Camillo Boito (1836-1914) was one of the founding figures of modern Italian preservation. In this key text, Boito lays out a theory of preservation that rejects the dualism between the stylistic restoration school of Viollet-Le-Duc and the pure conservation school of Ruskin and Morris. The text is organized as Socratic dialogue through which Boito’s own approach emerges as a synthesis of elements from both schools. He summarizes his theory in seven points at the conclusion, advocating a critical philological approach that distinguishes between layers of intervention in order to present the historical structuring of buildings in their material authenticity. Boito’s theory recognized that any intervention is necessarily based on value judgments. To that end, he asked that preservationists question their own prejudices when handling the material remains of the past. He famously defended the cleaning of the marbles of St. Mark’s Basilica in Venice against the accusations made by the British Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings that Giovanni Battista Meduna’s restoration was removing precious historical materials. The debate inaugurated a dispute, lasting into the present, about whether the dust and pollution particles encrusted on the surface of stones are an integral part of their patina. Boito thought to the contrary that they were extrinsic to the stone, a restrictive view of patina as the coloring resulting from the oxidation of the minerals in the stone that is shared by most architectural materials conservators today. Boito studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Venice, and from the 1860s on taught architecture at both the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera and the Politecnica di Milano (both in Milan) until shortly before his death. Among his major restoration projects were the Basilica di Sant’Antonio in Padua and the Porta Ticinese in Milan; his own architectural designs included the Gallarate Hospital and a retirement home for musician founded by Verdi in Milan. Also a figure of some literary renown and member of the bohemian scapigliatura movement, he also authored a number of short stories of sexual decadence. Boito was one of the principal authors of the Carta Italiana del Restauro, adopted at the 1883 Congress of Engineers and Architects in Rome, which absorbed his theories as guiding principles for the professionalization of Italian preservation practice. His influence can also be felt in two major preservation documents of the twentieth century, the Athens Charter (1931) and the Venice Charter (1964).

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