



A RICH VARIETY OF CULTURES
AND TRADITIONS
THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATIONS
TURKEY



INTERVIEW GIVEN BY AMBASSADOR GÜRCAN TÜRKOĞLU, PERMANENT DELEGATE OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY TO UNESCO, TO THE MAGAZINE “AKTÜEL ARKEOLOJİ”

ACTUAL ARCHAEOLOGY MAGAZINE: *How would you assess the situation in Turkey in terms of the preservation of cultural heritage in general and of the World Heritage properties in particular?*

GÜRCAN TÜRKOĞLU: We are pleased to see that awareness towards the protection of cultural heritage and the activities related to it are increasing in Turkey. It is a fact that there are still some mistakes and negligence due to past habits. Nonetheless we need to concentrate on the preservation of the existing heritage in the best possible and most assiduous manner rather than accounting for the past. There is actually quite an appropriate environment for this in Turkey: from the highest level of the State apparatus to local authorities, from civil society to the media, universities and the private sector there is, at every level, an increase in the consciousness and sensibility towards preservation of our cultural heritage.



AAPC-2011 / Huriye YILDIRAN / Side / Temple of Apollon

Can you provide some examples of this?

G.T.: The fact that the President of the Republic took over the patronage of the conservation activities of the Great Mosque and Hospital of Divriği, which is inscribed on the World Heritage List, and also of the Tombstones of Ahlat and of the Citadel and the Walls of Diyarbakır, which are both on the tentative list of Turkey is an example of the interest shown at the highest level.

The decision of the Prime Minister to earmark an important part of the allocations of the Istanbul 2010 European Culture Capital to preservation, restoration and conservation activities of cultural heritage starting with properties on the World Heritage List or the Tentative List was very

important and was highly praised at UNESCO.

The establishment by the Minister of Culture and Tourism in his Ministry of a specialized unit dedicated to World Heritage Properties was a very strategic and appropriate decision. This was welcomed by UNESCO as such a structure does not yet exist in all countries.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Çakabey Private Schools have also contributed to promotion and awareness raising activities carried out on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention by featuring our World Heritage Sites in their 2012 calendar and agendas.

The Turkish National Commission for UNESCO prepared an extensive report on the state

of our World Heritage sites and the issues related to them. The Minister of Culture and Tourism brought this report to the attention of all the relevant authorities by insuring a wide distribution of it ranging from members of the Parliament to governors. This was very helpful.

The Turkish ICOMOS Committee initiated in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism a monitoring process of our World Heritage sites.

The sponsor activities of the private sector and of foundations to excavations and restorations, the graduate level courses on management of heritage sites initiated at universities and the foundation by a group of citizens of an association related to the Heritage Sites (Travelers of World



Heritage) are all new indicators of the interest shown by society. The economic stability also makes it relatively easier to allocate resources for preservation.

Is the interest shown by the media sufficient?

There is an interest; however it is not possible to say that this interest is sufficient, given the richness of our heritage and the abundance of the problems we are facing. It is important that the media follows the issues related to the protection of cultural heritage more closely and monitor them continuously. As a matter of fact, the Turkish media have a substantial tradition initiated in this area by the journalist Özgen Acar. I wish he was a model for young journalists. It is important for young journalists, when covering issues related to the protection of

cultural heritage, to follow up and to master the technical aspects of the issue like Acar does. The latest example of the involvement of the media is the awareness raising campaign "Do not ignore it" launched by NTV Television and the magazine "Tarih Dergisi". This campaign was also welcomed by UNESCO.

Why is it that this interest does not yield enough results?

The mobilization of all the involvement of our society in a coordinated manner and with a strategic approach will undoubtedly allow us to get more productive results in the preservation of cultural heritage. Otherwise all the efforts could stay dispersed and be unfruitful. The preservation activities must be carried out with a holistic and strategic approach. There is also a need to

carry out information, education and research activities in the field of preservation starting from the youngest generations. The UNESCO World Heritage Convention provides a detailed guide in all these areas.

What are the other problems and difficulties encountered in Turkey?

With issues which link the past of humanity and of our country to the future, as it is in the case of the preservation of cultural heritage, criticism and debate should rather be kept away from the impact of daily politics. For this, the decision makers need to be transparent and open to dialogue and the different parties forming the public opinion need to be constructive and unprejudiced. As a matter of fact, the World Heritage Convention does attribute a



role in the protection of world heritage sites to central and local administration, civil society, the local population living on the site, universities, experts and media and recommends a constructive, transparent dialogue and coordination among all stakeholders.

Did the World Heritage Program of UNESCO play a role in contributing to the increase in the interest in heritage in Turkey?

The World Heritage Convention played a very important role in increasing the level of care, quality and consciousness in protection activities in our country. Turkey became party to the 1972 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1982. Nine sites from Turkey were inscribed on the World Heritage List between 1985 and 1998. After a break of 12 years, this number rose to 10 last year with the decision to inscribe Selimiye to the list. This year the nomination file of Çatalhöyük and in the coming years the files of Alanya Historical City, Bergama, Efes and Aphrodisias will be taken up at the World Heritage Committee. There are 26 more heritage sites on our tentative list waiting for the completion of their nomination files. A decision was taken to inscribe four more sites, Bergama, Eşrefoğlu Mosque, Saint Pierre Church in Hatay, Eşrefoğlu Camii and the archaeological site of Göbekli Tepe to the Tentative List last year and ten more sites this year (Aizanoi Antique City, Archaeological Site of Zeugma, Gordion, Hacı Bektaş Veli Complex, Historical Monuments of Niğde, Historic City of Ani, Historic Town of Birgi, Mamure Castle, Mausoleum and Sacred Area of Hecatomnos, Medieval City of Beçin, Odunpazarı Historical Urban Site and Yesemek Quarry and Sculpture Workshop).

I must mention the role played by the enthusiasm and perseverance of the Minister of Culture and Tourism Ertuğrul Günay in the preparation of the new nomination files and the increasing number of sites on the tentative list.

Works carried out in this regard contribute greatly to capacity development, adoption of international standards and increase in awareness, especially at a local level.





The Tombstones of Ahlat
the Urartian and Ottoman citadel

AAPC-2011 / Zeki YAVUZAK / Kars / Tombstones of Ahlat

How is World Heritage defined?

According to the World Heritage Convention, the sites applying to be inscribed on the World Heritage List must possess “an outstanding universal value” and must have kept their “authenticity” and “integrity”, in line with the criteria defined in the Convention. It is also important for the relevant States to commit themselves to continue to protect these places. This means candidate sites must possess a management plan or any other documented management system showing how its outstanding universal value is to be protected through participatory ways. Files prepared within this context are examined at the yearly meetings of the World Heritage Committee.

What does “World Heritage in Danger” mean?

This program is implemented in order to draw attention to and assist areas that risk losing or having impaired their World Heritage characteristics mentioned above for various reasons (war, natural disaster, urbanization, big infrastructure projects...).

None of Turkey’s 10 World Heritage Sites are on the list of World Heritage in Danger. In the past years there was such a concern and request due to the Golden Horn Metro Bridge Project in Istanbul. But following the establishment of a constructive dialogue between UNESCO and our authorities and the revision of the bridge project, the World Heritage Committee rejected this request. Meanwhile, the preparation and implementation of an extensive Management Plan for the Historical Peninsula and the

establishment of a Directorate for Site Management with the initiative of the Mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul was a very important development which was also exemplary.

Questions arise in Turkey sometimes as to why UNESCO and the World Heritage Center interfere with our business as if to teach us a lesson.

This approach emanates from not fully understanding UNESCO and the World Heritage Convention. UNESCO is an organization of which we are one the 20 founding members. The World Heritage Convention is an international law treaty for which we took part in the preparatory process, which we signed and which has been ratified by the Parliament because it served our national interests, as it allowed for the protection of our valuable World Heritage properties in the best possible manner. We have obligations emanating from the Convention on the protection of our sites that are considered as World Heritage Sites.

In return for this, with the help of the Convention, our heritage sites acquire universal status, prestige, touristic and cultural attractiveness. Thanks to this, we can provide technical assistance and financial opportunities.

Besides, among those providing advisory services to UNESCO on the selection and evaluation of World Heritage sites in other countries, there are several eminent Turkish experts such as Prof. Dr. Aysıl Yavuz, Prof. Dr. Doğan Kuban, Prof. Dr. Nevzat İlhan, Prof. Dr. Zeynep Ahunbay and Prof. Dr. Nur Akin.

ICCROM (International



Enver ŞENGÜL / Edirne / Selimiye Mosque



Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Conservation of Cultural Property), one of the advisory organizations of UNESCO, was headed for many years by Prof. Dr. Cevat Erder of METU.

In consequence, this Convention is not an outside mechanism that is being imposed upon us. It is a program whose preparation and implementation we took part in, which we consented to apply as it allowed the protection of our heritage in the best possible manner and which we benefit from.

Does the World Heritage Committee oppose bridge or metro constructions?

Contrary to common belief, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and the World Heritage Committee do not in principle object to big infrastructure projects such as metro or bridge constructions. On the contrary, it is said that these kinds of projects could even, in some instances, contribute to the preservation of the World Heritage Site, by for example directing the traffic underground in the case of the metro. But it is requested that utmost care is given to not impair the basic characteristics of the areas identified as World Heritage Sites.

In this respect, it is expected that during the early stage of the elaboration of big infrastructure projects, an assessment is made on whether the project will have a negative impact on the World Heritage Site and if necessary, that UNESCO experts be consulted in advance. In summary, it is expected that the balance between “protection” and “development” is satisfied.

Is Turkey fulfilling this expectation?

It is true that in the past there were some problems and delays in Turkey caused by the fact that this procedure was not very well understood. Those mistakes are unfortunately still repeated from time to time. Nonetheless there are also some positive examples. I may cite the example of the Great Mosque and Hospital of Divriği, where the buildings surrounding the property which were not suitable to a World Heritage Site have been demolished and a new restoration project was prepared. There are efforts made to better protect Nemrut. Cappadocia needs constant attention.



AAPC-2011 / Bülent AKBAŞ / Antalya / Aspendos



AAPC-2011 / Suat KOCAMAN / Adiyaman / Karakuş Tumulus / Hellenistic Period

On this occasion, I would like to point out that the archeological findings in Yenikapı during the construction of the Marmaray have attracted worldwide interest. There are plans to exhibit these findings at the future metro station. This is a project that constitutes an example of the balance between preservation and development.

Do World Heritage Sites in other countries also have problems?

Of course. There are problems in many World Heritage sites like in ours, due to various reasons such as urbanization, industrialization, negligence, bad management, war, natural disasters... For example, the Committee has discussed issues related to bridge constructions in Bordeaux, Dresden and Cologne, high rise building constructions in London and St. Petersburg, a fast train project in Barcelona, and deforestation in Congo and Mozambique. Those

few examples led to long debates in the Committee.

World Heritage properties in countries such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Palestine and Iraq are on the agenda of the Committee due to the fact that they are being harmed by war and armed conflicts. Lastly, the possibility of World Heritage sites in Syria and Mali being affected by internal conflicts caused concern in UNESCO.

In recent years, natural disasters such as the earthquake in Haiti and the flood disaster in Pakistan also necessitated measures to be taken in order to protect the Heritage Properties.

What should be done for our World Heritage Sites that are in the earthquake risk zone?

We need to act conscious of the fact that a great part of our country lies within the earthquake risk zone. UNESCO and its advisory bodies have exten-

sive knowledge of the impact of earthquakes on cultural heritage and of the way to prevent this. It could be useful to strengthen our current cooperation in this area.

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

I would like to congratulate the magazine "Aktüel Arkeoloji" for having taken up this issue within the context of the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention. The UNESCO official participating in the international symposium organized in UNESCO on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the death of Osman Hamdi Bey, qualified Turkey as being "a super power" in the field of cultural heritage. If we are to agree with this qualification, then our policies, facilities, resources, human power, consciousness and sensibility must be at a level worthy of a super power. ■



AAPC-2011 / Mustafa GEZER / Eflatunpınar - Konya - Hitrite Period