

# Family-owned Heritage Houses or Inhabited Monuments? A Peculiar Case of Living Heritage in Southern Italy

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**Abstract:** *In the current state of knowledge, this paper aims to propose the introduction into the lexicon of scientific literature of the expression “inhabited monument” with reference to those anthropised human sites in which the intended use of housing coexists with their status of a monument. At a macroscopic level, this research suggests a model that satisfies the requirements of buildings that are both permanently inhabited and recognised as cultural heritage. For this purpose, the case study of a UNESCO site in Southern Italy is presented: it was granted this recognition in 1996 due to the exceptional value of its inhabited houses, which were already declared as monuments at a national level in the early Twentieth-century: the “Trulli of Alberobello”.*

**Keywords:** *Cultural significance, Heritage Anthropology, Housing, UNESCO sites, historic houses.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the earliest mentions in the scientific environment attributable to the phenomenon of inhabited heritage dates back to the conference entitled “The inhabited monument” (Italian: *Il monumento abitato*), held in Matera in July 2000 and organised by the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* of Paris and the University of Basilicata. The conference programme was particularly noteworthy, and the studies presented merged into the work “Les monuments sont habités” edited by Daniel Fabre and Anna Iuso (2010).

Following the first meeting, “Regards anthropologiques sur les Monuments historiques”, held in Carcassonne in September 1997, the Matera conference aimed at making social science researchers and historic monument managers aware of the relationship between the local community and the architectural, juridical and tourist monumentalisation of its space. This reflection inaugurated a new field for ethnology, on which knowledge and practices on the social effects of monumental classification were built.

Part of the meeting also took place in Alberobello (Southern Italy), which was deemed a particularly noteworthy site in relation to the chosen theme. As in the case of Carcassonne, the conference made it possible to reflect directly “on the spot” on a local situation.<sup>1</sup> What emerged is that the Trulli houses (already universally recognized as a World Heritage Site since 1996) were distinguished by the fact that they had been inhabited for a long time and continuously. Similarly, the rocky area of Matera also offers, in a neighbouring region, another notable example of that kind of adaptation to a precarious habitat by locals (Mirizzi, 2010): its so-called “Sassi” are ancient cave dwellings which were inhabited up until the 1950s.

Finally, as part of the activities that promoted Matera’s candidacy for European Capital of Culture, the “Italian Society for Musicographic and Demo-ethno-anthropological Heritage” organised in 2010 a conference intended to update the previous debate of the previous one held in 2000. It was entitled “Being contemporary. Museums, Heritage, Anthropology” (Italian: *Essere contemporanei. Musei, patrimonio, antropologia*).

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<sup>1</sup> See the report on the meeting merged on the website <http://www.garae.fr/spip.php?article79>: «Comme dans le cas de Carcassonne, le colloque a permis de réfléchir “à chaud” sur une situation locale. Située dans la zone Adriatique ou l’Apennin laisse progressivement place à des zones de collines puis de plaines, la région d’Alberobello (Province de Bari) est aujourd’hui connue pour une spécificité architecturale: *les trulli*.».

## II. BASIC SCIENCE REFERENCE SOURCES

At present, the phrase “inhabited monument” has no specific definition. A search on Google Books of the expression produces numerous results. However, the terms are used in different sentences or within the same sentence but not in syntactic association with each other. On an international scale, the French anthropological school and landscape geography have already questioned the relationship between humans and heritage through the nexus of experience (Fabre, 2010, p. 19).

The bibliographic analysis reviewed ranges from historical to anthropological publications, as well as surveys of an economic and social nature; furthermore, quite a few studies derive from the scientific production of architects. The key texts in the definition of this topic will be subsequently presented.

In the meanwhile, the entries found as “inhabited monument” in English, Italian (*monumento abitato*), French (*monument habité*) and Spanish (*monumento habitado*) are now reported in chronological order of publication.

*Souvenirs d'Espagne* (Cornille, 1836, p. 198):

«Saragosse est comme un monument posthume élevé à la mémoire de ceux qui périrent en défendant leurs foyers: **monument habité**, populeux, où la foule interroge à toute heure les leçons de ses pères.»

The first utterance refers to an excerpt from the encyclopaedic work of the historian Henri Cornille, who describes the Aragonese city of Zaragoza (Spain) as “a posthumous monument, erected in memory of those who perished defending their homes: an inhabited monument, populous, where the crowd constantly questions the lessons of its fathers”.

*Primera Plana* (1968, p. 43):

«Siempre la misma inquietud cuando se penetra en la extraña ciudad acuática, el más inverosímil monumento de la civilización: **monumento habitado**, ruinas con hombres adentro.»

This is the only statement identified in Spanish and is from the magazine “Primera Plana”, a weekly of politics, culture and current affairs published in Buenos Aires (Argentina) between 1962 and 1973. Only an extract has been found<sup>2</sup> and does not allow a whole reconstruction of the context in which the expression “inhabited monument” is inserted; however, the clarification “ruins with people inside” is significant.

*Abstrait/Concret* (Nakov, 1982, p. 108):

«Le projet de Tatline, un retour à l'idée du monument fonctionnel, telle que la cathédrale gothique unissant la fonction symbolique et celle de l'utilité – lieu de réunions, une sorte de **monument habité**, conception à laquelle la tour de Tatline offre un pendant manifeste.»

Referring to a text by cubist sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon about the Eiffel Tower (Duchamp-Villon & Duchamp, 1966), the Franco-Bulgarian art historian André Nakov connected the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris, the Eiffel Tower and the project of the monument to the Third International (or Tatlin's tower). In Tatlin's project, he acknowledges a return to the idea of the functional monument, quoting the Gothic cathedral of Notre Dame, defining it as a “meeting place, a sort of inhabited monument”. Nakov was not the first to refer to a church as an inhabited monument. An analogy can be traced with an excerpt from a letter dated 29 January 1863 on the «restoration of a public monument of historical character» (French: *Restauration d'un monument public ayant un caractère historique*), in which we read «Churches are, in fact, inhabited monuments which must necessarily show progress in comfortable habits, and whose shape must be modified to serve new needs» (French: *Les églises sont, en effet, des monuments habités qui doivent nécessairement se ressentir du progrès dans les habitudes confortables, et dont la forme doit être modifiée pour servir à des besoins nouveaux*) (Dabas, 1863, p.10).

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<sup>2</sup> I was only able to read this excerpt through the so-called Google Books snippet view, at <http://bit.ly/PrimeraPlana1968>.

*Sassi e templi* (Macina, 2003, p. 219)

«Questi malcapitati turisti, inoltre, devono difendersi, a volte anche fisicamente, da “guide” turistiche abusive, aggressive e assolutamente dequalificanti per l'immagine della città. Le auto stanno occupando i Sassi. [...] Queste situazioni, insieme ad altre, hanno indotto questo Comitato a riprendere con rinnovato vigore il programma di lotte [...] Gli obiettivi del Comitato sono la conseguenza di una scelta precisa: salvare “il **monumento abitato**” dei Sassi attraverso la valorizzazione delle sue potenzialità storiche, antropologiche, architettoniche ed artistiche [...] Gli abitati vanno considerati soggetti fondamentali nel riutilizzo dei rioni.»

This is a testimony of the person who was the representative of the “Comitato Sassi” (the committee of experts for the protection of the Sassi, which were already a UNESCO heritage since 1993). It was the official statement by the association of inhabitants of the Sassi of Matera who considered the choice of housing as the cornerstone of the recovery program of the historic districts. The author quotes the expression “the inhabited monument” in inverted commas and, in all probability, refers to the title of the conference held in Matera in July 2000 “The inhabited monument. For an anthropological approach”.

*Architettura e potere* (Sudjic, 2012)

«Con il tempo, nel basamento dei Musei sono spuntati in gran numero caffè e negozi, che hanno iniziato a trasformare il luogo [Grande Sala del Popolo di Pechino] in un **monumento abitato**, allo stesso modo in cui, a Spalato, il palazzo di Diocleziano ospita nella sua massiccia struttura muraria case del XV secolo e negozi XVIII.»

Here the author argues that architecture is never neutral and that, despite being a substantially practical tool, it is a manifestation of power. The quoted extract compares the Great Hall of the People in Beijing (the National People's Congress building) and Diocletian's Palace in Split, Croatia, drawing an analogy as “inhabited monuments”. Among the most impressive architectural legacies of the Roman Empire, the Diocletian's Palace is nowadays a very popular tourist spot. It is not an actual palace or museum, but a vast quadrangular space of over thirty thousand square meters which encloses the city's beating heart, a maze of streets teeming with bars, shops and restaurants. It is then an “inhabited” monument, given that there are 220 buildings within the perimeter of the building, populated by about 3,000 residents.

*Habiter Le Corbusier* (Denèfle et al., p. 89)

«Pour légitimer le maintien de l'école, il a fallu opposer un registre d'arguments spécifiques qui tient à l'identité même de l'immeuble aujourd'hui. Il est devenu **monument historique habité** et le fait même qu'il soit habité, qu'on y maintienne tel ou tel service est constitutif de ce patrimoine. Ainsi une identité se construit dans la logique culturelle, patrimoniale.»

This excerpt refers to the Unité d'Habitation de Rezé, known as Maison Radieuse, a building on the outskirts of Nantes (France) designed by the Swiss architect Le Corbusier. Named *Monument Historique* in 2001, the building is the destination of regular guided tours.

*Bollettino del Centro di Studi per la Storia dell'Architettura* (Turco & Accorsi, 2016)

«I lodati miei colleghi furono unanimi nel riconoscere che la Casa di Cola di Rienzi si debba considerare come monumento, e dippiù come monumento di somma rarità, essendo il solo che possa fornire idea dell'architettura di quel tempo. [...] Furono similmente unanimi nel giudicare che riuscirebbero di sommo danno le innovazioni proposte [...] danno pittoresco aspetto alla rovina; ma soprattutto dando l'esempio d'un **monumento abitato**.»

This is an excerpt from a letter dated July 19, 1853, included in the appendix of the catalogue mentioned above. Specifically, it comes from the report of the archaeologist Pietro Ercole Visconti to the minister at that time, Jacobini, regarding the inspection carried out at the Casa di Cola Rienzo, an ancient medieval residence in Rome, located in the area of the Foro Boario in Rome. The letter refers to the possibility

of a restoration project on the site, which (having been a dwelling) is defined as a monument. In reality, the building is no longer inhabited and is now the seat of the “Centre for Studies for the History of Architecture”.

*Restauration de l'Immeuble Clarté* (Nemec-Piguet, 2016, p. 20)

«**Monument habité**, l'immeuble Clarté ne peut être traité comme un œuvre d'art, dont la valeur muséale prévaudrait. Par le maintien de son usage de logement collectif, condition nécessaire à sa conservation, il se distingue d'autres monuments de l'architecture du XXe siècle devenues des musées ouverts aux visiteurs, comme c'est le cas de plusieurs villas “iconiques” des grands architectes du Mouvement moderne: Le Corbusier, Adolf Loos, Frank Lloyd Wright, Gerrit Rietveld, Mies van der Rohe. Les fonctionnalités essentielles du bâtiment, celles de la “machine à habiter”, doivent être garanties et répondre aux exigences actuelles: stabilité, étanchéité, sécurité, chauffage, ventilation, alimentation eau et électricité.»

With regard to Le Corbusier's monumental buildings, in this excerpt, the Clarté building is defined as an “inhabited monument”: a condominium built in Geneva (Switzerland) between 1931 and 1932 to a design (1928) by Le Corbusier and his cousin Pierre Jeanneret. Long before building the famous *Cité Radieuse* in Marseille, the French-Swiss architect had explored similar housing principles for the *Immeuble Clarté*, one of the 17 buildings designed by Le Corbusier and added to the list of World Heritage Sites in 2016.

### 1. “LES MONUMENTS SONT HABITÉS”

During the bibliographic review, I found three significant publications that deal with the relationship between cultural heritage and the life of the residents, albeit with different criteria and nomenclature. The first of these works I bring to attention is entitled “Les monuments sont habités” (Fabre & Iuso, 2010). It is a collection of in-depth studies attempting to clarify the complex relationships between monuments and the population around them, whose link consists of those places which, while retaining their intended residential use, have been recognised as monuments (of national or even global interest).

This publication brings together ethnological and sociological studies and discussions of a political and urban planning order because the “monuments that are inhabited” essentially have to do with these instances. The monuments reported are mainly French and Italian, among them the site mentioned earlier, Sassi di Matera (Zinn, 2010). The common themes among all the monuments treated in this collection of essays are the issue of heritage conservation (the monument as part of the collective memory), the increasingly frequent search for the “authenticity” character of geographical regions (with the example of the musealisation of some villages considered representative of past life) and the process of building a place as a monument (since a place is not born as a monument, but instead it becomes one).

According to the discussions in this volume, a monument can be inhabited in two ways: when dwellers inhabit the place and when the place is inhabited metaphorically, by a legend or a character who has marked the history of that place. In this sense, the anthropologist Pietro Clemente (2010) talks about it in relation to “someone's country” which is symbolically “inhabited”: and so the monuments, whether they are buildings or spaces, manage to survive through the memory of an emblematic character of the past or that of someone who is still alive.

### 2. “HABITER LE PATRIMOINE”

“Habiter le patrimoine” (Maria Gravari-Barbas, 2005) tries to explain how contemporary societies inhabit the places, sites, and monuments that constitute heritage. The French language lexicon prefers the term *patrimoine* to *monument*, and for this reason, the reading of international essays requires, from time to time, a textual criticism also of linguistic origin.

The work explains how (and to what extent) the communities that live around (or within) monumental sites act in relation to those properties to which heritage value is attributed. That is, how customs and habits

evolve, how urban mobility is perceived, what are the employment opportunities, what are the possibilities of building in these areas, what are the consumptions and to what extent, and what is produced in the area.

Thirty-seven experts discuss what can be learned from how social groups reinvest “heritage places” in their relationships with space. “Habiter le patrimoine” explores the multitude of relationships that people weaves with what Gravari-Barbas defines as “hereditary spatialities”: the expressions of life, the practices that are linked to them, the constraints that are connected to places (both actual ones and in terms of perception), the conflicts generated by the influx of visitors or the tourist (and therefore economic) potential that insists on these places.

### 3. “LE PATRIMOINE HABITÉ”

“Le patrimoine habité” (Gueissaz, Steinmann & Zurbuchen, 2013) clarifies the meaning of “inhabited heritage”, a concept that applies to any building that has been “converted” (French: *réaffectation*). The authors extend the definition of living to places that are not strictly domestic.

The study offers some ideas on which it is worth recognising analogies with the Alberobello case study. We speak, for example, of “vernacular heritage” in reference to those types of buildings that take shape based on the habits that determine the life of the people who build them, giving a spatial form to those habits—a comparison with that “vernacular architecture” which is the basis of the Trulli.

We speak of “living heritage”, a concept applied to any building that has been, in fact, “reassigned”. Authors do not identify these places with geographical spaces but with specific properties, such as farms, workshops, factories, villas or schools. A safeguard dimension generally accompanies this transformation process, but the socio-economic and cultural implications that underlie it go far beyond the conservation principle alone. This way of thinking about architecture pays particular attention to the influence of the «soul» of these buildings: a concept that recalls the more spiritual sense of living.

### III. PROPOSAL FOR A DEFINITION OF “INHABITED MONUMENT”

Without a specific definition previously given, this paper proposes to consider “inhabited monuments” those spaces built or modified by human activity and inhabited by a population whose heritage status is also recognised; that is, monuments which currently retain their intended residential use.

There are two types of them: dwellings that are recognised with the status of “monument” (such as the aforementioned Trulli of Alberobello or the Sassi of Matera) and those heritage sites recognised as having historical and cultural value and which are simultaneously occupied by people for permanent use: for example, the Diocletian’s Palace in Split (Margareta, Marasović & Perojević, 2014, p. 331) and the Theatre of Marcellus in Rome (Gregorovius, 1901, p. 304).

In the broadest sense, a monument (from Latin *monēre*, to remind) is an artistic or architectural work erected to commemorate persons or events. Usually, a precise will guarantees that the architectural element is the exaltation of a given event: this is the case with commemorative monuments. Instead, regarding Alberobello’s case study, the process of monumentalisation was the consequence of the awareness of an architectural rarity on the verge of extinction. For this reason, in 1910, the legislative provisions on cultural heritage were implemented (i.e. Rosadi law, n. 364/1909), which led a few years later to the recognition of the Trulli as a “national monument” (Berrino, 2012).

That public act confirmed that the Trulli, which at that time were rustic houses, were a symbolic monument for the nation. Local people did not immediately react positively; in fact, up until the 1970s, many of those who lived in a Trullo felt embarrassed in the face of this condition (sometimes still decaying). The years of the twentieth century leading up to 1996 (when they were proclaimed a UNESCO site) brought the Trulli from family-owned heritage houses to inhabited monuments (Advisory Body Evaluation, 1996, p. 57).

### IV. THE TRULLO HOUSE: ANATOMY OF AN INHABITED MONUMENT

The Trulli of Alberobello are today among the best-preserved examples of spontaneous architecture in the European scenario. The characteristic houses are still permanently populated by a part of the residents of

Alberobello and many others are temporarily occupied by holidaymakers. Trulli are presently both private homes and monuments: this is the consequence of being protected since the early twentieth century. (Guarella, 2007).

Although this study does not intend to retrace the historiography of the peculiar conical-roofed buildings, it is reasonable to trace the leading studies on the subject.<sup>3</sup> Sigismondo Castromediano (1811-1895), an anti-Bourbon patriot, was an archaeologist and was the first to consider dry stone constructions (and therefore also the Trulli) as monuments. In his report, he referred to some studies that another countryman of his, the judge and collector Luigi De Simone (1835-1902), was carrying out in the area. Mentioning the activities of his colleague, Castromediano (1875, p. 29) noted that similar buildings were also found in Salento, a geographical region bordering the characteristic one of the Trulli: at present they are both part of the same administrative unit, the Puglia region. In that area, those constructions were known as “Truddhi”. Castromediano reported that the peculiarity of those houses in the Alberobello area was that the form of rustic architecture – which has always been linked to the rural and poorer population – gradually became the object of curiosity and interest on the part of the nineteenth-century intellectuals of Southern Italy.

Giustiniano Nicolucci (1819-1904), one of the fathers of modern Italian anthropology, belonged to the same historiographical context. Commenting on De Simone’s notes, he argued that those buildings perpetuated an older model: «the continuation of a primitive architectural type preserved in those regions» (Nicolucci, 1879, p. 147). This clarification allows an archaeological approach in the study of the Trullo that few other scholars have followed, considering the Trullo house as an artefact of the past still in use in the present. For the first time, that reasoning led to the association of those dry-stone buildings (that were inhabited but not yet reputed as “monuments”) as the vestiges of an ancient civilisation.

For this reason, the studies of those years are the first attestations in which the “Trulli-dwellings” are correlated to “fabricated-monuments”. De Simone affirmed that Trulli had to be considered «like monuments, whose type dates back to prehistoric times» (Nicolucci, 1879, p. 147). With the Italian scholarly circles becoming aware of the singular value of these buildings, even some non-Italian scholars became interested in the case study of the Trulli for the first time.

However, although this could really represent an object of interest, many foreigners were discouraged from exploring the hinterland of Southern Italy: the lack of carriageable roads prevented the arrival of many experts from abroad. Among the European scholars who explored the areas of central and southern Puglia was the French archaeologist François Lenormant (1837-1883), who reached Italy in 1866. His accounts relating to this journey are described in the reportage “À travers l’Apulie et la Lucanie” and in a passionate article in the “Gazette Archéologique” in which he recounted having observed builders in Alberobello erecting Trulli before his eyes: a visual observation that nullified any temporal collocation of those buildings already considered ancient at that time. Lenormant realised that he was experiencing a sort of laboratory of history in which the archaeological and anthropological evidences were not relegated to a past obliterated by the present: the Trulli were part of a still active and surviving fact.

Lenormant noted that the dry-stone buildings of that region were built according to a tradition so fixed in time that it would have been quite unlikely to distinguish between the ancient models and the contemporary examples. He remarked (Lenormant, 1881-1882) about the Trulli: «They are timeless buildings» (French: *Ce sont des constructions sans époque*).

### **1. A KIND OF ARCHITECTURE WITHOUT ARCHITECT**

From a purely architectural point of view, the Trulli are buildings made of limestone blocks stacked horizontally in a circular pattern: the stone cylinder, gradually tapering, culminates in the upper part in a small hole which is covered by a slab. The original dry-stone wall is surmounted by a dome which supports the conical roof. The gap obtained allows the installation of a habitable mezzanine or dedicated to conserving foodstuffs. The vaguely circular plan often changes in appearance: it becomes quadrangular in association with

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<sup>3</sup> The studies carried out on dry stone architecture and, more specifically, on the Trulli boast extensive literature including conference proceedings (Ambrosi, Degano & Zaccaria, 1990); a restoration handbook (Ambrosi, Panella & Radicchio, 1997); an anthology of writings on the Trulli (Speciale Giorgi & Speciale, 1989); a posthumously published doctoral thesis (Esposito, 1998) and some treatises by local authors (Notarnicola, 1940).

one or more communicating rooms, and therefore with as many Trulli, which in this formation gives the characteristics of a house with several rooms.

The Trulli are scattered throughout the entire Itria Valley area: those essentially linked to agricultural life can be recognised by their isolated circular structures. Alberobello is today the place with the highest concentration of these buildings: two districts entirely made up of Trulli still survive: Rione Monti and Rione Aia Piccola, together with a series of other Trulli connected to more modern buildings in other central areas and on the edge of the town.

The Trulli of Alberobello are usually not isolated but always connected: they generally have a quadrangular plan and contain square rooms (with conical vaulted roofs) connected by round arches. They were, and continue to be, built without foundations, resting directly on the bare rock. The double curtain of the walls has a cobblestone cavity and windows are sporadic (and in any case small) to contain the dispersion of heat from the internal environments as much as possible. The cone-shaped roofs also have a double layer: they rest on the load-bearing perimeter walls and are made up of limestone slabs (between 5 and 7 cm thick) locally called “chiancarelle”. The cone culminates in the pinnacle as a decorative element.

The interiors are partially in wood: doors and windows, and also the mezzanine obtained in the hollow of the cone (consisting of a plank in wood that can be reached by means of a ladder). For this reason, Trulli houses have the characteristics of what has been defined as “architecture without architect” (Rudofsky, 1987, p. 49) in an attempt by the local inhabitants to respond to the primary need to shelter by exploiting natural resources.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

This paper originates from the observation that some inhabited buildings are also recognised for their status as a monument. If, at a macroscopic level, the research tended towards the formulation of a definition of “inhabited monument” as a whole, a case study has been provided as an example: the UNESCO site of the Trulli of Alberobello.

Expressly, an “inhabited monument” is understood here as that building which is at the same time permanently inhabited and which is characterised by cultural heritage status. This condition deserves specific attention in the management of the cultural site and the involvement of the local population, to give them a renewed sense of their daily life and perhaps also to address tourist choices according to an inclusive vision of the population and not exclusive of the monument.

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