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## *Archaeological Buildings: Restoration or Misrepresentation*

AUGUSTO MOLINA-MONTES

THE PRACTICE OF ARCHITECTURAL RESTORATION extends back into the centuries; it is probably almost as old as architecture itself. The conservation and restoration of architectural masterpieces is well documented since at least the times of Imperial Rome. It is not until the eighteenth century, however, that restoration begins to take form as a specific activity upon the basis established by Neo-Classicism and by the Romantic Movement which, incidentally, were also prime movers in the development of archaeology. Early in the nineteenth century, restoration began to develop a philosophy, a theoretical framework, with the writings of Louis Vitet, the first Inspector General of Monuments in France, and those of his successor Prosper Mérimée. It was towards the middle of that century that the first dichotomy or confrontation developed in the new art; this confrontation is best exemplified by the personalities and philosophies of two great figures: Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc and John Ruskin.

To Viollet-le-Duc, restoration implied the remaking of a building to a complete state—to leave it, if possible, in mint condition. He stated that "to restore a building is not to conserve it, to repair or to reconstruct it—but to reestablish it to a complete state such as may have never even existed at any given moment" (Viollet-le-Duc 1967: 14). True, he insisted upon a thorough appraisal of the remains and upon a comparative study of contemporaneous architecture of the region as a prerequisite of restoration, but in general, his insistence on returning the building to its pristine state opened the door to imagination and whimsy, and, especially in the hands of his followers, his doctrines served to falsify numerous architectural monuments.

Ruskin, on the other hand, proclaimed an absolute respect for the origi-

nal material and the fabric of ancient buildings; he reacted against the massive reconstruction that buildings were subjected to in his own time, and stated: "Restoration . . . means the most total destruction which a building can suffer. . . . a destruction accompanied with a false description of the thing destroyed. . . . Do not . . . talk of restoration. The thing is a lie from beginning to end . . ." (Ruskin 1963: 199).

Ruskin's demand for honesty is particularly touching: "Restoration may become a necessity. . . . look the necessity full in the face and understand it on its own terms. It is a necessity for destruction. Accept it as such, pull the building down, throw its stones into neglected corners, make ballast of them or mortar, if you will; but do it honestly and do not set up a lie in its place . . ." (Ruskin 1963: 200). Ruskin's critics say that his is a doctrine of fatalistic renunciation, that he preaches the decay of monuments, and that to him the fundamental value of an ancient building is its ruinous state. But this is not so. The truth is that Ruskin was a zealous conservationist recommending to all "to preserve, as the most precious of inheritances [the architecture] of past ages." And he pleads: "Watch an old building with anxious care; . . . bind it together with iron where it loosens; stay it with timber where it declines; do not care about the unsightliness of the aid; better a crutch than a lost limb . . ." (Ruskin 1963: 200).

Another great confrontation that arose in the theory and practice of architectural restoration, concerned the aesthetic as against the historical values of a building. Cesare Brandi has stated that the dialectic of restoration is represented by the equilibrium and conciliation between these two main values of a monument. Yet strong tendencies towards interventions destined to retain the "unity" and "purity" of style in architectural monuments destroyed much of their historical value by eliminating valuable elements that had, in time, become part of the historical stratification of the building.

An imposing figure in the history of restoration, the Italian architect Camillo Boito (1836–1914) was the first to attempt to reconcile the opposing tendencies and to establish standards in the restoration of architectural monuments. His work and that of his followers, particularly Gustavo Giovannoni, led to the International Congress of Restoration of Monuments, held in Athens in 1931, which issued the "Charter of Athens," the first international document to establish guidelines for architectural restoration. -- The enormous destruction caused by World War II and the urgent need of tending to so many damaged buildings brought about a crisis in the

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practice of architectural restoration in Europe. Soon, however, the need was felt to return to the established principles, which were reaffirmed and reexpressed in the Second International Congress, out of which arose, in 1964, the Charter of Venice.

We obviously do not have time, nor is it the theme of this volume, to go deeper into the many and complex aspects of the theory of restoration. Let it suffice to say that there are three very basic and important principles that are universally accepted:

- 1) Restoration attempts to conserve the materiality—the material aspects—of the monument;
- 2) The monument has a double value: a historical value and an aesthetic value;
- 3) It is necessary, in restoration, to respect both aspects so as not to falsify either the historic or the aesthetic document.

Despite the formulations and recommendations contained in the Charter of Athens, the Charter of Venice, and in other international documents that deal with the conservation of our cultural patrimony, the fact is that in practice, and in theory as well, the confrontations still exist; many architectural monuments are still suffering from overdoses of reconstruction or from the precedence given to aesthetic over historical values. However, even though there are differences of opinion and of execution in the restoration of buildings that still retain their functionality and the usefulness of their original architectural space, there is unanimity in the criteria that in archaeological buildings there is no need for either reconstruction or for massive intervention. There is almost universal agreement, at least in theory, as to the validity of the norms expressed in the Charter of Venice forbidding reconstruction and establishing consolidation and anastylosis as the only proper procedures in the restoration of archaeological buildings.

The Charter is quite explicit in this respect. It states that "the process of restoration . . . must stop at the point where conjecture begins, and . . . any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp. . . ." Article Fifteen of the Charter which deals specifically with archaeological buildings, states:

Ruins must be maintained and measures necessary for the permanent conservation and protection of architectural features and of objects discovered must be taken. Furthermore, every means must be taken to facilitate the understanding of the monument and to

reveal it without ever distorting its meaning. *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. The material used for integration should always be recognizable, and its use should be the least that will ensure the conservation of a monument and the reinstatement of its form (ICOMOS 1971: LXX-LXXI; italics mine).

Needless to say that by "reconstruction" the Charter's prohibition means the rebuilding, with new materials, of parts or elements that have been lost, even when there is proof that those parts or elements existed in the past. It follows that it is even less permissible to rebuild parts or elements that only hypothetically could have existed in the original building.

And there are good and sound reasons for these norms. In buildings that can still be used functionally, there might be very pragmatic reasons for more latitude in the interpretation and application of the rules; but in edifices that are far removed chronologically from our culture and civilization, in buildings that can no longer be utilized for architectural purposes as the integral abode of man; in sum, in what I have been calling archaeological buildings, there is absolutely no need, in terms of practical use, aesthetic reasons or historic values, to reconstruct or to try to return the monument to its original state. In these instances, the architectural monument, through the ages, has taken on new cultural aspects and dimensions; it has lost many of its original architectural and aesthetic values and has acquired others, of a different kind; its value as a historical document, however, is enhanced by its condition as a "ruin," and this value is not to be tampered with for economic, touristic, nationalistic, pseudo-artistic or pseudo-didactic reasons. Conservation? yes!—Anxious care? certainly!—but not the gross reconstructions (even where there are good hypothetical evidences) that turn these great buildings into sad falsifications, cold and grotesque mockeries of their ancient glory.

In this regard, Cesare Brandi says: "It is manifest that a work of art has a life in time. For this reason, which is the same one which forbids falsification, the work of art cannot be taken back to its starting point as if time were reversible" (Brandi 1951: 21).

Restoration of Pre-Hispanic buildings in Mesoamerica formally began at the beginning of this century. Leopoldo Batres was appointed Inspector of Monuments in Mexico in 1885 and completed small-scale excavations in

Teotihuacan and other sites, but it was not until 1901 that he was "commissioned to repair and consolidate" the Building of the Columns in Mitla. Batres also carried out work on buildings in several other archaeological zones, among them Teotihuacan in 1905 and Xochicalco in 1910. Within a few years the restorations associated with the archaeological projects sponsored by the governments of Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, as well as by several private institutions, were initiated. In 1910 work was begun in Quiriguá. Between 1917 and 1920 extensive restoration work was carried out in the Temple of Quetzalcoatl and other buildings in Teotihuacan, in connection with the large archaeological project directed by Manuel Gamio. The Carnegie Institute projects at Uaxactún and Chichén Itzá were initiated almost simultaneously in 1934, and in 1935 work by the same institution was begun at Copán. The pyramid at Tenayuca was explored and restored between 1925 and 1926 by the Dirección de Arqueología of Mexico.

It can be said that with the notable exception of the work at Uaxactún, where several buildings were excavated and abandoned to their fate, the conservation and restoration of archaeological monuments and sites during this period was acceptable and in some cases very good, especially considering the time when this was being done. These projects, carried out before the Charter of Athens of 1931 and before modern ideas on conservation had received wide diffusion in America, showed respect for the integrity and authenticity of the buildings, for their aesthetic and historical values and for their original materials. In many restorations there was an evident intention to be absolutely truthful, to stop where hypothesis began, to reject reconstruction by analogy, etc., thus in several ways anticipating many of the present concepts of restoration theory and the norms dictated in the Charter of Venice.

This situation, however, did not last for long. As the number and rhythm of archaeological projects increased, the quality of restoration work decreased considerably, despite the improvements in archaeological techniques and despite the advances that had been made in Europe in restoration theory and practice.

In the decades between the 1940s and the 1960s, undue and exaggerated importance was given to the massive reconstruction of Pre-Hispanic architecture in Mesoamerica. These reconstructions have undoubtedly and seriously diminished the historic and even the aesthetic value of the many



monuments subjected to the process. The examples are myriad; I will mention only a few.

The Tlahuizcalpantecuhitli pyramid (or Pyramid B) at Tula was first explored and reconstructed in the years 1940–42. The building had been considerably destroyed and it is quite obvious from the photographs and drawings of those years that there was little evidence as to the original form of the stairway on the south side. As a matter of fact, there is reason to believe that it was first reconstructed without a stairway; the archaeological report covering the year 1942 states: “now that the pyramid has been reconstructed . . .” (Acosta 1944: 132). No mention of the stairway is made, and photographs of this period show no stairway.

In 1946, however, it was decided to reconstruct the stairway of Pyramid B (Fig. 1). Again the archaeological report corresponding to that year reads:

On the south side of the pyramid restoration was begun on the central stairway, whose state of conservation was very poor. . . . the search for data and elements . . . gave the following results:

1) The width of the stairway was 7.14 mts. based on the remains of the alfaridas.

2) *The imprint left by the first step on the stucco floor.*

As can be appreciated, these elements were insufficient to attempt a restoration. . . . But *although not one step remained*, we did know that the pyramid had a stairway and that it was located towards the Great Plaza. . . . In view of the fact that any solution . . . would have been hypothetical, we decided to build a *conventional stairway* using the measurements of the steps on Building C, which most resembles Building B. In the alfaridas we found the information that at the height of the eighth step [the eighth step according to Building C standards?] there are rectangular holes that served to support wooden beams vertically in the fashion of jambs to support a lintel. . . . there must have been additional supports in the central part of the stairway. This is the reason why the ninth and tenth steps were built in rough masonry . . . to show the possible places where the intermediate supports could have been originally, *as is the case in the Temple of the Warriors at Chichén Itzá* (Acosta 1956: 40; italics mine).

About fifteen years later, however, the intermediate supports were totally reconstructed in one of the many “possible places” and the ninth and

tenth steps were changed from rough to finished masonry. There was absolutely no basis for the reconstruction of these pillars; no new evidence had been found which would justify it.

If the west stairway was reconstructed on the basis of the imprint left by a step on a stucco floor, the colonnade in front of Pyramid B was also reconstructed with no more evidence than that offered by imprints of pillars on the same floor (Figs. 2, 3); there was little indication as to how those pillars were originally built or how they looked. The report of the 1943–44 excavations at Tula state:

A curious fact should be noted; although 48 imprints of pillars have been found, *there has not been a single indication of the bodies of the pillars themselves*. It seems that at a certain epoch everything was destroyed and the materials carried away. The great amount of debris found at the site was largely made up of material carried there by rain runoff (Acosta 1945: 48; italics mine).

The indications as to what these pillars may have looked like came not from the colonnade of Pyramid B, but from the colonnade in front of the Palacio Quemado. These were tenuous indications at best, and furthermore, I do not think that we can be certain that the pillars in front of Pyramid B were necessarily identical to those of the colonnade of the Palacio Quemado. Acosta generalized and stated that:

After several years of hoping, we at last found the datum that was necessary to attempt, with justification, the restoration of the many columns in different buildings, in order that the public may have a more realistic idea of what these sumptuous Toltec constructions were like when they were in use (Acosta 1960: 48).

I cannot accept these generalizations and analogies as valid nor can I believe that a small fragment can justify the reconstruction of hundreds of pillars and columns in different buildings of an archaeological site. At Tula the deceit is heightened by the fact that the pillars were made to look old (Figs. 2, 3); as reconstructed, they are of different heights, the stucco covering is irregular and incomplete, etc. There was a deliberate attempt to deceive. The public in general, and even many professionals, think that they are looking at the original pillars and not at twentieth century recreations.

What has been said of the pillars of the colonnades applies as well to the columns and pillars on the inside of the Palacio Quemado. Figures 4–6 dramatically exemplify the proliferation of reconstruction and falsification.

It should by now be obvious that Pyramid B at Tula (Figs. 1–3) was

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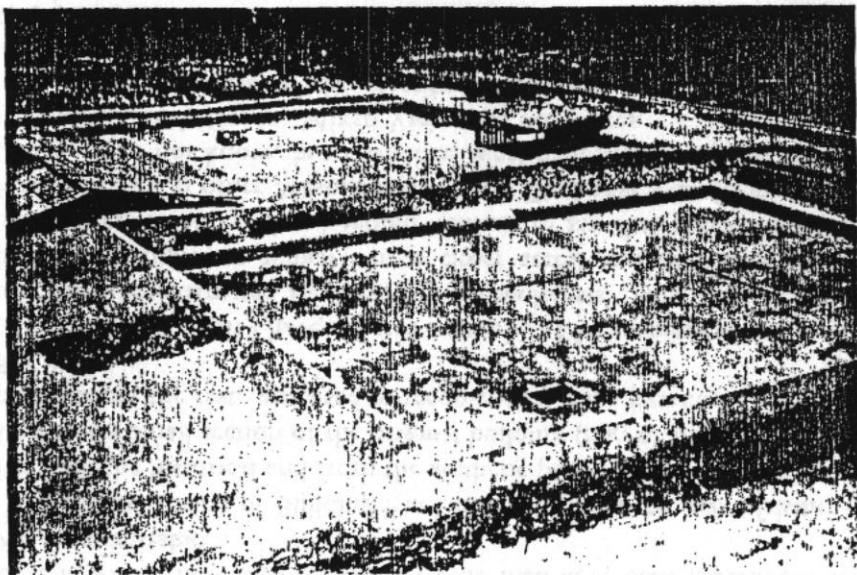


Fig. 4 Tula, Palacio Quemado (Building 3) ca. 1956. No pillars or columns are apparent in any of the halls. Photograph courtesy of Jorge Acosta.

This was, of course, a serious mistake; it implied a deliberate falsification since it pretended to be as similar as possible to what was *supposedly* the original. An important and accepted norm in restoration theory and practice is that any completion of missing parts that is necessary for technical or aesthetic reasons, should be clearly differentiated from the old and should be frankly contemporary, although harmonious with the original.

The report on the Palace of Quetzalpapatl further states that the reconstruction is hypothetical and largely based on analogy; the report reads:

Of course we did not have all the antecedents, but we did have 80% of them, and could obtain the missing ones by analogy with other sites, or from the representations of indigenous temples painted on walls, and, in the last instance, the problem could be solved by deduction . . ." (Acosta 1964: 38).

Here again we have the same problem as with Pyramid B at Tula; the reconstructed palace will become fossilized and accepted as archaeological fact, when it actually is largely hypothetical and based on analogy. Just to mention one aspect, the proportion between the height of the pillars and the entablature is most probably wrong. Any studies of Mesoamerican

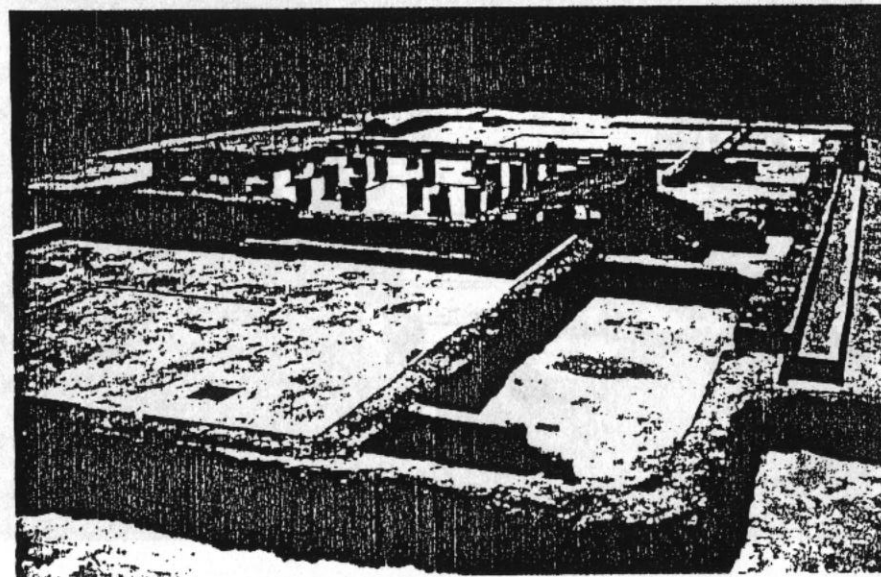


Fig. 5 Tula, Palacio Quemado (Building 3) ca. 1957. Pillars in the central hall have been reconstructed. Photograph courtesy of Jorge Acosta.

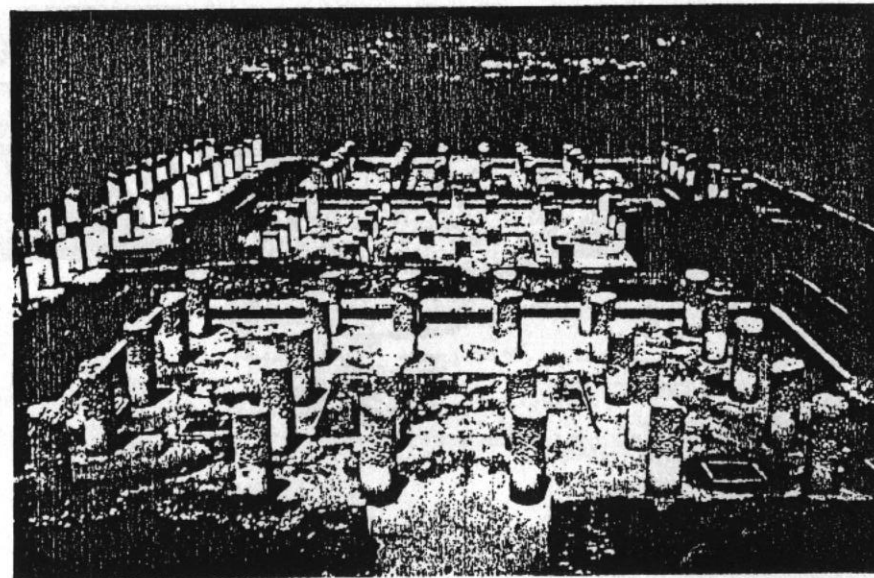


Fig. 6 Tula, Palacio Quemado (Building 3) ca. 1960. All the pillars and columns have now been reconstructed. Photograph courtesy of Jorge Acosta.

architecture, based on comparative analysis, will be on very doubtful ground if they take the Quetzalpapalotl palace into account.

The two examples we have seen are basically problems of historical falsification or, to say the least, of *probable* historical falsification. There are also cases of aesthetic falsification, based primarily on a lack of respect for the original materials and an unnecessary desire to "complete" the monument.

The Pyramid of the Magician at Uxmal (Fig. 7) was a noble building, but its huge and very steep platform showed the marks that time had left and was in need of urgent repair. A good consolidation of the loose stones of the facing and of the outer part of the core was necessary and would have been sufficient—as well as good restoration practice—and would have preserved the historic and aesthetic values of the monument. It was decided instead, in 1970, to reconstruct the structure by totally encasing it with a facing of new stone (Fig. 8). This was inexcusable from the point of view of good restoration practice and was unjustified on economic, aesthetic or technical grounds. The result is a cold caricature of the original. The reconstruction was also uneconomical, since a thorough consolidation of the core and facing stones should have been made before attempting to cover it with a new facing, which would then have been superfluous as well as undesirable.

The reconstruction of Building F at Cholula, in 1968–70, was a falsification from the historical and from the aesthetic point of view (Figs. 9, 10). A relatively small section of the original building (Fig. 9) and scant information about the rest, was used to reconstruct a huge pyramidal platform (Fig. 10).

You will notice that I have selected examples of Mesoamerican buildings in Mexico reconstructed by Mexican archaeologists. This is so, because these are examples to which I have closer access and on which I have firsthand information. But I would venture to say that much the same situation exists in other Mesoamerican sites. We know what happened at Zaculeu. I do not know, but I wonder, what happened as regards reconstruction at Tikal, Copán, Mixco Viejo, and other sites.

What was the cause of the massive reconstruction of Mesoamerican buildings? There is a saying that states: "name the sin but not the sinner." As a parenthesis I want to name, and render tribute to, a sinner. Jorge Acosta was one of the most competent and prolific practitioners of reconstruction. But he was a good archaeologist; he certainly did not intend to mislead, and he was honest in reporting the reconstructions that he exe-

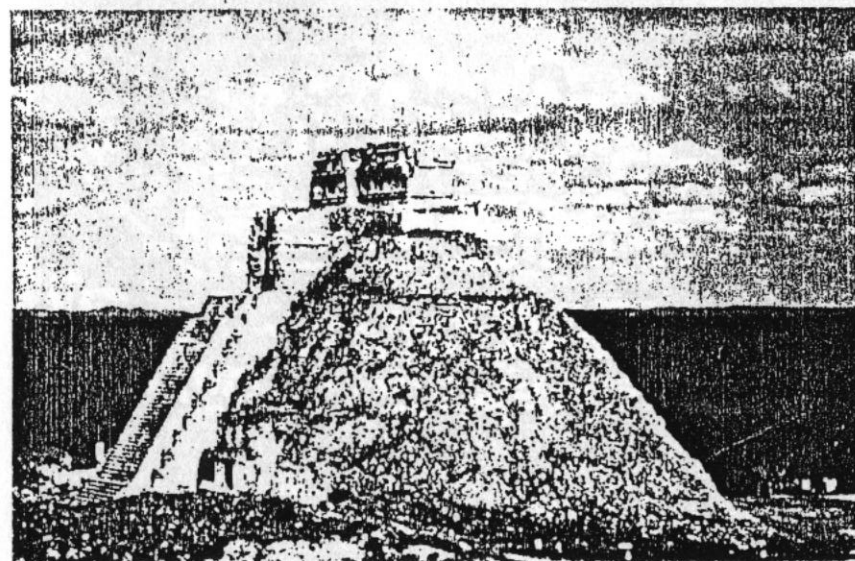


Fig. 7 Uxmal, Pyramid of the Magician, before reconstruction.

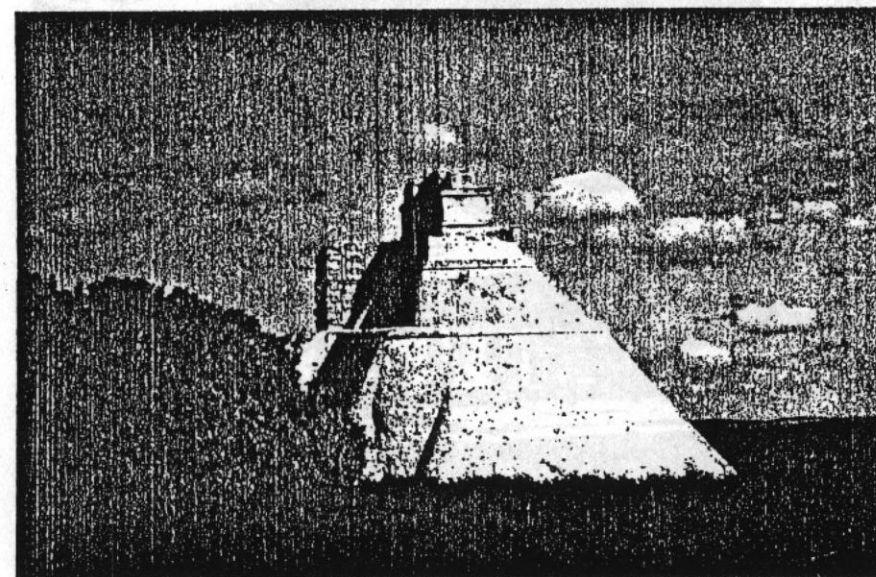


Fig. 8 Uxmal, Pyramid of the Magician, after reconstruction.



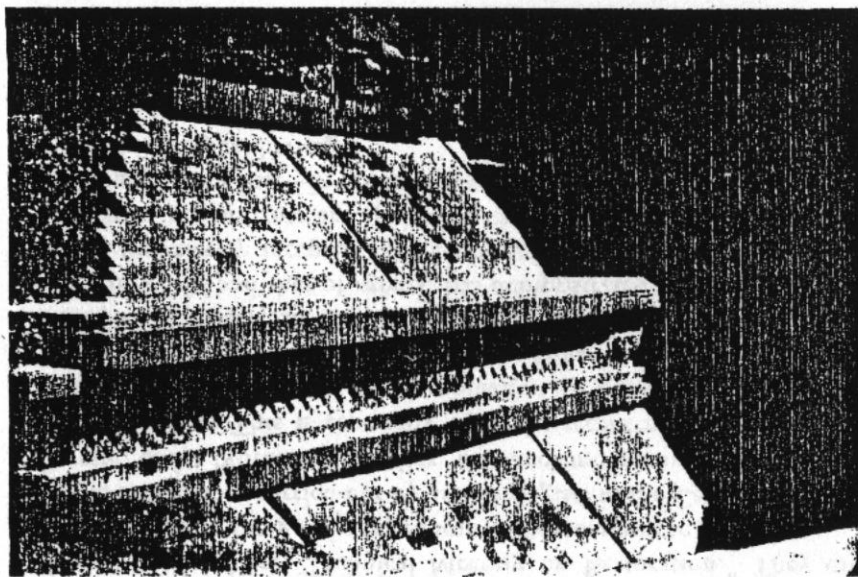


Fig. 9 Cholula, Building F. The excavated portion is at the bottom and right, the partial reconstruction at the upper left.

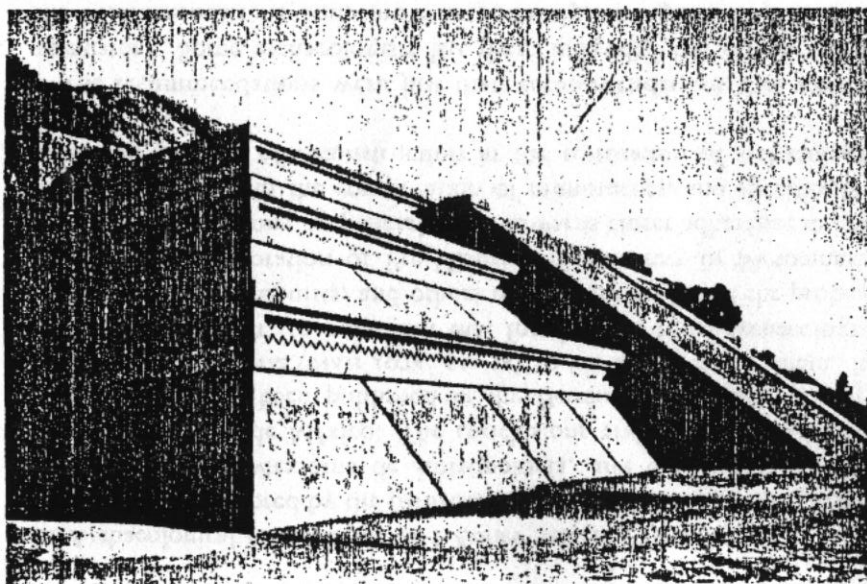


Fig. 10 Cholula, Building F, after reconstruction.

cuted, the analogies he used, and his reasons for doing so. That is why it is so easy to pick on Jorge Acosta and single him out for criticism. Yet he was, in all good faith, sincerely attempting to conserve the archaeological buildings. The same thing can probably be said about all the individual archaeologists who reconstructed so many Pre-Hispanic buildings. On another occasion I have referred to these reconstructions as "atrocities"; perhaps these "atrocities" are the price we have had to pay for the privilege of still having Monte Albán, Xochicalco, Tula, Uxmal, Teotihuacan, and so many other archaeological sites, even if reconstruction has diminished their factual value.

If it was not individual archaeologists who caused the widespread practice of reconstruction, what then can explain this phenomenon? I think there are many causes and factors; we cannot analyze them all but some of them should be mentioned:

- 1) There was little or no knowledge of the basic principles of modern restoration theory and practice. This led to a misunderstanding of the objectives of restoration.

- 2) Many archaeologists wrongly supposed that the concepts and norms developed in other countries, mainly in Europe, were not applicable to Pre-Hispanic buildings in Mesoamerica.

- 3) Governments and institutions wanted a visible and, if possible, grandiose, return on their investment. They wanted buildings to be "finished" and complete, reconstructed as much as possible to their original appearance.

These and other factors brought about the institutionalization of massive reconstruction.

The situation took on such alarming proportions, that by the beginning of this decade protests began to appear against the degradation of our archaeological monuments and zones. In its Resolutions, the First Latin American Regional Seminar on Conservation and Restoration, meeting in Mexico City in 1973, stated: "The participants condemn the proliferation of works that—removed from the spirit of the Charter of Venice—falsify and annul values of the monument. . . . They reject reconstructions such as practiced at Cholula and Tiawanaku . . ." (SERLACOR 1973).

Earlier, a few isolated voices had demanded more authenticity in the conservation of archaeological monuments, but in general they had gone unheeded.

Of great importance was the First Technical Meeting on Conservation



of Archaeological Monuments and Zones held in Mexico City in July of 1974, jointly sponsored by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, the Sociedad Mexicana de Antropología, and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. The conclusions and recommendations of this meeting have been published in the *Boletín del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* (INAH 1974: 51–54) so we won't repeat them. It is important, however, to point out that for the first time, archaeologists, architects, conservationists, and others thoroughly discussed the problems related to the restoration of Pre-Hispanic monuments in Mesoamerica. The recommendations, in general, were towards closer adherence to international standards in the conservation of monuments, and specifically to avoid the practice of reconstruction in the restoration of archaeological buildings.

The recommendations were just that; recommendations that were not mandatory. Some archaeologists left them unheeded but others adopted the recommendations and, more importantly, the general spirit of the resolutions and set out to put them into practice in the field.

The restoration of buildings at Yaxchilán, directed by Roberto García Moll, were executed under the guidelines and according to the recommendations of the "First Technical Meeting on Restoration." They can be included among the good restorations of Mesoamerican buildings.

The restorations carried out by archaeologists in the Centro Regional del Sureste, under Norberto González, are excellent examples of good conservation practice. This is especially so in the recent restoration of the Ball Court at Uxmal, where the combination of good archaeological techniques and sound concepts of restoration have resulted in one of the best examples of anastylosis in Mesoamerican buildings.

Their work, and that of others, has demonstrated that the concepts and norms universally accepted and recommended for the conservation of architectural monuments are applicable to Mesoamerican buildings. We can no longer accept that—in order to save it—we must falsify or misrepresent our archaeological heritage.

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