The invention of heritage in the Mediterranean. Images and uses of cultural heritage in the Mediterranean

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Since it has always been a region of movement and inter-action between peoples, the Mediterranean is seen by the social sciences as a vast arena, full of contrasts. It is a region strongly marked by history – a history shared by the many cultures which have always intermingled, crossed paths – and sometimes swords – here. While some of its peoples are the result of peaceful inter-breeding and others the fruit of a political will to expand and dominate, all the populations bordering the Mediterranean can claim religious or cultural distinctiveness. By maintaining specific identities, such as laying claim to a certain group of symbols, they rely on the legacy of the great civilizations of the past which flourished on their territories. From the earliest times the region had been criss-crossed by people, but this way of seeing Mediterranean cultures came largely from a discovery of a Mediterranean by men of learning – archaeologists, travellers and the military – who described, drew and studied what they found. From the invention of the Mediterranean as a place of monuments to the current management of heritage resources, the way the Mediterranean heritage is used offers a good perspective from which to question the ways certain images of the Mediterranean are re-enforced and how the ideology at the root of heritage preservation is put into practice in this very specific space.

To understand these issues better, we should remember that cultural heritage uses the legal vocabulary of family property transfer and that very early on the idea of heritage was linked to the creation of the nation state, as more recently it has been to regional sub-groups and minorities. A group's collective identity and official memory are thus said to reside in their cultural heritage and demonstrate to others its distinctive uniqueness. The creation of UNESCO in 1946 and the proclamation of its various conventions have added a universal and humanist counterpart to these claims of identity by suggesting that this kaleidoscope of cultural particularities is part of the human genius' universality. In this sense, cultural heritage is the result of a political and moral construct which tries to connect some local artefacts, supposed to come from their ancestors, with the current members of a group and the universal community which makes up humanity. Both regimes (the local and the universal) work together and relate to two major geopolitical processes: the creation of the nation-state (and all its subsets) and of the international community. But although conservation techniques, classification lists and exhibitions – core activities of heritage policies – do indeed present heritage as a singular yet universal collection of objects, architectures, sites and cultural practices, the authentication, selection and categorising of these objects are the real issues of heritage, and deserve a full and separate sociological analysis (Smith 2006).

Nabila Oubelsir's analysis of contemporary Algeria (2004) is a good example of this historical and critical perspective on Mediterranean heritage, although sometimes it leaves in the shadow the fact that the ancestry of Mediterranean heritage was the foundation of today's cultural policies. So in this text we shall situate the uses and appearance of the Mediterranean heritage by placing them in the longer history of the invention of the Mediterranean by scholars and by showing how the central ideas of heritage policy fit well with the natural, historical, religious and cultural contexts of the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean and the invention of heritage

The Mediterranean is a key player shaping cultural heritage and putting it into effect, both at the conceptualising stage and when cultural theories and policies became hard fact. Research into the legacies of the cultures of classical Antiquity, Al-Andaluz and the Christian Middle East has indeed allowed people to justify several sources which underpin the definition and values of heritage. Material remains of Mediterranean civilizations brought to light by archaeology play a major role in this, giving a visible, tangible basis to Mediterranean ancestry as it has been imagined and displayed in the major national museums of industrial Europe since the 18th century (2006 Poulot) or in the commercial capitals like Venice (Pomian 1987). Moreover the dominant heritage logic of this Europe went hand in hand with a systematic analysis of the archaeological wealth of the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, thus helping to enrich the museum-based, scholarly image of Mediterranean cultures outside their own territory. The broad sweep of colonization only increased this well-established process, encouraging the stereotype that local populations were unable to judge the value of the remains which lie within their territories (Jezernik 2007).

This imbalance, which even now is not fully corrected, can be seen throughout the 20th century in the northern Mediterranean, where there were several major declarations of intent in the cultural heritage field: the Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments was signed in 1931, the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites was enacted in Venice in 1964. Today, the Western-inspired heritage strategies, some of which have been in existence since the colonial period – libraries, museums, archaeological sites, and more recently nature reserves – are mostly located in the north, even though it is becoming noticeable that institutions and heritage interests are quietly, insensibly slipping south. This can be seen in several national or international public institutions such as the *Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée* in Marseille (http://www.mucem.org), or the more modest *Museu de la Mediterrània de Torroella de Montgrí* in Catalonia, http://www.museudelamediterrania.cat), Istanbul's three archaeological museums http://www.istanbularkeoloji.gov.tr/main_page) or the new *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* in Egypt (http://www.bibalex.org/Home/Default_EN.aspx), or again pan-Mediterranean foundations like the *Fondazione Roma Mediterraneo* http://www.fondazioneroma-mediterraneo.it/it/index.html) which brings together Italy, France and Morocco on cultural issues and research and development programmes funded by public concerns like Euromed Heritage (http://www.euromedheritage.net), which is financed by the European Commission.

All these elements of the Mediterranean "heritage machinery" make the most of or support the advances of human and social sciences by linking them to cultural action

(archaeology, history, anthropology, linguistics) so as to turn them into mediation strategies which pursue, amplify and normalize the image of a unified yet diverse Mediterranean, highlighting the factors that connect each of its cultures and those that make them unique: the environment, climate, the Ancient or Arab scholarly heritage, agriculture, trade, art or the religions. In the first edition of his thesis, Fernand Braudel also added significantly to this image by describing the Mediterranean as a museum of man, open to the heavens, showing every layer of mankind's historical and social evolution. He did the same in the television series "*Méditerranée*" which he produced for French and Italian television in the 1970's. The first episode of the series, "*Terre*" (Earth), is entirely about those elements which are shared by all Mediterranean civilizations, starting with geology and climate but extending to possible traces of religious customs inherited from paganism and the religions of classical antiquity.

INA00675 - Terre, Méditerranée, 1974 (25')

At the end of the 20th century, although Braudel and the academic approach seemed to be the best way of making the public aware of the Mediterranean's heritage, several events had already made an impact on people and helped give a physical reality to the concept. One of the first big heritage-based events television had been able to show was in the 1960's: UNESCO backed a project to move the monuments at the vast archaeological site of Abu Simbel, which otherwise would have been under water when the newly constructed Aswan Dam was opened.

INA00624 - Début des travaux pour sauver les temples d'Abou Simbel (AF 05/02/1964)

This short film points out the imminent danger of flooding of one of the greatest monuments of ancient Egypt, showing architectural details of temples, then the tourists and their guides at the foot of the gigantic sculptures. Then we see workers and engineers making surveys, while the voice-over suggests how long the work is going to take and what it is for, to close on a wide shot of the whole site. By using the camera and editing to emphasise the size of the monuments, the film highlights the enormous scale of the operation, in keeping with the heritage object itself. The way the film is put together also tends to make this rescue operation an event that affects not only Egypt but the whole of humanity – particularly the two political blocs which were confronting each other at the time: UNESCO was behind the rescue, the USSR funded part of the work.

Beyond showing us the reconstruction of a heritage which is at once Egyptian, Mediterranean and universal, the film also reminds us that although heritage can sometimes be the victim of economic conditions or political programmes to transform a society, it is also a resource, both economic and symbolic, and helps renew certain forms of pressure and maintain a balance of power. Moving the temples at Abu Simbel is an excellent example of the political issues that heritage arouses in a strategic region and at a sensitive moment in world history. But although cultural heritage is a social object which can reveal tensions in the present, it is above all something that comes from the past, and the art of heritage lies in making something that old mean something today. These memorial qualities are manufactured and maintained through practices now well described by the social sciences. They require a specific approach which

combines the risk of loss with the need to preserve, in an over-view of heritage which includes not only monuments but also natural sites and now intangible elements of culture.

Mediterranean heritage to discover

By accompanying the first surveys of the area, whether archaeological, geographical or historical, the scientific view of the Mediterranean during the colonial period helped create an idealized image of past and present Mediterranean civilizations, just as much as the Orientalist painters and writers. The large number of remains, the different layers of history and culture, the sometimes spectacular cross-fertilisation of architecture went hand in hand with exotic descriptions and revelations of the parallels between Northern Europe and the landscapes and populations of the southern Mediterranean. Finding evidence, long-forgotten but preserved through time, which is the first principle of archaeology, also reinforced the image of the Mediterranean as an unexploited archaeological field, still able to give Europeans traces of an otherness which they have inherited or whose exoticism or savagery they love to describe, as in the classical Greeks, the Arab astronomers or Berber farmers with whom they build some con-substantial links. The most spectacular example of this armchair view of discovering archaeology is probably underwater archaeology, a synthesis of every fantasy about the Mediterranean hiding priceless traces of lost civilizations. The underwater heritage has long been a central component of cultural, scientific and heritage policies in the Mediterranean, but its invention is an example of how the theme of things hidden, discovered and brought to light contributes to the creation of an image of the Mediterranean as a source and provider of traces of the past.

INA00518 - L'éphèbe d'Agde, chef d'oeuvre de l'archéologie sous-marine (ORTF, 10 février 1973, 26')

This longer documentary is about underwater archaeology off the shore of Agde, a town in southern France. It is also the portrait of Denis Fonquerle, a local amateur inventor and archaeologist who founded an association to protect the archaeological remains taken from the wrecks of escort ships of antiquity. Fishermen, including Fonquerle's own father, regarded these ancient amphora simply as "pots" which tore their nets. After working on several wrecks from different eras and places, the efforts to preserve and protect this heritage were crowned by a "spectacular" and "extraordinary" discovery in the river Herault: a 4th century BC bronze statue of a young man. For 20 years the statue, the *Ephebe 'dAgde*, probably of Greek origin, sat in the Louvre beside the "Winged Victory of Samothrace", ultimate proof of its heritage value. Then it was moved back to Agde and placed in a specially built museum. The bronze has become the town's emblem, attracting thousands of tourists. The film shows two aspects of heritage which have made it popular: a past forgotten by the locals and therefore hidden from humanity (the fishermen being unconcerned about the "pots"); the fight both political and scientific to transform the discovery into an effective local symbol, allowing the community's past and present to be enriched. The origins of today's inhabitants are reflected in Agde's ancient and prestigious past, and the local people are now helping the history of the Mediterranean be better understood. By bringing to light remains often buried under mud and sand, underwater work as at Agde contributes to the advancement of archaeological knowledge, flatters local pride, but also shows how

the Inland Sea is a reservoir of remains and symbols for the local communities to discover.

Mediterranean heritage all categories

What is true of underwater heritage at the local level of a small port can easily be applied to heritage from all sources – archaeological, historical, archival or ethnological, both at regional and national level. One way or another all these disciplines shed light on a temporal and cultural otherness which fascinates by its strangeness, or is the root a sense of local identity. Turning these discoveries into heritage always involves both differentiation and reconciliation, on the one hand because of the universal quality which imbues everything classified as heritage, encouraged by UNESCO, on the other hand because of the insatiable need shown by cultural tourism and the media in general to make things different and exotic. But it is not just the cultural aspects of the Mediterranean which are highlighted. The region also has its own excellent heritage attribute in nature, because although the Mediterranean as we think of it is the result of layers of history and diverse cultures, it is first and foremost a natural and complex geographical environment in which cultural events take place. Thus, the natural, geographical, zoological and biological aspects of the Mediterranean are their own heritage investment, superimposed on top of the cultural aspects, or more often overlapping with them. The hard division between natural heritage, cultural heritage and landscape heritage is softened by the process of preservation and by heritage publicity blurring the boundaries between these fields. A film report from the Italian series *Linea Verde* about the nature reserve at Torre Guaceto near Brindisi, shows how the natural and cultural aspects come together in this protected area of 1,200 hectares of agricultural land, protected natural coast line and marine reserve.

RAI00367 - La Réserve Naturelle de Torre Guaceto (Rai Uno, 10/10/2010 16')

First of all flying over the port of Brindisi, reminding us that since Roman times the port has been an opening on to the countries of the Adriatic, the camera then shows us the symbol of the reserve, a 15th century Spanish tower, before looking at the traditional fishing, the migratory birds, tortoises and organically grown tomatoes. Helicopter shots alternate with interviews with officials from the national reserve who talk about their work, techniques to preserve the environment, local history and the monuments which dot the reserve.

Situated near a large port trading with the eastern basin of the Mediterranean, this reserve is a perfect example, since under the umbrella-heading of heritage, geology, landscape and wildlife are combined with cultural aspects – presented as the result of the Mediterranean people adapting over a thousand years to the natural environment.

Mediterranean Heritage in Danger

Apart from the many kinds of heritage wealth waiting within the Mediterranean region, its vulnerability is one of the main reasons for creating projects to protect these objects, sites and species which have now become regional and universal symbols. According to David Lowenthal (2008), although history has provided the Mediterranean as a whole and the southernmost regions in particular, with a rich basket of heritage goods, poor

economic development, conflict, looting by the antiques market and of course natural disasters have significantly contributed to this potential wealth being under-exploited. For Lowenthal the urgency today is to deploy a deliberate political arsenal for the protection and economic development of this heritage. Wishful thinking or expert opinion, it is undoubtedly true that the value of heritage in general lies as much in its historical representativeness as its fragility, vulnerability and possible disappearance. The Mediterranean is no exception to this rule and, in Loewenthal's view, the region is the prime example of heritage in danger.

Of course, the urgency is very obvious whenever a natural disaster wreaks havoc on a heritage site. Floods, fires, and earthquakes create great moments of solidarity and collective action for the victims, but they also reveal our concern for heritage and put into words and pictures the place that the natural or cultural elements represent for the local communities in difficulty. The following excerpt shows the efforts made by the cultural services in the town of L'Aquila, hit in 2009 by one of the worst earthquakes to strike Italy in recent decades. The local archaeological museum became a centre for restoring the religious furniture badly damaged by the earthquake. As well as showing the techniques used to restore objects of sacred art and showing off the skills of Italian restorers, the report lists the types of material damage affecting the statues and paintings. It also highlights the emotional pull these objects of devotion have on the local people, all the more sensitive to their community symbols given the immense difficulties posed by the material and psychological conditions caused by the disaster.

INA00721 - La clinique des Madones (AFP, 23 octobre 2010 3'25)

To the unforeseeable and random heritage-destroying disasters must be added a major world-wide calamity, the destruction of biodiversity caused by the inexorable spread of human activity and settlement all along the shores of the Mediterranean – for with it comes the disappearance of traces of the past. Legislative strategies, which often go beyond the field of heritage and affect the economy, land use, international cooperation and ecology, usually fight changes to an environment or site. Coastal protection laws, which make the coast-line a sanctuary where polluting industrialization and tourist-linked urbanization cannot spread, together with marine parks and reserves sometimes spreading across national frontiers count amongst the initiatives which put certain areas of the Mediterranean within a perimeter of protection, safeguard and conservation of nature and landscape to protect them from the potential danger of man. Sometimes these heritage measures show a contradiction between heritage and tourist development.

During the second half of the 20th century every part of the Mediterranean coast-line was hit by the craze for tourism. Not only did it became a major property issue, dramatically changing the landscape and creating a new, flourishing economic sector profiting from higher international mobility, the tourist industry is also blamed for the deterioration of the cultural and natural Mediterranean heritage. The great seasonal waves of people arriving in the hottest season in an area where water resources are often limited, the uncontrolled and temporary development of those areas, the degradation of sites visited by thousands of people and the conflicts of use between residents, business-men and summer visitors are the downside of a development miracle based on mass tourism.
Other human factors contribute to the destruction of the natural environment and cultural sites, such as lack of financial resources to carry out maintenance programmes

for natural spaces, easy prey for summer fires, the political imposition of authoritarian regimes which have destroyed or erased architectural or religious elements, to the armed conflicts which inflame the eastern Mediterranean. The wars in former Yugoslavia during the 1990's showed how fighting often involves the destruction of heritage, since that is often linked to ideological, religious or political beliefs. Among the destruction of historical monuments, the bridge in the multi-ethnic town of Mostar has become a symbol of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, since the target was itself a symbol of the town's interfaith history. Built in the 16th century by the Ottoman rulers, it was destroyed by Croatian forces in November 1993. Soon after the conflict ended, the city centre and the bridge were rebuilt and in 2005 the district put on UNESCO's list of World Heritage of Humanity, as "a symbol of international cooperation and coexistence of cultural communities" (Description of the old bridge area of the old city of Mostar, UNESCO, http://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/946).

INA00720 - Le pont de Mostar (JT 20h, TF1, 20 novembre 1993, 2'30)

Heritage, as it operated in Mostar, although only after the event, as a variable of healing, peace and development, according to the wishes expressed at the founding of UNESCO, seems however to be ambivalent and divisive: sometimes a symbol claimed by minority or national identities, sometimes target and victim of armed attacks, the elements of heritage help us understand the dynamics of Mediterranean conflicts – and despite themselves can be an integral part of those conflicts. The fate of Palestinian holy places inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2011 is another example of attempts to pacify or exacerbate a Mediterranean conflict through heritage policies. But putting sites and heritage monuments in military danger during armed conflicts without a doubt increases their heritage value because of their potential destruction, while at the same time throwing into question the supposedly pacifying nature of heritage.

Intangible heritage in the Mediterranean

Between the image of different cultures living in peace round the Mediterranean and the geopolitical reality, often obscured by cultural heritage as a national or cultural symbol, the practice of turning something into heritage is, in a nuanced way, part of the Mediterranean landscape. The most recent category of heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage, enacted by UNESCO in 2003 after a long international incubation period, is not an exception to this political reality. Based on an anthropological and dynamic definition of culture, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage essentially concerns the live-performance aspects of culture (religious rites, music, spoken word, technical gestures, knowledge), emphasizing the role that intangible culture plays in preserving collective identities and inter-cultural dialogue.

On the international list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, there are no less than 69 items from countries imbued with Mediterranean culture, in the broadest sense since the "Mediterranean diet", for example, is cultural asset shared all round the Inland Sea and a generally agreed Mediterranean value: "Mediterranean diet is characterized by a nutritional model that has remained constant over time and space. Its main ingredients are olive oil, cereals, fresh or dried fruit and vegetables, a limited amount of fish, dairy products and meat, and many condiments and spices, all accompanied by wine or herbal

teas – and always respecting the particular belief of each community." We should note the care taken to manufacture a group of practices and products which, without standardizing the cultures, respects the differences and thus, in the sphere of cooking, is a fresh look at the old cliché of the pluralistic and tolerant Mediterranean.

Video on the UNESCO web-site:
http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=fr&pg=00011&RL=00394

The image of the many-sided Mediterranean, which the art of cooking seems to epitomise, comes from the very foundations of the invention of the Mediterranean heritage and the stereotypes about the societies on its shores. It is also no coincidence that respect for cultural diversity, which over the past 20 years has been closely linked to the development of heritage issues, is reflected in the intangible heritage of the Mediterranean, and not just cooking. Classified by UNESCO, the various different forms of Mediterranean music – flamenco, fado, Albanian, Sardinian and Corsican polyphonies – claim their roots come from socially marginal music, for flamenco, or that they are the product of a thousand years of cultural exchanges, for fado, or, for polyphonic singing, that they are variants of a culture widely shared by many Mediterranean societies. The musical aspect of the many-sided Mediterranean is also represented in the efforts to preserve the memory and traces of the Al-Andaluz culture (Roda 2011), though these efforts are mainly at the associative level and not yet recognized internationally by UNESCO. Without being confined to music, the heritage of Muslim, Jewish and Christian Spain covers architecture, poetry, agriculture and a certain lifestyle and because of the dispersion of Jews after their expulsion from Spain in the late Middle Ages it has spread far beyond the Iberian Peninsula. Present on almost every shore of the Mediterranean, the memory of the time when the three religions co-existed in harmony works well not only as a historical example (although it has been criticised) but as heritage. As we see in the following film, community groups are responsible for the spread of this legacy and, using all the means at their disposal, transmit the image of a period of cultural conviviality and artistic creativity. It is hard to think of any modern-day equivalent.

INA00263 - Héritage andalou (Mediterraneo, FR3, 28 septembre 1996, 5'50)

For those involved in the medieval Andalusian heritage it is worth making the past alive, enhancing and updating it so it can be a model for the present and show us that another social reality existed in the same Mediterranean space that people live in today. The plural, tolerant and creative Mediterranean of Al-Andaluz is indeed in this sense the result of a social construction, that carries and transmits certain moral values arising from the universal thought of UNESCO.

But simply to state that the Mediterranean is a heritage space built by men is doubtless not enough to account for the diversity of practices and relationships forged during the development, maintenance and even transformation of the Mediterranean heritage field. Although the Mediterranean is presented as a common denominator and although it is undeniable that certain natural species, climatic constraints and architectural principles

are shared, cultural pluralism and diversity often force the Mediterranean heritage to disappear behind armed conflicts or economic wars, or at least to be used in community life and human history, sometimes at its own expense. The historical and economic dimension of Mediterranean heritage production is just a first part of the analysis, which must lead us to wonder why there are still objects, customs and sites which are recognized as assets by some but not by the others, and secondly to compare the diversity of local situations in their uniqueness and their many social layers, and finally to shift our gaze to the mobile Mediterranean heritage, in other words the one re-constituted in exile by the Italians, Lebanese or North Africans in the Americas and Northern Europe. But then we are faced with the question of the Mediterranean's boundaries and limits, a Mediterranean seen through the prism of heritage, and its relationship to places which witnessed the birth and reformulation of Mediterranean cultural diversity. The vanishing point of these questions is doubtless very remote and difficult to locate, but this brief overview shows that the many diverse forms of heritage puts the Mediterranean at the centre of a vast reflection about the uses of heritage, and also at the centre of the history of the very concept of heritage.

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