

# The valorization of classified historical monuments in Algeria, a controversial issue: The case of the Agha Palace in Ferdjioua,,

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## **Abstract**

*Algeria has a rich cultural heritage; however, the heritageization process still has flaws. Indeed, there are historical monuments which have benefited from the classification procedure, but in reality they have been neglected, such as the Agha Palace in Ferdjioua. The reflection is focused on this type of classified monuments highlighting the relevance of heritage enhancement in Algeria.*

*We try to compare the current state of the monument in relation to the effects normally induced by the procedure of its classification in order to detect incompatibilities in the process of its patrimonialization.*

*In order to propose a revaluation of the palace through a new strategic vision as to its conservation, this monument must be able to acquire an economic value and a social role with a significant impact ensuring its sustainability, by associating the user with the value of most suitable use.*

**Keywords:** *heritage, patrimonialization, protection, classification, historical.*

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## 1.Introduction

Algeria has inherited for thousands of years rich and diversified cultural and natural legacies. This legacy constitutes a varied heritage and an important basis for the construction of identities. It "makes explicit a particular relationship between a legally defined group and certain quite concrete material goods: a space, a treasure, or even less" (Chastel.A 1985, pp67-82). A part of this legacy has been classified: "About five hundred and fifty sites and national monuments" (Oulabsir N 2004, p13). In spite of these actions of preservation and valorization in favor of the patrimonial heritage, some of them are completely neglected undergoing the wear of time and the destructive actions of the man.

Since 1998, the Algerian public authorities have launched several conservation operations throughout the national territory. Moreover, this concept has been widely supported. Thus, is considered historical monument "any architectural creation, isolated or grouped, which bears witness to a particular civilization, a significant development or a historical event" (Bailly G.H, 1975,p12).are valued through the classification procedure, which is the most relevant for the protection and enhancement of the heritage carried out by the patrimonial guardianship.

Algeria has long neglected the heritage because of urgent problems such as: poverty, economic development, industrial ..., which it faced after independence. The ordinance n°67-281 of December 20, 1967 relating to the excavations, the protection of the sites and the historical and natural monuments was much more the product of a context marked essentially by the urgency to equip Algeria after its independence, of a legislative means, allowing him to face and to prevent all kinds of deteriorations on the historical, artistic and archaeological heritage.

Since this ordinance, a whole legal arsenal has been put in place in favor of heritage. However, what is detrimental is the inconsistency of the texts in relation to the massive, rapid and anarchic urbanization of the entire territory and in relation to the evolution of land use planning and the new laws that organize it. (Souki.Benseddik.H, 2012, pp44-72)

Moreover, the 1998 law constituted a prelude to the implementation of a true heritage policy. It refined the notions and it established a detailed conception of the heritage fact generating, on the executive level, the creation of various organizations of heritage management. The object of heritage is no longer reserved only to exceptional and prestigious objects, but is identified through the notion of "property" which refers to any object bearing witness to the civilization and culture of a society. These cultural goods include immovable cultural goods, movable cultural goods and immaterial cultural goods (law 98-04, article 3). With the notion of immovable cultural goods, the Algerian legislation marks a clear break with the strict and nominative definition of monument and historical site already brought by the ordinance 67-281.

The classification, as defined by Article 22 of Law 98-04, is a protection measure which, once applied to a building (site or monument), entails a number of prescriptions and easements whose purpose is the protection of the monument against any voluntary or involuntary degradation. The classification is a definitive protection measure. This operation was only possible with the agreement of the owner. Originally conceived as a simple recollection, the inscription has become a real means of protection, comparable to the classification.

The easement of classification protects a historic monument very effectively. No work whatsoever may be carried out on this building without prior authorization from the Ministry of Culture. The latter may, moreover, have the necessary work carried out for the conservation of the building when its preservation is endangered by the owner's inertia. The classification of a monument or site has the following effects: The total or partial classification of a site implies the classification of all the buildings included in it. The classification does not entitle the owner to any compensation. This provision of article 35 of the law 98-04, constitutes an

important abuse with regard to the attack on the right of ownership. Therefore, the classification is rightly perceived as an infringement of the owner's heritage, and therefore the opposition of these would be understandable and legitimate. The owners of classified monuments are obliged to maintain them and to carry out all the necessary works (repair or restoration). The state is not obliged to participate in the costs, except in exceptional cases. This obligation engages the responsibility of the owner (civil and penal). The State can undertake the necessary work at the owner's expense. The opposability to the third party  
 Presentation of the historical monument.

The palace of the Agha, which is also known as Djnane el Hakem, or El Bordj, constitutes the identity construction of the city by the historical, symbolic and legitimizing values that it conveys.

The history of the region has been, written by the passage of several civilizations, but it is the Ottomans who have deeply marked this region. The palace of the Agha which stands in the center of Ferdjioua, is distinguished by its refined Muslim architecture, it served as the headquarters of the head of the region, which was designated by the Bey of Constantine. Classified since 1998 as national heritage, this palace is the witness of most of the events that marked this period. During the colonial period, the Agha Palace served as the headquarters of the French authorities. It was built on a former land belonging to Bouakkaz when he was sheikh of Ferdjioua. This palace was known at the beginning, under the name of seat of the Arabs after 1881, after the foundation of the mixed commune of Fedj Mzala, its name became another. After 1929, it takes the name of Dar el-Hakam or Djenane el- Hakam following the changes made by the French authority.

The colonial administration exploited this built space, which is, moreover, of great beauty. It ended up restoring it and making an extension a first time in 1929. According to historians, the Agha Palace was used in the mid 1940s as a refuge for agents of the colonial administration. Since 1998, this building has taken the name of Agha Palace referring to Hadj Ahmed Bouakkaz Benachour former Agha and Sheikh of Ferdjioua from 1834 to 1864. He built the palace in 1884 on Ottoman ruins. The French modified it later during the restoration of 1929. 3]

Figure 01: The Palace in its immediate environment



Source Google 2007. Treatment Authors

## 2. Methodology

To dispel the ambiguity that arises from the classification procedure of the Agha Palace, the methodology adopted is based firstly on a theoretical framing of the process of heritage of historic monuments and their management. The object of this research allows to reveal the dysfunctions in the process of patrimonialization engaged by the Algerian state. Through this work, it is a question of finding the best strategy or even the necessary measures to be undertaken for a better management for its revaluation.

Indeed, the operations of development of the classified monuments are based on the historical knowledge of the latter highlighting their origin, their mode of construction, their style. The historical approach of the Agha Palace, allows to highlight. The elements of reading. It emphasizes the different modifications and occupations that have taken place within the heritage property and its immediate surroundings.

The architectural analysis is essential to know the different spaces that the monument contains. This analysis is a prerequisite for any enhancement operation. It allows to highlight the sensitive points of the building at the architectural level. The main tools of this analysis are the exhaustive survey based on the detailed architectural survey of the plan and the elements that compose it. The elements of permanence of the palace are thus located by noting the various disorders existing at the level of it. The surveys allow, precisely, to reproduce all the architectural and structural details with the different cracks, alterations and anomalies.

At the end of this exploration, the light is put on the effects induced by the classification of this monument, supposed to provide a budget and actions aiming at its valorization and its preservation. This is why it is important to highlight the failures of the legal protection which, without being accompanied by real and effective actions, is inoperative.

### **The classification of t h e Agha Palace**

The region of Ferdjioua, is an Algerian territory that abounds in historical vestiges: the palace of the Agha, the red prison, the ancient Roman baths as Hammam Ouled Achour and Hammam Beni Guecha, Hammam Labibet Hammam Ouled Sidi Cheikh and the zaouia of El Bellaria near Tassaadane. These witnesses of history and many others constitute the heritage and the glory of the inhabitants of Ferdjioua. The palace of the Agha or "Djnane El Hakem", is a historical monument that has benefited from a classification by the Algerian authorities. It was classified as a national monument in 1998 by ministerial decree published in the official journal No. 20.

Despite this recognition as a heritage asset to protect and enhance, the Agha Palace is neglected and is in a state of continuous deterioration. Despite its classification, this monument has not benefited from any effective care. Its immediate environment has been completely abandoned. Knowing that the archaeological and aesthetic interest of historical monuments disappears if they are separated from their architectural context. To enhance a building, it is therefore necessary to protect its surroundings. Ancient authors also wrote: "the surroundings very often contribute to the enhancement of the monument, it is the case that highlights the jewel" (Laurent Frier.P 1979 p39).

The neglect of the Agha Palace has highlighted the relevance of the heritage process adopted by the Algerian authorities. This operation should highlight the roots and history of the population of Ferdjioua. Its valorization as a historical and identity witness is

essential for its preservation and conservation. The valorization of the Agha Palace, aims to create a consensus between the political discourse supported by a legal framework and a process of effective, sustainable and integrated heritage of this palace and other national historic monuments that are at risk.

**The Palace of the Agha: transformations of the monument and changes of use.** The Monument underwent several modifications there are parts covered with terraces others by frames. First, the construction of the enclosure itself, which was the residence of the governor, was the palace of Sheikh Ahmed Bouakaz in 1834. In 1929. The monument has undergone a first restoration and an extension by adding the second floor. The accesses were fortified with iron gates [4].

Figure 02: the uses of the palace



Source Authors June 2012

Two wings were added to the palace, today this part of the palace is used by the Scouts. A line of palm trees was also added to the ensemble with a line of stone paving that overlooks a fountain built in front of the door of the former governor's house.

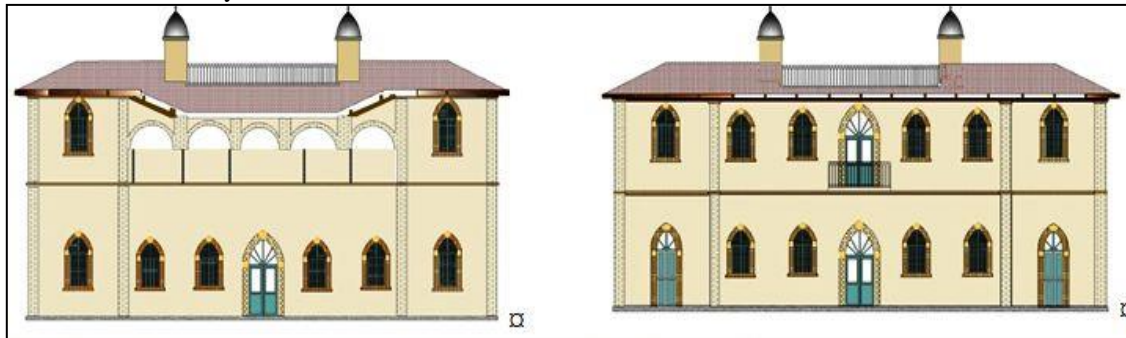
The garden with its important surface was the object of covetousness of several administrations. It is only in 1990 that the commune allowed the direction of education to implant in the northern part a C.E.M decreasing its total surface. As for the last change, it was materialized by the construction of a MATECO (sports ground) for the C.E.M. in the center of the garden next to the fountain and near the palace. Since its construction until today, the palace has had several uses, which each time give it a different status.

This monument which is distinguished by its refined Moslem architecture constituted the seat of the sheikh of Ferdjioua: Ahmed Bouakaz named chief of the region of Ferdjioua by Ahmed Bey of the beylicat of the East in 1834, to shelter then, the seat of the local administrator of the French colonization. The colonial administration which exploited this monument of a great beauty, ended up restoring it a first time by deliberation N 7 in 1881. This restoration was the first conservation action. In fact, it was its function as an administrative headquarters that led to its restoration. The use value of the palace imposed its preservation. In fact, for the sake of maintenance, the palace underwent more important consolidation works in 1929.

### 3. Results and discussion

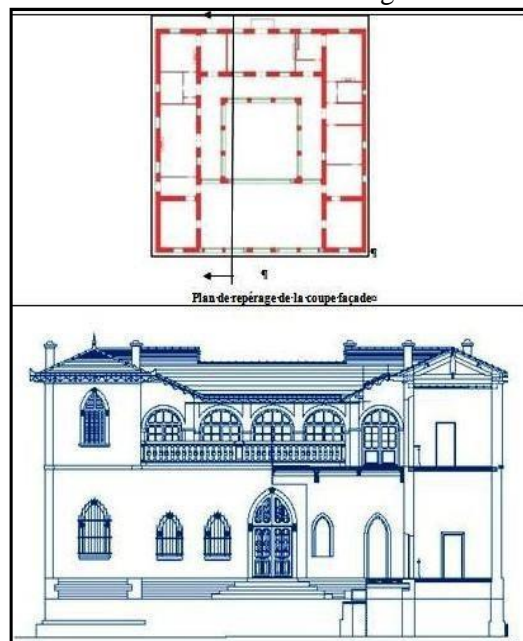
Architectural approach to t h e Agha Palace.The architectural approach, through the surveys of the different levels, cross-sections, facades, with the photographic montage made by the author, have allowed to better appreciate the palace from its functional organization to the architectural details.

Figure 03: Facade surveys



source: Author June 2012

Figure: 04 Sectional view - Façade At PatioLevel



Source Authors June2012

Like all ancient monuments, the palace has suffered the adverse effects of time. Humidity has been the cause of several disorders. In fact, humidity due to rainwater infiltration has caused cracks and delimitation of the concrete of the boxed slab visible to the naked eye. This type of disorder affected the reading room and the archivist's office because these spaces are located below the terrace.

The pre-established architectural study informed us about many disorders and imperfections at the level of the building of the palace on the one hand and at the level of the garden and the natural environment on the other hand

- the deplorable condition of the wooden frame caused by rainwater infiltration requires the replacement of the entire wooden frame with a waterproof film
- The revalorization of fireplaces is essential, being a decorative element conveying many historical values.
- The renovation of the staircase that connects the first floor to the first floor.
- The waterproofing under the terrace, as well as the renovation of the ceilings of the first floor for the whole building.
- Reworking of all the tiles on the first floor and on the first floor, as well as the ironwork, handrails, and bars of the various staircases and windows.
- For the garden, the solutions for its enhancement are profound, starting with the removal of the sports field in the middle, the resumption of the paving, the restoration of the fountain, the planting of trees and shrubs and the removal of other additions considered intrusive elements harmful to its preservation. Rearrange the natural environment of the Palace to resolve the issue of the surroundings on the one hand and visibility on the other. The garden has been cut off by the EMC blocks, but despite this encroachment, it retains a singular splendor and beauty, thanks to the diversity of plants it contains

Figure: 05 views of the garden



Source Authors June 2011

## What to take care of the Agha Palace?

Being a classified monument, the Agha Palace should first benefit from a definitive protection, then and in the second place, its conservation should induce a rehabilitation operation in order to enhance it. The Agha Palace has allowed us to highlight the importance of the "usefulness" or, above all, the "use" of the heritage property after its classification. The function attributed to the heritage object after its classification plays a primordial role in its maintenance and its perennality. The wrong choice of use can lead to its deterioration. In fact, the palace served as the administrative headquarters and residence of the governor. Thus, its maintenance was ensured by the users of the colonial period. The restoration operations carried out by the colonists testify to this.

Nevertheless, the transmission of this property from one company to another, with a change of owners and uses for this heritage property have contributed to its degradation. As the palace in question was classified, the municipality became the owner. The latter should have more prerogatives to manage the palace while deciding on the allocation of the function that suits him.

However, due to a lack of financial means and experience in heritage conservation, the monument was left to itself and was neglected. The Agha Palace has undergone enormous transformations since its foundation until today. However, since its classification, there have been several overruns namely:

1. The isolation of the palace by a fence that was built to delimit it. Although this fence reinforces the unitary and monumental character of the palace, it only cuts it off from its environment and even from the rest of the city. Its relationship with the rest of the city's historic ensemble is non-existent. It highlights the difficulty of applying the law of the easement of the approaches in accordance with Article 17 of Law 04-98 on the criterion of visibility.
2. The encroachment on the land base of the palace: the building of the CEM has occupied a part of the garden transgressing the monumental set formed by the monument and its garden. This construction represents, currently, a real damage to the surroundings of the palace. It calls into question the act of classification of the garden "Djenne El Hakem".
3. The palace contains historical and cultural facts that are being lost due to its current inappropriate use, which tends to gradually erase the history of the place, the city and its inhabitants.

The process of patrimonialization of the Agha Palace was purely political. It was triggered following the implementation of the law 04-98. The objective was to safeguard it. A file of expertise to determine the criteria of selection had to be a preliminary to this operation. It is necessary to think of assigning a function to the monument because the change of use is an important step that should concern the technicians, the civil society and the local authorities. The latter act in collaboration to appropriate the historical monument in question and put it on display through the media to finally achieve its revaluation. The training of a staff and a qualified workforce in restoration and awareness of the population are, indeed, the link in the chain of heritage that must be strengthened in Algeria.



In order for the process of heritage enhancement of historical monuments to succeed, it is necessary to review the supervision of these monuments. At the local level, it is necessary to set up specific political and technical management tools, and to reinforce the role of the communes (APC) in the decision-making processes relating to heritage. It is necessary in fact, to create in every commune an organization whose functions are:

- to draw up a strategy to implement the national policy at the local level;
  - Coordinate between the different administrations of the State (Ministries of Culture, Urbanism, and Housing, Commerce, Handicrafts, Tourism, Social Affairs)
  - Involve stakeholders, civil society and residents as early as possible in operations and projects, and maintain this involvement throughout the process.
- To give better prerogatives to the municipality in the management of its assets.

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