



Representations of Built Heritage in the International Actions for the Protection of Italian Cities, 1940s-1960s

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The paper will examine a few international actions and discussions dealing with the protection of Italian cities that took place between World War II and the postwar years, most notably in moments when sudden and severe threats to the conservation of Italy's heritage seemed to emerge. In these situations, the need for immediate action brought to the foreground some widely shared representations of what Italian cities were and what they meant for the western world. The analysis of these images may throw a light upon how Italy's urban heritage was internationally perceived—and tourism, it will be argued, played no small part in such a perception.

During World War II, the destructive potential of the new techniques of aerial warfare led all the actors involved in the conflict to actively promote some form of protection for Italy's built heritage. No general agreement existed on the principles to be followed in order to avoid the loss of relevant monuments, since pre-war attempts to update the 1907 convention of Den Haag had brought to no effective result. In such a situation, both diplomatic action and a specific training of military personnel aimed at establishing official and unofficial codes of conduct. Several lists of monuments, works of art and sites were drafted by commissions of experts and officers. These reflected conflicting views about the structural elements of Italy's dense network of historic cities. Lists were incessantly revised and negotiated; some of them were printed in small handbooks for officers on the ground, not dissimilar from the portable touristic guidebooks from which they drew so many informations.

In 1966, the floods of Florence and Venice seemed to pose, once again, a serious threat to the very survival of two cities that were perceived – almost without question – as two keystones of European historical identity. Campaigns for immediate action were launched from several sides, most notably by UNESCO, the organization that had emerged, after the end of the war, as the almost unique reference point for any discussion dealing with the preservation of the world's heritage. The arguments invoked in these calls for action and the images used to represent the two cities were shaped not only by the growth of academic knowledge in the fields of art and architectural history but also by the increasing role of international tourism as an economic and cultural phenomenon.

KEY WORDS: Tourism, place identity and urban transformations.