

# VALUE, MEANING AND UNDERSTANDING OF HERITAGE: PERCEPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN TURKEY

*Valor, sentido y conocimiento del Patrimonio Cultural: percepción e interpretación de las comunidades locales en Turquía.*

Veysel Apaydin (1)

(1) Institute of Archaeology. University College London

## ABSTRACT

The increasing importance of encouraging a widespread understanding of heritage has received a great deal of attention in the world context in recent years. In last decades hundreds of sites have become “world heritage” as they have been selected with certain criteria and valued by UNSECO. However, the selection procedures of those sites have not included what the meaning and value of heritage sites for people who live nearby. This paper argues that every single individual and community have a range of different socio-political, ethnic and economic backgrounds that shape their heritage perceptions that plays a significant role during valuing past materials and heritage sites. People develop different sense of relationship between themselves and heritage sites over a time. Therefore, it is significant to pay attention to the diverse voices of locals during the process of valuing heritage sites. This paper will specifically discuss the meaning of the heritage for locals regarding Çatalhöyük and Hattuşa, which are inscribed World Heritage Sites, and Ani that has been on the tentative list of UNSECO.

**Keywords:** Heritage, Turkey, Community, Perception, Value.

## RESUMEN

*La creciente importancia de extender la comprensión del patrimonio ha recibido mucha atención en los últimos años. En las últimas décadas se han declarado centenares de sitios como “Patrimonio Mundial”, seleccionados a partir de unos criterios que valora la UNESCO. De todos modos, esta selección no incluye los valores y significados del patrimonio para la gente que vive en su entorno. Este trabajo argumenta que cada persona y comunidad tiene un origen diferente y éste conforma su percepción del patrimonio y el valor que se le otorga. Las personas desarrollan diferentes relaciones con el patrimonio a lo largo del tiempo. Por ello, es importante prestar atención a las diferentes voces locales durante el proceso de valoración de*

*sitios patrimoniales. En este trabajo se discutirá específicamente el significado del patrimonio para agentes locales en el entorno de Çatalhöyük y Hattuşa, inscritas en la lista de Patrimonio Mundial de la UNESCO, así como Ani, en la lista tentativa.*

**Palabras clave:** Patrimonio, Turquía, Comunidad, Percepción, Valor.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of heritage has become a very common ground in recent years especially with the rapid increase of Neo liberal policies all around the world. Therefore, heritage is too often considered as a tool of economic income with tourism industry (see Chhabra 2009; Ashworth and Tunbridge 2000; Graham *et al.* 2000; Ashworth 2003) rather than its real meanings for different individuals, groups and institutions. I argue that heritage is a concept that has range of meanings and symbolizations for different individuals, groups and even for institutions. For example, while it can be important for identity and memory concepts for specific ethnic groups, it can be a threat for nation states which often considers the heritage of ethnic groups as a threat for their hegemonic powers. The heritage concept also could lead a conflict between ethnic groups over ownership rights of the lands, or it can be recognized as a world heritage by the different views (see Ashworth and Larkham 1994; Graham *et al.* 2000; Hall 2005; Logan 2008; Apaydin 2015).

Therefore, the meaning of heritage ranges accordingly because it is not an artifact or site but it is a process that uses objects and sites as a tool to transfer the ideas. It is also a vehicle of communication of ideas, values and knowledge that could be the tangible, the intangible and the virtual. It is also shaped according the needs of present, it can even be said it is assumed imaginary past and future (Ashworth 2007: 2).

Without doubt it has broad meanings and difficult to define it as it changes according to people, groups, societies and institutions such as states. However, I would argue that it can contain anything valuable (tangible or intangible) from people's past. For example, houses, monuments, buildings, objects or languages, songs, festivals, or rivers, mountains, landscapes and trees, therefore, the concept of heritage is usually considered to be a positive value (Harrison 2013) such as identity and belonging by different groups. Therefore, the heritage and its interpretation are an intensively subjective aspect, which can be used to define groups, communities and nations; hence it can be argued that it is a very political subject (Aplin 2002). This is because it also represents the connection of a groups or nation to the past and the reproduction of history (Harrison 2013: 5; also see Smith 2006; Harvey 2008; Apaydin 2015).

Apart from the political and representative meanings, heritage has a different meaning in personal and communal level for community members and

communities. It is because every individual and group has a different relationship with heritage objects and sites, because of the subjective understanding of the life, with the “place” as this relationship produces “practical sense” over a time (Bourdieu 1990). Therefore, this subjective relationship between place, in this case heritage places or objects, must be investigated with great care and paid better attention during the heritage studies for better protection and preservation of heritage sites.

This paper will provide broader definition of heritage by ethnically, culturally and politically different three communities of three World Heritage Sites in Turkey, then critically examine the role of these communities for protection and preservation of the sites.

## 2. SENSE OF PLACE: THE RELATIONSHIP OF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES WITH HERITAGE SITES

*.... the past as a matter of experience and interpretation, offers a totally different impression of diversity and multifariousness. Difference in space and time is overwhelming. We experience a permanent change of views on the essential nature of what history is about. Accordingly, the representation of the past in the cultural orientation of human life reflects this difference and variety to such a degree that it is difficult to identify one specific form as essentially historical.*

(Jörn Rüsen 2007:2)

The communities and even every single individual differ in terms of the way of living, traditions, and the way of thinking, even though they may have some similarities in terms of their socio-political backgrounds. I argue that the main cause of this difference is that the every individual and the communities have a different formation process that is shaped by the range of different environment that they live in. To add that, each individual also have a different life, even in the same society and community. The different experience of life also reflects people's perception of politics, worldview and the heritage. The different and distinct thinking produces different histories and pasts at the same time. As humans, we live and also produce tangible and intangible materials of the future in our every day lives that also shape the identity of individuals and communities even though people's views and the past interpretations are usually controlled by hegemonic powers, usually by nation states accordingly with their ideological views.

In the case of Çatalhöyük, Ani and Hattuşa (see figure 1 and 2), each site has different and various dynamics in terms of socio-political and economic backgrounds, therefore, their perceptions for the heritage sites and the understanding of the past are equally varied because their regional and social

needs requires, as Bourdieu (1990) emphasizes, 'practical sense', which influences the subjective understanding of the life. These dynamics are also the most significant aspects to be considered for preventing neglect of archaeological and heritage sites and increasing heritage awareness.

The communities of Çatalhöyük are mostly conservative and also nationalist (see Candan 2007: 96). The social structures of the villages are shaped by Islamic traditions. The heritage perception of the communities are also shaped by the strong affect of religion as they only considers the places as a heritage as long as they have a connection with Islam. Therefore, most of the communities do not consider Çatalhöyük as a heritage site (see Apaydin 2015) although it is listed as a World Heritage by UNSECO<sup>1</sup>. To add that most of the communities of Çatalhöyük don't get economical benefit from the site, this is because the tourism doesn't have a large impact at Çatalhöyük. Similarly the communities of Ani are also mostly Turkish nationalist in contrast the site remains are Armenian whom Turkey is having political disputes particularly since Armenian cleansing in 1915. As a result of high political pressure on communities of Ani, most of the community members don't consider Ani as a heritage site even though it is listed in the tentative list of UNSECO<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, most of the communities of Ani have no economical income from the site. In contrast to Çatalhöyük and Ani, the communities of Hattuşa recognize the site as a heritage, this is because the long term political investment of the Turkish state on Hittite sites to claim the ownership rights of the Turkey by making connection with Hittites in the first decades of Turkish state (see Apaydin 2015 for more details of the communities of three sites and their heritage perceptions).

Although Çatalhöyük and Ani are not considered as a heritage sites by most of their communities because of the impact of their political and worldviews these communities are also the ones who have protected the sites against looting, plundering etc. Because of their practical relationships between place and the site over a time which have produced different memories at personal and community level, therefore, the impact of politics and worldview losses its affect on individuals. For instance, the mound of Çatalhöyük is part of the landscape of the Çatalhöyük communities as they have farming areas and gardens all around the mound. The communities of Çatalhöyük have lived in this region for many generations, therefore, including the mound of Çatalhöyük, the landscape of their region has an important memories which has passed by one generation to another.

The communities of Ani have developed more personal relationships between themselves and the site although they were settled to region not long ago. For instance, the caves of Ani were the home for the communities of the Ani villagers

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1 See <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1405>

2 See <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5725/>

for decades until they moved to current village location; or the site of Ani used to be grazing area for the communities' animals (see Apaydin 2015). As a result of living with the site side-by-side personal and group memories were developed over a time (see figure 3). Similarly, although the communities of Hattuşa already recognized the site as a heritage the site has offered natural resources with its valley, grazing areas etc to community, therefore it has more important meanings than political agendas (Apaydin 2015).

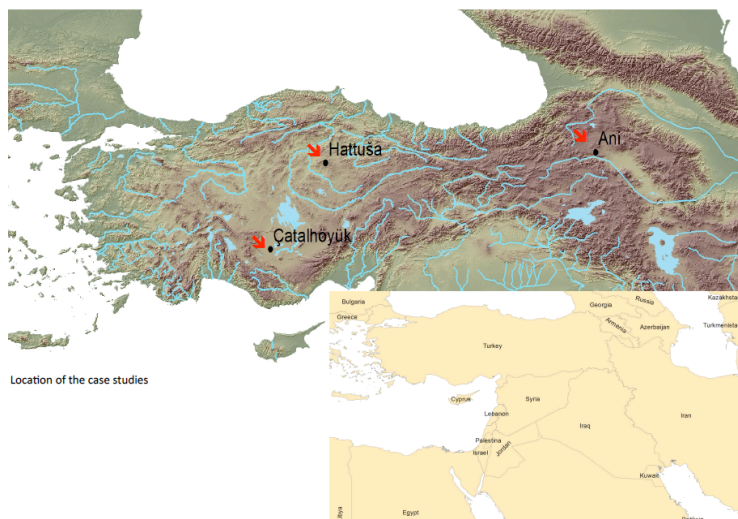


Figure 1: Location of the case studies.

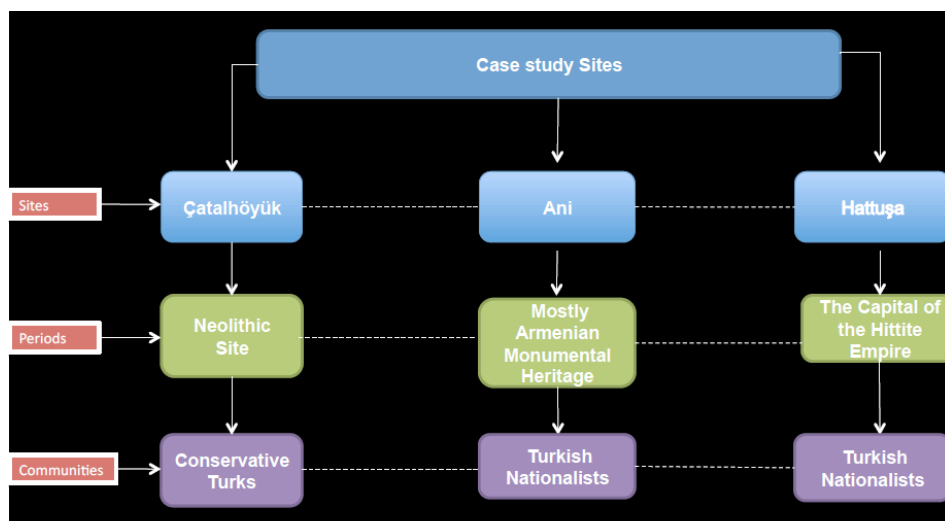


Figure 2: Case studies and their communities.

However, heritage specialists, or public archaeologists do not intensively investigate the importance of personal relationship of the individuals and communities with heritage sites although the local communities are the ones who can better protect and preserve the heritage sites. It is even almost completely ignored during the inscription process of UNESCO for World Heritage List. This is clearly seen from the points of view of community members of Çatalhöyük, Ani and Hattuşa (see Apaydin 2015).

Therefore, heritage perceptions and views of the local people who live near the sites must be exposed with great care. The selection criteria of UNESCO<sup>3</sup> for World Heritage List must be questioned and re-organized. It is because, as I pointed above, the meaning and value differs according to individuals and groups as a result of their subjective relationships with heritage sites.

### **3. CONCLUSION: WHO DEFINES AND VALUES HERITAGE SITES?**

In this paper, I have argued that the meanings of the objects and places range from people to people. Every individual and communities in different parts of the world have a different criteria for valuing objects and places because of the personal experiences of people with objects and places. Hence, the local people should be the one who can value heritage sites.

However, UNESCO, which imposes certain criteria to be announced as a World Heritage, excludes the local people in practice. This doesn't differ from some archaeologists and heritage specialists who have a quite top-down and elitist approach in many parts of the world. Those top-down approaches, which are the continuation of colonialist archaeology, have also excluded communities from the sites and aimed to impose certain knowledge and meanings that were only developed archaeologists to local communities. In other words, both archaeologists, who have a top-down approach, and UNESCO, by imposing certain criteria, reconstruct the meaning and value of heritage sites. However, instead imposing values and meanings to communities, participatory approaches (see Jameson 1997; Merriman 2004b; Okamura and Matsuda 2011) should be taken by people who deal with heritage objects and places. To add that, including local communities into heritage management of the sites would result with more effective protection and preservation of the sites.

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>

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