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The Nationalisation of Historical Monuments

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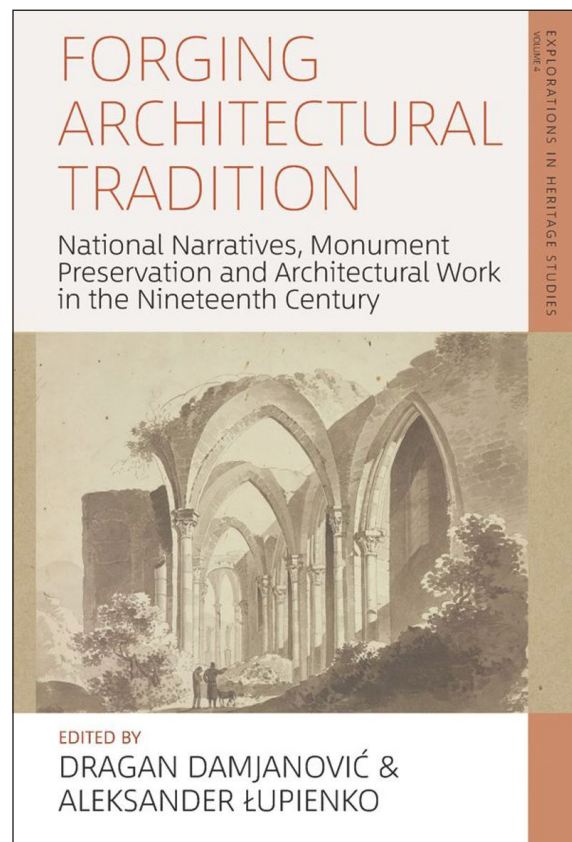
A review of Dragan Damjanović and Aleksander Łupienko (eds.), *Forging Architectural Tradition: National Narratives, Monument Preservation, and Architectural Work in the Nineteenth Century*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2022, 366 pages (ISBN: 978-1-80073-337-4). This volume analyzes the preservation and restoration of and writings about architectural heritage and the new national styles of the 19th century in various countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in France, Italy, and Germany. The authors represent these practices as contributing to nation-building efforts and as influenced by similar heritage practices in Western Europe.

Keywords: national narrative; monument preservation; architectural work; 19th century



While the history of heritage restoration and preservation in 19th-century Western Europe has been the subject of many publications, this history as it has unfolded in other parts of Europe has been less studied. The volume *Forging Architectural Tradition: National Narratives, Monument Preservation, and Architectural Work in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Dragan Damjanović and Aleksander Łupienko, redresses this issue by offering thirteen accounts of heritage in many Central and Eastern European countries, accounts that take up questions pertaining to the region's nation building, social and cultural history, and that demonstrate the multilayered histories and the shifting meanings of architectural monuments. It is, therefore, a welcome addition to a little-researched topic. Even if the majority of chapters concern Central and Eastern Europe, the volume aims to address the whole continent and so therefore also treats cases from France, the German Empire, and Italy. What unifies the contributions is that they all speak to national identity building.

As Damjanović notes in the afterword, 'The architectural heritage of Europe has become so thoroughly nationalized that today we can hardly think about it without using the national frames created in the nineteenth century' (335). The persistence of the national frames is illustrated even by the present volume as several contributions can be described as falling into what historians have termed 'methodological nationalism'; that is, while aiming to deconstruct national narratives, the authors make use of the same sources, actors, language, and geographical focus as did writers in the 19th century, thus reinforcing the ties between historical heritage and national identity (Storm 2014; Vasilev 2019). For example, some chapters analyze the preservation of monuments located in different regions not because they necessarily relate to each other in terms of preservation methodologies but because they would later become integral parts of nation-states such as Poland, Croatia, and Estonia. As recent literature



has successfully demonstrated, nation-states were not an inevitable outcome, and one can imagine that regions such as Galicia or Dalmatia could have also become part of other political structures in the 20th century. Another perspective shared by most of the contributors is Western centrism. They suggest that heritage practices in Central and Eastern Europe follow criteria developed in France or Britain, such as the teachings and practice of Viollet-le-Duc, who is, tellingly, the subject of the opening chapter.

The first part (one of three), entitled ‘Architectural Conservation and National Narratives’, focuses on restoration and conservation practices. The French architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc based his writings and works on a rational, scientific method, but as the first chapter shows, his writings were grounded in racist theories of the time as well as nationalism. For example, he argued that the medieval cathedrals needed to be revived because they were the home of ‘the Gallic spirit’, more important than the city halls and medieval castles, which were symbols of the authoritarian monarchy.

Case studies on Estonia, Poland, Romania, and Greece follow. The major restoration projects on the territory of what was to become Estonia in 1918 aimed to define a specific Baltic-German heritage and were led by ethnic German architects and writers. After the formation of the Estonian nation-state, Estonians sought to create their own heritage even if the prestige of the ‘German’ heritage continued. In Poland, an initial wave of enthusiasm for restorations was interestingly replaced in the second half of the 19th century by a discourse about heritage insufficiency, a ‘dead’ past, and a ‘weak history’ in comparison to Western Gothic heritage. The case of Romania demonstrates how criticisms of restoration projects, such as those of the French architect André Lecomte du Noüy, can lead to the establishment of institutions for heritage protection and to a rise in historical monuments’ prominence. Finally, in Greece, an interest in medieval Christian heritage gradually grew from the mid-19th century to the interwar period, when the restoration and protection of the Byzantine heritage reached its peak.

Part 2, ‘Styles for the Nation and State’, focuses on modern architecture, which uses architectural heritage as the source for national identity making. Architecture under the German Empire embraced the Neo-Baroque style, as reflected in the monument design to Wilhelm I in Berlin (1894–97), in order to reference a Prussian historic Baroque heritage.

The first transnational analysis of the volume centers on the architecture of palaces built by the newly established nations of Italy, Hungary, and Romania. The example of the Romanian King Carol — who built his palace in a German Renaissance style that avoided references to the local heritage — shows how national identity can be ascribed to monuments without the mediation of artistic styles. The next two chapters show

how the Renaissance heritage from the 14th and 15th centuries in Hungary was used to achieve nationalistic goals through writings and Neo-Renaissance buildings projects and how the idea of 'national' or even 'style' was understood differently in the three Habsburg provinces that formed Croatia: the Triune Kingdom, Dalmatia, and the Austrian coastlands. A welcome departure from the accounts of official projects and narratives are the highly original interpretations of national styles by amateur artists August Posilović and Ivan Rendić.

Part 3, 'The Appropriation of Heritage(s)', opens with a chapter on how the pre-Christian Tatar, or Kazan Khanate, heritage was promoted alongside Orthodox and imperial monuments of architecture in the Russian-ruled Kazan region. The following chapter takes up the patriotic, nationalist, and imperial relevance of archaeological excavations, which it illustrates with the case of Székesfehérvár Basilica, the Hungarian kings' coronation and burial place. The third chapter of this part disregards the geographical delimitations of nation states, therefore moving beyond methodological nationalism, in offering an overview of the preservation (or restoration) of Silesia's architectural heritage during the 19th-century Prussian rule. It explores other motivations, too, besides nationalism, that drove the development of this architecture, such as modernization, civic pride, and utilitarianism. The final chapter is a history of the restorations of the Ruthenian church of Santi Sergio e Baco in Rome, constructed in 1643, and represents a plea to include the Ruthenian Baroque in contemporary Ukrainian identity.

The multitude of heritage sites, events, and names make this volume a useful compendium for scholars and students of modern European cultural history as well as for architects with an interest in the history of heritage practices. The case studies also demonstrate the many ways in which restorations are relevant and the many reasons why architects reuse architectural forms from the past. The book isolates the complex layers of identity, heritage, and cultures in Central and Eastern Europe by focusing on archaeological sites, restorations, the idea of national style, public monuments, art, and architectural history writings, among other topics. It is, therefore, also a call for further exploration of a region that is still in search of its own identity and voice on the global stage.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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