Empires of Heritage (Edinburgh, 10-13 Jun 20)

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CfP for Session

Empires of Heritage: World Monuments before UNESCO

Our present model of "world heritage" owes much of its genealogy to the geopolitics of Empire. This hypothesis aims to expand prevailing narratives, which track the rise of "world heritage" programs starting with the creation of UNESCO after WWII and the elevation of monument preservation to international law (Allais 2018). In the century leading up to these events, however, state and non-state actors traveled throughout colonial territories with the self-ordained mission to study, document, and restore precolonial cultural sites, which often became "historic monuments" as part of an imposed scheme of "cultural heritage as civilizing mission" (Falser 2015).

These iconic monuments did not remain in situ. They traveled to imperial metropoles in the form of fragments, facsimiles, plaster casts, drawings, and photographs, facilitating their further mobility and thus expanding their reception as icons of "civilization." Iconicity's affordance for circulation was hardly unique to the Age of Empire, however. Many of these structures were sites of age-old religious worship and transregional pilgrimage beyond political boundaries (e.g., Angkor Wat in Cambodia), but underwent a secular turn and taxonomic shift within networks of colonial exploitation—from the pages of scholarly journals, to the halls of museums, to performative spectacles at World's Fairs. Such phenomena initiated the modern "world heritage imaginary" as a regime of monument worship with its own systems of secular governance between the "original" sites and their multi-sited substitutes.

In this session, we aim to cultivate genealogies of "world heritage" during the height of Empire, ca. 1870-1940, even if projects before this core period offer crucial points of reference. We seek contributions that explore how disciplinary expertise was developed and deployed—long before the UNESCO heritage-scape—to identify and (re)build historic structures as "historic monuments" beyond the boundaries of the modern European nation state.
Key research questions emerge:
What were the criteria for classifying heritage sites and to what extent were their pre-existing cultural and religious meanings appropriated into secular forms of iconicity? What role did indigenous knowledge and labor play in the circulation of monuments within and beyond empires? How did juridical frameworks develop alongside practices of cross-regional monument preservation? How do we situate the violence of colonial expansion within aspirations toward "global communi-

ty" and the idealism of early internationalist programs (Crinson 2017)?
Papers should focus on the material and discursive practices of "world heritage" or "heritage of humanity" and their far-reaching implications among disparate communities, polities, and economies.

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