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Michael Greenhalgh, *Destruction of Cultural Heritage in 19<sup>th</sup>-century France: Old Stones versus Modern Identities*. Brill, 2015. €150.00/\$194.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9789004289208; €150.00/\$194.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9789004293717.

Review by Janet T. Marquardt, *emerita*, Eastern Illinois University.

I was very excited to read and review Michael Greenhalgh's *Destruction of Cultural Heritage in 19<sup>th</sup>-century France: Old Stone versus Modern Identities*. I've focused some of my own work in this area of inquiry and find the theoretical issues such studies raise make fascinating intersections with memory, nationalism, tourism, conservation, restoration and identity politics. Unfortunately, there is little evidence of these larger questions in Mr. Greenhalgh's ambitious book. Instead, it is the latest addition to his encyclopedic documentation of the destruction of historical monuments. This one is focused upon France during the nineteenth century. Like his other works, it is not a book designed to be read through, but rather a resource for scholars seeking information on what was lost among specific types of monuments or by region. In this respect, it is clear that Mr. Greenhalgh has done a great deal of research and knows intimately the built environment of nineteenth-century France. The book is thus quite comprehensive and organized into both thematic and geographic sections. The themes are comprised of military defenses; transportation and documentation; government museums and monument work; and the requirements of modernity. Regional surveys are grouped into three initial chapters—the Île-de-France and Champagne; Normandy, Burgundy, the North and the East; the Center and West. Then come two long chapters on Narbonne, Nîmes, Arles and other Provençal towns because, in spite of the book's title, the author's true focus is on Roman ruins in the South where he finds "monumental losses" (from the title of chapter 11).

The written product is hard to negotiate. His approach—an inventory rather than an analysis—should make it easy for anyone to consult. Instead, I find the format is not conducive. Not only are there two bibliographies (entitled "Sources" [i.e. primary sources] and "Modern Scholars" [i.e. secondary sources]), but there are also two systems or levels of notes—footnotes on the page and a separate numbering system for endnotes with archival references to the bibliography. Things are made even more confusing because the print version and the online version of the books are different. Only the online version of the text contains full citations (with the unwieldy address provided by Brill: [dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.1494729](https://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.1494729)). In other words, when reading the print copy, one sees standard footnote numbers and those in brackets. The standard notes are at the foot of the page; the brackets appear at each chapter's end with a further reference to one of the bibliographies, that entitled "Sources," yet one must then also go online for the actual archival quotations. Once explained, this may seem straightforward. In fact, it was unnecessarily difficult to figure out, in spite of the author's description at the end of the preface. Furthermore, the book was prepared with what I can only consider lazy scholarship—incorporating French quotes into the text without translation and alternating back and forth with his own English commentary, employing both languages in single sentences. Certainly most scholars who use this work will read French, but the presentation assuredly limits the book's audience and discourages students or those from other fields making comparative studies. If one is

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providing unlimited online space for endnotes, then there is no practical reason why translation could not be made in the main text with original quotes at the remote site.

Greenhalgh supports his points about destruction with a trove of examples, often inserted parenthetically, which give great credibility to his arguments but tend to accumulate in an unorganized fashion, becoming too much to recall. Perhaps these could have been incorporated into supplemental lists, keyed to types or places, thus organizing the cases and collecting overlapping references to the same sites. Finally, the very tiny black-and-white illustrations collected at the back of the printed text are nearly all useless, being much too small to decipher, and there are no larger versions of these at the online endnote site to consult. With the book priced at \$194.00 U.S., one should be able to expect better.

Overall, I don't entirely understand the intention of all this work Greenhalgh has undertaken. It seems that he wants to document every single instance of the loss of anything ever built before the Renaissance (again, with a very heavy emphasis on Roman) that was demolished, reused, or remodeled in France during the nineteenth century. In a manner reminiscent of Louis Réau's *Vandalisme: Les Monuments détruits de l'art Français* from 1959,<sup>[1]</sup> Greenhalgh repeatedly suggests that damage to any stone from the past—due to new construction of fortification walls, modernization of a city center, or expansion of an existing building—was ill advised. Taken to the extreme, nothing would ever be built over existing sites and cities would continue to grow outward with decaying centers; sanitation would never have been improved by opening up squalid medieval alleys to light and air or building sewers; structures without any practical repurposing would stand empty; and every single inscription, retaining wall, or back porch would be treated as sacred and untouchable.

Greenhalgh poses some of the questions that the material he covers suggests throughout his study, but he rarely attempts to answer them. The title, *Old Stones versus Modern Identities*, introduces the current conversation about identity politics that city infrastructure and architectural patronage underlie. Instead of addressing this term, however, the key point of the work seems only to be that the nineteenth century is usually seen as the key period for the renewed interest in the past due to the appearance of antiquary societies and the focus on (primarily) medieval restorations. Yet, in fact, Greenhalgh believes it was also the time of vigorous modern growth which simultaneously caused more destruction than ever. That's fair, but it's also really interesting in terms of the dialectical forces it implies, but with which he never engages. Greenhalgh merely claims that France's official narrative of heritage pride was at odds with the remote destructive license taken by mayors to "expand and 'improve' their towns" (p. 353). He attributes a greater interest on the part of nineteenth-century Frenchmen in the future to what he pretentiously terms "psephological puerility" (p.354), by which I gather he means that the inexperience of a new voting republic caused people to elect administrators who promised that very expansion and improvement. I don't see that more mature democracies are any less susceptible to such ideas and sympathize with the desire of working class voters to get better living conditions, transportation, and other attractions that would provide the kind of urban environments where more jobs might become available. Roman ruins were ubiquitous and most people had little reason to take any pride in them. The reason medieval monuments were the subject of more restoration under the *Monuments Historiques* is because they fit a nationalist narrative shaped by the generation of 1820.

In his brief conclusion, Greenhalgh deplores the lack of coherent government policies regarding the classing of monuments and treatment of finds, recognizing that awareness grew through the development of local antiquary societies, but seemingly expecting that the government could have selected from among these informed amateurs to take over the vast administration necessary to identify, catalog, document, and conserve—including founding museums where necessary—and to do so practically overnight in many cases, as construction turned up likely objects. He also blames the restorers for the wholesale destruction of many monuments in the interest of recreating buildings as they imagined them to have been. This is true, but it was a subject of great controversy among contemporary historical commission members, as well as the general public (much of which he

documents in his own chapter four), and has been debated ever since. Greenhalgh's conclusion does not seem to advance the conversation. There are always growing pains with innovation, and restoration had large political ramifications, which Greenhalgh fails to address. His final point is one of irony—that our own version of this destruction comes from the demolition necessary for highways and parking lots. Going deeper than the railways, bridges, and roads of the nineteenth century, these excavation layers have opened up more material, and the resulting “rescue archaeology” reaps more material even as more is destroyed. I am certainly sympathetic to his views; yet without these projects, all would remain buried and unknown anyway, so is it all such a pity? I guess when you spend your life documenting only loss, you start to see every glass as half empty.

#### NOTES

[1] The original edition was augmented by Louis Réau, Michel Fleury and Guy-Michel Leproux in 1994 who, extending Réau's approach to near absurdity, even took the part of intransigent critics of Daniel Buren's 1985-1986 column installation piece in Paris's Palais Royal, considering it government “vandalism” to replace a parking lot with an artistic space in which people can wander and wonder and which coordinates beautifully with both the columns of the seventeenth-century portico and the stripes on the Culture Ministry's office window awnings. See Louis Réau, Michel Fleury and Guy-Michel Leproux, *Histoire du vandalisme: les monuments détruits de l'art français* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1994).

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