



CLAUDINE HOUBART

The Evolution of Urban Heritage Conservation and the Role of Raymond Lemaire



THE EVOLUTION OF URBAN HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND THE ROLE OF RAYMOND LEMAIRE

The 1960s and 1970s saw a marked change in the approach to built heritage conservation. From a focus on the preservation of individual buildings, attention turned to the conservation, regeneration, and reuse of entire historic districts. A key player in this process was the Belgian art and architecture historian Raymond Lemaire (1921–1997), yet beyond those in conservation circles few people know of his work and influence or even recognize his name.

In this book, Claudine Houbart traces how the change came about and the role played by Lemaire. She describes his work and influence and in so doing provides a history of urban conservation over the last four decades of the twentieth century and beyond. The first chapter summarizes Lemaire's background from his training during the Second World War and his work as a Monuments Man immediately after the war, to his role in the drafting of the Venice Charter and his appointment as Secretary General of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites). The next chapter describes the rehabilitation of Great Beguinage in Louvain. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the project was directed by Lemaire and is a perfect example of the restoration of an entire district. The following chapter provides case studies of his work in Brussels, demonstrating his methodology in action. The final chapter discusses the transposition of the model of the historic city to urban projects and summarizes Lemaire's influence on heritage conservation today, particularly integrated conservation. His participation in drafting key conservation documents sponsored by the Council of Europe, UNESCO and ICOMOS, and his desire to revise the Venice Charter are discussed. The book's conclusion reflects on what has gone before, ending aptly with Lemaire's own words 'the past, properly understood, is one of the references for judging the value of today and tomorrow'.

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Claudine Houbart

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Preface

I NEVER had the opportunity to meet Raymond Lemaire. He died in 1997, three years before my arrival to study at the centre named in his honour at KU Leuven. Perhaps this absence was a necessary condition for approaching his work with as much objectivity as possible. Lemaire, it seems, possessed an undeniable charisma, diplomatic finesse, and persuasive powers. For two decades, I have delved into his archives, which continue to serve as the backbone of my research. The reader might wonder how a single individual could inspire such extensive exploration. My response is one could easily spend another twenty years in those archives. This pursuit is not borne of obsession with a narrow subject, but rather because the Lemaire collection offers a unique window into the history of conservation in the latter half of the twentieth century. Countless other books could be written based on these remarkable documents, exploring different perspectives. This book is but the first instalment of a much larger and diverse narrative waiting to be uncovered.

Originating from my doctoral thesis defended in 2015 after a decade of research under the guidance of Professor Luc Verpoest at KU Leuven, this work has since been enriched by the discovery of new archives, publications, and discussions with colleagues worldwide. In addition, I had the time to produce my own illustrations based on archival materials. As the illustrations in the archives were often challenging to decipher (for example pencil drawings on tracing paper or low-quality prints of plans), I redrew them freehand. These drawings facilitated the visualization of changes made by R.M. Lemaire to building compositions (identified by grey shading). It is important to note that my drawings are primarily based on archive documents and may not accurately depict material replacements, as this information is not consistently documented.

While working on a French edition of this work, in 2022, I seized the chance to publish this English version, thereby making my research accessible to a wider audience in line with the global networks Lemaire

cultivated and the issues his work raises. However, the translation process posed challenges, particularly concerning the Venice Charter's significant role. Discrepancies between the French original and the English translation prompted the inclusion of a working translation as an appendix, facilitating comprehension of the Charter's inspiration and its aborted revisions. Yet, as the Charter reaches its sixtieth anniversary, these challenges have spurred a collaborative project to explore successive translations over time, transforming discrepancies into opportunities for intercultural dialogue. Though the dream of universalism among heritage professionals in the 1960s may have proved elusive, it remains a captivating subject for future exploration.

Although I never met Raymond Lemaire, the Lemaire I discovered through meticulous investigation was the source of invaluable lessons. Chief among them: transcend disciplinary boundaries; never settle for past accomplishments; and engage critically with fundamental principles. These lessons have transformed my vision of heritage conservation and my teaching to future professionals of the field. Through my research, I have also come to realize the scant attention given to monumental and urban heritage practitioners and intellectuals. Despite their significant contributions, whether through fieldwork or within esteemed organizations like UNESCO or ICOMOS, few have been the focus of in-depth studies. Yet, their influence in shaping our built environment and guiding intervention principles has been profound. It is my hope that this book serves as a catalyst for further exploration into these overlooked figures within the architectural realm.

Claudine Houbart

Landen

July 2024

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In the context of this specific work, the existence of this book in its current form owes much to the pivotal encouragement of Jeff Cody. The grants generously provided by ICCROM and the Getty Research Institute played a fundamental role in preparing the English version of this research. Special thanks to Ann Rudkin, the editor of this collection, for her guidance and kind assistance. My gratitude also goes to Steven W. Semes, whose help was essential in translating Gustavo Giovannoni's texts into English. Lastly, heartfelt gratitude is extended to my children, Hélène, François, and Hortense, who, despite the stolen moments, honour me with their pride in my research efforts.



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List of Acronyms

THE list below contains an alphabetical listing of acronyms used substantively in the text rather than simply for bibliographic purposes:

AacaR	<i>Associazione tra i cultori dell'arte di Roma</i>
AAM	<i>Archives d'architecture moderne</i>
ACL	<i>Archives Centrales iconographiques d'Art national et Laboratoire central des Musées de Belgique</i>
AGR	State Archives of Belgium
ARAU	<i>Atelier de recherche et d'action urbaine</i>
BESMEH	<i>Bureau d'études pour la sauvegarde des monuments et ensembles historiques</i>
BUAS	<i>Bureau d'urbanisme, d'architecture et de sauvegarde</i>
CGPAP	<i>Commissariat général à la protection aérienne passive</i>
CGRP	<i>Commissariat général à la restauration du pays</i>
CIAM	International Congresses of Modern Architecture
CIVVIH	ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Historic Cities, Towns and Villages
CoE	Council of Europe
CREAT	Territorial Action Research & Study Centre
CRMS	<i>Commission royale des Monuments et des Sites</i>
ERR	<i>Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg</i>
ICCROM	International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property
ICOMOS	International Council of Monuments and Sites
IRPA	Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage
MFA&A	Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Section
MRAH	Royal Museums of Art and History

OCMW	Public Social Welfare Centre
ORE	<i>Office de récupération économique</i>
PPA	Specific development plan
RLICC	Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation
RTT	<i>Régie des télégraphes et téléphones</i>
SAL	<i>Stadsarchief Leuven</i>
SDABr	<i>Société des architectes diplômés de la Ville de Bruxelles</i>
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
SLMB	<i>Service de liaison militaire belge</i>
UA	<i>Urbanisme-Architecture</i>
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UTEC	<i>Universitair technisch experimenteel centrum</i>

Introduction

IN 2025, the concept of ‘integrated conservation’ celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, having been established in 1975 under the auspices of the Council of Europe (CoE) during the European Year of Heritage. Over this half-century, our understanding of heritage has broadened, and the management of this ever-expanding body of work has faced growing economic, environmental, and social challenges. The question arises: can we still glean insights from experiments conducted in a context so different from our own? A return to the foundational debates of this once-revolutionary concept, as well as the projects that inspired them, suggests that we can. The emergence of integrated conservation marks a pivotal moment in the history of theories and practices dedicated to managing existing built environments. While historical and artistic values had previously held sway in the international heritage discourse, the European Heritage Charter and the Amsterdam Declaration, which accumulated the reflections of the preceding decade in 1975, recognized the functional, social, and economic dimensions of heritage on an equal footing. In doing so, these two documents sowed the seeds of numerous future advances. Among these, the potential of past heritage in terms of living environment, the strategic reuse of existing buildings for resource conservation, and the amplified role of users and citizens at every stage of the decision-making process are more relevant today than ever.

Transcending the traditional concept of historic monuments to encompass both urban and rural ensembles, the Amsterdam Declaration emphasized use value in heritage conservation. This marked a significant departure from the previous cautious approach towards considering the utilitarian worth of historic structures. In 1976, the policy of integrated conservation was defined as ‘the whole range of measures aimed at ensuring the perpetuation of ... heritage, its maintenance as part of an appropriate environment, whether man made or natural, its utilisation and its adaptation to the needs of society’ (CoE, 1976). From this point forward, heritage status no longer absolved historic buildings from playing a vital role in contemporary life. This shift set

in motion the dynamic that presently favours adaptive reuse as a dominant strategy for intervening in the existing built environment (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel, 2019). Recognized as an ‘economic asset’ (CoE, 1975*a*) and a means to ‘combat waste’, the utilization and preservation of heritage also became engines for job creation and curbing urban sprawl (CoE, 1975*b*).

Grounded in the belief that ‘the conservation of the architectural heritage ... should not merely be a matter for experts’, the Amsterdam Declaration also gave a voice to citizens. They were to be consulted ‘from the drawing up of inventories to the preparation of decisions’. While no specific expertise was attributed to this ‘public’, who should instead ‘be given the facts necessary to understand the situation ... through explaining the historic and architectural value of the buildings to be conserved’, their proposals were deemed ‘a significant contribution to planning’ (CoE, 1975*b*). As a contribution to equilibrium and fulfilment, the presence of the past in the living environment was to be accessible to all inhabitants of towns and villages, restored ‘in a spirit of social justice’ (CoE, 1975*a*). Although significant strides were yet to be made towards reaching the concepts of a ‘heritage community’ and ‘shared responsibility’ outlined in the Faro Convention (CoE, 2005), a recalibration of roles was already underway.

Consequently, the concept of integrated conservation and the experiences that gave rise to it emerge as the turning point in Europe between two paradigms. The first, centred on safeguarding a predominantly monumental heritage, is characterized by conservation and restoration strategies inherited from nineteenth-century expert-defined policies. The second, viewing heritage in a broader sense, considers it a catalyst for development through adaptive reuse, with active engagement from all stakeholder groups. In many ways, integrated conservation anticipated the holistic approach championed since 2011 by UNESCO and ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites). Both the Recommendation concerning the Historic Urban Landscape (UNESCO, 2011) and the Valletta Principles (ICOMOS, 2011) recognize the inseparable social, economic, and cultural dimensions of historic cities.

Going beyond the theoretical underpinnings outlined in doctrinal documents, this book delves into the practical realities of implementing urban conservation during its formative years. It offers a unique perspective by examining the experiences of one of the key figures intimately involved in shaping and executing this transformative policy. Raymond M. Lemaire (1921–1997), whose career began in the 1940s, bore witness to the evolution from the narrow focus on historic monuments to the broader concept of heritage, along with the increasing internationalization of discussions surrounding their preservation, restoration, and revitalization. During the zenith of his international career, serving as Secretary General (1965–1975) and subsequently as President (1975–1981) of the newly

established ICOMOS, he actively contributed to the debates initiated by the Council of Europe, ICOMOS, and UNESCO concerning the integration of urban heritage into contemporary society. Simultaneously, as the head of several successive design offices, he spearheaded pioneering initiatives in Belgium in the realm of ‘rehabilitation’, aiming ‘to regenerate old towns or residential areas while preserving, restoring, and enhancing their specific urban, architectural, aesthetic, and social qualities as well as their historical values’.¹ Examining this pivotal period through the lens of Lemaire’s unique journey provides a partial, but nuanced and precise illumination of the processes governing the development and evolution of intervention principles and practices. It also uncovers some of the motivating forces and challenges that accompanied these transformative processes.

Trained during the tumultuous era of the Second World War, Raymond Lemaire belonged to a generation primarily focused on preserving individual historic landmarks. Despite the deliberations of the Athens Conference in 1931, which touched on the broader context of these monuments, including their ‘neighbourhoods’ and ‘certain groupings and certain particularly picturesque perspectives’, historic urban areas received scant attention, except within the specific context of post-war reconstruction (Glendinning, 2013, pp. 273–283). The ground-breaking reflections of Gustavo Giovannoni, who sought a harmonious balance between preserving the historic city and accommodating modern developments (Semes *et al.*, 2024), were relatively obscure beyond Fascist Italy, where they remained on the periphery. Early attempts to rehabilitate historic ensembles to suit modern needs, as advocated by Patrick Geddes in Scotland in the late nineteenth century (Glendinning, 2013, pp. 181–184), were exceptional and were not integrated into conservation education or literature.

A genuine appreciation of the value of historic towns and districts did not truly emerge until the 1960s, when the modernist urban model, widely implemented in the post-war period, began to face scrutiny as a sustainable living environment. Lemaire’s contributions to these discussions ran parallel to those of urban planners like Gordon Cullen and Kevin Lynch, who re-evaluated the aesthetic qualities of urban landscapes inherited from the past (Jokilehto, 2018, pp. 294–295). Transitioning from areas once deemed slums to be demolished, historic urban zones evolved into spaces ripe for rehabilitation, even serving as models for a more humane urbanism. However, it soon became evident that the principles crafted for monumental conservation could not be directly applied to these new heritage entities. Within this context, Lemaire’s body of work was characterized by a quest for equilibrium, a delicate dance between an attachment to the artistic and historical essence of the old city, which he could not help but regard as a vast-scale monument, and an acute awareness of the imperative to integrate and adapt it seamlessly into contemporary society.

Through his functions within ICOMOS, Lemaire played a key role in shaping global heritage discourse over the final four decades of the twentieth century. Notably, he contributed significantly to key discussions that would influence heritage doctrine worldwide. These include his involvement in pivotal moments at both the commencement and conclusion of his international career: the drafting of the Venice Charter (1964) and the formulation of the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994). Lemaire also played an active role in the deliberations leading up to the establishment of the World Heritage Convention (1972). More significantly, he was instrumental in defining the ‘operational guidelines’ that provided a framework for its implementation in practice. Herb Stovel attributes to Lemaire no small measure of responsibility for the adoption of authenticity over integrity as the criterion for inscription on the list in 1977 – a choice that would present challenges in the ensuing decades (Stovel, 2008, p. 12). The collaborative effort between Stovel and Lemaire in crafting the English and French versions of the Nara Document in 1994 highlighted Lemaire’s struggles to transcend the values inherent in the European perspective on conservation. But even if he appears to have been progressively overwhelmed by the opening up to a multiplicity of viewpoints, in the context of globalized discussions, Lemaire still stands as a privileged witness to this historical evolution. In the domain of urban integrated conservation during the 1960s and 1970s, he undeniably ranks among the European pioneers.

Avoiding both exhaustive detail and uncritical praise, this book represents the first in-depth examination of Lemaire’s contributions, offering at the same time a kind of ‘subjective micro-history’ of the early years of integrated conservation. Surprisingly, few figures in the conservation movement of the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly in the realm of built heritage, have been the subject of monographs. With the exception of notable Italians such as Piero Gazzola, Roberto Pane, and Roberto Di Stefano, who garnered substantial attention at the national level in the twenty-first century (Aveta, 2007; Casiello *et al.*, 2010; Di Lieto and Morgante, 2009; Aveta and Di Stefano, 2014), the experiences of those who played pivotal roles in the swift evolution of conservation principles and practices during this period have received only sporadic consideration (e.g. Tripp, 2006). A comprehensive history of the development of ICOMOS remains uncharted territory.

Following Raymond Lemaire’s death in 1997, the Belgian Committee of ICOMOS paid tribute to him through a special issue of their *Bulletin* (Van der Meerschen, n.d.), featuring a series of short testimonials. While a selection of his writings, most of which were previously unpublished, was compiled in a French anthology (Barthélémy and Geerts, 1999), only his involvement in the design of the new town of Louvain-la-Neuve, which drew on the experience of rehabilitating old cities, has been extensively addressed in numerous publications, primarily in French and by those

involved in the project (e.g. Laconte and Rémy, 2020). The rehabilitation of the Great Beguinage of Louvain, a pioneering pilot project in Europe during the 1960s, was only subjected to a short study in a Dutch-language article in 2010 (Van Aerschot, 2010). Beyond these instances, Lemaire's extensive work in historic cities over three decades has, thus far, merited only brief comments, with the exception of my own studies (Houbart, 2012, 2014, 2018*a*, 2018*b*, 2020, 2022, 2023).

More generally, on an international scale, the field of urban conservation history is relatively recent. While Françoise Choay (2001) and Jukka Jokilehto (1999) briefly touched on it in the 1990s, it was not until the early twenty-first century, with the adoption of the European Landscape Convention (2000), the Vienna Memorandum (2005), and the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (2011), that it received more sustained attention. Notable publications, such as Francesco Bandarin and Ron Van Oers' *The Historic Urban Landscape* (2012) and Miles Glendinning's ambitious synthesis, *The Conservation Movement* (2013), gave it more attention. Very recently, in 2019, a pivotal anthology published by the Getty Conservation Institute, edited by Jeff Cody and Francesco Siravo in the *Readings in Conservation* series, further underscored the significance of this theme. However, the specific episode discussed in this book is only briefly covered in these broader works. Moreover, synthetic introductions to the history of urban conservation often omit it (e.g. Fairchild Ruggles, 2012; Bandarin, 2019). Yet despite their initial focus on Europe, the discussions and projects initiated within the framework of the CoE's actions directly influenced the development of principles adopted by international bodies like ICOMOS or UNESCO (Jokilehto, 2018, p. 256). At the European level, the situation is not markedly different. Besides a comprehensive inventory of adopted documents and a chronological account of debate evolution, published at the CoE's initiative (Pickard, 2002*a* and 2002*b*), it was only after the fortieth anniversary of the European Year of Heritage in 2015 that a substantial publication was dedicated to the implementation and legacy of integrated conservation policy. This collective work, under the auspices of the Austrian ICOMOS Committee, emphasized the German-speaking countries and provided not only contextualization of actions around 1975 but also a multitude of geographically diverse perspectives (Falser and Lipp, 2015). While the short articles in this volume are invaluable for grasping the diversity of approaches and contributions to this extensive programme challenging established principles and practices, they alone cannot capture the complexity of the debates or the intricacies of applying theories in the field. However, for the first time, several authors affirmed Raymond Lemaire's role as a 'key figure' in this field (Luxen, 2015; Glendinning, 2015). Yet beyond this recognition, the precise nature of his contributions remained somewhat unclear, save for a brief mention of his involvement in

two pilot projects during the European Year: the ‘structure plan’ for Bruges and the ‘renovation’ of the Rue des Brasseurs in Namur, both in Belgium (Cortembos and Van Aerschot, 2015). While subsequent books have been published on the action of the CoE’s Council for Cultural Co-operation, among others in the field of historic cities, their account of the development of this ‘integrated approach to cultural heritage’ only traces back to 1973, overlooking the experiences that fuelled it in the preceding decade (Bold and Cherry, 2016; Bold and Packard, 2018).

Today, this approach is sometimes rightly critiqued for not adequately considering the ‘living’ nature of historic cities (Rodwell, 2022), or for not aligning with ‘the social perceptions, needs, and realities of the emerging world’ (Bandarin, 2019, p. 5). Nevertheless, revisiting the origins of these pioneering initiatives allows us to observe their evolution without imposing anachronistic judgments and to better comprehend their breadth. Furthermore, it offers insight into the lessons that the processes at play during that time may have for us today.

The four chapters of this book trace Raymond Lemaire’s significant contributions to these debates. It explores his intellectual journey, starting from his training as an art historian and culminating in the development of an all-encompassing approach to the built environment, which he coined as ‘integral planning’ – a more expansive iteration of integrated conservation. Through pivotal experiences like the rehabilitation of the Great Beguinage of Louvain, and endeavours to extend the revitalized historic city model into the realm of urban planning, the narrative illustrates the intricate interplay between theory and practical application. This journey is far from straightforward, shaped by the pushback of reality against purportedly universal principles, as well as by echoes of Lemaire’s early training, which emphasized monuments, and even his personal affinity for a specific era in Flemish architectural history.

The first chapter provides a biographical overview, though not exhaustive, with its scope limited to events up to 1965. Its primary objective is to illuminate the unique trajectory of Lemaire’s career and to elucidate how, by the mid-1960s, he had ascended to a position of pivotal influence in shaping rehabilitation policies at a European and even global level. This chapter reaches its zenith with his active involvement in the 1964 Venice Congress and his appointment as Secretary General of the newly established ICOMOS. It delves into key milestones in his comprehensive education: his university studies, the influential role of his uncle – Canon Raymond A.G. Lemaire (1878–1954) – as well as his connections with Italy and his involvement in the reconstruction efforts and restitution of looted property following the Second World War. These experiences were instrumental in forging his professional networks and international aspirations.

Chapter II delves exclusively into the extensive undertaking of

rehabilitating the Great Beguinage of Louvain (1962–1972), an endeavour that came to define all Lemaire’s subsequent projects. This chapter relies extensively on a systematic analysis of graphic and iconographic sources, complemented by a handful of crucial, albeit rare, written accounts. It serves as a testament to the development of a model for the historic city that, in Raymond Lemaire’s perspective, had the potential to rival modern housing in terms of profitability while simultaneously catering for a broader spectrum of fundamental human needs. Serving as a pilot project, this endeavour contributed significantly to the discussions within the Council of Europe and the ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) courses, ultimately solidifying Lemaire’s standing as an expert in the field of rehabilitation. This newfound expertise would be instrumental in his establishment within the Brussels milieu towards the end of the 1960s.

Chapter III provides insight into both the methodology and the persona of Raymond Lemaire and is based on a detailed examination of a dozen case studies in Brussels. Beginning with a concise overview of the practices that evolved in Brussels during the 1940s and 1960s, essential for contextualizing his interventions, this chapter illustrates his attempts to apply the ideal model developed at the Great Beguinage to a radically distinct urban setting compared to Louvain. Running parallel to the discussions within the Committee of Technical Advisers of the Council of Europe, established in 1971, the projects in Brussels serve as a stage for the convergence of rehabilitation and urban planning, aligning with the contemporaneous rise of integrated conservation. The decision to focus specifically on the Brussels projects among the extensive portfolio of Raymond Lemaire’s rehabilitation work is warranted by several factors. In terms of chronology, spanning from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, these projects encapsulate the entirety of Lemaire’s career in rehabilitation. Furthermore, they illuminate every facet of his approach to the historic city, ranging from tailored development plans to broader urban schemes and the restoration of architectural ensembles. Lastly, these projects underscore the diverse array of stakeholders and the intricacy of the networks at play within a capital city grappling with ‘Brussellization’ (Romanczyk, 2011), effectively acting as a magnifying glass for these complexities.

The final chapter investigates the concept of ‘integral planning’, a term coined by Lemaire in 1973 that implicitly underpins all his endeavours in the 1970s, spanning the complementary domains of rehabilitation and urban planning. Following a clarification of his pivotal role in the genesis of integrated conservation policy and his involvement in formulating crucial doctrinal documents on the subject, this chapter draws parallels between select projects in urban planning and the rehabilitation initiatives examined in earlier sections. Notably, Lemaire’s use of the historic city as a blueprint for

shaping a new urbanism aligns him with the experiences of late modernism and even hints at elements of postmodernism.

NOTE

1. R.M. Lemaire, *Notes suite au séminaire Habitat sur la réhabilitation des centres historiques dans les pays en voie de développement*, San Kiriko (Bulgaria), 1989, KU Leuven, University Archive, Lemaire Papers, 4851, my translation.

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