

Unesco and International Conservation

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It is a very great pleasure indeed to participate in this first meeting of the Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material. Obviously it is a particular pleasure to me as Chairman of the National Commission for Unesco since your Institute originated through the efforts of one of our National Committees, that for Museums and Libraries and the National Commission gave financial support at various steps in your progress towards independence.

I know that I speak to the converted but the creation of this Institute has taken a very long time. Some of the matters with which you are concerned were already being brought to the attention of the National Commission when I joined it first in the very early 1960s, but of course, the major step forward was the arrival of Dr Tony Werner in 1969 as Unesco consultant on the conservation of anthropological and primitive arts. It was no disadvantage to Dr Werner when we were choosing a consultant on the National Commission that he was one of my old college friends, but he did have as you know, many other claims. He had, after an academic career, been Research Chemist to the National Library in London and I am delighted to know that you have an expert from that College with you today, and then for 15 years or so, he was keeper of the British Museum Research Laboratory before his recent move to Hawaii. Since he was with us he was elected President of the International Institute for the Conservation of Artistic and Historic Works, so you can see how correct our choice was. While over here he visited 35 of our Institutions as well as a number of Aboriginal rock engraving sites and his report, surely part of your basic reading, made recommendations for the establishment of a central research facility, recommendations which have been reflected in the report of the Committee of Enquiry into Museums and National Collections in Australia.

He now, by virtue of presence in Hawaii, is deeply concerned in the survival of Oceanic Cultures and the survival of these cultures has been among the major problems which have been before the National Commission as long as I have been a member. The peoples of the Pacific had few to speak for them at Unesco save Australia and New Zealand, though today, as members we have been joined by Papua New Guinea. The other independent States in the area like Fiji and Western Samoa, are, for financial reasons, not members of Unesco, but it was at our instigation and after many years of pressure, that an Oceanic Cultures Program under Unesco auspices is now operative, even if we may feel that it is inadequately funded.

With this background on our minds, the National Commission, in 1971, held a seminar on the subject 'Source Materials Related to Research in the Pacific Area' and published a handbook entitled 'The Preservation of Documentary Material in the Pacific Area' prepared by Dr H. J. Plenderleith who was the Director of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, the so-called Rome Centre. Dr Plenderleith was brought out as Unesco consultant to the seminar, and of course, had been Werner's predecessor at the British Museum and his collaborator in joint publications

When Unesco based Committees consider conservation we do not only consider Museum projects, but architecture and field sites and in 1972 we brought out Ian Grant as Unesco consultant in the preservation and restoration of 19th Century buildings. Whatever those of us with an immediate European or Asian background may think of a mere 200 years of antiquity, it is, in buildings, all that we have and Mr Grant's report, assessing the present and making recommendations for the future, evoked widespread interest and concern throughout Australia. However, from the point of

view of the National Commission, 1973 is the key year when, after a seminar to which we gave financial support, your Institute was created.

The National Commission is a generalist body and it is therefore essential to have your type of specialist organisation, but it is of course, our hope that you will give support to wider Unesco international ideas in the conservation field particularly now that two steps, long sought by our National Commission have been taken:

1. Our admission to the Asia and Oceania Region; and
2. the establishment, to which I have already referred, of the program of the study of Oceanic Cultures.

Broadly, the Oceanic Cultures Program is concerned with the conservation of the cultural heritage firstly by the setting up or improvement of Institutions within the area. Meetings have already taken place in Fiji and in Tonga. Secondly, facilitation of research on the cultures of the Oceanic peoples appropriately adapted to local needs and resources and thirdly to attempt to find out how to use the most effective means of making Oceanic cultures better known outside Oceania.

The Program is concerned with all aspects of material culture including the repatriation of artifacts as well as the conservation of archaeological sites. The Oceanic Cultures Program is one part of a worldwide Unesco Program under the title Preservation and Presentation of the Cultural Heritage of Mankind which is part of the Man and the Environment Program. There are eight projects in this area, two with specific impact for us:

1. the implementation of existing international instruments and the drafting of new ones, eg in matters of export of works of art or international principles on excavation and copyright;
2. the collection and diffusion of information through the Unesco documentation centres associated with the International Council of Museums and the International Council of Monuments and Sites.

There are two major programs of even more relevance:

1. the development of Museums. They are most

unevenly spread over the world. Over 80% of all Museums are in Europe or North America, while the remaining 20% supply ¼ of the world's population and the figures are getting worse;

2. There is a program for the training of specialists in the presentation and preservation of cultural property, I have already mentioned, at the Rome Centre.

Australia is one of the 60 supporting members and the Centre provides a wide range of training courses as well as educational assistance, it also carries out some research. There is also training at a number of regional or special regional centres — Jos in Nigeria, Churubusco in Mexico, Cuzco in Peru; New Delhi, India; Bagdad, Iran and Tokyo, Japan. In these Centres Unesco provides teaching staff, equipment and fellowships and some courses are supported by the United Nations Development Fund. Unesco also co-operates with the Asian Cultural Centre, Kyoto and formerly with the Applied Research Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts in Phnom Penh, Khmer Republic. Of course, everybody is familiar with the grand scale major operations of Unesco in preservation and restoration at Philae in the Upper Nile, at Borobudur in Indonesia and Moenjodaro in Pakistan and also of course in Venice, Athens, Syria and Tunis where the site of Carthage is being excavated.

In all these areas Unesco acts as a catalyst, it provides consultants, it provides seed money for meetings, it also arranges international fund raising. I am sure that most of you are well aware of some aspects of Unesco's work and so I conclude by inviting you to consider:

1. How Australia should exercise our rights of membership and co-operate in the Rome Centre, a co-operation first proposed 17 years ago by Professor Tendall; and
2. What priority in regional activities we should now have since we have become members of the Asia Oceanic region.

I hold strongly to the view that Australia has major Pacific responsibilities and I hope that you will bear them in mind during your meetings. Once again I welcome you all and wish you every success in your discussions.