

«Sailing heavy weather». Underwater Cultural Heritage Management in Italy

«Navegando con mal tiempo». Gestión del Patrimonio Cultural Subacuático en Italia

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Abstract: Underwater cultural heritage management in Italy, as the overall cultural heritage management, despite of the creation and development of several large-scale projects, is in a stuck situation since several decades. Political incapacity to identify a systematic and long term program, bureaucratic difficulties and legislative black-outs, on various levels and sectors (institutional, academic, private), make it difficult to plan and organize long term and far-sighting activities and lastly, the chaotic structuring of the management discipline hinders a necessary collaboration between stakeholders. National and local Ministerial Institutions, Universities, Private organizations and enterprises as well as the communities appear sometimes unconnected and in contrasting positions. Contrary, a complex and *longue durée* activity, as cultural heritage management should be, needs programming, systemic approach, cooperation and sharing.

Key words: Management of Italian underwater cultural heritage, Italy, cooperation, Ministry of Culture, University.

Resumen: la gestión del patrimonio cultural subacuático en Italia, así como la gestión general del patrimonio cultural, a pesar de la creación y del desarrollo de varios proyectos de gran envergadura, se encuentra en una situación atascada desde hace varias décadas. La incapacidad política para identificar un programa sistemático y de largo plazo, las dificultades burocráticas y legislativas, en los distintos niveles y sectores (institucional, académico, privado), hacen que sea difícil planificar y organizar las actividades a largo plazo y ya definitivamente, la estructuración caótica de la disciplina de gestión dificulta una necesaria colaboración entre las partes interesadas. Instituciones nacionales y locales, universidades, organizaciones y empresas privadas, así

como las Comunidades, a veces aparecen desconectadas y en posiciones contrarias. Contrariamente, una actividad compleja y de *longue durée*, como la gestión del patrimonio cultural, necesita de programación, enfoque sistémico y cooperación.

Palabras clave: gestión del patrimonio cultural subacuático, Italia, cooperación, Ministerio de Cultura, universidad.

Introduction

At the dusk of the twentieth century, Piero Alfredo Gianfrotta (1998a; 1998b) offered a sharp and close examination of Italian underwater archaeology in the twenty years that followed the death of Nino Lamboglia (recognized as the father of the discipline in Italy) in 1977. The present examination starts from that analysis, though time has passed and some situations have changed. In fact we stress, as Gianfrotta did almost twenty years ago, that Lamboglia's teaching and legacy should be kept and constantly re-evaluated and that, following Lamboglia's footprints, the Italian discipline should restart and get a new outburst, in order to be aligned with the good experiences and practices now being produced and followed in several countries.

Italian underwater archaeology is today sailing heavy weather, and the bearings to uncover the due course should be searched for in the wit and model of the man who, over half a century ago, marked the path for a new born discipline with the optimism and stable intents that allowed him to apply difficult choices; as an example, his decision to stop the *Artiglio's* bucket on the Roman shipwreck off Albenga stigmatizing the tremendous results of the «salvage frenzy» taking over on the «best intentions» of the commercial salvage firm SORIMA (Pallarés, 1997-1998). In this situation, while the media were attacking archaeologists for not recovering the whole cargo of amphoras, archaeologists kept standing in defense of their possibly unpopular but absolutely scientifically sound decision.

This consideration does not want to be a simple nostalgia for a lost Golden Age, but the starting point of a reflection on the present situation. Today, paradoxically, in a more favorable context, with an increasing number of well-trained and professional archaeologists able to dive and work underwater, with the improvements and with the advantages put forward by technological innovations, the Italian underwater archaeology system appears to have lost its original frame of mind. Although situations like the one in Albenga do not happen nowadays, the feeling is that underwater cultural heritage management (as overall cultural heritage management in Italy), needs to be rethought over a more systematic imprint and with a major focus on cooperation and collaboration.

Historical Background

The first experiences in Italian underwater archaeology were produced with Spain and France. Their shores and their coastal waters represented, for many years, the prominent proscenium for the experimentation of methodological aspects for the new born discipline. Simultaneously to the advancements produced in the eastern Mediterranean by George F. Bass, the western Mediterranean witnessed –thanks to the commitment of scholars like Nino Lamboglia and Fernand Benoit– the application of advanced techniques and stratigraphic methods in the underwater environment (Pallarés, 1997-1998).

A crucial turning point in Italy, as Gianfrotta correctly highlighted (1998a; 1998b), was represented by the finding and recovery of the Riace Bronzes and the ensuing «fever» for new

and sensational discoveries. The search for glaring discoveries, by «advocational» and –even more blameable– by certain «practitioners», brought to a sensationalistic drift of underwater archaeology laying the foundations, we agree, for a deranged «discontinuity» (Gianfrotta, 1998a: 2; 1998b: 2-9), taking Gianfrotta –once again– to affirm how «it needs to be specified that in Italy no shipwreck exists that has been fully excavated; following two excavation seasons, the works stop jumping to other rather promising locations» (authors' translation). Fortunately, the active commitment to the drafting phase, and then the adoption and ensuing ratification (see below) of the 2001 Unesco Convention for the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (hereafter 2001 Unesco Convention; see Secci, 2011) in Italy, has strongly mitigated such sensationalistic drift.

The reasons for a stalemate

From the National Workshop in Underwater Archaeology held in 1996 at the Certosa di Pontignano, Siena (Volpe, 1998, see particularly the introduction and the roundtable), comes out a picture of Italian underwater archaeology not far apart from today's situation. Workshop participants highlighted for the first time and in a clear manner the issues related to the management framework and those strictly related with a lack of academic training for new generations of underwater archaeologists, which appears still evident nowadays.

From an administrative point of view, the framework of the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities and (now) Tourism (MiBACT), particularly for underwater archaeology, after the decline and closing of the Servizio Tecnico per l'Archeologia Subacquea (STAS; see Volpe *et alii*, 2014) –a ministerial central body for expert advice in the field (son of the fever that followed the discovery of the Riace Bronzes)– appears highly fragmented and lacking a series of officially shared and accepted protocols and guidelines, following the examples of the Unesco Manual for Activities directed at Underwater Cultural Heritage (Maarleveld/Guérin/Egger, 2013), for the moment only available in English and French, or the Spanish Libro Verde (AA.VV., 2010); something similar, but also considering the specific legislative contexts of Italy, should be prepared in a quick time, in order to allow an unvarying development of the discipline on the whole Italian territory.

In spite of a very long legislative tradition on the protection of cultural heritage, with the first law enacted in 1939 –very innovative for that time, and widely considered as one of the best in the world–, the problematic Italian legislative apparatus, often deemed odd and «Byzantine», participates in creating difficulties to the sound and flowing management of underwater cultural heritage. The continuous modifications occurred to the Law 42/2004 *Codice dei Beni Culturali e del Paesaggio* (hereafter Codice) since its entry into force in 2004, are but one example. As well as the political contradictions of a country that, although proactive part in the drafting phase of the 2001 Unesco Convention, accepted its principles (annexed rules) in the 2004 Codice (art. 94), but formally ratified the convention only in 2010.

The legislative apparatus has been further complicated by the Constitutional Reform (Law 18 October 2001, n.º 3), where the amendments to articles 114-133 of the Italian Constitution attempting to reform the relationship between central and peripheral levels of government into a more federate fashion have unfortunately resulted in a detachment between the *exclusive legislation* (depending on the State) and the *concurrent legislation* (between State and Regional governments) on the legislative-administrative competences relating to cultural heritage –specifically and respectively, protection and public interpretation–, which attempting to pursue the principle of subsidiarity (vertical and/or horizontal), resulted in a «juxtaposition» (often ideological) between macro models of reference, «state» vs. «regions», «centre» vs. «periphery» and «practitioners» vs. «politicians», whilst as Cammelli (2009) has perfectly stressed:

«the point is to re-construct general principles that should become common independently from who is factually operating [...] the laborious but probably only outlet lays in the integration in a multiple system of a series of common parameters pertinent to the regulation, efficiency, funding schemes, recruitment and training of professionals [...]. Such shared ground [...] represents the only ground on which a cooperation between institutional levels and administrative systems can effectively become profitable. A mixed system, nor centralized nor abandoned to the self-government by the local systems, where State and territorial bodies have distinct roles but shared principles, rules and... little shared virtues» (author's translation).

The legislative-administrative issues strictly tie with a certain predisposition of the Italian archaeological discipline to result impenetrable (or too slowly permeable) to theoretical-methodological developments appearing in countries with a similar tradition and cultural *milieu*. This does not mean that Italian underwater archaeology should uncritically enclose theoretical and methodological developments produced elsewhere but, instead, it is a suggestion for a more proactive reflection on various aspects of the discipline, accounting for progresses obtained elsewhere.

A clear example is the delay often observed in the acquisition and exploitation of the potentialities inherent in the landscape archaeological approach, or the title «new technologies» applied to techniques and methods, such as acoustic remote sensing, that are all but new in the International panorama and instead participating in the disciplinary development since almost its birth. Even more unintelligible are the efforts (even economical) generated to train scholars on the understanding of remote sensing tools functioning without an appropriate infrastructure (in terms of hardware) enabling them to fully exploit tools potentials.

To these aspects ties what possibly appears one of the main limits of the Italian management framework. The concept of collaboration and cooperation between various stakeholders –foreseen and suggested by the above mentioned Codice and Constitutional Law–, appears a well drafted principle but, apart from some deserving exceptions, yet to be commonly applied. In such a poor collaborative environment –although eminent exceptions exist–, the variations between the different areas of the peninsula become even more clear. Such differences often derive from different sensibilities among appointed territorial officers, creating once again, a heterogeneous approach possibly ascribable to a limited central coordination, posing limits to the full and unvarying development of the discipline on the whole country.

In such a view, the idea of a Superintendency for the Sea –often proposed but never seen out (Stefanile, 2014: 169-170)– having jurisdiction on the whole Italian territory could result in a winning choice for strengthening and aligning underwater archaeology in Italy. A Superintendency not acting as a *deus ex machina* or as a sole actor but operating, instead, to grant disciplinary cohesion, applying a formal and shared (by all stakeholders) set of protocols, standards, procedures and best practices, so as to have the «periphery» (local administrations, Universities and other actors) and the «centre» (Ministry) management parties speaking the same language, practising the same rules while founding their actions on common parameters. This does not imply a flattening of research, does not deny the freedom of research but, instead, allows a complex discipline –as underwater archaeology– to fully develop on a National level on the basis of common grounds.

It is sad to note that, even in the recent, heavy reorganization of the territorial Superintendencies, promoted in 2014 and still in progress at the moment, practically zero has been the interest shown by the government towards the problems of underwater archeology. In a country with more than 7000 km of coastline, now one of the State Parties of the 2001 Unesco Conven-

tion, in a political season that points strongly on renewal and reform, albeit in a climate of cuts and spending review, the lack of interest towards the underwater heritage is a sign of a serious situation.

This is sad especially considering the very high density of underwater archaeological sites located during the Archeomar (see www.archeomar.it with related bibliographic references) campaigns (and during subsequent surveys, still in progress, with the support of the Navy), probably the last Italian big project with a national vision and an appropriate funding: a project that has delivered hundreds of sites and data to Superintendencies and Territorial Offices struggling with continuous, paralyzing, difficulties and emergencies.

Technical and Academic training drawbacks

Another issue that creates problems to underwater archaeology and archaeologists is represented by the certification of Underwater Technical Operator (OTS), a sort of commercial diving certificate, required to work in underwater sites, particularly in harbor environments. On the one hand, the excessive costs of this certification often disheartens archaeologist from acquiring the license; on the other hand, the peculiar training of these courses, arisen for technical work in off-shore platforms and the like, has nothing or little to do with an archaeological excavation. For this reason, from many sides and many voices it has been proposed a «scientific diving certification» procuring skills and competences useful for the various scientific disciplines that find in the water environment one of their main research areas (i.e. marine biology, geology and geomorphology of submerged landscapes), allowing meanwhile to acquire an adequate training for developing research in the water following strict safety standards. Hybrid experiences such as the OTAS courses or the «OTS for archaeologists» courses have supplied with good opportunities but have also bypassed a problem that needs to be solved upstream (with a specific legislation, possibly foreseeing a scientific diving certification).

In the nearly total absence of university programs fully dedicated to underwater archaeology, the few existing on the national territory –mostly caused by a reckless university reform– find many difficulties in training underwater archaeologists able to direct underwater excavations. For an essentially historical reason, archaeological training in Italy often appears still grounded to a historic-artistic approach, which highly hinders –compared to other European situations– the variety of acquired competences needed to confront with the current discipline. Sub-disciplines such as international legislation on UCH, ethics and theory in archaeology, UCH management (including the aspects related to conservation/preservation, public outreach and access), remain almost always out (or little scrutinized) by the syllabus offered within university curricula. This is surely due also to a severe structuring of the topics' offering at university, as they are charted by the Ministry of Education, University and Research, with limited opportunities to vary or adapt topics to an ever developing discipline (Volpe, 2013; Volpe, 2014; Zucca, 2013).

Positive evaluations that followed the 1996 Conference, relating to the establishment of the first university program in underwater archaeology and the observation (from several sides) of a marked necessity to implement training offer in the field has been, in the last 15 years, mostly disregarded. Responsibilities (if any), we believe, must be searched for in a University reform that ties the establishment of new post-graduated courses to specific and high-demanding prerequisite such as, for example, a numerical ratio among the teaching body, the Scientific-Disciplinary sectors, and the number of enrolled students. Oddly, the Bologna agreements aimed at uniforming on a European basis far apart university systems has instead produced the reform and the stiff grids that prevent the establishment of accomplished university programs in underwater archaeology.

It can be meaningful to remark also that a –sometimes– conflictual relation between protection Institutions (Superintendencies) and Research Institutions (Universities) contributes to hinder a coherent disciplinary development. An exemplary case in this sense could be the so called *circolari Malnati* (Circolare 16 March 2011, n. 3; 4 January 2012, n. 53 and 4 December 2012, n. 24), where it has been speculated a dual regime suggesting the archaeological research as prerogative to the Ministry (MiBACT) alone, while universities were left with the juridical exercise denominated «archaeological research grant» (Volpe, 2013; Zucca, 2013).

Towards the future

Andrea Carandini and Piero Guzzo (1999, in Volpe, 2013), respectively working in academia and in an archaeological Superintendency –in a relevant cultural debate titled «Academia in the archaeological heritage protection system»–, stated how the rivalry between universities and Ministry represents a battle of the have-nots that harms the efficient protection of the cultural heritage, representing instead an exercise that impose to both institutions a true collaborative intercourse (Volpe, 2013).

«The Christian God helps to explain the concept of heritage management, that is assumed as Triune, articulating in understanding, protection and enhancement of the resource. Superintendencies practice management in its three aspects. But only heritage protection is, and must remain, exclusive jurisdiction of the Superintendencies [...]. Universities must support Superintendencies in understanding the resource (through research), and territorial governments must participate in the enhancement of the resource that, without understanding and protection, will be nonsense. Understanding of the resource is the premise for any management, [...], but the knowledge collected by Universities does not speak yet to the one collected by Superintendencies, whereas summed up together will allow for a more analytical understanding» (A. Carandini, in Volpe, 2013; author's translation).

Underwater Archaeologist Giuliano Volpe (2013: 307), former Dean at the University of Foggia and currently President of the Superior Council for Cultural Heritage at MiBACT, suggested a series of proposals for relaunching the management of cultural heritage and landscape, affirming how:

«Role and structure of the Ministry should be rethought, brought back to the originally techno-scientific character, with a nimble centre, assigned to implement management orientation, coordination/collaboration and rigid supervision, and peripheral operative units based on real and close collaborations on a local level, between all the parts of the public system. Collaborations no longer tied to temporary good relations between individual scholars and the Superintendent or the local officer, but instead inserted in a consistent and oriented management system».

The management and coordination roles recalled by Volpe could be well addressed by a National Superintendency of the Sea through a series of legislation proposals, rules, guidelines, procedures and regulations (on specific aspects of the archaeological exercise) which could grant UCH management an unvarying development within national generic but commonly accepted parameters based on the most up-to-date and accepted international standards; those recognizable in International charters, conventions and recommendations (Secci/Spanu, 2015; see also Secci, 2011: 116-120).

In a management system which aims to a full accomplishment, the value of the public outreach and access phases can not be underrated, in order to make cultural heritage truly

valuable for communities. The last aim of cultural heritage management, in addition to resource protection, is to actively contribute –on various levels and to various aspects– to the socio-cultural growth of the reference community and of humanity as a whole. An accomplished UCH management allows for a «Harmonic Motion of *Utilitas Publica*» (Secci/Spanu, 2015), where cultural heritage truly becomes a useful tool for a socio-cultural growth of society.

Underwater Archaeological Parks, Maritime Museums and public access activities as underwater cultural heritage trails all foster fertile mechanisms for both the territory and related communities (Melotti, 2007; Canoro/Izzo, 2015). Nonetheless, such initiatives have to be «guided», «oriented» and «coordinated» following common rules that will allow to maximize results, obviously accounting for territorial dependent variables and for the intrinsic characteristics of the site or resource to be publicly interpreted. In this regard, it is clear the fragmentation of a system that is unable to network. Maritime museums (or museums of the sea) –more than once suggested and supported by Luigi Fozzati as fundamental institutions for a country like Italy, where each coastal village has its own maritime tradition– rise in a chaotic and anarchic way, often for private or avocational initiative and always lacking overall coordination, often resulting in worthless and costly duplications. Taking Naples as an example, against twenty-six centuries of sea-faring activities and a relevant maritime heritage such as the shipwrecks in Piazza Municipio or the Borbonic fleet, the city still lacks a true Maritime Museum. It only exists the laudable but inadequate experience of the Museum in Bagnoli, which represents a private enterprise by a philanthropist totally autonomous from managing institutions.

Similarly, the commitment to protect and enhance the common heritage, through marine parks and underwater trails with the positive experiences of Baia (Canoro/Izzo, 2015; Stefanile, in press, with references to past and present activities in the site) and the Sicilian trails, contrast with the tens of coastal, intertidal and submerged sites literally abandoned, encircled by abusive urban speculations and wild moorings, whose access is totally uncontrolled with all the risks and possible damage that this situation brings with it.

Conclusions

The awareness of a problem is the first step to its solution: with the present contribution we intended to bring forward a complicated tableau, and a prompt to pass through a stalemate increasingly embarrassing. From the swamp, we believe, it is possible to rise by recognizing the set of problems and by working hard to overcome them, but also through the communion of intents, major premise for whatever turn. A fragmentary nature of Italian underwater archaeology is also visible in the practitioners' association, that should instead mobilize the whole category. It is frankly unimaginable the search for a common effort for a community of few tens of practitioners that succeed in scattering in at least four associations: AIASub, the veteran of the associations, probably had to rise the instances of its members and is instead even drowning for the edition of the Conference proceedings, awaiting four years for the publication (and that, when and if published, will be irremediably obsolete), FAS, AIOSS and ANASub. Four groups to contend few, very few memberships, and sporadic meetings where everyone is hastening to present its own project instead of halting and reflecting on how to launch a common route.

To conclude, we believe that underwater archaeology and underwater cultural heritage management in Italy will benefit only from a major coordination and collaboration between involved institutions and individuals, as we agree with Albert Einstein that exist only three laws in jobs: «Out of clutter find simplicity. From discord find harmony. In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity».

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