

Lilian Hansar

ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF HERITAGE SCIENCE IN ESTONIA¹

It is a great honour to speak at the conference dedicated to the jubilarian and I am pleased to do it, even more so because Juhan plays an important role in my own development as a heritage protector. I have been both his colleague and student. In the following I would like to highlight various significant developments in Estonian heritage protection, which have been influenced by the esteemed jubilarian.

Although activities related to heritage protection started during the Renaissance in Europe, and examples of restorations can be given from the 19th century Estonia, we can only talk about scientific approaches to heritage protection and restoration since the mid-20th century, when *Teadusliku Restaureerimise Töökoda* (the Scientific Restoration Workshop – SRW) was created in 1950. Initially, that institution’s task was to register the condition of architectural monuments, study them and develop restoration proposals. Both the institution’s name and its activities stressed scientificity, which in the 1950s and ‘60s seemed to be the magic word of the era. In terms of heritage protection, it primarily meant that thorough studies had to be conducted prior to practical restoration works. Scientificity could also be used to justify any expansions of the SRW collectives,

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1 Prof. Lilian Hansar spoke at the conference “Landscapes of Memory. Juhan Maiste 70”, dedicated to Prof. Juhan Maiste’s jubilee on 30/09/2022 in the White Hall of the University of Tartu Museum.



Fig. 1. Juhan Maiste in 1981. Photo: Kalju Suur, Art Museum of Estonia.

but sometimes that term also influenced political decisions. For example, Tallinn Old Town was taken under state protection in 1966 partially because it was preceded by studies based on scientifically sound methods.

SRW included the elite of historians, architects and restorers at the time, led by art historian Helmi Üprus, who became Juhan Maiste's teacher and role model. At the end of the 1970s, *Vabariiklik Restaureerimisvalitsus* (the National Restoration Board – NRB), grown out of SRW, commenced a large-scale inventory of Estonian manors under the methodical leadership of Üprus, and Juhan Maiste also participated in it. NRB was my first workplace, too. I remember how young Juhan, who perhaps seemed a tad arrogant back then, without noticing anybody in the long corridors of the bureau, used to rush out to field works. We were a little jealous – who wouldn't have wanted to be a disciple and favourite of Helmi Üprus.

In 1978, NRB became *Kultuurimälestiste Riiklik Projekteerimise Instituut* (the National Planning Institute for Cultural Monuments – NIPCM), which ten years later, in 1988, was named *Riiklik Uurimis- ja Projekteerimisinstituut* (the National Institute of Research and Planning – NIRP). That institution, for the first time, had a research director and Juhan Maiste was appointed to the position. He had studied at International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) in Rome a few years prior to that nomination. That study period in Rome was probably one inspiration for Juhan Maiste's TV series *Kunstilinnad* (*Art Cities*), which was shown on ETV in 1991 and 1992.² The 40-year-old Juhan was already an art and architecture historian of engaging poetic expression and thorough knowledge. In one of the first episodes he says, 'We must tie ourselves up here in faraway Estonia in order not to leave, not to allow us to be enchanted by the music of sirens and the Mediterranean culture'. Nevertheless, only a few years later, teachers and students of the Estonian Academy of Arts were able to follow Juhan through many wonderful places in Greece and Italy.

It is possible that ICCROM's influence led Juhan Maiste to come up with the idea of establishing a Restoration School at the Estonian Academy of Arts; and he led the school since 1993. Thus, it was then,

² Eesti Rahvusringhääling, ERR, <https://arhiiv.err.ee/video/seeria/kunstilinnad> [accessed on 30/08/2023].



Fig. 2. Juhan Maiste at the conference “Landscapes of Memory. Juhan Maiste 70” on September 30, 2022. Photo: Aavo Kaine.

for the first time in Estonia, that the academic study of heritage protection started. Similar subjects – restoration of architecture and art, and heritage protection as a whole, are rare in European universities even today.

Juhan Maiste’s ambitions in developing the new academic subject at the Estonian Academy of Arts are evident in many of his activities back then. For example, Juhan designed a designated philosophy room in the new Heritage and Conservation building in Suur-Kloostri street, where one could delve into studies in silence, and where the library would be stocked under his direction with foreign literature on philosophy and heritage protection theory. The idea to translate into Estonian *A History of Architectural Conservation*³ by Jukka Jokilehto, professor at ICCROM, was born at that time. That

³ Jukka Jokilehto, *Arhitektuuri konserveerimise ajalugu* (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia, 2010).

book in Estonian is still one of the sources of heritage protection theory lectures at the Estonian Academy of Arts.

The department’s library acquired conspectuses and literature by the well-known 19th and 20th century heritage protection theoreticians – such as Alois Riegl, John Ruskin, Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, Cesare Brandi, and many other founders of modern restoration theories. Here I would like to highlight a thought by the Austrian historian and restorer Alois Riegl, which is considered the testament of the restoration theorist who can see beyond their own time. According to him, legal framework alone cannot be successful in protecting cultural heritage. Riegl writes about the cult of monuments (*Denmalkultus*) and compares it to religious feeling, which is unfathomable by reason, and not to behave according to it would be impossible. It seems that Juhan Maiste was great at instilling such religious feeling in his students. Following his departure from the Estonian Academy of Arts and move to the University of Tartu, the spirit that Juhan had created, which was still felt in the school building in Kloostri street, was talked about long after.

Juhan launched the periodic publications of the Department of Cultural Heritage and Conservation of the Estonian Academy of Arts, where thematic scientific articles are being published to this day. In one of the earlier editions, titled *Aeg ja ruum* (*Time and Space*), Juhan Maiste optimistically writes this about heritage protection, ‘Heritage protection is aspiring to escape the frame that has become too small for it. It steps out to the street from the temple, speaks to the small next to the big, uses language and words, which in the olden days was only allowed to philosophers. Heritage protection speaks about time and space. It speaks about the world that is filled with a gazillion small details that finds its true meaning not particularly in the things themselves but in the meanings we have given them.’⁴

Juhan Maiste tried to give new meaning to heritage protection, so that it would not simply speak of matter or in the language of law and order. Juhan deemed it important that the curriculum of the Department of Cultural Heritage and Conservation of the Estonian Academy of Arts would be open to change and founded on the philosophy of modern environmentalism. He directed his students

⁴ *Aeg ja ruum: uue muinsuskaitse poole*, ed. by Anneli Randla (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia, 2009).

towards phenomenological philosophy, where things – and therefore also monuments – have meanings which evolve through people's personal feelings, memories, as well as knowledge. Passing on the knowledge on restoration and explaining values to the wider audience is considered particularly important in today's heritage protection.

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My colleagues asked me to stress today that Juhan Maiste has an invaluable part in schooling a whole new generation of heritage protectors – I believe that this can be attested to by everybody in the audience here today, who has been taught by Juhan.

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