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Presentation

On a sunny day in 2019, Jennifer Celani, whom I had known for a few years thanks to a common friend, came to visit me with a proposal: write a book to explain the Italian law of cultural heritage to a foreign audience. Through her work at the *Soprintendenza* and owing to her bilingual nature, Jennifer realized that people abroad knew little or nothing about the extensive (and somehow peculiar) body of rules that surrounds and governs the world of cultural heritage in our country.

I could only confirm Jennifer's intuition: strangely enough, and apart from a few recent and notable exceptions, the literature on the Italian law of cultural heritage is often not available in English, today's *lingua franca*. This is not to say that nobody ever dealt with the Italian law of cultural heritage. For instance, in the following pages readers will find many citations to the works of the great American scholar John Henry Merryman who, both as a comparativist and art law expert, devoted much attention to Italy. Similarly, some of the authors that contributed to this special issue, already published important contributions in English on the Italian law of cultural heritage. Outside these notable and important exceptions, however, while 'our' cultural heritage is a gift to mankind, the laws governing *all* aspects of such world-renowned treasures seem to be regarded as a purely domestic business.

When Jennifer first explained her wish to fill this gap with a book, I had already spent enough years in the academic world to see how daunting her 'proposal' would be, and what an unprepared companion I would be.

The beauty of being part of an academic environment is that what you do not know, others will: what if – I counter-proposed to Jennifer – instead of taking up this task on our shoulders alone, we convened a group of experts in their fields in Florence to dialogue on these topics, with the aim of assembling a publication in English that may start an international debate?

Organizing a good conference is no less hard work than writing a book, and we needed to team up. Our choices were obvious: I asked Lucrezia Palandri and Alessandra De Luca, two of the finest comparativists around. Jennifer was able to bring Andrea Pessina, the *Soprintendente* himself on board (small note: if you are reading this and do not know what a 'Soprintendente' is and the duties he has, it will only take a few pages to clear the mystery). It was just too good to be true.

What followed were a series of meetings, sharing of ideas, hard work, and organization: the usual long build-up that would then culminate in a dense day-and-a-half-long conference. Well, once the welcome remarks began on June 17th, 2022, I could still not believe what a roster of experts had agreed to join our 'dialogue'. Words cannot explain how satisfied the five of us were with the unfolding of the panels; but the following videos of the conference, however, can give back a sense of an amazing event:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDc8z4qiSvA
www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAL0wLujeqg
www.youtube.com/watch?v=ob6mrCXlKEI

Once the conference was over, after the blues had passed, it was time to collect the papers. The following pages are, thus, the tangible fulfillment of Jennifer Celani's vision: offering to the international community at large a common frame of reference, and a shared glossary, to learn and share around the world the Italian view (or better, the many Italian views) on how cultural heritage should be understood, preserved, valorized and spread. It is not meant to be a final point ('look at the perfection of the Italian law of cultural heritage'), but rather a starting point for an intense discussion. Not by chance, you will hear many voices in this volume, showing different understandings of what it means to preserve and promote material and immaterial cultural heritage, standing between the duty to be faithful to tradition and preserve it 'as it is' for the next generations to come, and the challenge of granting to those same 'next generations' the freedom to reject a timeless, 'frozen' culture and to use and recontextualize it in order to produce new art and renew cultural heritage.

The importance of promoting a dialogue not only with the United States but with the entire world, lies also in being able to reflect our views through unfamiliar mirrors and find that our principles are neither absolute nor unanimously shared; and that each option entails political choices that will affect both the dead, the living and those who will come next.

We could not do all this without our participants, the sponsors and *Tutela & Restauro*, the *Soprintendenza*'s own periodical that is hosting the proceedings in a special issue with Massimo Tarantini's editorial guidance; and without the hard of work of Jennifer, Alessandra, Lucrezia and Andrea: to all of them, my heartfelt thanks.