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The restorations of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe in Egypt: "Conservation" or "reinvention" of monuments? = Les restaurations du Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe en Égypte: « conservations » ou « réinvention » des monuments?

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Citation

Ishak Bakhoun, D. (2021, January 21). *The restorations of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe in Egypt: "Conservation" or "reinvention" of monuments? = Les restaurations du Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe en Égypte: « conservations » ou « réinvention » des monuments?*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3134742>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



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Issue Date: 2021-01-21

**Stellingen behorende bij het proefschrift
van Dina Ishak Bakhoun**

Propositions for the doctoral dissertation of Dina Ishak Bakhoun

1. The analysis of the *Comité's* restoration interventions (1880s-1950s) on Egypt's Islamic art and architecture is an indispensable endeavor for art historical studies as it influences our understanding of the 'authenticity' of these architectural palimpsests composed of historic and modern layers. It complements the existing and precious scholarly works with new insights on the 'conservation' or 'reinvention' of these monuments.
2. The *Comité's* restoration methodologies and techniques demonstrate profound historic and technical knowledge, exquisite traditional craftsmanship as well as innovation and advancement not only within the Egyptian context but also beyond it. Therefore, the *Comité's* actions and actors must be studied and placed within the international history of architectural conservation.
3. The *Comité* has been so far often viewed through the post-colonial lens. This dissertation argues that moving beyond this framework and carrying out factual investigations of the *Comité's* decisions in a contextualized manner reveals new nuanced narratives and interpretations. It is suggested not to overestimate the power of this government agency and to take into serious consideration its 'Egyptianness' (in terms of the specificities of its work environment) as well as the impact of its transfer from the Ministry of *Awqāf* [Islamic religious endowments] to the Ministry of Public Instruction in 1936 on the management of these religious monuments.
4. Interest in collecting material from the Orient and the Muslim World was growing during the nineteenth century. For the *Comité*, collecting historic publications, photographs and other material was a research strategy and a prerequisite for any restoration intervention. This undertaking along with the wealth of written and iconographic material produced by the *Comité*, its members, and those it collaborated with qualifies them to be considered as significant patrons and forefathers of the field of studying Egypt's Islamic as well as Coptic monuments.
5. Historic photographs taken between the mid 1800s and mid 1900s allow to visually understand the condition of buildings at a specific moment in history and to trace changes over time. This is the case when the photographs are accurately dated and inscribed. Nevertheless, such information is often either missing from photographs (and photographic collections/archives) or is not precise enough. Dated restoration interventions could provide significant details on these photographs and their context, allowing different archives in several countries to speak to each other.
6. In the past and the present each restoration and/or reconstruction intervention is a decision, taken based on certain sets of values and within specific political, social and cultural contexts. Investigating such decisions must take all these criteria into consideration and make sure not to make *a posteriori* judgements especially with regard to presently contested issues.

7. If the fires that destroyed the spire of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in 2019 and that of the Basilica of Saint Servaas in 1955 would have taken place hundred years ago, what would have been the proposed restoration methodologies and techniques, and what decisions would have been finally favored and taken?
8. If I lived hundred years ago, I would have loved to join the *Comité* and would have certainly enjoyed participating with its Egyptian and European members on many of the challenging projects they were working on. I would have been, however, the only woman among its members.