"Cultural heritage is an ongoing process" A few notes[1]

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Abstract

This paper aims to undertake a preliminary analysis of the ongoing international processes of decolonising cultural heritage. The following study will be divided into two main parts: the first will delve into the evolution of the concept of authenticity from the Venice Charter *to the* Nara Document*, concluding with an examination of the relationship between heritage authenticity and the growth of cultural tourism. The second part will focus on repatriation demands within the context of the* Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums *and identity-based movements aimed at decolonising museum institutions. The primary goal of this work is to identify the underlying ontological and epistemological frameworks shaping the various approaches to constructing cultural heritage in the contemporary world.*[2]

Keywords: Authenticity, Heritage, Cultural tourism, Universal museums, Repatriation demands.

1. Discourses on authenticity: from the *Venice Charter* to the *Nara Document*

The concept of authenticity has been substantially corrected, revised, and adapted to the *Zeitgeist* ("spirit of the times") and the variety of discourses which have employed it throughout history. Following Foucault, with the term "discourse" I am referring to a system of meanings and values which not only reflects but actively constructs reality, is intimately intertwined with power dynamics, and evolves in response to the different historical and social contexts. Therefore, under these circumstances, the notion of authenticity appears as a historically determined concept undergoing continuous reinterpretations. For what concerns its use in the archaeological context, and more specifically in conservation practices, the term authenticity was mentioned for the first time in the *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*, more commonly known as the *Venice Charter* or *Carta di Venezia*. This document, resulting from the second *International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments* held in Venice in 1964 and adopted a year later, reflects the aspiration to formulate international guidelines for cultural heritage conservation practices.

[1] The title is modelled on the headline of an interview with Aemilia Papaphilippou, a visual artist from Athens, Greece (https://www.forumzfd.de/en/cultural-heritage-ongoing-process).

[2] The present text is an elaboration of the essay submitted for the MA course Thematic Seminar (South Asia), on "The rights to cultural heritage", held by Prof. Luca Maria Olivieri, in the academic year 2023-2024.

Although this vision had already emerged in the previous *Athens Charter* (1931), it is only with the *Venice Charter* that the concept of authenticity has been introduced in the ongoing debate.

> *"Imbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their age-old traditions. People are becoming more and more conscious of the unity of human values and regard ancient monuments as a common heritage. The common responsibility to safeguard them for future generations is recognized. It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity."* (Preface to the *Venice Charter,* 1964).

Nonetheless, the *Venice Charter* does not provide a detailed theoretical definition of the concept of authenticity, besides some indications in Article 9 on restoration:

> *"The process of restoration is a highly specialized operation. Its aim is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents. It must stop at the point where conjecture begins, and in this case moreover any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp. The restoration in any case must be preceded and followed by an archaeological and historical study of the monument."* (Article 9 on Restoration, *Venice Charter*, 1964).

Raymond Lemaire, present at the conference, underlined that the term authenticity had not been discussed in depth because it was implicitly understood according to a European perspective shared by the majority of the participants—20 out of 23 Europeans (Falser 2010: 116). The subsequent foundation of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) in 1965 and its adoption of the *Venice Charter* as its fundamental document marked the shift of this approach from a European conceptual model to an international, or better universal, dimension (Falser 2010: 116-117). Although the preface to the *Venice Charter* mentions how each country is "responsible for applying the plan within the framework of its own culture and traditions", the document does not provide further details regarding this aspect in none of its 16 articles. Moreover, the UNESCO *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (1977) introduced the so-called *Test of Authenticity*.

> *"The property should meet the test of authenticity in design, material, workmanship and setting; authenticity does not limit consideration to original form and structure, but includes all subsequent modifications and additions over the course of time, which in themselves possess*

> *artistic or historical values."* (UNESCO *Operational Guidelines* 1977, § 7).

The *Operational Guidelines* have undergone a significant evolution from 27 paragraphs in 1977 to a complex document of 290 paragraphs in 2005 (Falser 2010: 117), structure substantially unaltered to this day. In 1992, just fifteen years after the first version of the document, the World Heritage Committee highlighted the necessity of a redefinition of the concept of authenticity:

> *"A critical evaluation should also be made of the criteria governing the cultural heritage and the criteria governing authenticity and integrity, with a view of their possible revisions. The World Heritage Centre should, in consultation with ICOMOS, organize a meeting of experts in accord with the decision already made during the fifteenth session of the World Heritage Committee."* (*World Heritage Committee*, 16th session , Santa Fe, USA, December 1992, § 19).

In the same year Japan ratified the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and agreed, as proposed by Herb Stovel—ICOMOS General Secretary at that time—to host an international conference on the theme of authenticity in November 1994 in the city of Nara[3] (Falser 2010: 118). The *Nara Conference on Authenticity* was attended by a group of delegates more heterogeneous than the episode of Venice: 24 from Europe/North America, 17 from Asia/Pacific countries (of which 8 were from Japan alone), 2 from Africa and 2 from South America/Caribbean. Nevertheless, there was no representative from the Arab States. The latter resulted in the drafting of the renowned *Nara Document on Authenticity*, edited in its final version by the conference general rapporteur Raymond Lemaire and Herb Stovel (Falser 2010: 119). The Document, divided into 13 articles, introduced a significant innovation from the previous legislation: the valorisation of cultural diversity and the acknowledgement of the central role of local communities in the protection and conservation of cultural heritage.

> "It is important to underline a fundamental principle of UNESCO, to the effect that the cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all. Responsibility for cultural heritage and the management of it belongs, in the first place, to the cultural community that has generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it. However, in addition to these responsibilities, adherence to the international charters and conventions developed for conservation of cultural heritage also obliges consideration

[3] Location of the first Japanese site inscribed in the World Heritage List, i.e., the *Hōryū- ji* wooden Buddhist temple complex.

> of the principles and responsibilities flowing from them. Balancing their own requirements with those of other cultural communities is, for each community, highly desirable, provided achieving this balance does not undermine their fundamental cultural values" (Article 8 on *Values and Authenticity*, *Nara Document on Authenticity*, 1994).

2. Outcomes and challenges regarding the new definitions of authenticity

> *"All judgements about values attributed to cultural properties as well as the credibility of related information sources may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture. It is thus not possible to base judgements of values and authenticity within fixed criteria. On the contrary, the respect due to all cultures requires that heritage properties must considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong."* (Article 11 on *Values and Authenticity*, *Nara Document on Authenticity*, 1994).

Although Article 11 of the *Nara Document* briefly mentions how "information sources may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture" and the Document employs the word "diversity" multiple times (a total of 10, including titles and appendices), the text tends to emphasise the differences *between* communities, rather than *within* a single group. The inherent risks and shortcomings of this approach consist, to some extent paradoxically, in a rather homogeneous and consistent representation of those same communities. Furthermore, precisely defining a community and its connections to cultural heritage can often be a complex, if not impossible, endeavour. As I will clarify in the section on "Universal Museums" and repatriation demands, the above-mentioned methodology fails to avoid an essentialist approach (Curtis 2005: 53). This perspective, mainly elaborated in the articles dedicated to "Cultural Diversity and Heritage Diversity", is followed by a section on the re-elaboration of the concept of authenticity, here conceived as a dynamic and relativistic value, intimately associated to the sensibility of each community. This new interpretation, under the section titled "Values and Authenticity", is also evident in the expansion of the so-called "Test of Authenticity" of the UNESCO *Operational Guideline*s, and in the introduction of rather elusive concepts, such as "spirit and feeling".

> *"Depending on the nature of the cultural heritage, its cultural context, and its evolution through time, authenticity judgements may be linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of information. Aspects of the sources may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors. The use of these sources permits*

> *elaboration of the specific artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined".* (Article 13 on *Values and Authenticity*, *Nara Document on Authenticity*, 1994).

One of the main innovations introduced by the *Nara Document* resides in the widening of the concept of cultural heritage from a strictly material dimension to a more inclusive approach, comprehensive of intangible heritage. In this context, heritage is conceived as "living" and intrinsically dynamic and relativistic. This implies that present and future generations of each community are actively engaged in a constant process of reinterpretation of cultural heritage, making it a flexible construct open to continuous re-evaluation (Falser 2010: 122). In parallel to the mention of the term authenticity in the *Venice Charter*, the *Nara Document* introduced, without further elaboration, three new concepts related to cultural heritage: "globalisation", "post-modernity", and "cultural relativism" (Falser 2010: 124). The first one appeared in the preamble of the final document, whereas the other two were presented by scientific coordinator Knut Einar Larsen as the cornerstone of a new international perspective on the conservation of cultural heritage (*ibid*.). Both the definitions and the implications of these concepts have generated a complex and, to some extent, controversial debate in the years following the Conference.

> *"The* Nara Document *reflects the fact that the international preservation doctrine has moved from an Eurocentric approach to a post-modern position characterized by recognition of cultural relativism."* (Knut Einar Larsen, Preface to the *Nara Document* of Authenticity, 1994).

The very choice of Japan as the location for the *Nara Conference*, represented an ideal occasion to discuss the Eurocentric nature of the conservation approach deriving from the *Venice Charter* (Falser 2010: 125). On the one hand, Japan was identified as one of the only non-Western countries which could be included in the modern industrial nations that had not been colonised (*ibid*.). On the other, the hypothetic "comprehension of Japan" and its "traditional" conservation techniques ran the risk of perpetuating those same stereotypes towards the "other" typical of a Eurocentric framework (Falser 2010: 126). At the core of the debate on authenticity, there was the discussion concerning conservation techniques of wooden temple complexes, such as *Hōryū-ji* in Nara—the first Japanese site inscribed in the World Heritage List (*ibid*.). Larsen presented this theme during the workshop in Bergen, Norway, one of the preliminary events organised in preparation for the *Nara Conference* (*ibid*.). Despite the accurate differentiation on the part of Larsen regarding the ritual reconstruction of the shintō Ise shrine, prescribed every twenty years, and the techniques—closer to the approach of the *Venice Charter*—commonly employed for the majority of the other historic

wooden buildings in Japan, the case of Ise became the paradigm of a supposed "typically Japanese" conservative approach (Falser 2010: 126-128). This stereotypical idea of a "traditional, "cyclical", and "ritual" Asia, ideally completely opposed to the approach inherited by the *Venice Charter*, profoundly influenced the discussions of the UNESCO and ICOMOS European representatives (*ibid*.). Despite the differences between these two types of intervention had been highlighted multiple times by the same Japanese professionals, they themselves continued to accept and contribute to a representation of Japan strictly connected to the ritual reconstruction of the Ise shrine (Falser 2010: 128-129).

3. Cultural tourism: authenticity, past, and performance

The topic of heritage authenticity is inherently intertwined with the expansion of cultural tourism. As a matter of fact, the development of the tourist industry, and thus the commercial value of archaeological sites, monuments and cultural attractions of various kinds, has necessarily influenced the different interpretations around the concept of authenticity. In the last decades, the rise of cultural tourism has stimulated an intense academic debate on its definitions and implications. Whereas the pioneering studies of Hollinshead (1988) highlighted the importance of tangible and intangible heritage, more recent research has shifted the attention towards the economic nature of this process (Fyall, Garrod 1998), and, at the same time the psychological and motivational processes related to the behaviour of tourists and visitors (Poria et al. 2001; Zeppal, Hall 1991). The latter perspective underlines the role of nostalgia and the desire for cultural experiences perceived as authentic in shaping the approach of travellers. In this context, the Chinese word *xiujiu rujiu* (修舊如舊), which refers to the idea of restoring the original state—in direct opposition both at the *Venice Charter* and the term *zhenshixing* (真實性), which indicates the conservation of the present form, comprehensive of its different historic phases—has proven fundamental in the reinterpretation of the notion of authenticity surrounding Chinese cultural heritage and tourism (Zhu 2017). If in the Maoist vision of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the past was understood as a remnant of the previous historic period, and thus to be replaced at all costs, from the 1990s China's Open Door policy ultimately redefined the idea of "old" (舊 *jiu*) (Zhu 2017: 192). Under these conditions, dialectically with the influence of the international movement for heritage conservation, emerged a peculiar interest towards the past and the valorisation of tangible and intangible heritage, elements now considered fundamental for the construction of cultural identity (*ibid.*). Therefore, according to Taylor (2001: 33) "tourism sites, objects, images, and even people are not simply viewed as contemporaneous productions. Instead, they are positioned as signifiers of past events, epochs, or ways of life. In this way, authenticity is equated as original". To some extent paradoxically, one of the interpretations of this phenomenon has been

the proliferation of intentionally old buildings and artefacts intended to increase the earnings of the tourist sector and satisfy visitors' expectations. Representative is the case of the "Old Town" of the ethnic minority Yi (彝人古鎮 *yiren guzhen*), founded in 2006 in Chuxiong by a local real estate company. The city, composed primarily of souvenir shops and accommodations for tourists, has been tailor-made to reconcile the nostalgia for an idea of past, with the growing commercial and economic value of cultural heritage (*ibid*.). Besides tangible heritage, also intangible heritage has often been subject to cultural performances for tourist consumption (Zhu 2017: 196-197). For example, the local Dongba religion, practised by the Naxi shamans, has been commercialised through the adaptation of ritual performances, popular festivals, songs and dances to visitors' expectations (*ibid*.). The project of the Naxi Marriage Courtyard (納西喜院 *Naxi xiyuan*) represents an interesting manifestation of this process. Offering tourist packages comprehensive of Dongba marriage rituals, performances and banquets, the project transforms the Naxi marriage celebration into a saleable product, although presenting itself as an effort for cultural preservation (*ibid*.). Despite the drastic reduction in the duration of the ritual, from three days to about five minutes, in order to adapt to the demands of tourism, both the local community and the majority of the visitors claim to perceive the experience as authentic (Zhu 2012). In that context, the authenticity of a place manifests itself not so much in the structural materiality of a building, as defined in the *Venice Charter* or the *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China* (commonly known as the *China Principles*), whereas a performative dimension linked to intangible aspects of local cultural heritage (Zhu 2017: 197). Therefore, besides tangible heritage,

> *"Increasing intangible values and benefits, including local cultural identity [sic] and community pride, the links with local history, educational value and symbolic role of heritage, are addressed in studies measuring benefits of built heritage, as they constitute 'cultural capital' in the development programme."* (UNESCO 2008, *Mission Report*, Article 6).

The case study examined highlights how the concept of authenticity is constantly negotiated between local and global, as well as cultural and economic interests, where different value systems coexist and compete between them (Zhu 2017: 198). As a result, the creation of cultural heritage represents an active and dynamic process, where various kinds of social and historical actors select, interpret and valorise elements of the past. The collective memory, often selective and nostalgic, plays a crucial role in the construction of cultural heritage, which is continuously redefined in order to address the demands of the present (MacCannell 1979; Ashworth 1992; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998).

4. A Postscript on "Repatriation": between "Universal Museums" and identity politics

> *"The international museum community shares the conviction that illegal traffic in archaeological, artistic, and ethnic objects must be firmly discouraged. We should, however, recognize that objects acquired in earlier times must be viewed in the light of different sensitivities and values, reflective of the earlier era."* (*Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums*: 'Museums Serve Every Nation', 2002).

The *Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums* was signed in December 2002 by 18 directors of the most important art museums in Europe and America, including the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Guggenheim, the Met and the MoMA in New York, the Louvre in Paris, the Prado Museum in Madrid, and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. The *casus belli* for its creation had been the intense debate surrounding the restitution of the Elgin Marbles and the Pergamon Altar, respectively, at the British Museum and the Pergamon Museum in Berlin (Bailey 2003). Greece requested the repatriation of the Elgin Marbles on the occasion of the 2004 Olympics in Athens, while the Turkish government asked for the restitution of the Pergamon (*ibid*.). The British Museum does not appear among the 18 signatories of the Declaration however, its position on the issue is undoubtedly clear. According to Neil MacGregor (2003), director of the museum from August 2002 to 2015:

> *"This declaration is an unprecedented statement of common value and purpose issued by the directors of some of the world's leading museums and galleries. The diminishing of collections such as these would be a great loss to the world's cultural heritage."* (Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, quoted in Bailey, 2003).

Rather than focusing exclusively on these specific cases, the directors agreed to draft a document that highlighted the importance of the context offered by "Universal Museums". As a matter of fact, one of the main ideas of the document is that "Universal Museums", i.e., with collections from various parts of the globe, would be able to offer a broader context for objects and artefacts rather than limiting the interpretation to the museum's local perspective (Curtis 2005: 50-51). This approach, although claiming to be objective and neutral, reflects an epistemological framework typical of museum institutions, characterised by rigid classification schemes and a peculiar viewpoint shaped by the academic thought of the 18th and 19th centuries (Curtis 2006: 118). A second fundamental element of the Declaration concerns the rejection by the so-called "Universal Museums" of

repatriation demands. UNESCO (2003), which was critical of the Declaration, quoted the following position of ICOM (International Council of Museums): "repatriation of objects is an issue that should be very carefully dealt with. Wise and thoughtful judgment is necessary. Unnecessarily strong judgments or declarations should in any case be avoided". Although the Declaration explicitly mentions only classical Greek sculpture, the connection between repatriation demands and indigenous rights has not gone unnoticed. This point emerged on different occasions, such as the article "Top museums unite to fight Aboriginal claims" by the Sydney Morning Herald (Fray, Moses 2002). Other comments, as in Greekworks (2002) and Deport Art (2002), have primarily focused on the potential association of the Declaration with looting activities, i.e., illicit archaeological excavations (Curtis 2005: 51). The debate on the restitution of cultural heritage has often overshadowed the practice of looting, which is still supported by museums worldwide that, by accepting objects of dubious provenance, contribute to the phenomenon of academic laundering—the concealment of an artefact's illicit provenance through its display in prestigious contexts and its publication in academic research (Brodie, Renfrew 2005). Apart from that, the semantics of the Declaration reveal the vision of its signatories on the nature and role of museum institutions and their diverse collections (Curtis 2005: 51). For instance, the document places particular emphasis on the status of museum objects as "artworks". This is evident firstly from the list of signatories, most of which are art museums, and secondly from the frequent use of adjectives such as "artistic" and "aesthetic" (*ibid*.). According to Alfred Gell (1998: 3) "[…] the desire to see the art of other cultures aesthetically tells us more about our own ideology and its quasi-religious veneration of art objects as aesthetic talismans, than it does about these other cultures". Therefore, just as we can trace the roots of archaeology and anthropology back to a colonial framework (Gosden 1999: 16), it is not surprising that many have viewed the Declaration as yet another manifestation of this same imperialist approach (Curtis 2005: 53-54). Therefore, the Declaration has often been criticised for its claim to universality, supporting the Euro-American viewpoint of its signatories at the expense of other cultural contexts (Curtis 2005: 54).

Alongside the Declaration, today the increasing number of community-based museums, Indigenous or otherwise, reflects a growing recognition of the importance of preserving cultural heritage (Díaz 2017: 1). This approach indicates the profound change which is characterising museum institutions in the last decades: Indigenous communities, inverting traditional anthropological paradigms, have passed from being object of study and display to active subjects, curators of their own museums and narrators of their own stories (*ibid*.). The new reinterpretations concerning ethno-anthropological disciplines, together with the origins of the museum and collecting practices, have highlighted how these frameworks have often been associated with the appropriation and exploitation of

material cultures (Díaz 2017: 2). In this regard, the postcolonial demand to decolonise cultural heritage and create a new relationship with Indigenous communities, seems to echo some elements typical of nationalist discourses (Díaz 2017: 18). However, it is a reformulation of nationalism, now understood as a movement aimed at overcoming the exclusive and homogenising logics of the past, by promoting cultural diversity as the fundamental feature of a nation (*ibid*.). Under these circumstances, the so-called identity politics play a crucial role in reformulating the museum as an instrument for the construction and analysis of the identity, collective memory, and cultural heritage of a community (Díaz 2017: 6). It is nonetheless essential to question the assumption that heritage is simply a material manifestation of a culture, an ethnicity, or an entire nation (Díaz 2017: 8). Such perspectives tend to neglect the various interests underlying the construction and reinterpretation of cultural heritage by human agency (Díaz 2017: 9). The same repatriation requests, although legitimate, often rely on an essentialist conception of communities: each cultural sphere, understood as a self-contained unit, not only corresponds to a clear set of inherited materials but also has the exclusive right to interpret them (Curtis 2005: 53; Díaz 2017: 8-9). Only from this perspective can it be thought that cultural heritage can be repatriated, returned or reclaimed (Díaz 2017: 9). In line with Curtis (2006: 53), I do not aim to undermine the legitimacy of this movement or claim that the objects should not be returned, nevertheless, I consider fundamental to address these issues in order to avoid an overly simplistic understanding of such a complex phenomenon. With the purpose of preventing the analytical inaccuracies previously noted, the "biographical approach" to the complex lives of objects proves to be fundamental (Appadurai 1986; Hoskins 1998). This methodology underlines the importance of considering historical and cultural contexts, in order to better understand the meanings and values attributed to objects and highlight how these are contingent and reinterpreted over time (Curtis 2006: 122). According to Díaz, focusing on the object implies discussing intercultural connections beyond dichotomies (Díaz 2017: 32). Specifically, the analysis of the biography of an object—of its circulation through different territories and communities, together with its consequent transcultural and hybrid nature—would allow, privileging a constructivist approach of that same object, to better grasp the dialectical exchange between the various cultures, rather than excessively emphasising a rigid opposition between cultural spheres (Mitchell 1998: 455-472). Despite the impossibility of denying the power imbalance of colonial violence at the expense of Indigenous communities, postcolonial advocates often tend to underestimate, if not even ignore, the reactions of Indigenous people to colonialism, historically excluding them from the political and national life, as well as the different global processes of heritage construction (Díaz 2017: 14-15). This implies not considering Indigenous people as actual historical actors, but limiting to understanding them as a self-contained cultural sphere completely opposed and subordinate to that of the colonisers (Díaz 2017:

15). In contrast with this perspective, it is necessary to address the construction and decolonisation of heritage as a process of constant negotiation between Indigenous communities, the State, and cultural institutions (Díaz 2017: xxiv). Said (1993: xxix) himself warned against many later studies dedicated to the critique of colonialism, emphasising how, because of imperialism, "all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic". At this point, we could even claim that it is not completely correct to talk about the absolute novelty concerning the Indigenous contribution to museum institutions. The latter, at least theoretically, would have constantly been constructed and readapted by the different historical actors, among which the Indigenous presence, in order to fulfil the needs of the various socio-historical contexts (Simpson 2001: 237). Therefore, not only is heritage chosen in the present among a broad set of materials from the past, but also constructed—as we imagine our nations or invent our traditions—to satisfy a variety of political agendas. Thus, it is a constructivist approach, that has been recently adopted in heritage studies, allowing us to define this field not as a set of materials produced by a community, but rather as "the ways in which very selective past material artefacts, natural landscapes, mythologies, memories and traditions become cultural, political and economic resources for the present" (Graham, Howard 2008: 2).

5. Conclusions

The previous overview aims to show how the notions of authenticity and cultural heritage are constantly reinterpreted and readapted by the different historical and social actors to the discourses and needs of the present. Nevertheless, although the constructivist and, to some extent, imagined nature—quoting Anderson—of heritage, which I have emphasised, it is crucial to be aware of the effective political and economic power of the variety of discourses developed around the concept of cultural heritage. This dimension is intrinsically connected to issues of great contemporary relevance—nationalism, soft power, identity politics of auto-determination—which do not represent just abstract analytical categories of the social world but rather factors that influence and shape human lives on a daily basis. Under these circumstances, as I attempted to prove in this preliminary analysis, it is essential to at least try to avoid oversimplification concerning the processes of decolonisation of cultural heritage. In this framework, the Italian Archaeological Mission to Pakistan in Swat (Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province), has promoted since 2011 intervention methodologies and action plans based on community engagement, sustainability, and responsible tourism in order to benefit local communities in the long-term (Olivieri 2024). Heritage is here understood as a tool for social action (Byrne 2008): through the gradual transfer of responsibility to the local level and the valorisation of local resources and techniques, the Italian

Mission actively contributes to what L.M. Olivieri calls the "fourth mission"—the role of academic knowledge and research in addressing social and economic challenges.[4] On the issues discussed in the last paragraph (Postscript on "Repatriation": between "Universal Museums" and identity politics), it is important for us to learn from the lesson taught by Giuseppe Tucci, founder of the Italian Mission already in 1956. The Italian Mission was just funded (1955), when Tucci dealt with the issue of three manuscripts from Gilgit. His conduct can be considered exemplary in the development of the theoretical and legal framework around illicit archaeological excavations and the physical repatriation of artefacts (Olivieri 2023). Tucci's handling of the acquisition of those manuscripts from a high-ranking Pakistani army officer followed the Pakistani law in force at the time (Ancient Monument Preservation Act, VII, 1904): in fact, immediately after the purchase they were handed over to the Pakistani authorities (today they are in the National Museum in Karachi). This procedure represents a noteworthy model, especially in the contemporary context of increasing collections of manuscripts and artefacts of various kinds illegally exported and stored outside their country of origin. (Olivieri 2023: 62).

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[4] Olivieri, pers. comm. August 2024. The first three academic "missions" are universally recognised as (I) research, (II) teaching and (III) dissemination.

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