

# **EUROPEAN MARITIME HERITAGE**

## **The Charter of Barcelona -Commentary-**

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is a matter of fact that the majority of historic buildings, ships and other items, which have survived intact, have done so largely because they have been put to good use, even in recent years and even when that use is very different from the original. The inescapable fact is that continued use ensures that these treasures receive the funding and upkeep they require and deserve.

This was recognised more than 80 years ago by architects in respect of buildings. At the same time, they realised that it was important that any new usage did not destroy the very thing its curators were trying to save, whether by misuse or modification. To this end, an international group of architects and museum technicians drew up a code of best practice and published it in 1931 as the ATHENS CHARTER. This was subsequently reviewed and improved in 1964 when it was re-issued as the VENICE CHARTER.

Both Charters provided guidelines for those in charge of historic buildings how best to ensure their preservation for the future. The adoption of these guidelines has helped them to gain public support, not only in funding but also in tax concessions and other preferential treatment. Furthermore, the Charters' principles have influenced most of today's European laws on the protection of monuments.

### **WHY HAVE A CHARTER?**

For some time, the owners of traditional vessels and historians working in the field of maritime history have sought public recognition that adherence to traditional designs and methods of operation are undertaken, not for personal convenience, but in the public interest, i.e. the preservation of our maritime heritage. Hopefully such recognition should be reflected in exemption from draconian or superfluous safety measures as well as in public grant-funding or concessions from harbour, navigation or tax authorities.

Naturally such concessions should be granted only to vessels which achieve a certain level of historical authenticity, or where authentic techniques of traditional seamanship relevant to the vessel's history are regularly employed. The BARCELONA CHARTER provides a base-level for safeguarding quality. Consequently, if the vessel itself is treated in accordance with the principles of the Charter, and authentic seamanship procedures are employed in operating the vessel, it will attain this minimum level of authenticity which qualifies it as a traditional vessel.

The Charter will provide useful guidelines to owners of traditional vessels, even if they are not familiar with the general principles of keeping historic monuments and objects. Observance of these should ultimately enhance the authenticity and therefore the historic value of their vessels. “Restoration, maintenance, and operation according to the BARCELONA CHARTER” shall be indicative of quality.

A ship or boat which can “earn her keep” is more likely to be preserved for posterity than one subject to too many restrictions which may cause the vessel to be a drain on the owner’s resources. For this reason, a degree of flexibility has been recommended which will allow the vessel to be sailed or steamed while not destroying the intrinsic value of the artefact to be preserved.

Indeed, it is believed that the education of future generations and their interest in maritime heritage will be enhanced by, if not dependent on, the operation of traditional vessels, which, if in compliance with the terms of the Charter, will help to create a general understanding that such vessels help to fulfil the public interest in the conservation of both artefacts and skills.

European Maritime Heritage (EMH) believes that such a charter for the floating heritage was long overdue and has adapted the terms of the VENICE CHARTER as appropriate. It should be noted, however, that the terms of the BARCELONA CHARTER (so named because the concept of such a charter was first discussed and agreed at the EMH Congress held in Barcelona in 2001) have been extended to include the traditional seamen’s skills which many historians and curators consider as important as the vessels themselves.

## **COMMENTARIES on specific articles of the BARCELONA CHARTER**

- “Article 1”                    “evidence of a particular civilization or significant developments as well as traditional sailing, seamanship and maritime workmanship” may include a wide variety of specific historical aspects. For example, this can include a specific technical feature (engine, propulsion, rigging etc.) as well as participation of a vessel in a certain historic event. ”Traditional sailing, seamanship and maritime workmanship” are especially linked to such activities that are no longer part of regular maritime activity and require special knowledge, which will be forgotten without the continuation of their use (firing of a coal-fired-boiler, pure astronomical navigation, sailing without an auxiliary engine, etc.)
- “Article 2”                    Although “preservation, restoration and operation” mainly should be a practical demonstration of historical methods, modern science, techniques and facilities are not totally excluded. The products of research that can contribute to long-term preservation should be used where they are appropriate. Nevertheless this will not justify the use of modern materials solely because their use will make maintenance easier.
- “Article 3”                    “works of art” refers to a wider sense of art. In particular ship design or technical equipment can be seen as a kind of art in the sense of applied art.
- “Article 4”                    -
- “Article 5” :                    EMH believes that “using” a ship will not only help to ensure that she is safeguarded by the increase in funding which such use will generate and justify, but may also help to exhibit her to a wider audience.  
“Socially useful” may include an educational element but may also include a commercial development, e.g. conversion of an industrial or freight area for passenger use.  
With reference to “exterior layout”:  
the prohibition placed on any change to “the exterior layout of the ship” is aimed to protect outward appearance. It is important that activities undertaken to ensure the ship’s survival do not destroy the very thing we seek to preserve. Furthermore, there is a strong argument for saying that any change to the structure of a vessel should allow the owner to revert to the original design.

- “Article 6”: This is a recommendation.  
In other words, it is *desirable* that vessels ply in home waters but not *essential*. After all, by their very nature, ships and boats move.
- “Article 7” The historical study of the ship is meant to provide the background for any decision that might arise during restoration or maintenance. Its purpose is to prohibit any restoration based on supposition that “this is what it should have been” or pure conjecture.
- “Article 8” The limitation to materials whose “efficacy has been shown by scientific data and proved by experience” is part of the Charter, because any other material would lead to a situation of the ship as an experimental playground.  
This cannot be complying with the concept of a traditional watercraft as a singular artefact, because otherwise a failure of unproved material would result in additional restoration, resulting solely from the experiment and not from the long-time upkeep of the ship.
- “Article 9”: Ships may change over the years, whether due to changes in cargo carried, method of propulsion or some other reason, even during their commercial life.  
This article endorses restoration to any period of that life.
- “Article 10”: The objective here is to ensure that modern equipment should not be confused with the vessel’s original or traditional equipment.
- “Article 11” It is considered that modern safety or navigation devices are necessary for the safe operation of a traditional vessel. Nevertheless the addition of such components should be done in a way that does not interact with “the interesting parts of the ship, its traditional setting and the balance of its composition”
- “Article 12” Documentation is absolutely needed to secure the long-time quality of a vessel as a historic artefact, because otherwise it will not be possible in future times to decide which features are still original and what is material added later.

Commentary written by: Dr. Ingo Heidbrink (German Maritime Museum)  
Based on material by: David Morgan  
Supplementary Contributions: John Robinson

Version 3 / Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> 2003