

# Ideological Uses and Management Policies of Archaeological Sites in Post-Socialist Albania: The Case of Saranda Area (Finiq and Butrint)

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**Abstract-** *This article is a sample of the research I am conducting in the wider area of Saranda as part of the wider framework of critical analysis of cultural heritage, this scientific field that is placed at the meeting point of archaeology and anthropology. The two sciences have intersected in many different ways since the 1980s. Archaeology as a science that studies the archaeological remains of the past was confronted with anthropology whose purpose is the cultural analysis of social phenomena and relationships. The result of this partnership is a wide range of approaches, which are called post-process archaeologies. These approaches represent a variety of analyses, which emphasize a contextual, and thus contemporaneous, nature of archaeological evidence, the critique of archaeology as a scientific search for objective truth, its links with history and the contested nature of archaeological data and of the archaeological work. This perspective turns the interest of research from explanation to interpretation and from the positivist tradition of natural science to the tradition of interpretational philosophy, i.e. the preeminent study of meaning.*

**Keywords:** *archeological sites, post-socialist Albania, policy management*

**Theoretical background -** The modern reality, with its depiction of social changes, the new balances of economic power and the consequent political decisions and actions in an increasingly fluid international environment, finds archaeology confronted with the effects of emerging nationalism in Western societies, the ties and the links between archaeology, archaeological material and places, nationalist discourses and practices, turning this topic into an academic subject and leading to several publications. Also important was the contribution of the work of Eric Hobsbawn and Terrence Rander, who introduce the term *"invented tradition"* by which is meant: *"a set of practices which are usually governed, overtly or implicitly, by accepted rules and of a ritualistic or symbolic nature, and which seek to inculcate certain values and rules of conduct through repeti-*

*tion, which automatically implies continuity with the past."*

In the science of anthropology there is the rise of an interpretive trend that focuses on the study of cultural meanings and symbols, with Clifford Geertz as an important exponent. Geertz in his book *The Interpretation of Cultures* advances the following view of culture: "Believing, along with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in a web of meanings which he himself has woven, I consider this web to be culture, and consequently his analysis not an empirical science in search of law, but an interpretive science in search of meaning. I seek interpretation by analyzing superficially enigmatic social expressions. But this declaration, a whole creed in one sentence, itself requires some interpretation."

Therefore, the science of archeology

evolved through these theoretical approaches opening up to archaeological ethnography and the management of cultural heritage in relation to the construction of national identity.

The present article has as its object of research the archaeological heritage in post-socialist Albania, as archaeological ethnography is that which studies the relationship of people with space, with the landscape and with the monuments - such as are the archaeological sites - investigating public discourses and practices, the ways and involvement of local communities with the materiality of the past in which the archaeological remains are also involved. The international literature in the last 30 years has been enriched enough with important works regarding this field, but as far as the Albanian area is concerned, research is in its infancy with papers dealing mainly with issues related to the ideological use of cultural heritage in the communist period or the effects it has in the present. In the case of Albania, the ideological use of antiquities was necessary for the "awakening" of national consciousness and the creation of the Albanian state. Even more, during the communist period, antiquity and the science of archeology were used to prove ethnic continuity: with the theory of the Pelasgian origin of the Albanians and the "purity" of the "Albanian race", as well as the theory that the Albanians they were first Pelasgians, then Illyrians, then Arben-Albanians, and finally Shqipëtar. In its post-socialist period, Albania went from absolute isolation to the opposite stage by

opening its borders, gaining a strong presence on the international scene. This period was characterized by the application of modern methodology and interdisciplinarity, paving the way for Albanian archaeology and reaching the point of occupying the European archaeological community and gradually turning from terra incognita into a regional center for the development of archaeological missions from all the developed scientific countries of world, creating the corresponding spheres of influence within the country itself, inextricably linked to cultural activities. The question inevitably arises as to how far and in what way and to what extent foreign schools have influence Albanian archaeology and consequently the interpretation of cultural heritage at the local and national level. Also how Albania manages its cultural heritage in the present and how it deals with this national identity, based on the aforementioned social and political changes.

This is also the starting point of the present research in an attempt to map the still blurred ethnographic landscape by conducting an ethnographic research in the local communities of the archaeological sites, studying public Discourses and practices, the ways of involvement of the local communities with the ancient past and how this affects their current identity. A small part of the results of the ethnographic research is listed below.

## The ethnographic example

The city of Saranda is located at the southernmost point of Albania in an open bay



Fig1 / The Hill of ancient Phoinice. At the top of the hill is the Archaeological Park, while down in the plain is the current village with the name of Finiq.  
source / the authors



Fig2 / Archaeological Park of Phoinice, Ancient Theater.  
source / the authors

of the Ionian Sea in the central Mediterranean, approximately 14 km east of the northern tip of Corfu. Today, this city is an important Mediterranean port, which enjoys the advantage of being a disembarkation point mainly to Corfu. The literature characterizes it as an important port both in Roman times and in the Ottoman period with the ancient name Onchesmos. It is interesting, then, that this port existed when Butrint (today a UNESCO World Heritage Site) was located 20 km to the south and 10 km to the east from the city of Ancient Phoinice (Finiq), which was the capital of the Chaonians and the capital of Koinos of Epirotes in the Hellenistic years. In modern times due to the isolation of the communist period (1945-91), it had a reduced trade move, but after 1992 a steady tourist development is observed.

The object of study of the present research is this trio of ancient cities which today are famous archaeological destinations, giving the current city of Saranda an important cultural

profile, which the current municipalities of Saranda and Finiq (municipality to which the ancient city of Phoinice geographically belongs) are managed through tourism with the ultimate goal of economic development.

Onchesmos, which has left important monuments that are now Cultural Monuments, ancient Phoinice, which is now an Archaeological Park, and Butrint, which has the status of a National Park (because apart from its archaeological value it has now been declared a Monument UNESCO World Heritage Site, is also a separate

environmental site, which is considered threatened and protected by the Ramsar Zone), are important archaeological sites, which are managed by the Ministry of Culture of Albania through local cultural heritage management bodies.

This choice is due to the fact that these ancient cities have a common historical background. They belong geographically, politically and institutionally to the ancient state of Epirus. The wider present-day area of Saranda has been identified by archaeologists as the land of the Chaons, a "tribe" which geographically and institutionally belonged to Ancient Epirus. This ancient past has been interpreted in the recent past and present in various ways, as a large part of the Greek minority lives in this area today. This condition automatically creates a great interest in how this past is interpreted at the local and central level, as in the past the question of the identity of the ancient past has been raised in Public Speeches and scientific writings and indeed in modern terms. This tactic led to many readings and interpretations of the historical past, which has either been interpreted as Greek (mainly by representatives of the Greek minority), or Illyrian following the theory that the Albanians were first Pelasgians, then Illyrians, then Arben-Albanians. The common point of reference in both cases is that the past has been used ideologically in order to strengthen the national identity of the present.

Therefore, through the current management of the cultural heritage of the region of Saranda, an attempt will be made to give an example of the association of

people with the space, with the landscape and also with the monuments - such as the archaeological sites - by researching current Public Discourses and practices, the ways and the involvement of the local communities with the materiality of the past in which the archaeological remains are also involved.

So, from the period of the ideological use of antiquities by Enver Hoxha, it is a fact that the facts have changed a lot, regarding the current use and interpretation of the cultural heritage and consequently of the archaeological sites. Hoxha used antiquity and the science of archeology to "build" in Albania an ancient identity that proves the great history of the Albanians. Today, things have changed a lot. A look at cultural heritage management demonstrates this in the best way. This change is the result of the collapse of the communist regime, the opening of borders and the international relations that were created immediately.

The need of the specific period was the creation of the national identity of the Albanians, who had to have deep historical roots in the region, in order to be able to claim territorial and historical rights. Each era therefore creates its own standards, has its own needs, and the current need of Albania, without a second thought, is of an economic nature. Cultural heritage has also been included in this context, which has been set to help the country's overall goal of

a European future (through the country's accession to the European Union) and a constantly growing economy.

Our first example, the city of Saranda and the management of its archaeological sites proves this to us. The competent services are now oriented to the protection and preservation of the monuments but also to their promotion, thus contributing to the development of tourism. The grants given by the Ministry of Culture for maintenance are mainly given for monuments which are located near main roads, so that they can be found more easily by tourists. Regarding the interpretation of archaeological sites at the local level, there is a lack of a specific policy in their management, as has been observed it depends on the professional background of each employee who works in these services. Beyond that, however, the region of Saranda is an area that is open to national issues, this mainly because of the close relations that the region has with Greece, based on the fact that half of its population has immigrated to Greece, but also because of Greek origin which has a part of the inhabitants.

In our second example, the Archaeological Park of Phoinice, the conclusion is further strengthened that there is a



Fig3 / Butrint National Park, Ancient Theater.  
source / the authors



Fig4 / Butrint National Park, The Souvenir Shop with local handicrafts  
source / the authors

lack of a specific management policy at the local level and that it depends on who works in this area. In the example of Phoinice, there is an extroversion in management, following the general spirit of cooperation and interdisciplinarity, applying the modern considerations of science to the interpretation and presentation of the Park. But we see that this does not always go along with the interpretation given by the community living near the archaeological site. Our example, therefore, proves that the community perceives its past and present differently from the official line, using the past to build in the present a distinct identity, its own identity.

The research results further reveal that the villagers perceive the site as an important part of their history. In summary, our example showed us the power of collective memory through the collective groups examined, such as, and that the collective memory of communities is often at odds with official policies. The ideological use of antiquities at the official level was also confirmed by the current policy of the official bodies representing the Greek minority in Albania, especially with the recent example of the choice of the ancient name "Phoinice" as the name

of the new municipality representing all the minority villages in area, in the context of the new territorial reform. On the other hand, the Albanian state, since the communist period, had never given the appropriate value to the area, using only its strategic position for defense and economy, since for many years the isolation of the country had not allowed the investment and the use of location for economic growth. In recent years, the change of regime has been reflected in all the changes taking place in Albania due to its participation on the world stage.

Our example, therefore, proves that the community perceives its past and present differently from the official line. A distinct identity emerges, their own. This identity is what the current administration of the municipality of Finiq is trying to exploit for tourism. This area has traces from all historical stages which are represented by a large number of cultural heritage monuments. The municipality spreads geographically to a very rich area of archaeological and natural monuments, which in the future can offer economic growth through tourism. As it is located in the strategic crossroads between Greece and Albania, near the most popular tourist destination, the Alba-

nian Riviera. Municipality has implemented in 2018, the "Strategic Tourism Roadmap" and integrated strategy for the tourism development, having as cornerstones the Ancient Finiq ( Phoenice ) Archaeological part, the famous Blue Eye National Water Park, the mountain and alternative tourism areas, as well as creative industries development based on the unique folklore heritage (intangible asset) of the area. The municipality is making great efforts through European programs by building infrastructure for the development of tourism.

In our third and last example, the Butrint National Park, seems to be like a detached piece of the "puzzle" of the wider political management of Albania, since its management has been essentially done by international organizations, which have implemented modern management policies, whose main feature is the use of the archaeological site for the economic development of Albania. What is observed, therefore, with the example of Butrint, is that now the use of the past is aimed at economic development and its commercialization.

Butrint as a UNESCO World Heritage center is advancing because of its location. It has long been widely accept-

ed that it is the primary "treasure" of Albania's Cultural Heritage. After Tirana, as the capital, Butrint is probably the most well-known place of Albania. Furthermore, while it is a tourist destination for the Albanians of Albania and Kosovo, its main income comes from the touristic sea excursions that come from Corfu.

The communities surrounding the site could not help but be affected by the large number of tourists that flood the area every day. Some communities have taken full advantage of their proximity to the Park, not only offering tourism services but also developing a handicraft activity in the field of souvenirs. Some of these products are sold inside Bouthrotos. Actions of course that are part of a more general political management of the area that aims at the development of the local economy. The above examples give us a picture of the use of the past in the present in post-socialist Albania. Albania has now moved into another era, has joined the global economic community, a "victim" of globalization, which logically imposes an adjustment and an interaction relationship that affects all sectors of society. Culture, of course, could not remain unaffected by the general phenomenon of globalization



Fig5 / Saranda, Part of the Ancient Castle  
source / the authors

. So we are living in the period of the retreat of the nation-state, a fact that is certainly not shared by many people, I would say the opposite, through my empirical data.

In conclusion, the active subject of history is the one who interprets the past in the present. In material culture there cannot be a final and unique "explanation" based on the objective consideration of all possible factors, on the contrary, the meaning that a cultural form has is eminently variable and lies within the jurisdiction of the same active subjects of each era .

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