



**Modernes Erbe in Beton**  
**Modern Heritage in Concrete**



**Dokumentation / Documentation**

UNESCO-Welterbetag  
Denkmalsalon und Denkmaldialog  
3.6.2018 in Schloss und Gutshof Britz, Berlin  
anlässlich des Europäischen Kulturerbejahres 2018  
UNESCO World Heritage Day  
Heritage Salon and Dialogue  
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on the Occasion of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018

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## 8 Patch repair, the cure for the typical weaknesses of early Modern and older Heritage in concrete

**Guido Stegen, arch.**

**dir. assoc. ARSIS sprl, association d'architectes**

The European standards provide several techniques for the repair and conservation of reinforced concrete, to be chosen after a complete examination of the reinforced concrete. Current approaches are increasingly evolving towards global treatments, and tend to remove a significant part, or even the totality, of the epidermal layer of the concrete, together with the concrete cover of the reinforcements. Among the electrochemical methods that could allow the preservation of the original skin, the Belgian market is favourable to cathodic protection. Realkalinization, though successfully applied, and mentioned in literature and standards as a patrimonial solution, has lost its appeal in the marketplace. The reason behind leaning towards surface destruction and cathodic protection is not primarily of a technical or scientific nature, but mainly out of risk and responsibility management.

This article summarises the logic of these preferences and analyses their relevance in view of the major characteristic problems for the heritage of reinforced concrete dating from before 1960. We propose an approach appropriate for these characteristic problems while causing the least harm possible: patch repair, a technique fallen into disuse due to promises for global solutions. The traditional arguments for this loss of appeal are known. However, newly discovered means and approaches enable us to counterargue these while simultaneously increasing the performance of patch repair.

### 1. Introduction

The main problems in solving the architectural heritage for reinforced concrete, dating from before

1950-1960, are degradations due to the corrosion of the steel reinforcements, initiated by the absence of an alkaline environment around these steels. Information on the distinctive features of the absence of passivation, the historical reasons for this phenomenon, and the consequences of the repair technique will be discussed under subtitle 2. Evidently, these degradations required repairs.

Before briefly outlining the historical evolution of the repair and conservation strategies of reinforced concrete, it should be convenient to consider the problem of reinforcement corrosion using the Pourbaix diagram, also known as a potential-pH diagram. This diagram, shown in Figure 1, situates conservation and repair strategies compared to two parameters that influence corrosion: the corrosion potential<sup>1</sup> of reinforcement steel and the alkalinity of the substrate around the rebars. The Pourbaix diagram consists of 4 zones:

- An immunity zone, where the corrosion potential of the reinforcement steel is below a threshold of thermodynamic stability of protection, in the shown diagram, is approximately -600mV.
- Two zones of corrosion: the corrosion is mainly acidic, and marginally alkaline<sup>2</sup>. Based on this diagram, it is also understood that the problem is often simplified by saying that the substrate must have a pH above 10, and that control by phenolphthalein can suffice.
- A zone of passivity, where the steel is protected by the formation of oxides and hydroxides on the surface of the metal

## Iron E-pH (Pourbaix) Diagram (25°C)

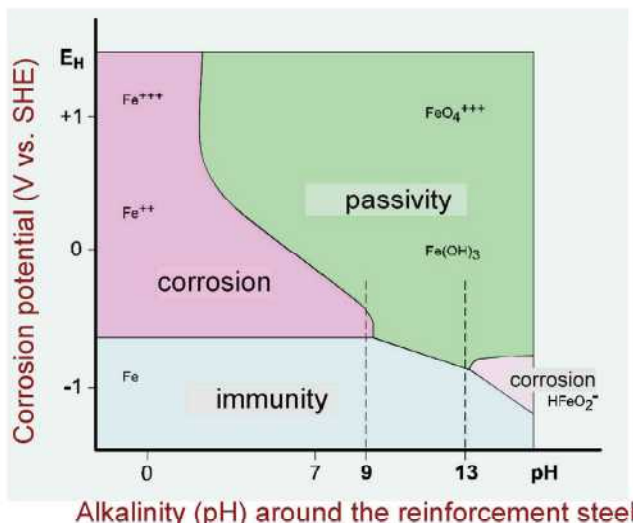


Fig. 1: Pourbaix equilibrium diagram for iron in aqueous environment. The diagram shown here is valid for wet corrosion at a temperature of 25 ° C. The limits of passivity, corrosion and immunity zones vary depending on the temperature, the presence of water and electrolytes such as chlorides ...etc.

## 2. The evolution of repair strategies, and their impact on the concrete heritage.

Mortars for local repair of degradations of reinforced concrete, called patch repair, are traditionally based on hydraulic binder (mainly Portland cement). These mortars are alkaline, and aim to restore the alkaline environment around the reinforcements. In the Pourbaix diagram, this is a passivation strategy, with the intention of returning to the initial situation of the concrete in which the substrate acts as a corrosion inhibitor.

Over the past decades, patch repair has evolved. However, this evolution did not produce a satisfactory solution for the sector of restoration of the heritage in reinforced concrete, which led to the implementation of other techniques, hereby, paradoxically, facilitating the disappearance of an aspect increasingly appreciated and recognized in concrete heritage: its skin, i.e. its surface, the relief, the colour, the expression of the material, ...

The main reasons that caused patch repair to lose its appeal, together with the alternatives practised, are as follows:

I) Adhesion and shrinkage problems, creating micro-cracks in the repair and at the connection to the substrate in place. In order to solve this problem, two solutions are used: one is to modify hydraulic mortars by adding polymers, another is to use mortars bound by resins. These solutions are not satisfactory for the restoration because:

- Repairs do not age like the original material in place; their appearance will differentiate themselves more and more with time (Fig. 2)
- They tend to accelerate the erosion of the original substrate where it is in contact with the repair, which causes the loss of adhesion.



Fig. 2: The patch repair, made using modified mortar, ages differently (more blueish) than the original substrate.

II) Problems of appearance and acceleration of the corrosion of the healthy reinforcements in the direct environment<sup>3</sup> of the zone of repair in a carbonated substrate, on a depth of 2 to 5 cm in the substrate. This phenomenon is known as “ring anode corrosion”, which is the appearance of macrocell corrosion<sup>4</sup>. In this type of corrosion, an area of the substrate at the direct periphery of the repair is put in anodic position, hereby destroying part of the rebar section through corrosion. At the location of the anode ring, the corrosion potential is higher than that of the reinforcement in the alkaline repair. In the case of corrosion caused by a lack of alkaline environment - which is the case in a carbonated substrate - this corrosion is expansive. It destroys the original substrate at the periphery of the patch repair. According to research

, the width of the anode ring in the original substrate depends on the electrical resistivity of this substrate. In all cases, the corrosion current on the surface of the armature is maximal at the limit of the repair and decreases exponentially in the deeper part of the substrate<sup>5</sup>. Ribeiro et al.<sup>6</sup> characterises the risks of corrosion in terms of the difference of corrosion potential, firstly, on the reinforcement in the substrate and secondly, in the repair:

- negligible risk if the difference is less than 50mV
- moderate risk if the difference is between 50 and 200mV
- high risk if the difference exceeds 200 mV

To solve this corrosion problem in the ring anode zone, the European and national standards for reinforced concrete repair recommended patch repair to remove the substrate up to 3-5 cm beyond the corrosion present on the frame. Subsequently, it was recommended to remove the entirety of the carbonated concrete. Ultimately, an approach originated which consisted of replacing the entire surface and the concrete coating of the reinforcement steel to a depth beyond the reinforcements, aiming to reinstall an alkaline medium around them<sup>7</sup>. For two decades, alternatives to these significant losses of authenticity of the architectural work have emerged. These are less destructive in their intentions, and can be categorised as follows:

- a) A group of electro-chemical conservation, that is to say:
  - RE: the re-alkalization of the substrate (passivation strategy in the Pourbaix diagram)
  - ICCP: impressed current cathodic protection of the reinforcement steel (immunisation strategy)
  - GCCP: galvanic current cathodic protection using galvanic or sacrificial anodes (immunisation strategy)
- b) an “impregnation” group, that is to say:
  - Re-alkalization of the substrate by impregnation with alkaline or alkaline reacting substances (passivation strategy in the Pourbaix diagram)
  - Blocking corrosion by impregnating the substrate with rust inhibitors (anodic and cathodic pro-

tection, depending on the type of inhibitor). The complex formulations of rust inhibitors do not make it possible to locate the strategy easily in the Pourbaix diagram.

To summarise, it can be noted that the repair strategies of reinforced concrete are leaving the practice of local repairs and move towards a generalised treatment that aims at:

- Either, a more or less global replacement of the concrete surface and cover of the reinforcement steel,
- Or a more or less global electrochemical treatment.

Consequently, the desire for heritage conservation in reinforced concrete tried to abate this global scale, due to the confrontation with reductions in the guarantee and the alleged risk of unsustainable restoration. The management of this risk is associated with the postulate that the problem is, by definition, global, and if it is not yet the case, it will be sooner or later when the monument is “at the end of its life”, following a critical advancement of carbonation.

### 3. A doubtful assumption?

#### 3.1 The report

The “clinical” practice of the restoration of reinforced concretes of the monuments until the 1940s, even 1960, makes it possible to doubt this postulate, which supposes a global and homogeneous problematic:

- I) The carbonation depths measured with phenolphthalein<sup>8</sup> on pre-1960 reinforced concrete are substantially lower than the depths predicted by standard models of calculation of carbonation depth over time. It is not unusual to measure a depth of less than 5 MM on centenary structures.
- II) The degradation of monuments of more than 60 years is mainly related to the presence of the local voids around the rebars. These voids are caused by the difficulty for the mixture to penetrate the spaces too narrow compared to the aggregates used. These honeycombs and larger voids are created at the place of

the casting joints, between closely spaced rebars, on the surface of the demoulded concrete, or in the back of the lost formworks in natural stone, in architectural concrete, ... etc. (see Fig. 3)

III) Significant differences in the carbonation depth between the zones above and below the pouring joints (see fig.4). A few centimetres below the joint the depth is much greater than above the seal due to the water/cement factor which is higher there<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, it should be noted that it is not uncommon to find gravel pockets just above the retrieval joint. The casting joint is therefore typically a risk area.

4) Steel surfaces exposed to air and moisture, often remain relatively intact contrary to what might be expected. It is then mainly soft steel, of rounded section. (see Fig. 4)



Fig. 3: See 3.1.2: Honeycombs and larger voids in the back of the lost in architectural concrete

### 3.2 The historical foundation

There is a historical explanation for this recurring and systematic observation. Indeed, the fact of “pouring” a concrete was considered a bad practice, to proscribe. The concrete had to be “rammed” in small thicknesses to guarantee a water/ cement factor as low as possible. In addition, in the period before 1950, the steel used as reinforcement was preferably a soft, and often smooth, low carbon steel. Examples of recommendation literature:

I) Technical documentation published in 1909 by J & A Pavin de Lafarge, written by J.BIED, Director of

Lafarge’s laboratory, and L.Lecarme, Engineer of Arts and Manufactures. This notebook refers to the conclusions of the Committee on Reinforced Cement, constituted on 19/12/1900, which served for the drafting of the ministerial instructions of 20/10/1906:

- p.111 “The cement used in reinforced concrete construction is most commonly slow-setting and hardening Portland cement ... it lends itself to ramming.”<sup>10</sup>
- P.112 “mild steel is becoming more and more a substitute for iron in reinforced concrete constructions”<sup>11</sup>. Mild steel could be shaped on site. The need for steel economy required a more worked, calculated and complex layout than the one practiced today.
- P.251 “It is necessary to put the amount of water



Fig. 4: Honeycombs above the retrieval joint; homogeneous but sparse concrete below the joint. The black dots in the gravel nest are rebars bare for 60 years, without expansive rust, despite their exposure up front

strictly necessary for it to flow under an energetic pounding, water excess is always harmful ...; this excess of water decreases the resistance and the elasticity coefficient “. However, “it is better to have a concrete that is less resistant than a cavernous concrete that does not come into contact with the reinforcement steel at all points”<sup>12</sup>.

II) TNO Delft Building Course, by prof. Ir. J.G.Wattjes, first part, published in 1922, p. 361: “it is generally recommended to work the concrete as dry as possible and then tamp it down”<sup>13</sup>. The course shows a large number of tamping tools.

Definitely, the builders of historical monuments knew the dilemmas inherent in the realization of high quality concrete. We can now measure their high resistance to carbonation. But the other side of the coin is the presence of voids and gravel nests, which shapes and location are predictable (see 3.1).

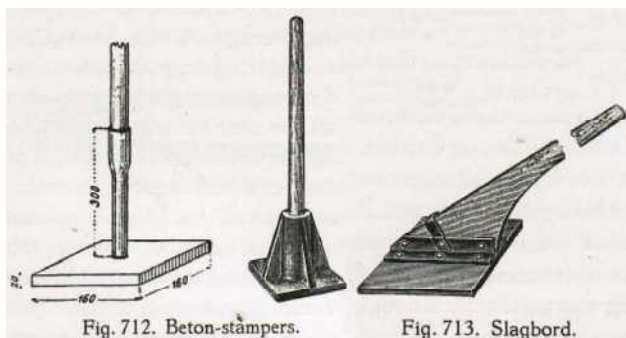


Fig. 5: Models of pestles for tamping concrete in formwork, published in 1922, in the construction course of Prof. J.G.Wattjes - TNO Delft. These pestles are inherited from the implementation of rammed earth, a type of construction in raw earth, groomed in formwork.

#### 4 The labyrinth of electro-chemical approaches

The electrochemical preservation techniques, mentioned under 2.2.a) above, are intended to be less destructive than other standard repair strategies. This is correct in the sense that they do not have to remove the carbonated substrate, since the process is aimed at passivation (for RE) or immunization (for PCCI and PCAS) of the reinforcement.

##### 4.1 The risks

The defective executions of these techniques (RE and CP) involves significant and destructive risks:

- a) Stray currents expose metals not connected to the cathodic reinforcement system to new and accelerated corrosion.
- b) The electrical discontinuity in the reinforcement system leaves the unconnected parts, even unexposed to stray currents, without the intended protection. The reduction of the corrosion potential of the connected reinforcements creates an additional differential of corrosion potential, which is penalizing for the unconnected reinforcements, since these will go into

anodic position.

c) In the case of the RE process, a theoretical risk of alkali-silica reaction (ASR) should be taken into account.<sup>14</sup>

d) The voids and honeycombs remain unknown, which may deprive the steel surfaces in these voids of contact with the conductive electrolyte of the protective current. The risk for reinforcement exposed to voids is comparable to that of unconnected reinforcement steel (b). Corrosion may accelerate, compared to the lack of an electro-chemical treatment.

To avoid these risks, the implementation has become quite destructive, following the desire to connect a maximum of reinforcement frames. Nevertheless, we can reduce the damage on the original substrate:

- By opting for more delicate seeking and connecting techniques for reinforcements (see Fig. 6)
- By reducing the reinforcement to connect to those located in the carbonated or potentially carbonated concrete. (See Fig. 5 and 6).



Figure 6: Damage caused to connect all reinforcement, including those located in non-carbonated areas

Nevertheless, there is still a risk of not being able to solve the most frequent problems of heritage concretes, which are the voids and honeycombs, where the damage can worsen in the case of an electro-chemical intervention if they stay unknown and without repair.

##### 4.2 An offer overthrown by the risks of exploitation.

The norm CEN / TS 14038-1 for Electrochemical Re-alkalisation states: “The purpose of re-alkalinization





Fig. 7: To limit the damage by finer techniques of search and connection of reinforcement, limited to those located in the carbonated or potentially carbonated concrete.

is to provide long-term corrosion protection for steel reinforcement in carbonated concrete. .... Does not apply to concrete containing prestressing steels that may suffer embrittlement due to hydrogen produced during re-alkalinization or concrete containing epoxy-coated or galvanized reinforcements, or where contamination by chlorides contributes to the corrosion of reinforcement. The process therefore applies to monuments from before 1960. The Technical Information Note (NIT231<sup>15</sup>) of the Technical and Scientific Center for Belgian Construction mentions on page 48 under point 8.1.4: “The method, very little used, is particularly suitable for buildings of great architectural value such as protected monuments”.

On the other hand, cathodic protection (ICCP and GCCP) is standardized by EN 12696.

From a technical and scientific point of view, RE and CP are part of the restoration and conservation possibilities. However, in practice, and despite the demand in public markets, it has become unlikely to obtain implementation. The pretexts are supposedly and pretended technical, and the threats of withdrawal of guarantee frighten public and private powers and sponsors.

After deleting the irrelevant technical and scientific arguments, it turns out that the reluctance is inspired by a considerable difference in the risks of operating the construction site.

I) In the event of defective execution: For re-alkalinization, the risk that the damage will immediate, before the final acceptance of the works cannot be neglected. For cathodic protection, they occur much later because the total current intensity accumulates at a significantly slower rate.

II) The added value of the work is executed on site in the case of re-alkalization, and requires a permanent know-how together with experience on site throughout the period of application. The materials used for RE are not specialised commercial products. In the case of cathodic protection, this added value is created upstream (at the manufacturers).

The company that executes the work, is at a higher risk in case of re-alkalinization. From a commercial point of view and at the level of guarantees and risks, a higher interest in defending cathodic protection can be noticed.

### 5 What about the replacement of the surface?

The practice of replacing the concrete cover, destroys the original surface, including the epidermis, which has become difficult to accept. This drastic repair strategy does not seem to offer an extension of life to the monument either. It reproduces and multiplies what is at the origin of the majority of the degradations of the monuments from before 1960, which in this case concerns the voids in contact with the rebars, and thus the absence of passivation. It is almost impossi-



Fig. 8. Layer of concrete.

le to sink without honeycombs or voids or to empty a layer of concrete 4 to 6 cm thick, of complex and irregular shape (Fig. 8) and which has to be simultaneously resistant to carbonation (and therefore without plasticizers<sup>16</sup>, nor excess of water).

## 6 What contributions can be expected from alternative strategies?

In practice, alternatives to patch repair do not provide a favourable solution to the authenticity of the monument:

- They damage the concrete in the short term, during the implementation for “preventive” reasons.
- They rarely solve the essential problem of pre-1960 heritage, that is to say, the elimination of the effects of present voids and gravel nests.
- They aggravate and accelerate the risks of corrosion on reinforcements not connected or hidden in the voids.

When looking at buildings of the age of 60 or older, it must be noted that the to be feared damage based on current standards and acceptances is often absent. Is it just a matter of time, or is it characteristic of this heritage<sup>17</sup>? If heritage management is an equilibrium exercise aimed at extending the life of monuments, a strategy to solve the major problems encountered in buildings aged 60 and over, is possible. This strategy would be based on local solutions to the problems of local degradation, the logic of which can be discovered after a complete diagnosis of the building.

## 7 The advantages of patch repair, without the disadvantages

The reasons for abandoning patch repair were listed under point 2. We here propose a response to each of these weaknesses.

### I) Problem of adhesion and withdrawal.

The use of slow-binding mortars eliminates shrinkage in repairs.

### II) Appearance and quality of the repair

A custom-made mix, regular inspections and adjustments allow the use of appropriate mortars depending on the location and the specific context of the repairs. For an implementation on small surfaces, the local realization of the original relief, must often be done with other techniques than those used during the creation of the monument. In-depth research can reveal whether the epidermis originally benefited from a finish (wood stain, whitewash, paint, sandblasting, etc.). The restoration of this finish has the advantage of softening any color differences in patch repairs compared to the original skin. (Fig.11)

### III) “Ring anode” corrosion

Soleimani et al. and Ribeiro et al., mentioned in footnotes 5 and 6, describe in more detail the dynamics and characteristics of the development of corrosions in anode rings, as well as the measures to avoid them.



Fig. 9 and 10: On the left, the relief and the original stain on Art Deco architectonic concrete (1927). On the right, restoration of the relief in a fresh local repair with tools developed ad hoc.



Fig. 11: Staining and Porometry Modification Treatment Tests

When the original substrate is of good quality<sup>18</sup>, the depth of the anode ring is low and corrosion is negligible. This is often the case in rammed (dammed) concrete monuments. However, it is important to pay attention to all possible means to avoid this ring anode corrosion. Several strategies allow it:

a) The use of repair mortars with higher resistivity than the substrate is a good electrochemical strategy from the start as to prevent corrosion in the anode ring (see Soleimani et al.). However, these mortars generally have superior mechanical characteristics, which is unfavourable to the good behavior (permeability, freezing, thermal behavior ...). In conclusion, the best repair mortar is the one that comes closest to the original substrate in terms of porosity, density, resistivity, etc.

b) The impregnation of the substrate with alkaline products (or having alkaline reaction) before proceeding with the repair, in order to reach the depth of the anode ring if not the depth of the carbonated zone. Considering the existant skepticism about the penetration ability of these products, together with the fact that these are not considered effective when applied to the epidermis, the advantage of using these on the substrate in the gap before the repair is to applying directly where they should be active: at the edge of the anode ring.

c) Impregnation of the substrate with a rust inhibitor before proceeding with the repair. As for the alkaline pre-impregnation, the advantage of a rust inhibitor impregnation on the substrate in the gap before the repair is to approach directly the place where it must be active: on the edge of the anodic ring. This rust inhibitor is also added to the repair mortar to inhibit the cathodic aspect.

#### 4. Voids and honeycombs

It is important and possible to trace the logic of the presence of gravel nests, in order to fill them with alkaline mortar in contact with the reinforcement facing the void. Two approaches are possible:

- Empty the honeycomb on the surface and make a patch repair according to the recommendations mentioned under 1), 2) and 3).
- Inject voids (from bottom to top) with Portland cement grout, loaded with rust inhibitor, as mentioned under 3)

#### 5. Slowing down carbonation

This strategy consists of limiting the progress of the carbonation through the concrete cover of the reinforcements. When the original concrete in place is of very good quality (high resistivity, high density, high resistance to carbonation, ...) this measure does not have much sense or effect. Otherwise, the strategy is to modify the porometry of the substrate by transforming the pores into a pre-capillary structure. This thinner structure does not render the concrete water-proof, but prevents alkaline water from the capillary from leaving the substrate. This alkaline water blocks the penetration of carbonic acid. The presence of water in the pores is more stable when they are thinner, more capillary. Knowing that the fluctuation of the wet front of concrete is one of the most favourable factors for carbonation, the stabilization of the wet front contributes to the slowing down of carbonation.

If necessary, this treatment can be used at the same time as a stain (see 2 above) to attenuate the colour differences between the patch repair and the original substrate.

#### Endnotes

1 The electrochemical potential value mentionned in the Pourbaix diagram is the potential difference between the anode and a reference electrode. This difference is equal to zero for the hydrogen electrode which is used as a reference for all metal potentials.

2 The diagram shows that corrosion may even occur above a pH of 10 (alkaline corrosion), but also that its development may not occur below a pH of 10.

3 <sup>3</sup> This corrosion typically develops on the reinforcements in the original substrate from the repair up to 2 to 5 cm in the original substrate.

4 In the case of macrocell corrosion, the distance of the corrosion current reaches several centimeters, creating relatively large homogeneous anodic and cathodic zones. In the case of microcell corrosion, the anodic and cathodic zones are very close to one another, the distance of the corrosion current is very small, which produces a homogene-

ous and uniform corrosion distribution on the surface of the steel.

5 Soleimani S. and all, Modelling the kinetics of corrosion in concrete patch repairs and identification of governing parameters. 2010, Elseviers. *Cement & Concrete Composites* 32 (2010) 360–368.

6 Ribeiro J.L.S. and all. Proposed criterion to assess the electrochemical behavior of carbon steel reinforcements under corrosion in carbonated concrete structures after patch repairs. 2012. Elseviers. *Construction and Building Materials* 40 (2013) 40–49

7 The case that set a precedent in the field of the restoration of the architectural heritage in reinforced concrete, and which proceeded the trend of replacing the total surface of the apparent concrete cover, was the restoration of the façade at rue de l'église St.-Antoine in Basel (Moser Arch). This restoration was published in the *DOCOMOMO* magazine of April 1997, published under the theme "The Fair Face of Concrete, Conservation and Repair of Exposed Concrete". This publication had a significant impact, see destructive, since the restoration of the façade on the street side was taken as an example and reference for two decades. Incorrectly, since all the other façades, as well as the passage to the interior of the house block, were restored by means of patch repair, with success, but of course with the disadvantages (local differences of appearance at the place of the patch ), known and mentioned in this article. Today, such a loss of the original surface would probably no longer be accepted.

8 It is important to emphasize the method of measuring the carbonation front, given the systematic divergences between chemical (phenolphthalein) and optical (petrography) measurements. The first method analyses the presence of hydroxides (alkaline), while the second examines the presence of carbonates. With regard to the risk of wet corrosion in the carbonate concrete, it is the presence of alkali that must be taken into account. Until the 1960s, Portland cements were used without the addition of pozzolans,

which produce large quantities of calcium hydroxides during hydration, and leave a large reserve of soluble and mobile alkalis in the concrete, which can very well coexist with some of the already carbonated calcium

9 Excess water is typically concentrated in the upper part of the casting.

10 " Le ciment employé dans les constructions en béton armé est le plus habituellement du ciment Portland à prise lente...il se prête au damage. »

11 " l'acier doux tend de plus en plus à se substituer au fer dans les constructions en béton armé »

12 "Il faut mettre la quantité d'eau strictement nécessaire pour qu'elle reflue sous un pilonnage énergétique, l'excès d'eau est toujours nuisible...; cet excès d'eau diminue la résistance et le coefficient d'élasticité. ..., il vaut mieux un béton moins résistant qu'un béton caverneux qui ne serait pas en contact de l'acier en tous ses points"

13 " In het algemeen is het gewenst, het beton zoo droog mogelijk te verwerken en na het storten te stampen "

14 Although this risk is mentioned in the European standards, its Belgian application NBN CEN TS 14038-1, point 5.7 mentions the absence of cases of RAS known as a result of RE. This risk is related to the aggregates used. With the increasingly international origin of aggregates and cements, this risk is increasing. For the heritage of 60 years ago and more, the appearance of (ASR) is very unlikely.

15 NIT231 "Repair and Protection of Reinforced Concrete Structures", September 2007

16 Plasticizers reduce the water / cement factor of concrete but do not increase its resistance to carbonation

17 The example of mild steel reinforcement that is found in an open air gravel nest for 100 years without causing degradation or ruptures due to expensive rust, is quite common.

18 Good quality here means: compact and with high electrical resistivity. The fact that a concrete is held drier also increases its resistivity.