

# THE MEDITERRANEAN AND WORLD HERITAGE

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## Abstract

The richness of the Mediterranean culture and history is indicated by many inscribed World Heritage sites (144), which is about 20 percent of the sites inscribed. Many of the sites are inscribed based on the direct or tangible association with events or living traditions, or beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. This is, perhaps, an indication of the collective memory of the Mediterranean

Impressive as this may be, these sites are the result of national inscriptions on an individual basis, and there is a certain randomness that has been identified to be rectified with a better analysis of representativity.

The World Heritage Committee is aware of the imbalances that have evolved over the years and has taken decisions to redress this inequity. Therefore recommending assistance in identification of places that are over- or under-represented on the World Heritage List, while recognizing the inseparability of natural and cultural heritage;

This better understanding of the meaning of world heritage allows more serial groupings and more trans-national boundaries based on the emphasis on cultural routes and movements, bio-diversities that are intertwined in the settlement patterns of the cultural evolution of the Mediterranean

This paper suggests the possible narratives that reflect on the Epochs of History, by culture, by time and by place. The evaluation looks at the themes and narratives in history, in the movement of beliefs and trades and in the literary and cultural significance of our arts.

## Introduction

The Romans called the Mediterranean - *mare nostrum* - relating to the inland sea as the life source of the empire. The Roman empire at its zenith gave the Mediterranean political boundaries and power that Gibbon quoted: 'If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus.' For human race substitute 'Mediterranean world' and for the regnal dates the second century ad. The scale was impressive. The empire encompassed an area now requiring the services of some 35 separate governments now coming together in a more cumbersome European Union.

The cultural boundaries have also changed dynamically of the years while the topography and climate has been the more consistent over the thousands of years of modern history. Even the cold fourteenth century of Europe did not make much difference to the settlement patterns in the overall. As Braudel determines in his definitive book on the Mediterranean, these aspects determined the movement of peoples in the region, their common diet and their common fate. Therefore for the discussion on world heritage, the space between the mountains in the north and the desert in the south has been the basic definition, balanced on the area of the olive tree and the 10 degree isotherm of the month of January.

Traveling north from Ethiopia up the 7200 kilometre Great Rift Valley the hominids of Lucy arrived in Ubadiyah by the Jordan and then through the Fertile Crescent to Europe and Asia and into the Mediterranean, developing from hunter-gatherers to early farmers. The early cultures were intertwined with their natural environment and the understanding of our history is embedded in geological structures. But the cradle of western civilization has centred on the Mediterranean and specifically on the Levant coast, moving from the spirituality of Jerusalem westwards into the Mediterranean -on to the Canary Islands and finally into the Americas.

Then the cultures over the developing periods of civilization centred around seas. The technological advancements like the Corinth Canal, the developments of naval architecture of the sixteenth century, the Canal du Midi and the Suez Canal represent naval achievement of the people of the Mediterranean. This had been true till the advent of the railways in the mid-nineteenth century when the modern meaning of continents developed together with their positive contribution to development and technology and with their negative contributions in nationalism. The Mediterranean then sunk to a cultural low representing a *mare suum* which now is to be revived by the identification of the common World Heritage.

Our area which looks back into the epochs of history represents some 21 countries, five of which are in Africa and including 144 sites inscribed on the world heritage list- a hefty twenty percent of the 721 sites in the world.

## World Heritage

A proposal for a World heritage convention was tabled in the League of Nations during the 1920's but arrived on the table for discussion only in 1939. The Second World War generated more interest in a convention for the protection of cultural heritage during armed conflict and this gave way to the present Hague Convention in 1954. Finally the Convention for the protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage was approved in 1972 with the first sites inscribed in the year 1979. Today some 170 countries are signed on the convention, making this the most popular in UNESCO with 170 States Parties out of the 184 members; Israel is the 158 State Party to sign, then joined by Botswana.

Once again, we need to understand definitions, this time of world heritage. According to the World Heritage Convention, "cultural heritage" is a monument, group of buildings or site of historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological value. "Natural heritage" designates outstanding physical, biological, and geological features; habitats of threatened plants or animal species and areas of value on scientific or aesthetic grounds or from the point of view of conservation. While there are only six natural sites inscribed in our region and of universal significance we shall be concentrating on the 96% of the Mediterranean cultural sites.

The cultural criteria for the inclusion of cultural properties in the World Heritage List should always be seen in relation to one another and should be considered in the context of the definition set out in World Heritage Convention which is reproduced below:

**"monuments:** architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;

**groups of buildings:** groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;

**sites:** works of man or the combined works of nature and of man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological points of view."

A monument, group of buildings or site - as defined above - which is nominated for inclusion in the World Heritage List will be considered to be of outstanding universal value for the purpose of the Convention when the Committee finds that it meets one or more of the following criteria and the test of authenticity. These criteria are defined by the Committee in its Operational Guidelines. Each property nominated should:

- (i) represent a masterpiece of human creative genius; or
- (ii) exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design; or
- (iii) bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared; or

- (iv) be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history; or
- (v) be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement or land-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change; or
- (vi) be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (the Committee considers that this criterion should justify inclusion in the List only in exceptional circumstances and in conjunction with other criteria cultural or natural);

In relation to the 721 World sites in 124 countries, the 144 Mediterranean sites in 21 countries are identified as follows:

WORLD		MEDITERRANEAN		% of the World
721 sites		144		20%
554 cultural	77%	132	92%	24%
144 natural and	20%	6	4%	4%
23 mixed	3%	6	4%	26%

These include 61 historic sites which represent a third of those inscribed on the World Heritage List.

The richness of this culture and their history is indicated by the fact that most sites are inscribed on the basis of three of the six criteria while the use of the intangible criteria (vi) is used in the case of 43 sites - a massive 30 per cent. This is, perhaps, an indication of the collective memory of the Mediterranean

The examples of the three groups, the **monuments**, the **groups of buildings** and the **sites**, will allow us to grasp the wonders of our sea. But these are the result of national inscriptions on an individual basis, and there is a certain randomness that has been identified to be rectified with a better analysis of representativity, celebrated in this, the thirtieth year of the Convention.

## Quo Vadis?

The World Heritage Committee is aware of the imbalances that have evolved over the years and has taken decisions to redress this inequity. The Consultative Body recommended that:

in particular, in line with the discussions at the meeting of experts (Amsterdam, 1998), that further work be undertaken on breaking down the cultural themes outlined at the 1994 Global Strategy Experts Meeting into sub-themes that would assist identification of those types places that are over- or under-represented on the World Heritage List. This work should recognise the inseparability of natural and cultural heritage;

Some thirteen new sub-categories have been identified to allow a better understanding of the World Heritage List. This now include: archaeological, rock art, fossil hominid, historic towns/urban ensembles, religious, industrial/technological, military, architectural, modern heritage, vernacular settlement, symbolic, cultural landscape - gardens, associative, continuing, and burial.

This will mean that there should be more serial groupings, more trans-national boundaries; emphasis on cultural routes and movements, discoveries and the intangible together with the bio-diversities that are intertwined in the settlement patterns of the cultural evolution of the Mediterranean

The work should not only be 'top-down' but 'bottom-up' and the Mediterranean cultures need to be appraised within the perspective of their own time and place.

What are the possible narratives that we can identify with our sense of objectivity? We should reflect on the Epochs of History, by culture, by time and by place. But how do we balance the images in the fragile glass ball and mirror that we hold up to ourselves. The evaluation will have to look at the themes and narratives in (i) history, (ii) the movement of beliefs and trades and (iii) the literary and cultural significance of our arts together with the discovery of knowledge. These narratives need to have tangible evidence as a thread to be rewoven into the new cloth to be worn in the Mediterranean. The Coat of Many Colours (Ram Koolhas' new flag of the European Union?) needs to be a multi cultural celebration, a pleasure for the eyes and mind and a sense of pride for the peoples by the Sea.

An adventitious register is proposed for discussion.

- (i) The possible historical groupings could include
  - Human origins
    - from hunting to farming
    - the spread of agricultural settlement
    - the introduction of metallurgy
  - Egypt and Mesopotamia
  - The first civilizations of the Mediterranean
    - Aegean, Mycenaean and Greek
  - Near Eastern Empires
    - Jewish, Assyrian and Babylonian
  - The Greek world

The Roman Empire  
The Byzantine Empire  
The Caliphates  
The Crusaders  
The evolving Mediaeval and Renaissance World  
The Ottoman Empire  
The new Monarchies of Europe  
The Colonialism of the last centuries.

(ii) But there are also the beliefs, patterns and movements of

Trades  
Wars and Peace  
Religions  
    Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

(iii) And finally, the literary and cultural significance of our arts and the discovery of knowledge

Megalithic monuments  
The Gothic in art and architecture  
From Galileo to Newton  
The European voyages of discovery  
The industrial revolution  
    the spread of printing  
The Golden Ages and the Kabbala  
Our modern heritage.

All this - to the redefinition of *Mare Nostrum*, a contribution of the Mediterranean to World Heritage, requires us, in Israel as part of the community of nations, to reconsider our Tentative List and nominations to the World Heritage to reflect our identity, its manifestation and inter-dependence within our own Cultural Heritage.