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THE EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE

A Multi-Perspective History of Modern Europe, 1500-2000

https://www.openbookpublishers.com

7.4.2 Heritage and Memory in Modern History (ca. 1800–1900)

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Introduction

The use of the past for contemporary purposes was hardly a new phenomenon in the nineteenth century. The period nevertheless saw profound change in how societies related to the past and its tangible and intangible remnants. There was a new sense of radical discontinuity between the past and the present: the past became a distant and distinct sphere, inaccessible and yet open to the curiosity of historians and amateurs alike. A modern historical culture emerged that was marked by widespread interest in the past and its remnants. History provided a reassuring sense of continuity and progression, sanctioning national claims and rooting these claims in the past. History could provide a measure of advancement and a signpost for future development. The past became a matter of public interest and an important foundation for the construction of modern, national identities. No wonder, then, that by the late nineteenth century, the social relevance of history was in evidence virtually everywhere: from the founding of new museums to historically-informed street naming, from school curricula to urban heritage preservation initiatives. This chapter brings this development to the fore, while focusing in particular on the creation of national heritage, the dissemination of national memory in public spaces, and the construction of urban heritage.

The Making of National Heritage

The rise of national heritage was a process during which antiquities and artworks were appropriated and reinterpreted as representing a national past and belonging to a particular nation—rather than belonging to their previous princely, ecclesiastical, noble, or municipal owners. The French Revolution played a seminal role in this process. The initial destruction of cultural artifacts

which had belonged to the feudal aristocracy and the Catholic Church was soon condemned as a counterrevolutionary act of vandalism by Abbé Grégoire, while the plundered symbols of feudalism and the *ancien régime* were reclaimed and redefined as 'national property' created by the genius of the French nation. The transfer of artwork and monuments from the countries occupied by the revolutionary armies to French museums was another formative experience. The calls for the 'repatriation' of monuments after the end of the Napoleonic Wars reflected a growing sense among European cultural elites that the remnants of the past belonged first and foremost to a particular nation, and were bound to their country of origin, even if they embodied common heritage of the European civilisation as well.

Increasingly systematic measures of heritage preservation were prompted by growing concerns about the irreversible loss of monuments or dispersal of national heritage due to acquisition by private collectors. The century thus saw the formation of networks of heritage inspectors, the making of monument registries, and the enactment of protection laws. Measures like these were normally the consequence of both state action and pressure from below, though in some countries (such as France) the state played a stronger role than in other countries (such as Germany) in which voluntary associations and professionals were arguably a more important factor. In the Austrian Empire, for instance, the Imperial and Royal Central Commission for the Study and Preservation of Artistic and Historical Monuments (*K. K. Zentral-Kommission* für *Erforschung und Erhaltung der Kunst- und Historischen Denkmale*) was established in 1850, and was soon followed by a network of state-appointed conservators who oversaw several districts. Still, the system was deemed insufficient, partly because the protection measures were not sufficiently enforced. Some of the Czech advocates of preservation therefore appealed to the Bohemian Diet and the self-governmental bodies of the counties to take initiative in heritage protection as well, particularly in spreading an awareness of it among municipalities and individuals. Many regional and municipal museums, which from the 1880s increased in number throughout the Czech Lands, were instrumental in broadening the protection measures. At the turn of the century, a robust preservationist movement was triggered by the controversial clearance of the historical heart of Prague. This clearance was especially focused on the former Jewish Ghetto, and gave birth to the influential Club for Old Prague, which soon launched branches in other Bohemian cities and towns. In Czech society, as elsewhere in Europe, the preservation of historical monuments and heritage became an integral part of nation-building and an indicator of a country's or a nation's cultural advancement.

Newly formed nations constructed themselves around notions of continuity, rootedness, and cultural distinction. In seeking out such symbols

of continuity, rootedness, and cultural distinction, the attention of cultural elites turned to the medieval past and to vernacular traditions, finding new interest in remnants of Gothic architecture, Celtic monuments, Nordic Sagas and ancient eposes and legends, some of which were fabricated rather than discovered. These relics were used to construct a sense of connection, linking the nationalist movements of the present back to the mythic past. They supplied public historical culture with myths, heroes, and symbolic places, as well as themes for artistic development. For example, the adoption of the medieval Gothic style as a 'national style' by French, English, and German intellectuals shaped the development of architecture in those countries. Others, like Czechs or Poles, looked back to the Renaissance for inspiration, viewing the period as one of national flourishing. Historians crafted influential narratives of the national past, constructing sometimes precarious continuities and depicting major national dramas, constituting 'golden' or 'dark ages' in national history. Often a particular version of the past prevailed and would influence historical culture for several decades. In the Czech case, František Palacký's *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě* (*History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia*, 1848–1872) prevailed, though German historians did develop alternative interpretations of Bohemian history. Sometimes, different 'schools' competed for an appropriate narrative. Polish historiography provides one example. Some accounts of Polish history idealised the early modern 'democracy of the nobles' and blamed neighbouring predatory states for the ultimate failure of the Polish state, other accounts emphasised the internal deficiencies of the ill-fated political system of the *Rzeczpospolita*. Other examples of contestation included disputes over the meaning of the Norman invasion in British history or historiographical disputes about the French Revolution.

Nationalism within existing states and the aspirations of stateless nations found expression in the birth of national museums, which stored and studied pieces of national heritage, while also creating powerful representations of national history and the homeland. Many of these museums developed from regionally or imperially focused institutions. The Czech National Museum in Prague, for instance, was founded in 1818 as a patriotic museum for the Kingdom of Bohemia, and only gradually became the principal museum of the Czech nation. Later ethnographic museums joined in representing folk national heritage, for which the open-air Skanzen Museum in Stockholm was a prototype. Expositions of rural and regionally specific cultures, ultimately subordinated to nations, had their parallel in colonial museums in the overseas empires. To be sure, other rationales alongside national ones stood behind the proliferation of museums. Museums of decorative arts appeared in many cities, with the intention of cultivating industrial production, interweaving the tradition of arts and crafts with ambitions of industrial modernity. City

museums bolstered urban pride and local identity, and in some cases—such as the Prague City Museum, founded in 1883—underpinned claims for the historical importance of would-be capitals. But they also stored remnants of the vanishing urban landscapes, with some of them developing in part as a response to the massive destruction of the historical city centre—like the Musée Carnavalet in Paris, which was created in the wake of the renovation of Paris under the French official Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809–1891).

Heritage and Memory in Public Spaces

Until the late nineteenth century, schooling only played a relatively small part in disseminating a nation's history: novels, pictures, historical paintings, architecture, and theatre were more prominent channels for creating a sense of nationhood. To reinforce the historical perception of the nation, the nineteenth century saw the creation of commemorative rituals to bind the national community together and to propagate a national history for the population as a whole.

Maurice Agulhon has described the years 1870–1940 as being "statue obsessed"—during this period, European cities created numerous sites for public remembrance. But such memorialisation was not merely expressed through statues. Memory took hold of public space in many different forms, with commemorative plaques, street names, pantheons, cemeteries, and more. In many ways, this enabled the deployment of a tangible and concrete applied history, and is indicative of the mania for history which intensified in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It was in the 1860s that remembrance initiatives grew in scale, developing a new political ritual which was initially restricted to the ranks of the elite. The nationalisation of the masses became a conscious programme to rewrite history through the evocative names of famous battles and great men. In Barcelona, for example, Víctor Balaguer (1824–1901)—a Romantic intellectual—set about naming the streets in the new *Ensanche* districts of the expanding city. He chose to follow a logical progression telling the history of Catalonia in Spain, taking inspiration from a book he had written, the *History of Catalonia and of the Crown of Aragon* (1863). Like his contemporaries, he thought that Catalonia was a prototypical land of freedom, as demonstrated by its anti-centralist tendencies. Catalonia thus acted as a guide for Spanish liberalism, and placed itself at the head of Spain's nationalising agenda. Thus, in the street names of Barcelona, alongside the great men of the seventeenth-century anti-centralist resistance movements, Balaguer included the names of battles against Napoleon, which in his mind symbolised the birth of the Spanish nation.

Fig. 1: Jean-Louis Prieur, *Triumph of Voltaire, 11 July 1791* (1804), Library of Congress, https://www. loc.gov/item/2005691833/. A nineteenth-century print showing the funeral procession moving Voltaire's remains to the Panthéon in Paris from an abbey in Champagne in 1791.

Such coherent programmes are few and far between. Most of the time, the imposition of a singular interpretation of history on to public space sparked intense political conflict. In France, for example, championing the writer and philosopher Voltaire (1694–1778) became a battle cry for those opposing the Church's social and political influence in nineteenth-century society. Between 1814 and 1824, liberals published 1.6 million copies of Voltaire's works to counter the Bourbon Restoration. Between 1841 and 1845, quarrels over the freedom of education fuelled a battle to erect a statue of the philosopher. The project was revived by the famous historian Jules Michelet (1798–1874) in 1867 to bind together opponents of the imperial regime. After the advent of the Third Republic, the centenary of Voltaire's death in 1878 marked a victory for republicans over the Catholic Church. Victor Hugo transformed Voltaire into a prophet of the nineteenth century, and the secular republican camp was unanimous in championing him. In 1879, the boulevard running from the Place de la République to the Place de la Nation in Paris was symbolically renamed for Voltaire. Among those opposed to the philosopher, this apotheosis triggered an equally fervent negative response, in the form of the cult of Joan of Arc. Festivities in her honour, reintroduced under Napoleon, provided King Louis XVIII with a passing opportunity to promote this historical figure. But liberal historians seized upon the moment, and in 1853 Michelet published

Jeanne d'Arc, his famous history of the Maid of Orleans and her holy mission. It was the defeat of the French Army against Germany in 1870 that turned Joan of Arc into a symbol of spiteful patriotism. Four years after being brought to life by Sarah Bernard at the theatre in 1874, Catholicism seized upon the figure of Joan, henceforth presenting her as a saint opposing Marianne, an abstract republican figure adopted by supporters of the Republic since the 1840s. After 1890, clerical and nationalist celebrations of Joan of Arc took root. Between the two wars, she acted as an object of memory for nationalist leagues, and has more recently been taken up by the far right. Mobilising history thus provided a way of unifying one's political camp and marshalling one's troops against a political opponent.

Remembrance policies are by nature conflictual, in that they exploit history for political ends in order to legitimise the present. In the nineteenth century, historians played a leading role in promoting national memory through remembrance. In return, they benefited from the financial and political mobilisation of these projects. They thus set themselves up as prophets of the nation, reinforcing the moral power or authority they claimed to embody. Political authorities were rarely behind such initiatives, which tended to issue from intellectual elites. But in the early twentieth century, remembrance policies expanded, recruiting new sections of the population hitherto indifferent to an insistent worship of the past. A model of mass commemoration emerged, maximising strategies to mobilise crowds as never before, with civic parades, or the use of flags, songs, and gestures, festivals and fêtes, public lectures and plays to trigger the enthusiastic support of ever larger crowds. Nationalist society thus used emotion to extend its hold over the social body, bending it to exercises in commemoration on which it placed excessive value.

In the early twentieth century, established commemorative practices started to decline in certain European societies where political expression was channeled through other efforts, particularly voting rights, strikes, and demonstrations. Equally, the historical sciences started criticising the instrumental use of history for political ends. In democratic societies, the subsiding obsession with statues did not necessarily indicate a decline in commemorative practices. On the contrary, memory played a discrete yet persistent role in most social activities. Mass tourism, for example, paid worship to the past through a passion for heritage and the invention of tradition. But there was no diminishment in authoritarian regimes' love of monuments, which were deployed with ever greater means to mobilise the masses.

The Construction of Urban Heritage

The European city provided a crucial setting for furnishing public places with tokens of nation building and for the political instrumentalisation of public

remembrance. The roles of capitals, big cities, mid-sized cities and small towns varied in these efforts to represent a national story. While capitals became the focal points of national identity thanks to their wealth of cultural institutions (i.e., museums, theatres, opera houses, research universities) and other big cities and regional centres strove to achieve cultural significance through the establishment of similar institutions, small towns gradually began to be perceived as backward and incongruent with modern sensibilities. The construction of nineteenth-century European urban heritage can be understood via the paradox of modernisation—the paradox being that modernisation was a source of development and yet simultaneously generated nostalgia for the traditional world that this very development destroyed. Depending on their level of dynamism, cities acted and were regarded as agents of modernisation, or—conversely—as guardians of traditional values and activities against cultural centralisation and ruthless industrialisation.

A city's dynamism was shaped by the role that it played in urbanisation. Urbanisation as a demographic process affected large, mid-sized, and smaller cities and towns, all of which together gradually constituted an urban hierarchy across Europe, described as *structural urbanisation*. The growing number and size of population concentrations are described as *demographic urbanisation*. As a result of this process in the nineteenth century, modern urban life became an everyday reality for millions of people, as metropolitan life did for dozens of millions of people, whether they lived in cities or not: they got involved in urban behaviour and participated in urban modes of thought and activity—a process which is described as *behavioural urbanisation*. The construction of urban heritage in individual cities was co-determined by the local characteristics of this triple process of urbanisation.

Though the concept of 'soft power' was unknown in the nineteenth century, European powers gradually expanded their economic and military rivalry to the domain of culture and the preservation of monuments. By the last third of the nineteenth century, great powers were expected to possess the necessary expertise and institutions for both national and local as well as international and global monument protection. Urban heritage was integrated into the register of national and local heritage through the demarcation of historic cities or quarters and the protection of noteworthy historical monuments. In an urban context, these monuments were not necessarily Gothic cathedrals or royal palaces, but could simply be typical urban edifices. The preservation of the remains of Crosby Hall in London provides one example. This fine secular example of medieval domestic architecture in London, a rare survivor of the Great Fire of 1666, narrowly escaped destruction as the result of a public campaign initiated in the 1830s and led by antiquarians and men of letters. In the same decade, the first state institutions dedicated to the protection of historical monuments were created in France.

The conceptual scope of urban heritage and its legal definition was debated and refined by prominent nineteenth-century intellectuals, who each had different views about the protection of threatened monuments and buildings and their role in rapidly growing industrial cities. Urban growth was one of the major challenges for nineteenth-century Europe. This challenge led to the gradual institutionalisation of urban planning—the methodology and the discipline of managing urban development and its social consequences. In this context, urban heritage did not seem to be a priority, since it represented the past, the deteriorating urban residue which rational urban planning was seeking to transcend. Nevertheless, the restructuring and redesign of the historic centres of European capitals such as Barcelona, London, Paris, Rome, or Vienna immediately raised objections from intellectuals and locals, who felt nostalgic for and attached to the threatened urban past. This dilemma—stemming from the conflict between urban development and the preservation of urban heritage—elicited different responses from different quarters, which are fundamental for the practice of urban planning even today.

These major responses—embodied in particular theories and practices—can be illustrated by three classic works: John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (London, 1851–1853), Eugène Viollet-le-Duc's *Entretiens sur l'architecture* (Paris, 1858–1872), and Camillo Sitte's *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* (Vienna, 1889). Ruskin (1819–1900), an English writer and philosopher, regarded the historic city as an organism in which decay, i.e., the eventual destruction of historic buildings and monuments, is acceptable as in nature. Thus, the authenticity of the European city lies in its capacity for survival, development, and reconstruction. In contrast, the French architect Violet-le-Duc (1814–1879) refused reconstruction in the name of historical authenticity and fought for the development both in practice and in theory of monument protection. In his renovation projects—as in the old town of Carcassonne, the City Hall of Narbonne or several medieval cathedrals such as the Notre-Dame of Paris—he placed the urban quarter or monument in a polished and imaginary past, which became a static enclave within the urban environment. The Austrian architect and urban theorist Camillo Sitte (1843–1903) appreciated the irregularity of premodern cities and towns in opposition to the standardised urban spaces imposed by modern and contemporary architecture. Thus, he considered historic European cities as principal reference points for modern urban design, which he felt should not be rejected or separated, but rather integrated within urban development. Though standards of urban heritage protection were subsequently defined to favour renovation over reconstruction and to separate and demarcate the historic urban quarter from the rest of the city, the organic and integrative theories and practices,

partially stemming from Ruskin's and Sitte's approaches, also continue to remain part of the debate on the urban design of historic cities.

Conclusion

The nationalisation of society, rapid and large-scale urbanisation, and the rise of the mass society were among the major processes that shaped uses of the past in the nineteenth century and gave birth to the modern concept and practice of heritage. The idea of national heritage and the instrumental uses of the past to foster national identities became ubiquitous. Urban spaces were essential to the dissemination of public memory, while becoming an object of heritage in itself. To be sure, the nation and the city were not the sole focal points of memory and heritage—regional and local memories and heritage were zealously cultivated by local patriots throughout the nineteenth century, with the *fin-de-siècle*'s crisis of modernity witnessing a new wave of interest across Europe in regional culture and heritage. But even this regionalist movement was nevertheless intrinsically bound up with nationalisation and urbanisation, although it positioned itself as its alternative or adversary.

Discussion questions

1. Describe the role of the French Revolution in the development of heritage and memory in nineteenth-century Europe

2. What was the role of nationalism in the way people remembered and used the past in nineteenth-century Europe?

3. Do the uses of the past of the nineteenth century still influence our heritage and memory today? Why, or why not?

Suggested reading

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