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Towards the Egyptian Charter for Conservation of Cultural Heritages

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ABSTRACT



The notion of “Cultural heritage” is quite modern compared to other humanistic fields developed in the last century. Conservation as a science has emerged and took shape during international conventions and treaties in many places in Europe and developed various frameworks to recognize the heritage and its value but based on “Eurocentric bias” criteria. The fact of sharing universal values and common practices during the age of globalization had a significant impact on conservation actions in contexts utterly different from western societies and don’t share the same historical or cultural dimensions. Therefore, this study traces the history of the evolution of conservation in the west from two perspectives; the historical one and the developing methodologies, and the philosophies behind the main theories in conservation. Cultural heritage is a reflection of the identity of the society and its past; thus, this study outlines the development of conservation practices in Egypt within the international approaches in a chronological order to investigate the social response and the impact of the political and cultural influence of the cultural consciousness of the society and the conservation actions in the Egyptian context. Furthermore, to investigate the contribution of international charters in developing national policies in Egypt.

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1. Introduction

The last century has witnessed a crucial development in the science of conservation and its theories. Most of the synthesis of the critical debates and critique was driven by western intellectuals and historians who perceived the past from their perspective (Yazdani Mehr, 2019). Moreover, developed protection methodologies and techniques that are compatible with the legacy of their ancestors. All these efforts paved the way to have a profound base for conservation as

science and expand its definition to include cultural heritage as tangible and intangible heritage (Laurajane Smith & Akagawa, 2008).

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However, these efforts reached a point at which we cannot move forward unless we look back at the origins of that science and review them analytically (Cuno, 2010). To perceive the past of a product of an individual nation, the principles of conservation and heritage recognition must be revised and adapted before being adopted blindly anywhere else. History is not just the told past, it's a cultural element that must be perceived within its context; through the remarks of the previous civilizations and the actions of the new ones.

The French Novelist Marguerite Yourcenar once declared that the changes caused by people's tastes are more profound than those caused by time. By this statement, the art historian reflected on the subjectivity towards the protection of heritage or monuments with peculiar values for the society. Admiring the legacy of the ancestors could be something inherited in the culture, not imposed or shaped by the importance of the monument itself, not its historic and aesthetic values (Szmelter, 2013). Time changes the taste of people, the way they perceive and evaluate things and it changes buildings as well and leaves traces of the passing of time. This change of taste is the social consciousness of heritage that formed and refined over time from mere protection of the function to the preservation of buildings that recall a myth or holds a memory for the place, to a more advanced treatment based on scientific methodologies (Reid, 2002). The ever-expanding definition of the term conservation and its evolution from restoration and preservation was an important topic in the global debate, that kept changing after critical times and significant events (De la Torre, 2013). However, the global conflicts urged the need for conservation management in many places; some contexts showed contradicting reactions like Egypt. The most recent debate is going towards generating conservation strategies led by the society as the main player in identifying their values and assessing their monuments. In Egypt, where the long history is the accumulation of so many layers, each one of them left behind a legacy that must be recognized first then protected (Tunbridge, 1984). The review of several conservation actions in Egypt shows how society reacts to these movements. Although the concept of "cultural heritage" is drawn from humanities and made people question their heritage and evaluate their values differently, the

development of this discipline in both theory and practice didn't flourish in Egypt compared to the international ones." (Rezk & Rabie, 2019). It is about time to start developing a national approach driven by the synthesis of international developments and social consciousness. The main aim of this paper is to highlight the milestones that shaped conservation as a science and its evolution concerning the critical political events and shifts in ideologies that affected its emergence directly. Moreover, in an attempt to fill the gap in recognizing the history of conservation in Egypt along with the international track; an analytical reading of each era and its historical consequences is provided as a research methodology; to clarify the sequence of conservation development and compare the Egyptian actions to parallel one in the international direction.

2. The nature of restoration in the past

The idea of building protection in the past was merely protection out of respected and valued structures, it was an expression of admiration and gratitude of the predecessors for centuries the process of protection aimed at deliberately erasing the traces of previous civilizations and alter their monuments in an action "to pursue in vain an attainable original condition" (Philippot, 1996). Some art historians claim that the regular maintenance of a building is considered as an act of conservation, however, the roots of conservation dates back to the Renaissance when the architectural stock began to be recognized by the society and the historians started to differentiate between the types of buildings values; either "art value" or "age value" (Marijnissen, 1996). Before the advent of the word "restoration" as a cultural concept, the slight improvement in cultural appreciation was the "Connoisseur", formulated by art historians who can contextualize and situate the artworks, and the archaeological artefacts in their original context and assess them by craftsmanship. By the end of the 18th century, a more historical consciousness was established due to the industrial progression in western countries where the degradation of city centres became more prone to further deterioration after riots and several revolts. The industrial revolution put an end to the conventional ways of preserving the monuments and developed new ideologies.



2.1. Disconnection: traditional vs new ways of conservation

With the emergence of modernism, Europe has experienced a cultural paradigm, which formulated a new basis for restoration. There were two conflicting causes of the disconnection between the past as a "completed element" and the "modern European man"; The striving drift towards a modern scientific approach in restoration and architecture in general, on one hand, and the rift between the people and their past where, on the other hand, they could not pursue it as a continuous history. *"Purely scientific approach to the past cannot in itself to ensure the continuity that was guaranteed by tradition... to fill this gap another approach developed to keep the contact with the past in a nostalgic way which is "preservation." This rapture was due to the tension between the sense of romanticism of the past and the rationalism of the enlightenment"* (Philippot, 1996). the emergence of the stylistic approach was a milestone in treating monuments as reminiscent of a society.

The Father of the "stylistic approach"; Viollet-le-Duc, reformed the term "restoration" after the "Romanticism approach", and used elements according to the same form and appearance of the original building to complete it. Despite the speculative essence of this method that has been adopted and practised widely in many European contexts, it confronted a very critical disagreement from the intellectuals who opposed the concept of adoption and modification of public monuments, and the invention of "revival styles" as a synthesis of the historical findings and individual interpretations. (Yazdani Mehr, 2019). John Ruskin insisted on giving the builders credits and value each building, claiming that the workmanship and the intentions of the builders are something that cannot be re-established or rebirthed - "as impossible as to raise the dead" (Ruskin & Birch, 1885)- in an attempt to defend the "Authenticity" of the monuments. In the "Society for the protection of ancient monuments SPAB", he tried to set up standards for the idea of preservation following the "Anti-restoration" notion by replacing "restoration" with "protection" as daily care to halt decay. By the end of the 19th century, Camillo Boito became a pioneer in Italian conservation who proposed his conservation guidelines in 1883

with new parameters of treatments and interventions and also established the first Italian charter in 1884. He developed a philological approach that harshly opposed the dualism between the "Revival restoration" and the "pure protection" as expressed clearly in one of his lectures *"with rare exceptions, only one wise course of action remains: to leave them alone or, where necessary to free them of restorations"* (Philippot, 1996). By this statement, Camillo declared the end of the "imitative restoration", and promoted his measures to restore and preserve a monument while keeping the historical appearance and value, therefore, he sorted our building by age. Moreover, he affirmed that by distinguishing between the layers of treatments and the original buildings, we can restore severely damaged monuments paved the way to introduce the notion of "anastylosis".

2.2. The age of universal values

Toward the outbreak of world war I that lasted for 4 years and followed by world war II after two decades; Europe had witnessed a devastating and destabilizing era. The main casualties of these two wars were the historical city centres and the national monuments. The destruction of districts and the displacement of thousands of people urged the governments to find new strategies to rebuild their cities as fast as possible with moderate costs. The modern theories at that time promoted the standardization of building codes and planning principles that can be implemented easily everywhere.

The motive of rebuilding their societies encourages the European communities to share a wide range of "universal values". Therefore, the fundamental ideas of the French revolution expanded and led to a movement of ignoring the traditional ways of building and organizing cities to be able to face the massive global (Rezk & Rabie, 2019). Concerning the restoration of monuments, it reached another peak by broadening the scope of interventions and take into consideration the restoration on a bigger scale including parts of the urban fabric (Lamprakos, 2014). Moreover, as a natural consequence, the society itself started to build cultural awareness.

Following a series of conventions and treaties, the broad definition of restoration and monuments started to be redefined and take a new shape within the social context. The



universal values revolved around the word "Heritage" and its cultural significance after being introduced in Athens Charter in 1931 (Khodeir et al., 2016). The contribution of this international participation helped in identifying the values of buildings and peculiar ones. Moreover, they acquired a special interest in reusing the destructed city centres instead of contentiously rely on passive conservation. However, these efforts could not draw a proper framework and regulations for rehabilitation and integration of historical parts of the city with contemporary ones due to the various specialization in conservation after the 50s (Philippot, 1996). The modern and fast-growing tendencies developed the laboratory work and created an independent sector where intellectuals can have a prosperous debate that merges between scientific advancement and the humanities. the idea of "cultural conservation outreached other continents; each was trying to build their sensibility in dealing with heritage.

2.3. Urban conservation

In the following decade, historians discussed the notion of "urban conservation" based on the theoretical contribution of Cesare Brandi's writing and the "Teoria del Restauro" In 1963; His theories were valid for almost 20 years in Italy till the constitution of "Carta del Restauro" in 1972. Some historians believe that Brandi's work can be conspired as a foundation for a conservation school, as the characteristics of conservation were not standard but kept reforming based on the term "Reversibility" (Barassi, 2009). Regardless of his great contribution, his theory was subjective, limited, and contradicts the variety of technological methods at that time Brandi treated the buildings and artworks from all contexts and eras equally, neglecting their historic and social value.

2.4. International Charters

The following international conferences in the 20th century were devoted separately to a specific topic, the most prevailing movement at that time was the relationship between the community as a driving force in developing the idea of "cultural heritage" and their monuments. After the establishment of ICOMOS, they paid attention to the policies on rehabilitation in general and "adaptive reuse" in specific. Venice charter in 1964 played a substantial role in shaping the content and

focus of the international treaties by resolving the confusion between "conservation as a means of maintaining while the *restoration is a method to accentuate the aesthetic values*" (Yazdani Mehr, 2019) Such a global debate enhanced the idea of "Pluralism" of methodologies, where every context has a vast range of possibilities and choices in developing and regulating its approach towards their history.

2.5. The modern notion of the monument and the dilemma of value

In the 60s, the prevailing approach towards the realm of "Values" in conservation was influenced by the "historicism approach" which was imposed by Brandi and prioritized over the "Aesthetics values" of a monument (Rezk & Rabie, 2019). after almost two decades, the Venice charter had been revised and criticized by historians for endorsing the "historical" principles of determining "values" of the Athens charter and recasting them under the umbrella of "Universal values". Venice charter emphasized many unrelated articles regarding the authenticity of the monument and the principles of rehabilitation which caused and never-ending arbitrary explanation about the essence of "monument" (Lamprakos, 2014).

Alois Riegl, in 1903 developed his theory about the evaluation of monuments based on a set of values -instead of fixed values- that can shape the identity of the monument and can be investigated from the historical and the cultural dimension of the monument. his paper "the modern cult of the monument: it is charter and origin", can be considered as a profound base for studying the wide range of values and their attributes. The attributes reflect all the layers of the history of a monument, present, and future. He believed that the proper reading of the monument comes from the proper understanding of the integrated attitudes and how they identify the real values of a monument, therefore the proper conservation plan.

2.6. The development of Authenticity

The growing notion of preservation took a refined shape as a synthesis of conferences and conventions. A key twist in defining preservation science was Nara Document in 1994 (Szmelter, 2013). With the expansion of the definition of conservation, historians had to



face the struggle in determining the authenticity of monuments and context in the far east; in contexts that are entirely different from the European ones. The term itself had to be re-considered to be able to determine a framework to assess the authenticity of monuments that can extend to include the authenticity of the beliefs and notions.

2.7. The 20th century -Money ethics-

the 21st century is the acme of the holistic notion of "cultural heritage", It adopted and integrated both aspects of heritage; tangible and intangible manifested in language, customs, beliefs, and social norms. The focus on the notion of tangible heritage started recently after the year 2000, but it was discussed for the first time officially in the international debate in the "folklore and traditional culture" UNESCO recommendations in 1989.

The expanding definition of conservation influenced social awareness and heritage recognition especially during globalization and the era of mass tourism (Orbasli, 2002). Globalization altered the importance of heritage to be seen as a national income source from an economical point of view. Thus, new policies emerged to use heritage in generating income especially after the release of the world heritage list in 1972. The universal vision of heritage appeared again behind the so-called "international heritage" (Rössler, 2006). Compared to any other science, the science of conservation is considered as a very dangerous process that took shape rapidly in the last 60 years; a science that is evolved based on analytical theories, critiques, and debates on the empirical treatments and special cases with both shortcomings and virtues.

3. Conservation in Egypt

The old eastern civilization, particularly Egypt has developed a sensibility regarding their heritage recognition, but not as a "memory" out of admiration and appreciation, but as a "memory" that can be lived, experienced, and be expressed in everyday activities and lifestyle of various communities (Szmelter, 2013). The definition of restoration as the continuous care of buildings has always been practised in Egypt in all eras since the pharaohs. However, the scientific meaning of the conservation process has been introduced in Egypt at the end of the last century. The old civilizations in Egypt

developed their methods of preserving their monuments as well as the larger context that has significant importance such as necropolises and temples to satisfy their "divine leadership" notion and to manifest the idea of "eternity". The authenticity of the intent of the builder is a profound role in preservation in Egypt; they aimed at making their monuments last till the afterlife.

The following epoch and the spread of Islam changed the beliefs and the ideologies of the society and the conception of preservation with new principles that conform to the principle of Islam. The new conception was described as "Eslah" which means "repair"; the regular repair of a public building that has a certain function in serving people and should be functioning for the benefit of the society. During the Mamluk era, a certain typology of public buildings called "Al-Waqf" flourished and was constructed all over the country. the efficiency of these buildings is strictly related to "Sustainability" and self-sustaining mechanism. "Such a typology that constitutes almost 93% of the Islamic heritage stock in Cairo had a regular maintenance plan until Mohamed Ali changed their maintenance policies, and the building's condition started to decline".

The significant event and natural disasters that can cause damage to architectural stock are the main motives behind special restoration campaigns in Egypt during the Mamluk era. Their appreciation of the remarkable buildings and their desire to keep expressing the authority and glory of their power helped in shaping a well-defined track in restoration in Egypt (Steinberg, 1996). After an earthquake, there was three main commission led by three different rulers dedicated to the restoration work of the affected building and rebuilding some of them. Each commission had a specific target and was following a particular way of restoration, however, according to historians, all of the commissioners shared one main common philosophical principle; which the differentiating between the layers of intervention from the original parts of the buildings, and till now this is the unbreakable role in ethical conservation action.

3.1. What shaped an old cultural problem that affected the conservation policies in Egypt today?

All the variable historical events, different movements in administrative frameworks,



and critical times, in the past, have influenced and formed an accumulated attitude in perceiving and recognizing the cultural heritage. In Europe, the world wars and the era of modernization changed radically the societies and the face of conservation; as they were striving to save the remains of their cities.

3.2. The French invasion and “Description de l’Egypte”

Despite the political aims behind The French occupation of Egypt for three years from 1798 to 1801; it significantly altered the conservation and heritage recognition. One of the unrevealed aims is to sort out the treasures of Egypt and document them for economic reasons. Thus, Napoleon appointed 150 scholars to accomplish his scientific expedition to study the economical, historical, and social situation in Egypt and produce the masterwork “*Description de l’Egypte*”. The extensive documents that include sketches, drawings of public life that depicted the Egyptians daily life, mappings, remarks regarding the social and economic activities, produced the foundations of “modern Egyptology”. The various copies and volumes of this work, besides many art pieces from Egypt, had been transferred to Europe there, which formed an exceptional tendency towards Egypt and its cultural legacy (Rezk & Rabie, 2019). The international interest in studying its antiquities encourage the commissioners to develop their work in restoring historical monuments in Cairo but they approached the buildings from an orientalism perspective and imposed the tendency of “orientalists revival style”.

3.3. The role “Comite de monuments de l’Egypte” in protecting monuments

The first formal institution that was mandated with the maintenance of heritage was the “le Comite de monuments de l’Egypte” in 1881. After the French occupation, Egypt became under the authority of Mohamed Ali who had a striving aim to modernize Egypt. He proceeded with transforming Cairo to be “Paris

3.4. Pan Arabism

With the declaration of the Republic of Egypt and its independence, a new nation was established by Gamal Abdul-Nasser based following a secular notion to sustain the modernization plan, which naturally deepened the gap between the original traditional

(Mahdy, 2017). On the contrary, the critical times and instability made the heritage in Egypt more prone to further deterioration, vandalism, and looting. Such deterioration can be observed during the French colonization and the era of modernization and their impact on the social awareness of their culture.

of the east” by altering its original fabric passing over the national identity as an extension to Napoleon’s intentions. The Parisian boulevards cutting through the historic fabric had a profound impact on changing the face of Cairo and erased many historical buildings for the sake of this project.

Another major impact is the rift between the community and “Al-Awqaf” after the termination of its original maintenance policies. He formed another administration dedicated to the maintenance of public buildings, which afterwards, put “AL-Awqaf” out of service, and left for decades to deteriorate and be exploited (Mahdy, 2017). By the time, these godforsaken buildings lost their role in the society because the secular administrations planned to control heritage instead of preserving it and couldn’t replace the traditional religious management of such typology.

The committee was run by foreigners mainly French that imposed the “stylistic” approach as the prevailing attitude towards the monument. The “orientalism” direction lasted for almost a century and considered the Islamic legacy as “dead buildings” with no value to their society or function (Mahdy, 2017). This rift between the community and their heritage is similar to the rift in Europe after the french revolution in a deliberate attempt to separate heritage from their cultural context. Nevertheless, the majority of the Egyptian population were not aware of this schism which reflects on the very low level of awareness of their cultural heritage and identity, even the educated elite who were influenced by orientalism and didn’t comprehend the disconnection in the history and its consequences.

identity of the society and the new imposed ones. Due to the political unrest and the was in 1965, many conservation projects stopped and decreasing the international funds for minimal restorations with more governmental restrictions.

After the war and delocalizing thousands of Suez Canal and Sinai displaced inhabitants into



dilapidated buildings in old Cairo, the condition of the buildings became worst until the 70s when Cairo was listed as a world heritage site. The national and international attention it gained as a national income source made it liable for more exploitation (Frey & Steiner, 2011). For almost a decade, the projects and interventions at that time in historic Cairo aimed at supporting tourism disregarding the locals who had been delocalized and left their place where they built a coherent cultural network.

3.5. The Egyptian revolution in 2011

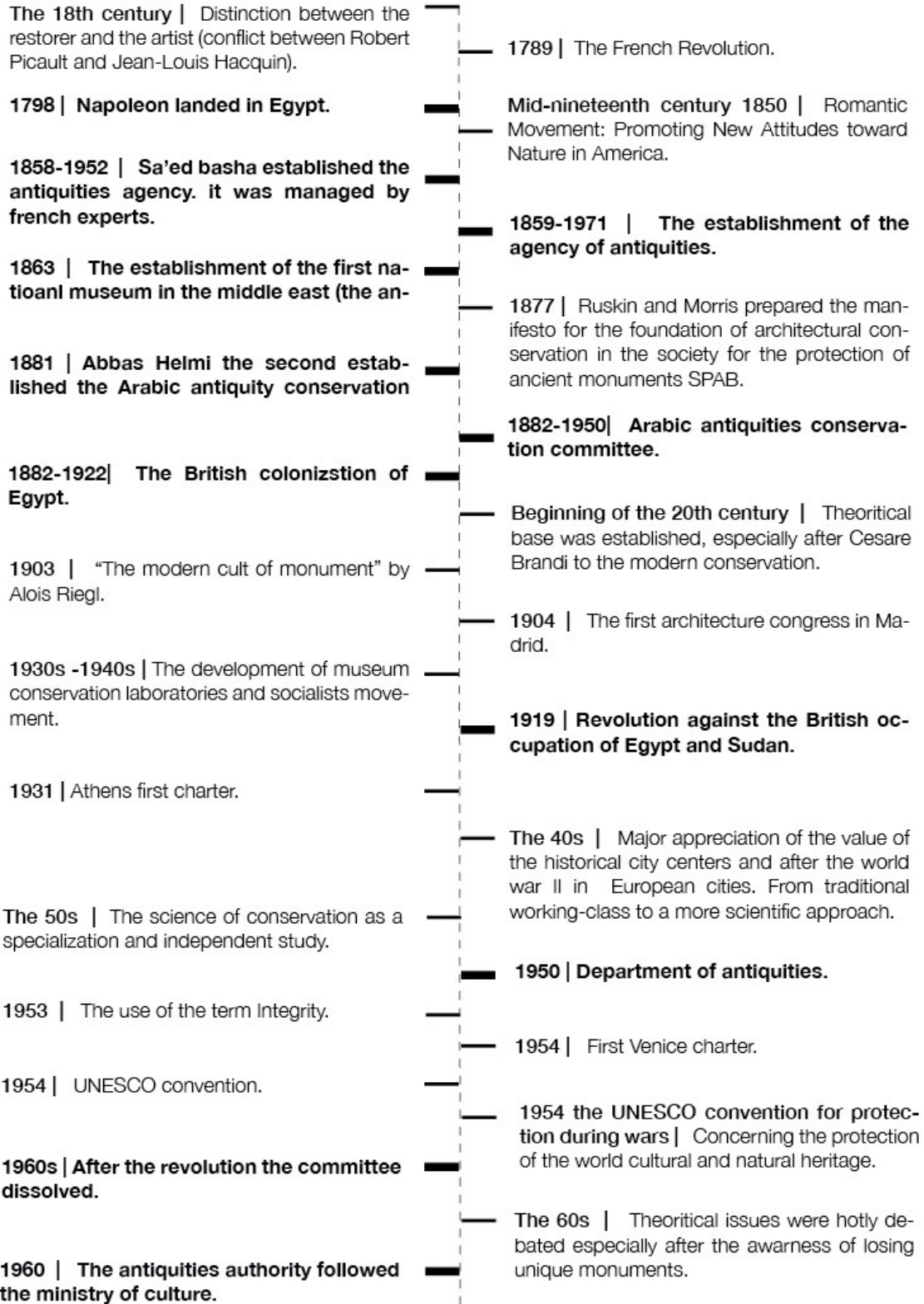
In the 80s, Egypt concentrated its efforts on political and economic strikes. The establishment of various institutions with ambiguous agendas and vague laws affected the conservation track because of the inconsistent coordination between the different parties. The conservation actions were not very prosperous because the state was weak and couldn't save heritage buildings from exploitation and vandalism. After the revolution in 2011, the situation became worst and worst; bands of outlaws broke into museums, looted artefacts, and demolished some heritage buildings. By statistics from the NOUH organization, Egypt has lost more than 70% of the heritage buildings in the three years following the revolution.

The revolution and its subsequent uprisings and turmoil, uncovered serious facts regarding the conservation approach in Egypt. moreover, the halt of tourism left the heritage buildings in complete ignorance from the government and the absence of risk management. However, the lack of funds and the termination of conservation projects saved many buildings from inappropriate and dreadful interventions and further destroy the revolution flattened the conservation practices, which gives us a pause and time to rethink our national plans and strategies.

4. Why do we need an Egyptian national charter?

The whole process of conservation starts with values and ends with values that are shaped differently according to the context. According to the nature of the evolution of the science on conservation in the western side of the world where the context changes radically than the eastern parts, and for a long time we have been following the tendency of universal values; the true recognition of the true values of heritage emerges from the inclusive analysis and reading of the history of a certain context and element to be able to develop a robust consciousness (Meskell, 2014). The recent approaches evoke the uniqueness and originality of heritage which is strictly linked to the social and cultural accumulation and it needs to be preserved itself.

Today's historians claim that the future of conservation should be the domain where culture and technology become the two faces of one coin and urge the need of developing a national approach taking into consideration previous experiences. A national approach is drawn from the social reaction to the conservation actions. Riegl claiming that the process of building a social consciousness should follow an uninterrupted history (Rezk & Rabie, 2019). Consequently, it's essential to follow a scientific methodology to evaluate the cultural actions in conservation projects and to recognize the various set of old and new values according to their defined attributes after the proper study of the history of monuments and the nature of the society, and their level of consciousness. However, such an essential step is still not present in Egypt because the society didn't shape his awareness of his cultural heritage regardless of the voices and efforts calling for a national charter.



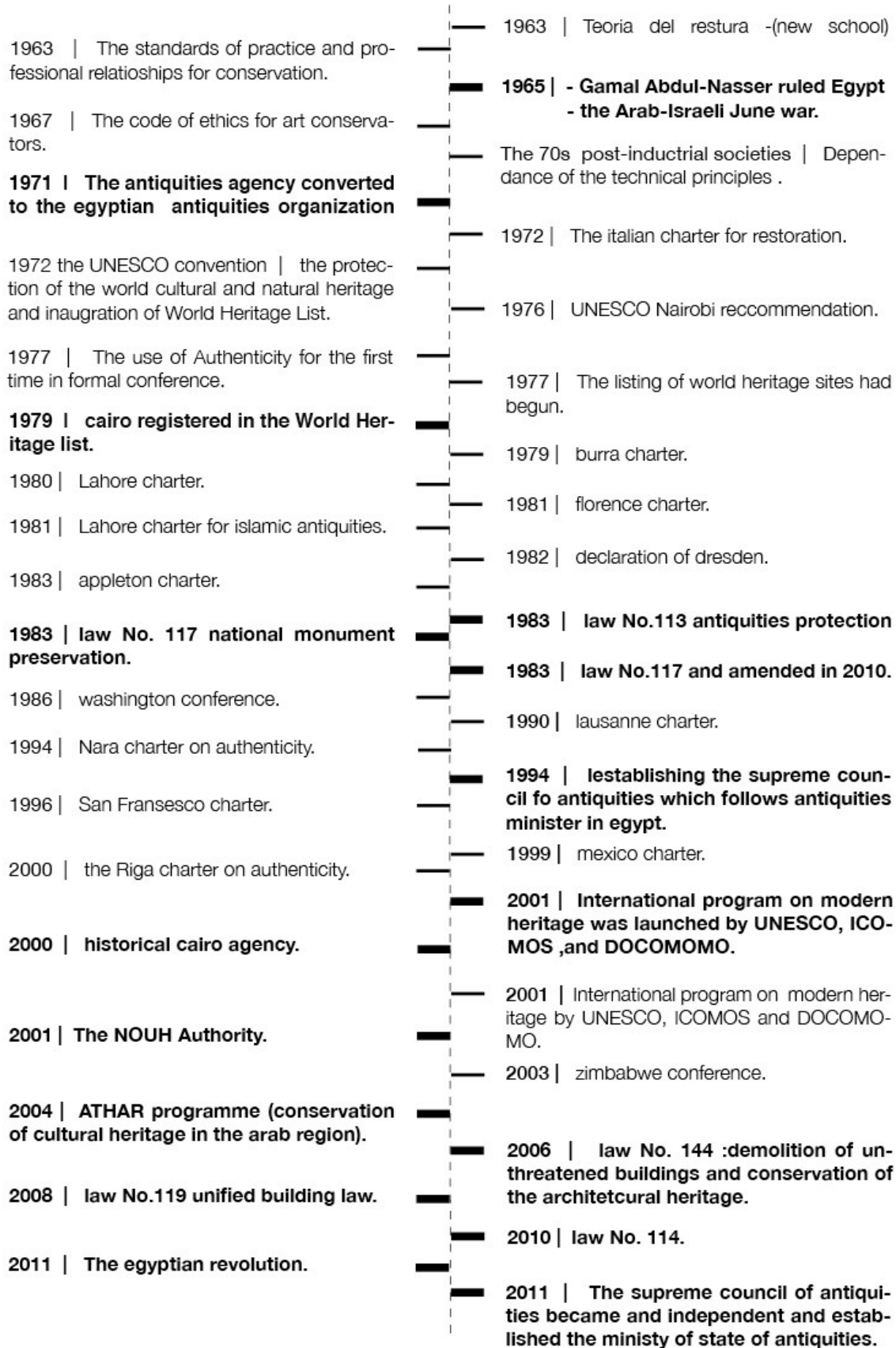


Figure 1. A timeline of the evolution of conservation in the international track and the Egyptian one in bold (Developed by the authors).



5. Conclusions

Before the evolution of "cultural heritage" as a concept and a scientific field, the protection of heritage buildings and monuments, the conservation was formed through three main stages. First, the idea of restoration during the renaissance was characterized by "stylistic restoration" as a result of the romantic approach towards national monuments. Second; the idea of preservation provokes the mere protection of buildings from further deterioration. And finally, the idea of conservation includes both restoration and preservation but following a scientific approach in determining the level of intervention. After the modernization, the definition of conservation kept changing in theories and treaties to be more inclusive and tackle more social and cultural aspects in an attempt to develop a mechanism to assess heritage buildings and identify their values.

The broad notion of conservation surpassed the western boundaries after globalization and started to take another shape and be adapted to fit in another context and function properly. But such a progression was limited to a certain case, therefore the limitation and vagueness of some principles were revealed and had to be revised to be applicable somewhere else. The Cultural response to conservation actions and the greater idea of preserving heritage do not contradict each other's philosophically nor morally, in other words, the recasting of conservation plans based on the social, cultural, and economical dimensions of society urges the need for a national charter that conforms to the needs and essence of the society.

Although The idea of protecting national monuments in Egypt was always there since the ancient Egyptians, Egypt couldn't develop its approach, nor the Egyptians managed to build a cultural consciousness towards their heritage due to the deliberated schism between the society and their continuous history. The various regimes dropped behind the national identity and the conservation actions were not linked to social existence. But all the international efforts and the global debate regarding the connectivity between successful conservation and the need for individual value-based assessing of monument; are valuable material for Egypt to establish its conservation management policies and to relink the people with their heritage.

For further investigations and a better understanding of the history of conservation in Egypt, extensive research and documentation of previous and current practices must be conducted and including all the needed data to be shared with the public. Moreover, further studies on social indicators are much needed to indicate the social response to conservation actions in Egypt, therefore better monitoring of the process and the after-plan phase.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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