



## THE MONUMENT

# The Monument

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### ABSTRACT

The production of monumental architecture is an essential aspect of European cultural history. Beginning in Antiquity, and then under the influence of Christianity, an extremely diverse body was built throughout the continent, and was the source of vast stylistic movements stretching over nearly two thousand years. This sacred and secular collection was adapted and passed down until the twentieth century, both with regard to its forms and its technology, while simultaneously importing non-European motifs. Since the Enlightenment, the recognition of monuments has stimulated this cross-cultural transfer, assisted by the rise of national spaces and driven by the near-sanctuarization of the monument, which was recognized by protective laws applied during the nineteenth century in various countries. Despite destruction and the World Wars, Europe never ceased to think of itself as a monumental continent whose resources, which are today used for political and economic purposes, confer on it the best part of its global prestige.



Snowhill Manor, England.

In choosing to present stylized fictitious monuments on the bills of its new currency, the European Union carefully managed the sensitivity of its different member states, and in particular reminded one of the fundamental qualities of the continent's cultural history: the production of a monumental architecture that since Antiquity has represented a dual framework that is both constructed and spiritual. Europe, whose entire history is marked, through both time and space, by public and private buildings of considerable scale, consequently distinguishes itself from civilizations without architecture. Along with ancient Egypt and the Mesoamerican civilizations, it includes the oldest built heritage of humanity, as demonstrated by spectacular ruins and intact buildings, sometimes still in use.

It was through the recognition of these buildings that a history of taste was formed, along with a history of the gaze specific to it. This heritage is characterized by the two initial qualities of diversity and adaptation, which gave rise to a uniquely European evolution (shared with the world since 1970 thanks to the World Heritage list), which during two key periods sketched a paradoxical arc: the sanctuarization of monuments acknowledged in the nineteenth century, a kind of secular emancipation of the religious basis; and its subsequent expansion to include the architectural production of the twentieth century, culminating in a sacredness that is sometimes rediscovered, and sometimes denied. By its dual nature, this instability periodically poses a threat to the material existence of monuments, but does not call into question their primacy in European culture.

## **Diversity**

Greco-Roman Antiquity represents the monumental basis of this long history, both within the geographic area in which it flourished—which is to say the southwestern half of the continent—along with the rest of Europe, thanks to a tradition that was acknowledged as a source, and broadly shared. Since Antiquity, the intensive use of geology and reliable technology made it possible to construct buildings that were monumental and lasting, in both the domain of the sacred and of power as well as for municipal use. At its origin, the notion of the monument depended on a dual authority: that of the person who builds it, and that of the person who designs it. It was thereby inseparable from the grandeur attributed to it by the Greeks, for whom all architecture competed with the gods or with nature. The monument was endowed from the outset with a quasi-exceptional status, allowing it to escape the weight of the territory and the passing of time. Hence the travels and efforts undertaken to discover them, going as far back as the earliest Antiquity—distant founders of the notion of tourism, which was reborn in the middle of the nineteenth century following romantic and picturesque voyages.

Christianity reinforced this aura by recovering the sacred sites of fallen religions in order to integrate them into its own corpus, and by linking the prestige of major buildings with praise for the relics of saints they housed. The abbey was part of a network of roads that led believers from monument to monument until Santiago de Compostela, the endpoint of a pilgrimage that attracted believers from all over Christendom. It was in this way that, during the Middle Ages, recognition of monuments took on a spiritual nature, one that was, if not unique, at least of a privileged nature.

On the basis of this heritage, which was established as a model beginning in the fifteenth century and echoed until the twentieth century, Europe experienced a succession of vast stylistic movements stretching over nearly two thousand years: Paleochristian, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Classical, Baroque, Neoclassical, Eclectic, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Modern, and Post-Modern architecture. These major movements, whose designations, characters and even limits are shifting and endlessly debated, nevertheless remain broadly shared and used, and therefore possess a practical validity that makes them effective not only beginning with the typologies of the first art historians (Winckelmann), but especially as the foundation of an undeniable community grounding.

Beyond similarities, continuities (for instance architectural orders beginning in the fifteenth century), and even revivals and movements for identity-based revision of monuments (neo-Gothic, neo-Rococo, neo-Norman, etc.), the variety of this architectural history is striking. As a result, Europe also differs from cultures with a permanent architecture, and offers many faces that are reinforced by local particularities. A large part of this renewal was made possible by major technological breakthroughs, such as the invention and intensive use of complex materials (cast iron, steel, concrete, glass), which wrested European architecture from the weight of traditional materials (stone, wood, earth), and renewed the art of building on the formal and quantitative level. The Parthenon, Saint Peter's Basilica, the Crystal Palace, and the Millau Viaduct are the fragments of a single history.

## **Adaptation**

A second aspect of this European architecture is its flexibility and malleability. These were fueled chiefly by the capacity for exportation and adaptation exhibited by European architecture and its codes, which followed the continent's expansion beyond the seas beginning in the sixteenth century. This phenomenon affected both the conception of cities and buildings of power, along with eminently adaptable domestic architecture. Acclimatization took various forms: assimilation, as shown by the major capitals of the American continent (Washington, Buenos Aires); direct import, as seen by the model of the British Empire (Canberra, New Delhi); transmission, as in the case of recent architecture, whose models were exported to every continent thanks to the International Congresses of

Modern Architecture (CIAM), and applied as is (Tel Aviv); and even reduction, as with the Jesuit missions of South America.

Just as the model of the ideal city was spread during Roman times by legions in the provinces of the Empire, during the twentieth century the monumental forms of the theorized urban utopia in Europe gravitating around Le Corbusier were applied throughout the world, for instance in Chandigarh or Brasilia (Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer). The engineer François Hennebique's patent was used everywhere, in both works of a civil spirit and public architecture of a massive scale, not to mention the metallic structures of Gustave Eiffel, which were also disseminated across the globe.

Secondly and inversely, European architecture was very porous, and permeable to non-European motifs and technology, which were imported and amalgamated. This last movement was itself dual in nature: technological contributions (Arabic stereotomy, for instance) were accompanied by stylistic interplay that, beginning in the nineteenth century, Europe engaged in with the architectures of non-European civilizations, during the time of a first globalization. The continent created an exotic architecture, both in the colonies and on its own territory. This system of transfer followed complex paths: outright import, for instance the single-storey rural home from Bengal known as the *bangla*, which around 1870 became *bungalow* in the United Kingdom, and was exported after 1905 to North America after its dazzling success; or cultural crossover, as when Lyautey's productions in Morocco, blended with French and local influences, were copied in Egypt. It was common for architectural orientalism, that of Albert Ballu among others, to make the neo-Moorish style used in Algeria a mark of France, and to make the classical *fantaisies* bearing Islamic details exhibited in France a mark of the Maghreb. World exhibitions, which were inaugurated in London in 1851, served as laboratories and amplifiers for these movements, against a backdrop of pointed rivalry between European nations, who were hungry for colonial expansion and rationalization. Beyond effects of style, they gave rise to experiments on materials, forms, and typologies, which were then exported to all continents. In this respect, European architecture also separated itself from civilizations with endogamous architecture, which were underpinned by their own heritage.

## Sanctuarization

A third quality appeared during the early modern era, which gave the word monument its current meaning, and developed slowly in the collections gathered by scholars and architects gravitating around papal and ancient Rome. Under their influence, and then that of Enlightenment philosophers, the notion of the monument moved away from the exclusivity of religious sources, and was gradually secularized. The treatise published by the Austrian architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, *A Plan for a History of Architecture* (1721), drew attention to this evolution as the universal perception of familiar monuments. This coincided with the removal of the Ottoman threat that had weighed on Eastern Europe, as well as with the beginnings of archeology in Southern Italy (Pompeii, 1748). Subsequently began the Grand Tour, a voyage of archeological discovery in the Italian peninsula that served as an introduction to art for all cultured elites, and quickly drew their attention to the constructed remains of their respective countries. As a result, a scholarly and progressive recognition of monuments in national spaces was constructed. This recognition strove to select emblems for the spirit of budding nations—such as in the central empires (Cologne Cathedral)—and to raise awareness of their resources for older constituted nations (cathedrals of Strasbourg or Canterbury).

While England chose in the eighteenth century to preserve, restore, and pass on an essential portion of the monuments of its past, beginning with its religious buildings, the independent kingdom of Greece (1832) declared its ancient monuments national property in 1833, shortly after it was stripped of the Parthenon marbles by Lord Elgin (1805). France was an exception in this harmonious march toward the sanctuarization of monuments because of the bloody break of the Revolution, which unleashed its fury on buildings linked to the church or the monarchy. This was done in a paradoxical context in which destruction proceeded side by side with discussion of theories regarding the new regime's purifying mission, the need for an education of free citizens, and the role to be played by monuments of the past for this purpose. Although the National Convention defined and accepted as harmful the times of vandalism, which were associated with barbarism and a lack of culture, it took until the romantic generation of Chateaubriand and Goethe before monuments were rehabilitated as the sole protectors of the memory of the ages, and were included in the national epics of narrative fiction (*La Chanson de Roland*, published in 1837), epic poems (Ossian), and folk collections (Finnish *Kalevala*).

The institutional recognition of monuments began in this way, with the July Monarchy's action in October 1830 shedding light on its political motivations. Toward this prospect of legitimization, European regimes gave them a memorial and cultural value, doing so at great expense and under new constraints, both technological and legal. A series of protection laws were developed: in 1867 in Sweden, 1881 in Hungary, 1882 in the United Kingdom, 1883 in Finland, and 1887 and later 1913 in France. The sequence of these dates is a clear sign: this sanctuarization was an entirely unique event in the history of human civilizations, and immersed Europe in the phenomenon of monumental conservation, requiring the establishment of rules (which went as far as limiting the right of property), the establishing of a complex ethics, and the implementation of an economy of restoration and reuse.

The latter opposed two schools of thought and action, based on two contradictory values of monuments as they were recognized at the time: historical value and age value. Historical value consisted of reverting to the initial state of the monument—even if assumptions were favoured when certainty was lacking—as well as relying on architectural typologies deemed to be perfect, which were linked with societal phenomena. This is what Eugène Viollet-le-Duc did. For the French, restoration was subsequently seen as a didactic effort based on archeology, the identity of the form, and a classification borrowed from transformism. Gottfried Semper in Germany rather shared this paradigm. Their parallel thought enabled popularizing the neo-Gothic throughout Europe, prompting the transition toward pre-Modernity (Vienna Secession, Catalan Modernism). In what was one of the central elements of the European conception of the monument, architecture from the past was not cut off from that of the future.

Opposing historical value was age value, which involved freezing the monument in time, whatever its state: as the only trace that mattered, nothing should be added or taken away from it. This was advocated by John Ruskin (1849). This view heralded the almost sacred notion of the monument that prevailed for the Arts and Crafts Movement, and that tended to spread in the late twentieth century after Alois Riegl's attempt in 1903 to achieve a synthesis between the French and English philosophies, which introduced the new notions of "will to art" (*Kunstwollen*) and the contemporary use of monuments.

## Expansion

Having become more attuned to its monumental past, Europe differed from civilizations that rebuilt their artifacts solely to maintain their form, and all the more from those who sacrificed them irrevocably. This approach led to complex phenomena, including a passion for archeology and heritage. The modern era has seen an increase in the problems threatening monuments in their authenticity, integrity, and even their survival. The two World Wars shook national temporality through the massiveness of their destruction and the profound divide in opinion that they revealed. The first showed the power of suffering based on identity, as well as the patriotic attachment to battered monuments, while the second produced opposing attitudes under the same desire to gather within the wounded nations the times of all past monuments. This desire justified both the identical reconstruction of ruined cities, as well as their complete refashioning. Although this opposition between the rebirth of the past and the *tabula rasa* may appear irreducible, Europe in reality rekindled its original destiny as the monumental continent.

The phenomenon of monuments nevertheless began to dissolve into the new concept of heritage, which began to replace the clear legal entity of the historic monument with laws concerning urban and rural sites and landscapes, along with a legal arsenal recently motivated by the criteria of sustainable development, but whose meaning escapes the public. People became aware of the fragility of this notion when the *Journées du patrimoine* [Heritage Days] were created in France in 1984, during which thousands of monuments were opened to visitors. After the expansion of these *Journées* to countries of the European Union (1991), their success proved colossal (20 million visitors counted in 2010). This heritage, shared by a number of individuals, a group, a nation, or even all of humanity, grew so profuse that it had to be divided into categories (historical, linguistic, natural, genetic, etc.). The monument was now no more than one part of the traces that had fashioned European civilization. This semantic shift was of an institutional nature, and bore within it a major change in the role played by cultural policy, leading to two phenomena at work since the 1980s: the use of monuments for political and economic reasons. The political inclusion of monuments now consists of using the sociology of heritage objects. Aside from buildings representing the grandeur of an immanent or earthly authority, the recognition was extended to the buildings of the twentieth century, and also incorporated the ideologies that accompanied them, which often had a simplistic understanding of progress. The addition of commercial monuments in the notion of shared heritage also involved the economic mechanisms stemming from the Industrial Revolution that characterized the West, while the incorporation of productive monuments tended to include the

standardization of buildings. Through these recognitions, room was made for entities that were shared and demanded by collective memory, but without unquestionable doctrine. The inflation of protections that resulted was denounced by the expression "monument abuse" (Régis Debray), which resulted from undecipherable choices and a network of protected buildings that had become unmanageable due to its enormous size.

This inflation can be detected starting in the 1960s, which saw a complete reversal of the perspective of time. André Malraux accepted the classification of buildings by Le Corbusier during the latter's lifetime: the monument was no longer a matter solely concerning the distant past. This acceleration was in keeping with the time of instantaneity, which preferred memory—the traces left by successive pasts—to history, the reconstruction and distancing of these same pasts. The historian François Hartog created from it the notion of "presentism", which limits critical perspective, and obliges one to react to events without taking distance. Monuments have without a doubt suffered from this haste.

Their economic utilization has taken different forms, with their use in marketing being merely an accident. The major royal châteaux have today acquired a worldwide visual identity. On the contrary, the reuse of familiar monuments for their aesthetic quality or social connotation has provided results that are contrasting, seductive (pool of the *Lutetia* (1935) which has become a Hermès store), or questionable (Molitor pool (1929) remodeled as a hotel complex bearing no relation to the original). At the same time, thousands of monuments suffer from slow abandonment in the countryside far from tourist circuits.

Hence, there is presently a sense of a loss of meaning due to the overly large number of protected monuments. The growing subjectivity of the notion of heritage gives monuments over to the programs of various interest groups with nontransparent strategies. Local authorities see noteworthy buildings only as levers for increased tourism. Preoccupied by the huge increases in their spending, states are disengaging, which could be understandable if at the same time they were not losing their sovereign capacity to define a doctrine. Economic logic overrides the protection priorities of monuments, presenting measures that harm their authenticity, modify their purpose, and favour channels of profitability in the short term. The challenge of monument policy is now to contend with the question of numbers (of buildings as well as visitors) in addition to that of the expense of restoration.

These difficulties—which are on the whole recurring ones—should not obscure the fact that the entire European continent lives to the rhythm of its monumental or archeological network, from which it draws a not insignificant portion of its resources and, especially, the best part of its global prestige. Since their discovery by early modern scholars, these monuments have been presented not as inert remains, but as evidence of the grandeur of the past, whose respectful preservation is the most tangible sign of the grandeur of the present. This sentiment remains truer than ever in early twenty-first century Europe.

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