HUMAN AND NATURAL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MONUMENTS

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Monuments comprise by definition a reference mark in the natural or constructed environment. In most of the cases they are distinguished by their oversized proportions, the elaborate building material used, their peculiar morphology or even by the particular synthesis of all these characteristics. They constitute valuable records of information of the past and they provide us with evidence for the social, philosophical and political circumstances, under which they were conceived as well as for the individuals, that is wealthy citizens and influential political or religious leaders, who contributed to their creation.

Monuments of the past can be grouped in categories: functional or utilitarian monuments, religious structures which usually set off the socio-political frame of the era of their construction and finally various monuments which were built by individuals in order to propagate their political as well as their economical sovereignty. As such, these monuments are inevitably affected by the social upheavals that are taking place throughout history and which are sometimes carried out in the most brutal and violent way.

Political reforms usually result in changes in the shape, use and morphology of the monumental buildings. In some cases the character and use of the monument itself changes completely due to the negligence and the change of appreciation of its aesthetic or historic value. Under these circumstances occurs the ravage of carved or ornamented blocks in order to reuse these valuable materials for the embellishment of new constructions. In the worst of the cases, desecrated in the
conscience of the people, important monuments were destroyed for the mere reason to be used as cheap source for common building materials, even for the production of lime for the mortars used in the construction of humble even rural small and unimportant buildings.

In order to prevent or at least to constrain destruction or damage of important monuments, especially in times of lose political circumstances, it is known that there has been political initiative by enforcing severe laws and heavy penalties against all those who would participate in the spoilage and ravage of this valuable public property.

The monuments, as every other object on the surface of the earth, underlie to the universal law of natural decay. The main reasons that cause extensive damages at the old buildings are the natural weathering of the material and it’s exposure to extreme natural phenomena, among which earthquakes are the most destructive. In the case of an extensive collapse we have to be very careful in determining the exact causes of this kind of destruction, whether it has been provoked by seismic activity or if human intervention has been once again the actual cause for the destruction.

In most of the cases the growth of vegetation plays an import role for the deterioration of the ancient constructions. Trees and bushes growing in between the stones and the rest of the building materials, provoke the complete decomposition of the structure. Microorganisms (fungi and algae) finally attack the surface of the stone and the rest of the building materials, thus causing severe decay of the elaborated surface of the monuments.