

---

H-France Review Vol. 15 (April 2015), No. 63

Astrid Swenson, *The Rise of Heritage: Preserving the Past in France, Germany and England, 1789–1914*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Part of New Studies in European History. xvii + 413p. Table, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN: 9780521117623.

Review by Janet T. Marquardt, Smith College.

A study exhaustively researched in three languages, Astrid Swenson's contribution to heritage studies adds a plethora of material to the detailed history of the heritage movements in Britain, France, and Germany. She wishes to disprove two general premises about the rise of heritage awareness in Europe that the author believes exists in literature up to this point. First, that "French heritage was created by the state, German heritage by the bourgeoisie, and English heritage by an anti-modern aristocracy" (p. 329). And second, that each nation developed their own system in isolation from others. My own sense of the material that I have consulted over the years does not support these generalizations, but I am open to a wider reading of the international influences and exchanges that shaped the concept of "heritage" and drove preservation movements.

Swenson chose to limit her study to only three "nations," those in Britain (usually meaning the United Kingdom, during the time encompassed by the study, including all of Ireland with a few late references to other parts of the empire), France (with fluctuating borders), and Germany (a term whose meaning varies before and after imperial unification of the myriad independent duchies and principalities of the region, all with differing policies). Also restricting her study to the years 1789-1918, Swenson tries to establish that France was the source from which the other countries derived their own interest and institutions in support of conservation. Only once does she imply that private ownership and conservation of historical ecclesiastical monuments in England derived from the Dissolution (i.e., *before* the French Revolution) (p. 59). Certainly she is correct that many of the legal measures and bureaucratic organizational developments were most evident in France; however, the notion of a growing awareness or appreciation is harder to date. In fact, she often disproves this point herself, such as showing the earlier measures passed in German-speaking regions for preservation already in the 1770s and 1780s (p. 293) or often citing the powerful model that the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in England served for France.

As a comparative project, it is too bad Swenson's interests and/or language skills did not extend to at least Spain and Italy, and perhaps Turkey and Greece, among others. Although she occasionally refers to these and other European nations, particularly in coverage of the international expositions and legislation movements, no archival material was consulted and they are not part of the narrative. Nevertheless, it is clear that Italy, Spain and Greece, among many other countries, were quite active in conservation and restoration.

Swenson divides her book into three major sections: "National Heritage Movements," "International Meeting-Points," and "Transnational Campaigns." Within these sections are two chapters each: the first comprising a record of the rise of heritage movements within the three national regions she has chosen; the second recording occurrences of international exhibitions and conferences; and the third

documenting international attempts at collaboration around conservation followed by the creation of both national and universal historic monument laws.

The first section takes up nearly half the book, offering a detailed report on archival material supporting the narrative of heritage development in these three regions, one at a time. As she reports on the plethora of movements, associations, leaders, ideas and government policies, Swenson tries to compare the three countries, but the method is here made rather awkward since the reader does not yet have all the information and there was so much change within each country across short periods. It is particularly confusing when covering Germany because political allegiances regarding local or German imperial monuments (most often formerly Prussian) varied. She also delineates the differences between the reasons for interest, definitions, and cultural tendencies that helped or hindered heritage movements as well as the broad range of subjects this entailed—not just historic buildings but prehistoric monuments, public sculpture, both rural and urban landscapes, and provincial traditions.

It is only when she arrives at parts two and three that Swenson truly begins to address her thesis. Her presentation becomes much more readable and the comparative aspect is better realized. She begins part two by describing the various international expositions that featured national exhibitions concerning historic monuments, citing the differences found in their form and motivations from France to England to Germany. A second chapter compares national and international conferences whose goal was to bring proponents together across political lines. Here she easily shows that France was dominant but their model worked both for and against international developments.

In part three, Swenson presents the results of her research on correspondence between leading figures in the three countries during campaigns to save threatened monuments. She concludes that “a rhetoric of international collaboration and national superiority could exist simultaneously” (p. 272). This chapter is followed by a consideration of the attempts to effect legislation regarding the treatment of monuments, as well as landscape, both at home and elsewhere in the world. Again, she presents material about each country one at a time, but as always, the chronology must then be qualified within each subsection. We begin to see the pattern of differences from other chapters coalescing here—the varying definitions of “heritage,” the pressure from the public versus the “top down” enactments by central governments, the greater or lesser roles of private societies, the contrasting ownership conditions of church buildings, the controversies over privileges and private property rights, preferences for domestic antiquities or those abroad (especially classical), differences in classifications of “national” monuments, colonial policies, divergent methods for allocating funding, attitudes about imposing legislation, enthusiasm for drafting proposals versus success in passing laws, and so on. In this section, Swenson emphasizes the competition between countries as well as the heavy reference to the policies of others in order to stay “modern” and “cultured.” The primacy of Italy’s policies on heritage, preservation and renovation is apparent by the continued reference to them in the proposals written by proponents in France, Britain, and Germany. Thus the lack of information about Italy’s own heritage history, upon which to measure the three countries that Swenson studies, becomes even more evident and unfortunate.

In her conclusion, Swenson pulls together all the threads to return to her major points. There was constant interaction between proponents in these three countries for the developing preservationist movement on historical monuments and a larger field called by terms like “patrimony,” or “heritage.” However, there was no linear progress towards international conservation policies, and attitudes shifted according to fashion. Political pressures caused a mercurial retention of both discourse and resolutions. Participation by governments, notable societies, and the public was uneven. Competition worked both for and against cross-cultural collaboration. Wars caused disruptions and realignments, but also pointed out the need for universal legislation. A rhetoric of a shared cultural heritage of humanity belonging to no one country, which was used to suggest that preservation would lead to peaceful civilization, helped

form UNESCO, but the campaign was fraught by bitter nationalist sentiment engendered during two world wars.

In the end, we are still left with a sense that each country had its own set of rules and that its heritage policies, though influenced by those outside, were essentially home grown. So this book does not really change our ideas about the history of heritage development, but it deepens our understanding of the similarities and differences in the process between three major European countries. An enormous amount of information is provided to support work that has already mapped out the field for each of these locations—the material on German-speaking states is particularly welcome in English—and a broader application of archival documentation shows the idiosyncrasies of a history that did not move steadily forward, but had ups and downs, backs and forths. I do not want to understate the amount of work Swenson has accomplished and I know that scholars will consult this book as an extensive record of transnational exchange and influence for many years to come. In fact, however, Swenson's study also suggests that an even larger picture of the rise of heritage across Europe, particularly incorporating those with early struggles regarding their antiquities being taken away to form the collections of neighboring countries (especially the three treated by Swenson), would be another welcome addition to current scholarship.

Janet T. Marquardt  
Smith College  
[jmarquardt@smith.edu](mailto:jmarquardt@smith.edu)

Copyright © 2015 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172