funding for this paper was provided by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for specific research (IGA\_FF\_2021\_024). Hana Logan deserves credit for the English translation, and Josef Štulc for his valuable comments.

**Martin Horáček** is an associate professor at the Department of Art History, Palacký University Olomouc, and the Faculty of Architecture, Brno University of Technology. He has published several books and many essays on architecture of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century, architectural theory, and heritage conservation. He is a member of the Czech National Committee of ICOMOS and four international scientific committees of ICOMOS. Main publication: *Za krásnější svět: Tradicionalismus v architektuře 20. a 21. století / Toward a More Beautiful World: Traditionalism in Architecture of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries*, Brno 2013.

[martin.horacek@upol.cz](mailto:martin.horacek@upol.cz)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)