

Introduction

Fabio Maniscalco

The globalization of "uses", "tendencies" and "products", imposed by influential lobbies, together with the arrogant interference of a few Powers in the home politics of other, economically and militarily weaker states, are some of the main causes of the recent ideological clashes and frictions between different nations and civilizations, that often make it more and more difficult to understand and/or to legitimate mutual "rights".

Moreover, the economic trend that, in the recent years, has been slowing the growth of Western markets as well as the unstoppable migratory flows coming from areas of crisis inevitably, stimulate the phenomenon of racial and religious intolerance. This worrisome phenomenon spreads, also, because of prejudice and aversion to "difference."

Funding provided by the International community directed toward increasing the mutual understanding and common interest and, therefore, respect for other races, religions and/or cultures, has been fruitless, both because of the shortage of resources and because of the fact that subsidized projects are sometimes unsuitable for concretely promoting the dialogue between different "populations" and "cultures".

It is clear, therefore, that in the present world political context, in which economic affairs predominate over human rights and individualism prevails over solidarity, we feel less and less the necessity to safeguard the cultural heritage, both material and non-material culture that represents the identity of every Region of the world and is in danger of disappearing not only because of wars, natural calamities or carelessness, but also due to the loss of idioms and popular traditions.

I do not believe it is possible to transmit to future generations the same feelings of horror, disconcertment and "helplessness" felt by those who experienced the destruction of unique monuments, such as the bridge of Mostar,



1. Bosnia-Herzegovina. Mostar, the bridge reconstructed after the 1993 cannonade.



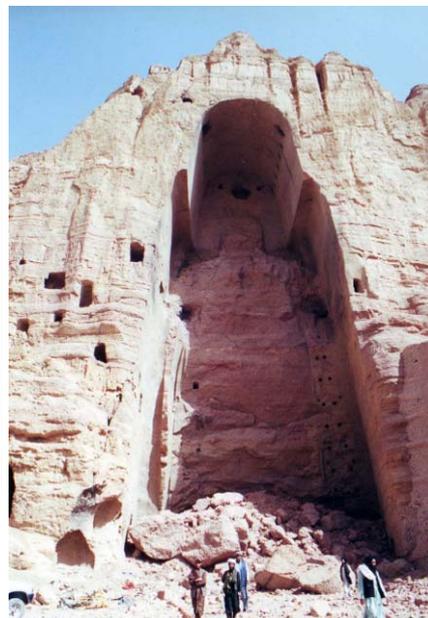
2. Bosnia-Herzegovina. Sarajevo, the Library bombed in 1992.

the Library of Sarajevo or the Bamiyan Buddhas. Similarly, it will be difficult to describe the sensations felt by those who had had the opportunity of visiting the rich Serbian Orthodox churches, which had been vandalized, set on fire and/or mined by Kosovar-Albanian extremists; or to reproduce the colours, the chiaroscuro and the details of lost masterpieces, such as Caravaggio's *Adoration of the Shepherds with the Saints Francis and Lawrence*, which no photographic or digital duplicate will be able to show satisfactorily.

Too many are the cultural objects that on a daily basis are lost because of carelessness, the inadequacy of laws, building abusiveness (frequently encouraged by unexpected remissions), conflicts and/or catastrophes caused by man or nature.

Countless are the archaeological material and other movable ethnographic objects stolen from areas of the world that are underdeveloped but rich in history and culture.

The dissolution of international historical memory is a phenomenon that public opinion and the media rarely observe with attention; it is favoured by the lack, in international juridical conventions, of an In-



3. Afghanistan. Bamiyan. The niche that contained the great Buddha sculpture after the destruction operated by the Taliban regime.



4. Michelangelo Merisi from Caravaggio, *Shepherds' adoration with the Saints Francis and Lawrence*, stolen from the St. Lawrence Oratory (Palermo) in 1969.

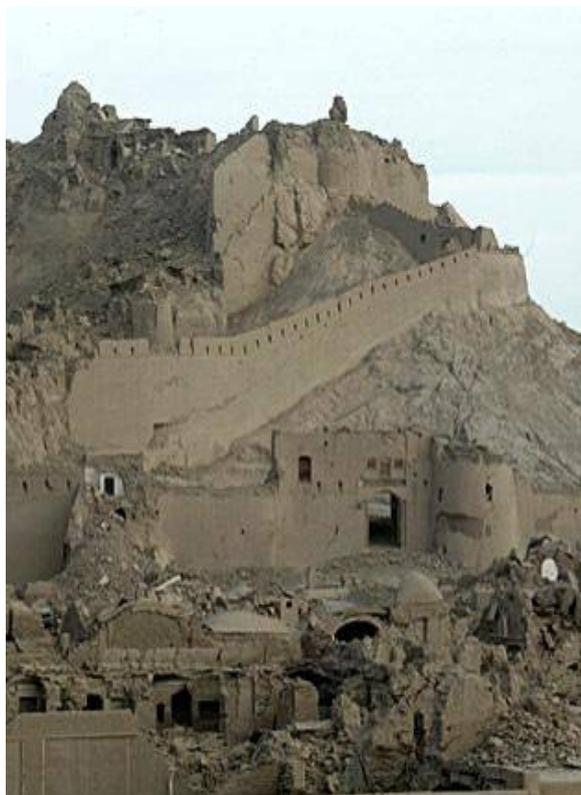
stitution, with a role codified by international law, able to promote, to approve, to disseminate, and to apply coercive, general and universal criteria.

At present the only institution put in charge of safeguarding cultural heritage, UNESCO, is lacking in real powers. Above all, it has recently lost its authoritative-ness because of its insufficiency and its sloth shown in the management of crisis situations.

In 1996, on the initiative of the UNESCO and the four most prestigious non-governmental organizations in the cultural patrimony sector (ICOM, ICOMOS, ICA and IFLA), the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) was constituted. Through the ICBS, with its "Radenci Declaration" (16 November 1998), tried to establish a very modest structure to avoid cultural heritage loss or deterioration in situations of urgency. Unfortunately, despite the good intentions and the devotion of a few persons, ICBS also has been useless.

Fortunately there are many researchers and centres successfully carrying out theoretical and practical projects for the protection and development of cultural property. The "Web Journal on Cultural Patrimony" is directed to these specialists, who often lack the opportunity to disseminate the results of their research and to engage in discussion with experts from other sectors. It intends to offer, through a multidisciplinary approach, new chances for reflection and study aimed at identifying methodologies, technologies and appropriate instrumentation for safeguarding cultural property.

Under the aegis of prestigious universities and international research centres and created by the Euro-Mediterranean and Black Sea Observatory and University in of Naples, "L'Orientale", this web journal is freely disseminated on the web, a precious tool that will assure the availability of the "Web Journal on Cultural Patrimony" to a wider public than the few specialists who work in this field.



5. Iran. Bam after the violent 2003 earthquake.