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*Eurolog* Symposium in Tunis 2012

## Introduction

### ***Eurolog* – European Dialogue on Ancient Cultures as an Instrument to Understand Present and Past Foreign Cultures**

Honourable Director Ghalia, dear ***Eurolog*** partners, dear summer school participants, ladies and gentlemen,

It has really come true: the summer school in Tunisia. Alone the fact that so many culture experts from different countries have come together to speak about a particular topic makes us proud and happy. It shows clearly that these cultural experts, all of us, want to live and work together. These are excellent conditions for us all to solve problems.

The ***Eurolog*** project is a small cultural project; however, if it is applied well, it can play a large role in breaking down misunderstandings between people from different cultures. When people from different origins do not get along, different languages are the smallest problems. The biggest problems are cultural differences, which makes mutual understanding and acceptance difficult.

You rightly ask yourself: “how can a small group of cultural people solve this big problem?” Well, we will certainly not be able to solve the whole problem, but we can definitely make a contribution to understanding between nations.

Furthermore, you are probably also asking yourself why archaeology can make this contribution. Now one focal point that has become established in the field of archaeological research over the last years can help us to solve problems of understanding between nations: several researchers have been investigating the fact that ancient monuments, cities, gods or other phenomena of ancient times could be classified as genuinely Roman or Greek or even country-specific for a particular region. The result was that they could not. Many phenomena are the result of a multitude of influences, mixtures and transformations. An analysis is currently being undertaken in the field of archaeological research to see if individual segments of an antique phenomenon can be defined and categorised into its various cultural origins. This is not always easy, as the transformation processes were also dynamic in ancient times and continued to develop over time. We will see several examples of antique phenomena that underwent intercultural transformation processes during the conference today and tomorrow. This research area makes archaeology a relevant science for today’s modern society.

How can the analysis of ancient intercultural processes help to solve modern problems? The answer lies in the comparability. Our own culture is also the product of various influences, mixtures and local characteristics in exactly the same way as cultures of the past.

In order to present this concept, I have chosen a small, “harmless” phenomenon from the German kitchen. In the Germany there is a dish that is generally recognised as a local speciality from the Swabia region: the so-called “Schwäbischen Maultaschen”. The city of Maulbronn in the middle of the Black Forest, with a monastery of the same name, claims to

be the “inventor” of the “Maultaschen” because the dish contains the name of the city and monastery.

The “Schwäbischen Maultaschen” is a pasta pouch that is filled with minced meat, onion and spinach, which is usually served floating in a broth. In 2009, the European Union agreed to award the dish a designated origin certificate, which means that only filled pasta products made in the Swabia region of Germany can be legally called “Schwäbischen Maultaschen”.

According to an old legend, the cistercian monks of the Maulbronn monastery wanted to hide meat from the all-mighty God during the fasting time and did so in a pasta pouch, which was known locally at the time as the “Herrgottsbscheißerle” (literally, “God’s little cheat”).

One could easily believe this must be an old German cultural treasure. However: it is more than likely the idea of the “Maultaschen” is not a Swabian invention at all, but rather originating from Italian architects, construction workers and plasterers who brought it with them to southern Germany. These workers and master craftsmen came from Italy for large construction projects in southern Germany for noble houses, palaces and churches, and they brought with them typical Italian dishes with them: “Tortellini al brodo” – pasta pouches in broth. The Italian tortellini are generally smaller and filled with meat or vegetables, but not both together.

However, before we pat our Italian friends on the shoulder for being the proud inventors of the filled pasta pouch, it must be said that the invention actually occurred during the Venetian Marco Polo’s tour of adventure from China to Italy. There in the Far East, filled pasta pouches in broth are known as “Dim Sums”.

The Chinese pasta pouch influenced the Italian and southern German kitchen through trade and cultural contact from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and was changed through local ingredients – so much so that it is no longer recognisable as a foreign dish. But how is it that no-one in Maulbronn can remember the imported idea? Especially during the late middle ages in Germany where people were very proud of imported specialities, for example exotic spices that came to Europe via Venice, which were the signs of wealth and successful contact with foreign countries.

In this case, one needs to look at the more recent history of Germany. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1871) many different and independent areas of Germany were united under the German Empire. The people at the time sought common roots in order to feel connected to this new artificially created entity. During this time, attention was given to the Germanic and Celtic tribes and their history, which was often made up. Old Germanic sayings, such as the “Nibelungensage”, were given an important new function through the compositions of Richard Wagner as national legends of supposed common ancestors. Memories of the migration or immigration of groups of people or individuals, and the mixture of genes and cultures that occurred over the years in central Europe, were deliberately pushed away.

The emergence of nationalist tendencies in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, which were ultimately used for the National Socialism propaganda of the Third Reich, meant that the old German roots of

society were emphasised and anything foreign was denied. This was a deliberately false representation of historical facts that was politically and ideologically motivated.

I do not need to present to you the consequences of this artificial Germanisation and the rejection of anything foreign in Germany during the Nazi dictatorship.

Despite many attempts following the Second World War to “refresh” the memory of Germans by reminding them that Germany is a multicultural country and German culture is the result of mixing and transformation, this has not always been successful.

As a consequence, we are starting an attempt with the knowledge that our neighbours in Europe and the Mediterranean wish to solve similar problems. For this reason we started a joint project: **Eurolog**.

I will quote here the first paragraph of the EU culture application for **Eurolog**:

“The objective of our project is to develop, apply and integrate new presentation and communication methods for museums, historical sites, monuments and buildings.”

And further: “Five large museums, well-known for their cultural and historical exhibitions, have joined together to work towards this goal. Four partners are from countries within Europe and one is from a neighbouring country.”

Baden State Museum, Karlsruhe, Germany, Professor Harald Siebenmorgen with the project partners:

- The 23rd Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Herakleion, Crete (Greece), the director Professor Athanasia Kanta.
- The Alanya Archaeological Museum (Turkey), the director Dr. Seher Türkmen
- The Capitol Museum in Rome (Italy), the director Dr. Claudio Parisi Presicce with his curator Dr. Isabella Daminani
- As associated partner, the National Bardo Museum in Tunisia, the director Dr. Taher Ghalia

I am very happy that all project partners could attend this meeting and would like to hereby welcome you all.

An important aspect of the project is this summer school here in Tunisia. The purpose of the summer school is to learn about the current focus of archaeological research on intercultural competence. However, not only archaeology will be discussed. Specialists from the disciplines of sociology, pedagogy and cultural studies, who also work in the field of interculturality, will present their work. In this way we hope to learn from other studies and to integrate this knowledge into our project.

The project will have proved itself to be a success when even the Swabian housewife explains, as she serves “Maultaschen” to her guests, that the dish is actually an ancient recipe from Asia that came to Germany through the Italian kitchen!

Finally, I would like to show you that the transformation of the “Maultasche” has not yet finished. The American kitchen has also put forward an intercultural contribution: the old

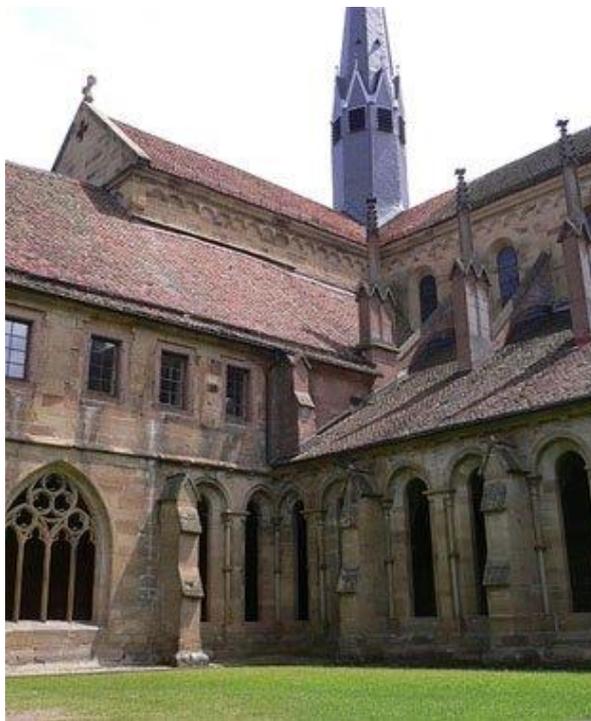
American custom to cook all types of food on a barbeque has also reached the “Maultasche”. “Maultaschen on the Grill” are now also available in Swabia.

With that, I would like to wish you all a successful summer school!

Thank you.



Swabian ‘Maultaschen’



Monastery Maulbronn



‘Tortellini al brodo’



Dim sum



Translation: Scott Hemphill