

MONUMENTS TO MANKIND

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From afar they look like 380 dots sprinkled on the world map, haphazardly spread between the 70th degree of latitude in the north and the 60th in the south. In reality, however, they are 380 monuments, buildings, landscape and nature parks which are as varied as their geographical location or the cultures and epochs in which they arose. What do the megaliths of Stonehenge in England have in common with the pyramids of Egypt or the futuristic centre of Brasilia? What traits do the Taj Mahal in India, Chartres Cathedral and Machu Picchu, the city of ruins in Peru, share? What is the common denominator of the Barrier Reef in Australia, the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe and the Grand Canyon in the USA? It is an emblem, ultramarine and white: a square dissolving into a circle which protectively envelops it - the circle is a symbol of nature and the square represents human achievement, the two inextricably linked.

The symbol of the "world cultural heritage of humankind" distinguishes architectural structures and landscape which are unique in the world and which are subject to a very special preservation order. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) applies a set of stringent criteria before deciding what really belongs to the common cultural heritage of humankind and what does not. The only possible candidates for this constantly and rapidly growing list are "unique cultural achievements" which either "had a great influence on the development of architecture" or else "represent a unique testimony to a lost culture".

The guardians of UNESCO regard the upkeep of irreplaceable examples and relics of nature, culture and civilisation as a responsibility towards the coming generations, and one that links nation to nation. The event that triggered this collective cultural conscience was the building of the Aswan Dam in 1960 when the Nile threatened to inundate the temples of Abu Simbel. The international community

suddenly became aware that these temples were not only important to Egypt but were part of "mankind's collective consciousness" and as such were irreplaceable. A joint rescue operation the like of which had never been seen before saved Abu Simbel. The example caught on. Since then 129 nations have signed the "International Convention on Cultural and Natural Heritage" set up in 1972. These countries have thereby pledged to uphold the outstanding cultural assets on their territory and to help protect those of other states, and not just in the form of financial subsidies but also through the training of experts or by making technologies available. For example, the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation contributed know-how and money over and above the regular UNESCO budget to the restoration of a caravanserai which has just been completed in Sanaa/Yemen.

The UNESCO commission has the unenviable task of deciding on new unique natural and cultural monuments every two years (each country puts forward its own list of proposals which has to be scrutinised). Its members also gather information on the state of the monuments and concern themselves with procuring the financial means for their salvation and preservation. They have an annual budget of 250 million dollars. Last year, in order to signalise just how important the protection of natural and cultural monuments is, UNESCO established a centre for the world's cultural heritage in Paris. It is headed by the German forestry ecologist Bernd von Droste zu Hülshoff.

His objective is a redoubling of efforts, for the dangers facing the world's cultural heritage are growing just as fast as the UNESCO list. They range from environmental pollution, mass tourism and the population explosion to climatic changes and civil wars.

UNESCO is not always able to help- thus it could not save the old city of Dubrovnik in Croatia from destruction. Yet it can still

point to numerous success stories: thus, for example, in Delphi UNESCO prevented the construction of an aluminium factory in the direct vicinity of the Temple of Apollo, and it was successful in arguing against the staging of the next World Exhibition in Venice in the year 2000.

Two German cultural monuments have recently been added to the global heritage list: the medieval centre of Goslar with the Kaiserpfalz and the nearby silver mine at Rammelsberg. This means that twelve German edifices now bear the blue and white UNESCO insignia. However, Cologne Cathedral, one of the biggest tourist attractions in Germany, is not among them. For guidelines stipulate that monuments of the same type (e.g. "Gothic cathedrals") may only be represented by the most representative examples - regardless of the country of location. Thus Cologne Cathedral

was ousted by the judges in favour of French rivals. On the other hand, ten other edifices were given the nod: the cathedrals at Aachen and Speyer, the historic core of Lübeck, the Roman buildings in Trier, the cathedral and church of St. Michael in Hildesheim, the Wieskirche church in Bavaria, the royal residence in Würzburg, the Sanssouci in Potsdam, and the monastery and archway of Lorsch along the Bergstrasse.

"The world cultural heritage of mankind" - it has a grand ring to it. It has nothing to do with any ratings chart for tourists; instead it has everything to do with architectural artefacts and with the cultural heritage that underlies the creation of such monuments. It can help to find answers to the questions which the philosophers of ancient Greece also asked themselves: Where do we come from - Who are we - Whither are we going?

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IN SEARCH OF HISTORY'S MUSE

Then, in the third quarter of the last century, as history became an academic discipline, the free companionship between literature and history was deemed by newly founded university departments to be fundamentally unserious. The storytellers were shoved aside by scientists intent on reconstructing from fragments and clues what they insisted would be an empirically verifiable, objectively grounded version of an event, its causes and consequences precisely delineated. Until, that is, another historian working from exactly the same sources came to exactly the opposite conclusion, thereby establishing the character of "historical debate", a differentiation game played in almost every historical journal. The conventional form runs something like this, in a fictitious example:

Serfdom in Baroque Fredonia: A Revision by John J. Juggins. In 1968 Wendy F. Muggins published her seminal article on manorial social structure in 17th-century Fredonia. A decade later, this orthodoxy was substantially corrected by Cuthbert C. Buggins, based on a reading of Fredonian tax records. Unaccountably, neither Muggins nor Buggins consulted local manorial records in Upper Sylvania. Had they done so, they would have seen that the prevailing view ought to be

radically revised. In the pages that follow, I hope to shed light on ...

As the academic institutions of history grew in strength and numbers, so the Juggins-Buggins-Muggins syndrome became the predominant form of historical argument.

Analysis was to proceed by knuckle-rapping corrections; the temporarily victorious scholar inevitably became the ignominiously corrected dunce. The subject of history became other historians. And the narratives that had been the great intellectual engine in works by John Lothrop Motley, the celebrated 19th-century American historian of the Dutch revolt, or Michelet were now demoted to mere entertainment. The power to make a reader live within such vanished moments, to feel for a while the past to be more real, more urgent than the present, was henceforth left to the historical novelists, while the "professionals" got on with the "serious work", the productions of a Definite Explanation for Important Events.

Storytellers not only lost ground, they became aggressively despised: Michelet was replaced by Karl Marx; Carlyle and Macaulay by Sir John Seeley and Bishop Stubbs, the vigilantes of British and imperial and constitutional history. The thrilling, beautiful prose of the Bostonians - Bancroft, Prescott, and Parkman - began to gather dust

and line the shelves of antiquarian bookstores, where they may still be dependably found, neglected giants slumbering within their dark green casings of cloth and morocco.

To emulate, of course, is not to imitate. We shall never write again in their manner and with their rhetorical confidence, nor should we try. The present generation of historians must find its own voice, just as every generation has before it. The narrative tradition is by no means extinct. In work of unimpeachably "professional" historians and contemporary scholars - Bernard Bailyn, Jonathan Spence, Eric Foner, James

McPherson, William Cronon, Peter Gay - it remains brilliantly vivid. Nonfiction writers outside the academy - like Richard Rhodes, author of *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*; J. Anthony Lukas, author of **Common Ground** about school desegregation in Boston; and Taylor Branch, biographer of Martin Luther King, Jr. - have created forceful and imaginative, even epic, work on the history of our century and find a correspondingly large reading public.

Extract from Simon Schama's, Professor of History, Harvard University article in *The New York Times* as reprinted in *Dialogue* 3, 1992.
