

# **Conservation Beyond Consolidation for Pre-historic Monuments: Creating Narratives from Archaeology to Architecture for Scottish Brochs**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The sophisticated drystone Iron-Age brochs of Northern Scotland, called Complex Atlantic Roundhouses by archaeologists, show a relatively high technological culture. Their architectural conservation should strike a balance in presenting their key features (structure, materials, building use, architectural elements) in a concept of wholeness that integrates its major phases rather than design unity of a hypothetical original form. Currently however there is uncertainty due to the lack of agreement for a standard broch scheme and the need for more archaeological research.

There are more than 300 Brochs in Scotland dated from 800 BC to 250 AD. In their around 2500-year-long lives, they have been affected by people from different times so that the trace of the original broch has become difficult to read. As the brochs were built purely based on dry-stone material, the archaeological research cannot date the origin but could tell some of the sequences of modification. Their most prominent conservation projects were done by unprofessional antiquarians who removed significant evidence to exhibit their own ideas of understanding a broch, eventually causing distracting damages and misconceptions to the public. Therefore, the current situation of brochs is often a confusing mixture of fabric modified by people from different times.

At present any restoration attempt is conservative. As most brochs in Scotland are fragile ruins and only a few of them have been scientifically explored, they have been conserved through basic consolidation for the safety reasons in a very localized fashion, primarily by archaeologists. All of them are open to the public but only a few are developed as tourist sites. In both situations, none has shown the complete features of anything close to a standard typology: Mousa in Shetland, the most complete broch, proved to be heavily modified while other brochs only survived in fragments. Conservation was conducted before full archaeological excavations and did not lead to a satisfying architectural experience, so people still have a blurred image of brochs after a visit.

This paper would study the current range of conservation approaches for brochs in Scotland and argue for modern holistic conservation projects that go beyond consolidation when most of previous studies have been limited to the conservative concepts for pre-historic conservation. The architectural and technical complexity of these monuments and their imposing scale demand to be communicated through proper modern narratives, which combine archaeological (stratigraphy, material cultures, change, landscapes) and architectural perspectives (reintegration, shelter, scale, space, circulation).