



# THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON HISTORICAL MONUMENTS, 1933–1937

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## ABSTRACT

At the end of 1933, the International Commission on Historical Monuments (ICHM) was founded under the framework of the International Museums Office. The ICHM was a result of the discussions at the Athens Conference in 1931, at which the participants had explicitly expressed the wish to cooperate more closely internationally in the field of the conservation of cultural heritage. The ICHM considered itself a coordinating body for experience and documentation, a platform for exchange and a source of inspiration for the national administrations. They aimed to generate greater respect among the people for the testimonies of the past and to stimulate a spirit of international solidarity. Even before the ambitious goals of the Commission could bear fruit in practice, the disintegration of the international community put an abrupt end to the ideas of the Commission members around 1937.

In this research note, a brief overview of the institutional and personnel anchoring of the ICHM is given, likely to be an impulse for further research questions.

## KEYWORDS

Historical Monuments | Cultural Heritage | Intellectual Cooperation | Charter of Athens | Conservation

## INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Under the impression of the First World War, the League of Nations was founded in 1919. However, cultural cooperation was not mentioned in the statutes of the League of Nations. Three years later, in 1922, the International Commission for Intellectual Cooperation/ Commission Internationale de Coopération Intellectuelle (ICIC) was founded within the League of Nations, also based in Geneva. Its purpose was to promote international cultural and intellectual exchange between scientists and researchers and to contribute to peace among nations through cultural understanding. The committee initially consisted of 12, later of 19 people and came together for the first time in summer 1922 under the leadership of Henri Bergson<sup>1</sup>. To support this commission, the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC)/ Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle (IICI) was founded another three years later. It was not based in Geneva, but in Paris (Cladders, 2018: 74-75; Rogan, 2014: 177, footnote 2)<sup>2</sup>.

As far as the preservation of cultural heritage is concerned, the establishment of the International Museum Office (IMO)/ Office internationale des musées (OIM), initiated by the IIIC in 1926, was a decisive step towards institutionalising cultural heritage issues.

The IMO is a direct predecessor of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which still operates under the umbrella of UNESCO. At that time, the IMO dealt with cultural heritage issues, especially archaeological finds that entered museums after excavations and was therefore the important organisation dealing with cultural heritage.

The IMO organised the first explicit international conference on conservation of artistic and historical

monuments from 21<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> October 1931, named after its venue: the "Athens Conference" or "International Conference of Experts on the Protection and Conservation of Monuments of Art and History" (Ohba, 2017: 99). The conference realised the wish for an international meeting of conservation experts, which had probably already been expressed for the first time ten years earlier at the archaeological "Congrès international d'histoire de l'art" in Paris in 1921 and renewed in 1930 at the "International Conference on Conservation of Works of Art" in Rome (Iamandi, 1997: 18)<sup>3</sup>.

Vice-president of the Athens conference was German archaeologist Georg Karo, who at that time, was director of the German Archaeological Institute (GAI), an important player in German foreign cultural policy<sup>4</sup>. One hundred and twenty experts from twenty-four countries participated in the discussions, nevertheless the participants primarily came from Europe. Italy and France were represented with 25 and 19 delegates respectively, as was the host country Greece (21), followed by Belgium with 6 delegates. Switzerland, the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries as well as Poland, and the Czech Republic had also sent a few representatives to Athens. Germany, Austria, and England were represented by one expert each (Karo, 1932: 37).

Whereas the previous year's meeting in Rome (13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> October 1930) focused on the conservation of works of art in painting<sup>5</sup>, the participants in Athens took up this idea and explicitly extended the theme to the conservation of architectural monuments (Jokilehto, 2011: 3). The agenda had six main topics: "statement of various legislative provisions concerning the protection and preservation of monuments of artistic and historical interest; general principles for

the restoration of monuments; damage resulting from age and atmospheric influences; surroundings of monuments and protection of sites; the utilization of monuments; the role of the international museums-office" (OIM, 1933: 3)<sup>6</sup>.

In his report, Karo lamented the lack of opportunity for discussion during the extensive program. He emphasised the "preparatory" character the meeting had had (Karo, 1932: 40). The Athens Conference was intended to be the impetus for a coordinated international cooperation in the field of monument preservation, "[...], in a way, the introduction to the studies which the [International Museums] Office proposes to pursue in this field. It afforded the experts an opportunity of examining several questions to a general order and, at the same time, of drawing up a program for future activities of the Office" (League of Nations, 1932: 1827).

There was a consensus among the participants that the work of national experts must be institutionally

embedded to effectively bundle research results and practices in heritage conservation and to incorporate them into the practice of national heritage conservation (Karo, 1932: 40).

By the end of the congress, conclusions were drawn, divided into (A) General Conclusions and the (B) Proceedings of the Conference on the anastylosis of the Acropolis monument in Athens (OIM 1933: 18-23; Ohba, 2017: 99-100). The general conclusions related to the agenda: General principles such as respect for the works of the past as well as administrative and legislative measures regarding historical monuments. The participants agreed to collect already existing legislation in the different countries, to ultimately compare (League of Nations, 1932: 1776). The conclusions drawn as Part A later led to the "Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments". This Athens Charter was published in 1933 by the International Museums Office under the title "La conservation des monuments d'art et d'histoire"<sup>7</sup>.

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION CONCERNING CULTURAL HERITAGE

Number VII of the General Conclusions of the Athens Charter was dedicated to "The Conservation of Monuments and International Collaboration". The participants wrote that the "conservation of the artistic and archaeological property of mankind is one that interests the community of the States". Euripide Foundoukidis, the Secretary General of the IMO, had explicitly raised the concept of the "common heritage of mankind" in a radio address in the run-up to the Athens Conference as a central point for the discussions. The concept has been "emerging for some time now" (Olender, 2021: 142), Foundoukidis said. The participants of the congress hoped that the states will cooperate more. This was not a matter of course and was indeed a new idea. Until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, heritage conservation was a deeply

national matter. International cooperation in the field of conservation of cultural heritage had existed primarily in the case of armed conflict (Trötschel-Daniels, 2022: 270). The fact that states were now thinking about how to protect cultural heritage, even more: a common cultural heritage, in a collaborative manner even in times of peace, were indeed "real innovations in the international order", as Jules Destrée, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the IMO on the Work of the Athens Conference, stated in his report (Olender, 2021: 145).

Part of the Athens Charter were seven resolutions that preceded the actual text of the Charter. They were also known as the "Carta del Restaura", together with the General Principles (Iamandi, 1997: 17, footnote 2).

1. <https://atom.archives.unesco.org/downloads/ag-1-international-institute-of-intellectual-co-operation-iiic.pdf>.

2. All the directors of the Institute between 1926 and 1939 were French. IIIC was therefore suspected, especially by the German side, of being part of French foreign cultural policy.

<https://atom.archives.unesco.org/downloads/ag-1-international-institute-of-intellectual-co-operation-iiic.pdf>.

3. "Conférence internationale pour l'étude des méthodes scientifiques appliquées à l'examen et à la conservation des oeuvres d'art": <https://roerichsmuseum.website.yandexcloud.net/DD/DD-1157.pdf>

4. Karo was director of the GAI in Athens from 1930 to 1936. Karo was Protestant, and "known for his German nationalist views" (Schwingenstein, 1977), but had Jewish ancestors. In February 1936, the Reich Minister for Science, Education and National Education Siegmund Kunisch had written to the President of the DAI Theodor Wiegand in Berlin that "the Führer and Reich Chancellor [raises] no objections to Professor Dr Karo being left in office by way of exception until 31 March 1936, and if necessary also until 31 March 1937", BAArch Berlin, R/5101/24334, 18.02.1936. Nevertheless, Karo had to leave the DAI in Athens at the end of 1936 because of his Jewish origins and the occupational ban imposed by the National Socialists and returned to Munich; in 1939 he emigrated to the USA until 1953.

5. Summary of that meeting in the journal *Mouseion* 13-15/1931. This meeting was originally planned to take place in Paris in 1929, had ultimately to be postponed due to lack of resources after the economic collapse in 1929, Olender, 2021: 142.

6. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6524895f/f15.item.textImage>.

7. The Athens Charter 1931 did not bear the name by which it is known today. It is not to be confused with the other "Charter of Athens". This second "Charter of Athens" goes back to the IV<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), which was held, also in Athens, but in the year 1933. The conclusions drawn there were published ten years after the conference in 1943, first anonymously in fact edited by the architect Le Corbusier (Iamandi, 1997).

In the first resolution, the participants called for the establishment of “international organisations for Restoration on operational and advisory levels” as a conclusion of the Congress in Athens<sup>8</sup>.

Following this resolution, the ICIC requested the League of Nations in 1932, soon after the end of the Athens Conference, to submit the following recommendations to the member states: the states “should establish closer and more concrete co-operation with each other for the purpose of ensuring the conservation of monuments and works of art”. In a second recommendation, the ICIC called on member states to ensure that respect for monuments, regardless of the era, is conveyed to

children and young people by educators in the respective countries, but also “extended to the general public with a view to associating [them] in the protection of the records of any civilisation”<sup>9</sup>. A year after the Athens Conference, on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1932, the National Assembly of the League of Nations recommended the ICIC’s proposals to the member states [fig.01]. At the suggestion of the International Museum Office, the ICIC, at its meeting in July 1933, forwarded the proposal to the Council and General Assembly of the League of Nations to establish an International Commission on Historical Monuments within the International Museum Office. This proposal was adopted by the Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1933 and by the General Assembly on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1933.



Fig 01. © United Nations Archives at Geneva. LON Archives. Photo A13-001  
One year after the Athens Conference, in October 1932, the National Assembly of the League of Nations adopted a resolution by the ICIC to establish more concrete cooperation in the field of monuments preservation.

8. <https://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-texts/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/167-the-athens-charter-for-the-restoration-of-historic-monuments>, Resolution No. 1.

9. UNESCO Archives, FR PUNES AG 1-ICI-OIM-[1934]-34, IICI0000004251, Le Programme de la Commission Internationale des Monuments Historiques, p. 2.

## FOUNDOKIDIS AS PREPARER OF THE COMMISSION

The members of the newly to establish commission should be appointed by the respective governments of the countries and should be representatives of the national fine-arts administrations. The International Commission on Historical Monuments (own abbreviation: ICHM) was to be operated by the IMO (Melman, 2020: 52). Euriptide Foundoukidis, who was Secretary of IMO at that time, was chosen to be Secretary-General of the ICHM<sup>10</sup>.

Foundoukidis certainly is not generally known, but he is not “completely forgotten” (Melman, 2020: 51) either. Karo describes his coeval as “extremely enterprising” (Karo, 1932: 37), he was “multilingual and open-minded” (Kott, 2014: 210). Foundoukidis was born in Greece in 1894. However, he was educated in Paris, at the Institut des hautes études internationales and the École des hautes études sociales. He worked as an editor for the Greek magazine Phos and as an advisor to the Greek embassy in Paris (Stöckmann, 2015).

In January 1929, Foundoukidis began working as an attaché at the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation. Only a few months later, in April 1929, he became Secretary of the International Museums Office and, from 1931, Secretary-General there. He held this position for fifteen years until 1946 (Stöckmann, 2015). With Foundoukidis’ assumption of office, the IMO launched numerous international conferences with “a huge number of participants” (Kott, 2014: 210).

His first task in relation to the International Commission on Historical Monuments was to draw up a work program for the new body. To this end, he called together a six-member expert panel. These experts were invited to Paris in November 1933. In October 1933, he had already been able to win high-ranking and knowledgeable experts from Austria, France, Spain, Great Britain and Italy.

The meeting in Paris was chaired by Roberto Paribeni, former Director-General of Antiquities and Fine Arts

and member of the Reale Accademia d’Italia; Ricardo de Orueta y Duarte, Director General of Fine Arts Spain, Leodegar Petrin, President of the Federal Monuments Office in Vienna, Raleigh Radford, Conservator in Great Britain and Louis Hauteceœur, Conservator of the National Museums in Paris, took part in the meeting as well.

The fact that no representative from Germany attended the meeting, was due to the political situation at the time. In Germany, the restructuring of the state by the National Socialists was in full process. Their party had won the Reichstag election in March 1933 and was pursuing a national and fascist program. On 14<sup>th</sup> October 1933, the government under Adolf Hitler had announced that Germany would withdraw from the League of Nations.

Foundoukidis, however, had long been in constant exchange with the former director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Leipzig, Richard Graul, who had been the coordinator of the German delegation at the Rome meeting in 1930 (Cladders, 2018: 76). At the beginning of October 1933, they mutually had considered either Robert Hiecke or Paul Clemen as a German representative for the expert commission<sup>11</sup>. Foundoukidis finally addressed his request to Robert Hiecke. Hiecke was a trained architect, subsequently conservator of the province of Saxony for many years, and from 1918 head of monument conservation in Prussia (Bornheim gen. Schilling, 1953: 194-197). In 1933, he was a ministerial councilor in the Prussian Ministry for Science, Art, and National Education, based in Berlin. Only one day before the planned meeting in Paris, Hiecke announced by telegram that he would not attend the expert panel. Foundoukidis wrote to Graul, sobered, that under “the present circumstances” he could only resign himself to the fact that there was no German member on this committee<sup>12</sup>. The expert panel met in Paris on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1933 without a German delegate.

10. UNESCO Archives, FR PUNES AG 1-ICI-OIM-XIV-1, IICI0000002516, Commission internationale des Monuments historiques. Circulaires.

11. UNESCO Archives, FR PUNES AG 1-ICI-OIM-XIV-5, Allemagne, IICI0000002520. <https://atom.archives.unesco.org/uploads/r/5c00m/b/2/8/b281cd5ae48094778abd452f71aba5a541f451002c3543ecd902251fc72c01af/0000002520.pdf>

Hiecke had taken over the chairmanship of the annual congress called “Denkmalpfegetag” from Clemen in 1932 and in this capacity chaired the Denkmalpfegetag, which took place in Kassel in 1933, for the first time; Hiecke, 1934: IX-XI; Meier, 1933: 195.

12. UNESCO Archives, FR PUNES AG 1-ICI-OIM-XIV-5, Allemagne, IICI0000002520: Foundoukidis to Graul, 20.11.1933: “Étant donné la situation actuelle je ne pouvais que me résigner à l’absence d’un membre allemand à ce” Comité.

The panel of experts wrote a letter to Graul saying they hoped the current situation in Germany would improve soon and that Graul would then be able to work with the International Museum Office again<sup>13</sup>.

A few months later, however, the German Embassy announced that the German government would not participate in the ICHM<sup>14</sup>.

A total of 68 countries were invited to nominate a delegate to the Commission<sup>15</sup>. The invitation was also addressed

to countries such as Brazil, Costa Rica and the United States of America, which were no longer or never have been members of the League of Nations at that time. With Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, China, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tunisia and the United States of America eventually half of the countries contacted appointed a delegate<sup>16</sup>.

## THE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE ICHM

In November 1933, the panel of experts drew up a work program for the International Commission on Historical Monuments to be established. Basically, it was determined that the ICHM only existed to coordinate national efforts in the field of historical monuments.

The final report of the meeting devoted much attention to the concept of “historical monument”. In the context of the expert panel, a “historical monument” was understood to be an “edifice” in whose preservation the general public has an interest because of its significance for history and especially for art history. The definition of what is to be understood by a “historical monument” also serves to limit the scope of the Commission’s activities. In any case, buildings should be included, which should be judged both by their character and by their use. A comparison of national regulations showed that the surroundings of a monument should also be included in the term.

“The acceptance of this expression [...] plays an important part in the framing and evolution of legislation of jurisprudence, as well as in the application of laws and administrative regulations”<sup>17</sup>. The ICHM was to become active where it was necessary to mediate between different areas of monument preservation. According to the commission’s self-image, the protection of historical buildings was not just a matter of antiquities or fine arts. The care for historic buildings was also a matter of urban planning, hygiene, agriculture, and internal affairs. The Commission’s activities were therefore to include “moral and educative actions”, “legislative and administrative actions”, “technical actions” as well as “international documentation”<sup>18</sup>.

Within the framework of moral and educational actions, the ICHM would have wanted to work towards further deepening the idea of a common cultural heritage, following on from the Athens Charter.

13. UNESCO Archives, FR PUNES AG 1-IICI-OIM-XIV-5, Allemagne, IICI0000002520: Foundoukidis to Graul, 20.11.1933: “Vous voulez bien exprimer l’espoir de voir s’améliorer promptement la situation actuelle afin de vous permettre de continuer votre collaboration à l’Office. C’est également mon plus vif désir”.
14. UNESCO Archives, FR PUNES AG 1-IICI-OIM-XIV-5, Allemagne, IICI0000002520: Memo of conversation German Ambassador m. Kühn with Foundoukidis, 6.4.1934.
15. UNESCO Archives, International Museums Office (IMO), FR PUNES AG 1-IICI-OIM-XIV-70, Constitution de la Commission internationale des Monuments historiques. Généralités et correspondance, ICI0000002585, <https://atom.archives.unesco.org/uploads/r/5c00m/5/1/2/5123258c6e0bb791b82ebd10d7e9c1b90b9404da67350bab58ecaaf2c31e4d16/0000002585.pdf>
16. UNESCO Archives, International Museums Office (IMO), FR PUNES AG 1-IICI-OIM-XIV-70, Constitution de la Commission internationale des Monuments historiques. Généralités et correspondance, ICI0000002585, Liste des membres de la Commission internationale des monuments historiques.
17. UNESCO Archives, FR PUNES AG 1-IICI-OIM-[1934]-34, IICI0000004251, Le Programme de la Commission Internationale des Monuments Historiques: 4–5.
18. UNESCO Archives, FR PUNES AG 1-IICI-OIM-[1934]-34, IICI0000004251, Le Programme de la Commission Internationale des Monuments Historiques: 6.

Not only those countries in which the treasures of the world community are located should benefit from it. The sense of responsibility for the common treasures could be strengthened in early childhood through “a spirit of tolerance and international solicitude”.

In the area of “legislative and administrative action”, the ICHM offered to help those countries that did not yet had their own stable heritage legislation and administration to draw on the experience of other countries when

drafting legislation. In addition, the ICHM wanted to be a coordinating body for technical support on practical heritage issues. A network of technical experts, to which national administrations could turn, was to be built. Finally, the Commission wanted to pool the experiences, regulations, and publications of the nation-states. As a long-term goal, it stated that it wanted to promote the publication of documents prepared by qualified technicians that present monuments both in detail and in general scientifically, historically, and aesthetically<sup>19</sup>.

## GONE BEFORE IT BEGAN

After months of preparation, the ICHM was able to appear as a body in the course of 1934. As an organisation subordinate to the International Museums Office, the ICHM participated in the international congresses which, after Rome (1930) and Athens (1931), continued in 1934 in Madrid and 1937 in Cairo.

The meeting in Madrid in 1934 was primarily devoted to questions of museology (Jamin, 2017) and thus only affected a marginal area of historical monuments.

The 1937 conference was devoted to historical excavations. The International Conference on Excavations/Conférence internationale des Fouilles was held in Cairo from 9<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> March 1937. As early as March 1935 – apparently the Secretary-General of the IICI, Daniel Secrétan – had proposed to organize a conference to discuss administrative and technical problems in excavations<sup>20</sup>. The ICHM took over the auspices for this conference<sup>21</sup>. The aim of the conference was to lay the foundations for an “ideal system of administration of excavations”<sup>22</sup>. The Final

Act of the International Conference, published by the IMO in 1940 (IMO, 1940), was in many ways the basis for the UNESCO Recommendations on International Principles applicable to Archaeological Excavations, adopted by the General Conference on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1956 (Price, 1995: 8).

Before the ICHM could put its ambitious program into action, the global political climate deteriorated, which stood and stands in the way of the success of international associations such as the ICHM (Glendinning, 2013: 200). The beginning of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 once again brought questions about the protection of monuments in times of war into focus<sup>23</sup>. Ultimately, in December 1937, Italy declared its withdrawal from the League of Nations. Thus, after the withdrawal of Japan and Germany in 1933, another permanent member of the Council of the League of Nations had left. The community of states thus fell further apart. Roberto Paribeni, who had still participated in November 1933 as one of the six experts in the elaboration of the work program for the

19. UNESCO Archives, FR PUNES AG 1-IICI-OIM-[1934]-34, IICI0000004251, Le Programme de la Commission Internationale des Monuments Historiques: 11.
20. UNESCO Archives, FR PUNES AG 1-IICI-OIM-XIV-71.b [1935-1936], IICI0000002587, Agenda for the meeting on 1 and 2 March 1935, <https://atom.archives.unesco.org/uploads/r/5c00m/6/e/f/6ef66777fef43df5ea1c4417a65c4b4687ad8223192ffdc9f8e66d10f7e71ce/0000002587.pdf>
21. International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC), Report of the Committee on the Work of its Nineteenth Plenary Session from July 12<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>, 1937. XII.A.2., S. 15, online: [https://biblio-archiv.unog.ch/Dateien/CouncilMSD/C-327-M-220-1937-XII\\_EN.pdf](https://biblio-archiv.unog.ch/Dateien/CouncilMSD/C-327-M-220-1937-XII_EN.pdf).
22. UNESCO Archives, FR PUNES AG 1-IICI-OIM-[CONF.Fouilles.1937]-O.I.M.71. 1937, 0000004291.pdf, Preliminary Report, Question 2, Administrative Organisation of Services <https://atom.archives.unesco.org/uploads/r/5c00m/7/a/4/7a465ac5c5437f278652cd976472918884a75b642a0b881107e699b3efc03b70/0000004291.pdf>
23. International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC), Report of the Committee on the Work of its Nineteenth Plenary Session from July 12<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>, 1937. XII.A.2., S. 15, online: [https://biblio-archiv.unog.ch/Dateien/CouncilMSD/C-327-M-220-1937-XII\\_EN.pdf](https://biblio-archiv.unog.ch/Dateien/CouncilMSD/C-327-M-220-1937-XII_EN.pdf).

ICHM in Paris, submitted his request for withdrawal from the Commission in January 1938<sup>24</sup>. After the 1937 conference on excavations in Cairo, the ICHM's archival record ends<sup>25</sup>.

The fascist world views virulent in Europe by the end of the 1930s and finally culminated in the Second World War abruptly interrupted the efforts for international cooperation in the field of cultural preservation.

However, these threads were picked up again immediately after the Second World War under the umbrella of UNESCO. Euripide Foundoukidis continued to work in the field of cultural heritage

conservation after the Second World War. At the constitutional meeting of the International Committee for Monuments at UNESCO, that took place from 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> October 1949 in Paris, Euripide Foundoukidis was one of the invited experts (Rehling, 2014: 117; Jokiletho, 2011: 7, footnote 22). Nevertheless, the processes are lengthy, and the committees cumbersome. Although the war lasted six years, it took five times as long to fill the intellectual gap left by the war and its nationalist environment. And so it took thirty years until the ideals and ideas of the interwar period could be implemented by the founding of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1964.

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