

DOCUMENTI – DOCUMENTS

CONSULTATION OF SPECIALISTS

ON THE STUDY, DOCUMENTATION AND CONSERVATION OF ROCK ART

Valcamonica, August 31st – September 13th, 1981

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The participants in the Consultation were unanimous in considering that rock art is an extremely important part of the cultural heritage of humanity. Found throughout the world, rock art is a truly universal human creation. It constitutes one of the earliest manifestations of the uniquely human capacity of abstraction, synthesis and idealization.

Rock art contains the principal evidence of the earliest stages of man's cultural history before the invention of writing: creative expressions, economic and social activities, ideas, beliefs and practices. It reveals aspects of the imaginative and emotional life of man, which no other available evidence of early civilization is able to do. It represents successive stages of the human adventure, from the Stone Age to present-day hunting and gathering, pastoral and incipient agricultural societies whose cultures are threatened with extinction.

Through its common characteristics, rock art demonstrates the unity of the human spirit and thereby contributes to mutual understanding and to the elimination of racist stereotypes.

In addition, it can provide precious information for the advancement of knowledge within in various disciplines:

- human geography, in terms of man's relationship to different environments, his economic resources and technology, ideology and social activities;
- the study of material culture, its uses and functions;
- art history, by revealing archetypal forms of world view, religious expression and practice, mythology;
- paleo-ecology, particularly through the depiction of animal species which, together with other evidence, permits the reconstruction of past environmental conditions.

However, the worldwide heritage of rock art is still insufficiently studied, documented and conserved. It is little known beyond a small but rapidly increasing circle of specialists. Its significance for our common identity and cultural understanding in the world today has not been adequately made accessible and explained to a wider public. For all these reasons, the participants formulated the following Recommendations, addressed to all specialists concerned with the preservation and presentation of the cultural heritage, to national authorities responsible for its protection and to other international organizations concerned.

Study and Exchange of Information

More scientific energies and resources must be devoted to the systematic study of rock art, which should involve cooperation among the various disciplines mentioned above, as well as in the sectors of documentation and conservation.

Specialists currently working in the field of rock art face acute professional isolation and have inadequate means of being made acquainted with the work of colleagues in other countries. Hence the strengthening of communication and exchange among specialists should be given the highest priority. The exchange of visual materials such as slides and tracings should be encouraged. The Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici, which through the present Seminar, other symposia and various publications, has played a major role in the professional interchange achieved so far, should continue to perform a coordinating function in this respect.

The following specific measures are recommended:

- i) The ICOMOS International *Who's Who in Rock Art Studies* working in the field of rock art should be completed as soon as possible, with the help of ICOM and ICCROM, and circulated to the specialists concerned as well as to cultural heritage preservation institutions, to university departments and to governments.
- ii) An annual report on the state of research in all aspects of rock art should be prepared by the national specialists or institutions concerned and forwarded to UNESCO by the competent national authorities; UNESCO should ensure that the respective national reports are collated, published and circulated.
- iii) In consultation with ICOM and ICOMOS, UNESCO should examine the question of national legislations to protect rock art and make comparative data available to specialists.
- iv) International seminars for exchange and comparison of information should be held regularly at least once every two years. Governments in whose territories rock art is found, UNESCO, ICOM, ICOMOS and ICCROM are urged to provide continuing support for the holding of such seminars.
- v) Specialists and institutions who have carried out research on rock art in developing countries, to whom the results of such research are often no longer available, should make every effort to return this

documentation (e.g. in facsimile) to the countries where the rock art is found. Specialists who carry out rock art research in other countries should work with national researchers in the field so as to share with them the knowledge gained and any special techniques developed. Specialists aware of failures to respect such principles of professional ethics are urged to bring them to the attention of ICOM, ICOMOS and UISPP, who should take the appropriate steps in this matter.

- vi) Welcoming the proposal of the Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici to adapt its *Bulletin* as an international forum of information and reflection on all aspects of rock art, the meeting requests UNESCO to assist in making the *Bulletin* available to specialists in all countries.
- vii) ICOMOS is requested to draw up and circulate a list of institutions willing to share equipment, materials and services with other specialists in countries where such facilities are not available;
- viii) Governments and international organizations concerned should promote the creation of regional centres devoted to the study, documentation and conservation of rock art and should further support such regional centres as may already exist.

Inventory and Documentation

Inventories are a basic pre-requisite for the understanding, comparison and protection of the cultural heritage as a whole, both nationally and internationally. The inventorying of rock art is still at a very early stage and for this reason it is indispensable to adopt a common methodology and terminology.

It is therefore recommended that:

- i) The Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici, the International Committee on Documentation of ICOM and the International Committee on Inventories of ICOMOS should produce a draft inventory form for the recording of rock art sites. As ICOMOS has agreed to distribute such a form internationally, this draft should be circulated for comment to all the specialists concerned. The future computerization of the data collected on a world scale should be considered when drawing up the form.
- ii) In addition, the bodies referred to above should produce a draft proposal of a basic terminology to be distributed for comment.
- iii) In view of the limited resources available for such work, the support of all institutions and government agencies, particularly antiquities services and archaeological museums, should be sought whenever necessary.

Conservation

By its very nature the world's heritage of rock art

is vulnerable to a great number of agents of deterioration. These include many kinds of geophysical and geochemical weathering which are encountered in varying degrees at all rock art sites. In addition, the complex interactions with the rock art of various animal and plant species, including microorganisms, must also be considered, for they are not only detrimental in their own right but also accelerate rock weathering. To this list must also be added the threat posed to rock art by man. Vandalism is all too often encountered and many rock art sites have been destroyed or irretrievably defaced in this way. Other sites have been lost through the encroachment of civilization, for example, by deforestation, by road construction and by hydroelectric development. In other cases the effect of man's presence has been more subtle as in those instances where the delicate ecology of caves has been altered by the presence of many visitors resulting in a serious threat to the art contained therein.

The most urgent requirement for many rock art sites which are readily accessible or are centres of tourism is for their immediate physical protection. The experience of Lascaux and Altamira as well as countless other sites around the world which have been damaged either through malice or through the legitimate desire to open them to visitors is certainly proof of this fact. The importance of public awareness and of legislation for rock art site protection cannot be too highly stressed.

These problems have been the subject of intense research by scientists in many countries where the need for understanding the processes of rock art deterioration has been recognised. These efforts must be redoubled and every encouragement must be given by local authorities, national governments, UNESCO, ICOM, ICOMOS and ICCROM to conservators, conservation scientists and others who are involved in this research.

The recording of rock art must also be recognized as being essential to its conservation, especially since many sites will disappear either through slow attrition by nature or rapid destruction by man. The recording of rock art poses many technical and logistical problems which have not all been solved. As an example one could cite the methods of photogrammetry which have recently been applied to rock art in several countries. The study of such new applications of established techniques should be encouraged, as should the development of new methods to cope with the wide range of situations encountered.

Another aspect of recording must also take on greater significance. As the longterm outlook for much of rock art is bleak and it is destined to an inevitably complete natural weathering, consideration must be given to the archival storage of records that are made. This will ensure that these images will be available for future study by scholars and for appreciation by future generations.

In particular it is recommended that:

- i) Priority attention should be given to conservation in the study and exchange of information recommended above.
- ii) As there is no international grouping of conservation specialists working in this specific field, the International Committee on Conservation of ICOM is requested to create a "Working Group on Rock Art", in the hope that this group might be able to prepare a booklet on problems of conservation of rock art.
- iii) Governments and individuals everywhere should recognize the urgent necessity in certain cases, to close rock art sites for conservation purposes (e.g. Lascaux, Altamira), it being understood that the institutions concerned should make every effort to open them as soon as progress in conservation science permits.

Training of Specialists

The lack of trained specialists is an acute problem, especially because many rock art sites are located in countries which lack the necessary 'know-how' for study, recording, documentation and conservation.

Specialists, specialized institutions, governments and international organizations should step up the training of specialists in this field. Such training must inevitably be the result of cooperation among the various disciplines concerned.

In particular it is recommended that:

- i) UNESCO should provide fellowships for training in the field of rock art.
- ii) ICCROM should provide scope for training in the relevant conservation areas; in cooperation with national or regional institutions it should organize training courses on the conservation of rock art in various regions.

Education and Public Awareness

It is imperative to sensitize the population at

large to the cultural heritage as a whole. Such awareness is particularly needed with respect to the universal significance of rock art, to the grave dangers to which it is exposed and to the responsibility for its protection that should be assumed by every citizen. Disregard for national legislation, for example, is a worldwide problem of civic education. Similarly, the ravages of vandalism can only be halted if people appreciate and respect their heritage of rock art.

It is therefore recommended that:

- i) The significance of rock art be included in educational curricula at various levels.
- ii) School teachers, university students, youth groups, cultural associations etc., should be involved in public information activities to this end.

Special Resolution Concerning the Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici

The International Consultation of Specialists:

Recognizing the efforts made since 1964 by the Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici to promote the understanding of the universal heritage of rock art and to stimulate international cooperation among specialists.

Conscious of the significant fact that the Centro functions within an area that has been placed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Deeply grateful to the Italian Government, the Government of the Region of Lombardy, the Comunità Montana di Vallecambonica and the other local authorities for the support extended to the Centro, particularly for the organization of the present Consultation.

Believing that the Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici should have a coordinating role in the measures of international cooperation recommended above.

Requests the above-mentioned Italian authorities, UNESCO, ICOM, ICOMOS and ICCROM to continue their support to the Centro so as enable it to carry out its indispensable task.

