Who Profit from Heritage (And Who Loose)?[1]

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If we conceive of heritage, as suggested by standard definitions, as a repertoire of traits transmitted from one generation to the next, we inevitably fall into the trap of a circular conceptualization, because 'heritage' then simply becomes a synonym of 'culture' at large and thus loses its particular meaning. I therefore suggest to prefer the alternative explanation of 'heritage,' namely the one that conceives of it as a *selected set of traits* in a culture, ones that are explicitly 'branded' (or otherwise 'marked') as valuable and indispensable for the subsistence of a given group. In short, culture transmission as such does not become heritage unless the transmitted traits are branded to acquire symbolic values.

Branding culture traits to make them valuable assets for those who possess them has been a known practice since the dawn of history, and plausibly also a long time before that. There is a magnificent evidence to such a possible marking in pre-historical times from the archaeological site of Göbekli Tepe in the Southeastern Anatolia Region of modern-day Turkey, a Neolithic site that was in continued use between 10,000 and 8,000 BC. Although we cannot be sure about its uses, Klaus Schmidt, who discovered the site in 1996 and carried out excavations there until 2014, believed that it was used as a holy site (Schmidt, Dietrich *et al.*), and that "[d]ie Steinpfeiler stellen womöglich Ahnen, Totengeister oder Dämonen dar" (Schmidt "Als" 14)[2]. Its continuous use, elaborate symbolism, and the lack of any relics of dwellings certainly suggests its status as inter-generational heritage site. Whether such an interpretation is solidly supported by the material findings is still a matter

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1   Based on a paper delivered at the first ProPeace meeting, University of Wageningen, Wageningen (The Netherlands), January 16-20, 2017, integrating stuff from Even-Zohar 2017.

2   "The stone pillars probably represent ancestors, spirits of the dead, or demons".

of controversy, but the idea of perpetuated heritage practices in prehistory is no longer something that is inconceivable.

By contrast, there is abundant evidence of the prominent use of heritage in historical times since the deepest antiquity in the fourth millennium BC, with the foundation of Egypt, the world's first state. It is surprising to find that prominent scholars ignore the evidence and present heritage as a novelty[3]. Contrary to these views, it is quite striking to find in these periods of early antiquity all of the components of heritage uses and manipulations that allegedly characterize primarily our own times. First in Egypt, but soon throughout the entire Levant, a large repertoire of traits —both material and immaterial— has been created and utilized to serve as branded features. Naturally, this repertoire included monumental buildings like pyramids and *ziggurat*s, gold and precious stones, statues and stelae, furniture, chariots and horses, hanging gardens and other marvels. They all clearly served to symbolize power and gain prestige by means of assigning values that make them sought-after and indispensable goods for assuming not only a prominent position in the world system, but also actually any position at all. Since those times immemorial until our own, a set of such possessions has become a standard for being recognized as an entity in the world system. Those who have accumulated such goods naturally have better options for branding and converting them into assets. Newcomers, on the other hand, like new nations and states, must either adopt them from prior groups or invent them. New circumstances may of course make it possible to add new components to the already established set, and thus get better options for attaining such assets. Just a random example: Old Icelandic manuscripts that were scattered for centuries in various homes in Iceland without any sense of importance attached to them all of a sudden became hot goods towards the end of the eighteenth century under the vogue of European Romanticism that generated a competition for proving ancientness.

However, the material set of components has been only one way of using heritage since antiquity. The other way, and perhaps the more powerful one, has been the ideational, or immaterial, traits that are branded as valuable and become in their turn assets by which to gain prestige. Such is the self-image that rulers have been projecting as benefactors of their ruled population. This kind of projected image, diffused through verbal and visual propaganda, has been perpetuated for centuries. At least from the third millennium BC for some two thousand years onwards, this is how even the cruelest rulers often preferred to present themselves to their subjects. This rhetoric was carried out often in combination with proclaiming a strong attachment to some past, even —and perhaps mainly— when reforms were introduced rather than an actual preservation of some past traditions.

The examples for such practices are abundant, but among the highlights I would like to mention the Sumerian king Ur-Nammu (2047-2030 BC) and the Babylonian king Hammurabi (c. 1810-1750 BC), both of whom managed, each in his term, to create and maintain a large empire in Mesopotamia. In order to pacify the heterogeneous population

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3   For example, Bugge believes that "the idea that such objects have a value beyond their utility and constitute a 'heritage' is in itself relatively new" (Bugge 62). Similarly, in Rodney Harrison's view, "[h]eritage, and the formally staged experience of encountering the physical traces of the past in the present, has become an all-pervasive aspect of contemporary life" (Harrison 1).

whose territories they conquered, they demonstrated loyalty to local past traditions not only through verbal declarations, but more efficiently by initiating large building projects dedicated to the local gods and by maintaining practical traditions of economic measures, such as keeping up and developing the vast network of irrigation canals. The procedures taken by Hammurabi show an almost one-to-one resemblance to his predecessors. A conspicuous initiative taken by him, one that has made him famous in world history is his new Code of Law. However, with Ur-Nammu, who initiated the first known such code, the very making of a code of law has become an indispensable trait, part of the repertoire that must be followed and implemented by any ruler or group. Moreover, the act itself had to be branded as valuable in order to guarantee that it serve for gaining prestige. No ruler with some aspirations has later been able to evade the creation or adaptation of a code of law[4]. Another trait introduced by Ur-Nammu was a royal hymn. It was perhaps unprecedented but became highly popular with all of his successors and was established ever since in all repertoires of heritage (Heinz 713; see also Tinney). According to Hallo, "[…] the extent of our genre can be said to cover close to five hundred years and as many as seven different dynasties. At no time is there a certain gap of even so much as a generation between the rulers or dynasties commemorated in the genre" (Hallo "The World's" 185).

Showing respect for the past through verbalism and impressive construction projects certainly has been instrumental for such rulers as the Egyptian pharaohs or the Mesopotamian kings for inculcating some degree of socio-cultural cohesion into the populations under their domination. As the Ur-Nammu and Hammurabi cases demonstrate, and so many similar cases in the course of the history of the Levant, persuasion became a preferred manner of interaction with a population rather than the exercise of sheer force. Ultimately, to achieve deference not by creating *fear* but by gaining *respect* has turned out to be much more profitable, not the least in terms of expenditure. It makes a lot of difference between acknowledging someone else's superior status out of fear or out of respect. This is simply so, because respect means acting voluntarily with no coercion. The same sort of procedures served also outwardly, that is as assets that can create prestige vis-à-vis others. When in competition, each participant tries to be at least equal with the others, and possibly more respected. This kind of respect is generally referred to as "prestige".

This sought-after prestige makes others wish to follow one's example in adopting the same kind of traits that have given one a better status in a contemporary world system. Thus, traits that are established in one period by successful groups, like Egypt, Sumer and Babylonia are accepted as branded heritage for many ages to come. Indeed, most of the traits invented and diffused already in the Bronze and Iron Ages in the Levant are still with us (See Hallo "Origins"). Evidently, those who managed to possess those traits and control them did it for profit. Rulers and their elites were those who profited most, but one could say with due caution that in cases of true prosperity, which also meant freedom of

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4   Among the most famous lawgivers, many centuries later, one can name the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, known in his own country as "The Law-Giver" (Kanunî Sultan). As much as his codex is considered a bold act in view of the sanctity of the Islamic Sharia, it should not be forgotten that Suleiman could not possibly allow himself not to follow both his father Selim I, and his great-grandfather Mehmet II, both of whom had created innovative codes.

movement and safety conveyed by law and order, larger circles also acquired some share in that profit. Nevertheless, evidence tends to indicate that those in control, that is, rulers and governance bodies in general, are more interested than the population at large in those assets that are supposed to create prestige. It seems that in both antiquity and today, the efficiency of the group's proclaimed symbolic goods may grow under conditions of clashes and conflicts, whether violent or otherwise, rather than in times of peacefulness. Contests for symbolic assets may incite normally indifferent people to take sides in a feud. A few examples may illustrate the case.

A strong commotion arose between Armenians and Turks following the Göbekli Tepe site discovery in the Southeastern Anatolia Region of Turkey. Each party claimed historical possession of the discovered culture, which evidently had nothing to do with any of them. Graham Hancock reports that "many Armenians are outraged that Turkey claims this uniquely important site as its own heritage as though the ancient Armenian connection did not even exist". In a comment to a YouTube video, cited by Hancock *(ibid.),* one Armenian wrote: "Those people who built Portasar (the Armenian name of Göbekli Tepe) are here among the Armenians. Their spirits have transcended into the Armenian people of today".

A more notorious example is the case of the so-called Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which displays various strategies of utilizing heritage used by groups for gaining advantage over their opponents. These go from complete annihilation and elimination of the other's heritage to its negation by adoption, direct usurpation, or appropriation. Annihilation and elimination means that one group destroys another's heritage, both physically, politically and mentally. The ancient Assyrian and Babylonian methods of destroying conquered cities, the Roman devastation of Carthage and Jerusalem, or the Taliban's destruction of Buddha statues are just emblematic examples of collective consciousness. Similarly, Stalin's decision to flood the alleged territory of Sarkel —the medieval city of the Khazar Empire— with a new dam construction near Astrakhan was attributed to his desire to erase the memory of the Khazars, a subject sensitive to the Soviet era.

Negation, usurpation and appropriation may appear as more subtle means of elimination, but in fact they are no less radical, and perhaps even more so for the affected party. These measures are not only aimed at eliminating the heritage of the other both physically and in memory, materially and immaterially: they aspire to assume possession in place of the other. The victorious group does not destroy or erase the heritage in memory, but on the contrary adopts it by reclaiming it, while at the same time denying the rights of the previous owner. Examples: pagan heritage monuments (such as temples and other places of worship) are transformed into churches, churches are converted into mosques (such as the basilica of Jerusalem or the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which became a museum and recently a mosque again). Synagogues as well as mosques have been converted into churches in all parts of Spain after the expulsion of Muslims and Jews in 1492. This extends to other types of possessions, such as various instances of intellectual property. The Hebrew Bible became the property of Christian peoples, not to mention the Hebrew protagonists, such as patriarchs and prophets, who have been adopted or confiscated by various other cultures.

The sacred hill of Jerusalem, whose buildings were destroyed by the Babylonians and Romans, was partially rebuilt with a Byzantine church, which was later destroyed

but finally rebuilt in 705 AD by the Caliph al-Walid in its form of basilica to function as a mosque. It became a church with the crusades after 1099, and then rehabilitated as a mosque under Sallah ad-Din (Saladin) in 1187. Popular traditions introduced the hill as the place where the patriarch Abraham took his son Isaac to be sacrificed to his god. Islam has erased Isaac from memory and replaced him with Ishmael. A holiday has been instituted to mark the event in the collective memory, namely the Feast of the Sacrifice (īd al-aḍḥā; عيد الأضحى). It should be noted that this is not an indigenous pre-Islamic Arab tradition, because even the format of the name shows its Greek origin rather than Arabic or even Hebrew. It was certainly meant to claim possession and consequently the symbolic value of the mount, expropriating it from the other parties involved.

In this war of possession, the double game of appropriation and substitution played its role in the treatment of names. For a long time, the hill received in Arabic the name of *Bayt al-Maqdis* ("The House of the Temple"), literal translation of the Hebrew *Bet ha-Miqdash* (בית המקדש), even giving its name to the entire city. This was later abbreviated to *Al-Quds* ("Holiness"), but recent conflicts have led Arab activists to take once more the name *Bayt al-Maqdis* to name organizations and institutions, such as The Jerusalem Center for Documentary Studies"[5]. On the other hand, the current name of the mount in Arabic, i.e., "Noble Sanctuary" (*Al-Haram ash-Sharif,* حرم الشريف), cuts all links with the original name.

This process of patrimonial usurpation and re-appropriation is still active thanks to the power of Internet diffusion used by journalists, semi-scientists and even Islamic religious authorities, who go so far as to even deny the historical existence of Judaic temples on the mount[6].

Obviously, heritage is mobilized and exploited in the above-mentioned cases to win a symbolic but important geopolitical battle. Heritage itself is certainly neither the source nor the cause of most such conflicts.

However, when a conflict is already taking place, even in situations where the arsenal of physical measures is effective in the hands of some party, stirring emotions by the excitement of heritage always helps raising the level of commitment of the members of the groups involved. It seems that the need is even stronger and perhaps more effective when the group concerned is the weakest participant in the conflict and that symbolism can then become the last resort in the absence of other means. In such situations, even if there were no heritage resources available for such use, groups have no trouble inventing patrimonial repertoires on the spot and claiming they are old.

This use of heritage in conflict situations paradoxically helps heritage (and of course its adherents) retain its real potential or power at a time when it seems to have lost it. At least in Western countries, until recently, namely before new waves of immigration and terrorist threats, it seemed that people had become quite indifferent to heritage. It is widely

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5   مركز بيت المقدس للدراسات التوثيقية (http://www.aqsaonline.org).

6   The arguments in this regard are very varied and typically contradictory: some deny the existence of a Judaic temple ("there is lack of material evidence"), others deny that there is a link between "the Jews of today" and "The sons of Jacob, the Israelites of old". Another argument is promoting the idea that Moses, "the founder of Judaism," had nothing to do with Jerusalem, "since he was born and died in Egypt" (according to Islamic tradition). Another argument is that even though it is true that there were Judaic temples on the mount, the Arabs of Palestine are still "older than the Jews," being "of Canaanite origins".

recognized that it is becoming less and less a tool for socio-cultural organization and increasingly a revenue-generating commodity, especially by attracting exogenous people to the group to consume it in various ways, which in the most cases are simply expressed by tourism. In short, the use of heritage to encourage conflictual behavior obviously causes damage to the groups involved, but at the same time also prevents heritage from completely losing its power to generate or maintain cohesion.

Similar kind of unexpected care and interest for goods kept in some storehouse, like art canons or museums surprisingly erupt when someone makes an attempt to change their status in that storehouse. In a recent article, my colleagues Elias Torres, Antonio Monegal and I (Even-Zohar, Torres Feijó and Monegal) dealt with attempts made in Italy, Portugal, and Brazil to remove certain canonical texts from the school curriculum. Although few people still ever read these texts nowadays, and schoolchildren do not particularly cherish them, when the mentioned measures were announced, or even hinted at, a large outcry, both learned and popular, erupted all of a sudden in those countries demanding withdrawal of the decisions. We commented that although the texts were for most people boring and hard to read, it was evidently unacceptable for them to think that they could be eliminated from the world's literary canon, where they were recognized as part and parcel of the prestigious world canon.

Ancient rulers and modern national movements have tried to persuade populations at large that branded traits can be profitable, as well as mold their collective sentiments with it. This has been at least partly successful. Nevertheless, there are strong indications that in our actual world, such symbolic capitals are losing their power in either creating in-group consensus or generating prestige that is convertible to tangible profits for an inter-group competition. Many efforts and financial resources are invested by modern nations, or larger entities like the European Union, in preserving and propagating both material and ideational traits, branding them as valuable and making them part of local and global identities to be emulated by groups and individuals. In spite of all that, when it comes to stable and established societies, what seems to take place was diagnosed more than twenty years ago by Gísli Sigurðsson in his masterpiece "Icelandic national identity: From nationalism to tourism" (1996). His study indicates that while Icelanders have become relatively indifferent to their heralded heritage, which includes volcanos, glaciers and geysers, Iceland is now flooded by tourists who deliberately come to see all those riches. Thus, as I suggested back in 2010,

> [...] in established countries of the European Union, those which no longer have to legitimize their existence or justify the value of their legacies, legacy work is already often detached from identity work, serving the purpose of reinforcing the value of the assets on display for sale. When there is an abundance of objects and images, the state institutions involved with the promotion of legacies often mostly only work to facilitate the physical access to such assets (like places and monuments, books and manuscripts) or duly promote them via publications, visiting deals, or the Internet (Sigurðsson, 1996). On the other hand, for little known areas, or which need some economic injection, legacy objects and images may be dug from some imaginary or covert sources. In short, it would be justified to contend that heritage has become mostly a matter of competition about 'who has got the better goods for sale,' while for the majority of people in everyday life they carry very little meaning. [...] (Even-Zohar 36)

It would be proper to ask once more: "So who profit from heritage now?" The answer must be roughly the same: it is the ruling bodies and their elites that get the profit first in being able to negotiate status and position and gain prestige by attracting more tourism, and then by earning revenues from that industry. It cannot be contested that parts of the population at large also benefit, but other parts may begin to suffer from the touristic surplus, which have converted many sites to souvenir shops and drained normal life for the local residents. Entities like states or the European Union have learnt how to embellish this heritage commodification with a sophisticated jargon, provided by members of the educated classes, to actually initiate a new level of competition about desired assets by branding even banal tourism as motivated by high values of time-honored heritage. This is a clever strategy or a smoke screen if you wish.

In addition, *intra*group conflicts must also be mentioned as a case where heritage generates both profits and losses. I am referring to situations where ordinary people's ways of life are threatened not by an outside adversary but by their often democratically elected governing bodies. One of these cases is the harm done to the inhabitants of many urban neighborhoods by the authorities who decide to evacuate residents in order to perform what some researchers call "heritage-making" (heritageization, Hammami, Harvey, Smith) namely, the use of available or fabricated assets to generate financial profit conditions to the detriment of local populations. According to Hammami and Uzer,

> […] authorities select specific places and objects, and place value on them through processes of "heritageisation" […]. Such processes often provide authorities with legitimate and moral reason to intervene in people's daily lives […], and construct the historic and cultural values of places and objects. This may develop into enforced urban change and result in "displacement" (Lees, Bang Shin, and López-Morales 2015), "gentrification" (Non 2016), "exclusion" (Ingram 2016), "marginalisation" (Wacquant 2007), "spatial cleansing" (Herzfeld 2006), or "alienation" of both built environment and community (Timothy and Guelke 2008). (Hammami and Uzer 1)

In this type of clash between the heritage imposed from above and the emotions of local heritage "from below", we get evidence not only for how heritage causes damage to modern city dwellers, but also how it was executed in the past, even the most remote one, such as when building the pyramids subjected people to painful living conditions. In these cases, what is being carried out is setting one heritage against another, namely the official heritage, often fabricated or fake, against the heritage of people's daily lives.

Conclusion

Heritage agencies always tend to present it as an indispensable component of any culture, which performs useful and positive functions to improve the quality of life of any group vis-à-vis all the others through the acquisition of prestige, which is intended to produce benefits. The fact that the insistence on the necessity of heritage inevitably leads to the creation and amplification of rivalries is often ignored, as well as the fact that these rivalries generate conflicts with detrimental results for all parties involved. It is time for heritage research to take a critical look at this complex, to admit its dangerous consequences and raise universal awareness of them.

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