

The State of the Discipline: A Look at Heritage Studies

Geoffrey M.J. Chappell

University of Lethbridge

Object review:

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Editors: William Logan, Máiréad Nic Craith, and Ulrich Kockel

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The editors of *A Companion to Heritage Studies*, the 28th title in the *Blackwell Companions to Anthropology* series, choose to consider the origins of heritage studies with the Venice charter of 1964 before moving to the “heritage boom” of the 1990s and onwards to the present day. In the wake of the rapid increase in scholarly production regarding heritage studies, the editors offer their work as illuminating the concept of “new heritage” which they define as “the exploration of cultural heritage as a construct resulting from processes that give present-day significance to elements from the past” (Logan, Nic Craith, and Kockel 2016).

As the burgeoning field of heritage studies advances, the absence of a foundational handbook style work which synthesizes the current views from several authors and several areas of specialization can be felt. Logan, Nic Craith and Kockel have completed an ambitious project to fill this gap. Their aim has been to compile in a single volume “an up-to-date, international analysis of the field [of heritage]”. The resulting work calls on contributions from 44 scholars on five continents, from a range of disciplines both within and outside the academy, resulting in 37 chapters divided into 3 sections.

Part One entitled ‘Expanding Heritage’, is further broken down into 3 subsections by the editors in their introduction. Chapters two through five explore theoretical questions concerning: conceptions of tangible heritage spaces, the transition from “folklore” to “intangible heritage”, the shortcomings of legislation surrounding intellectual and culturally property rights, and Japan as a non-Western example of intangible heritage practices. Chapters six, seven, and eight fall under ‘Landscapes of Heritage’ wherein the authors use location based case studies to consider heritage landscapes. Part One closes with ‘Collecting Heritage’ which includes a discussion on UNESCO’s Memory of the World document preservation program, and Maurice Mugabowagahunde’s work with the Rwandan Batwa people and the possession of indigenous artefacts by museums.

‘Using and Abusing Heritage’ is Part Two of *A Companion to Heritage Studies*, it begins with a section on ‘Socioeconomic Development’ a topic that has been of great interest to many scholars in the field of heritage studies. Chapters 11, 12, and 13 consider the connection of heritage and socioeconomic development through case studies from Canada, Peru and India, and Sri Lanka. Chapter 14 reflects on the role of heritage in social needs and the preservation of community identity. The next section addresses ‘Digital Heritage’. In Chapter 15, Maria Economou discusses some of the ways current technology has been, or can be, implemented in heritage spaces, and considers the benefits and challenges technology brings. Chapter 16 is a discussion of the use of UNESCO designation of spaces as world heritage, as an ongoing means of nationalist state reinforcement in China. Part Two continues on to ‘War and Civil Unrest’ which is particularly relevant in the present, in light of the destruction of heritage sites to violence around the world. Chapter 17 considers post-communist associations to World War II in Poland and the development currently underway of the new Gdańsk Museum of World War Two. Chapters 18 through 20 discuss instances of heritage destruction in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Mali, including both tangible and intangible heritage. ‘Using and Abusing Heritage’ closes with a chapter from O. Hugo Benavides who discusses the harm to heritage and culture inflicted by the European invasion of the Andes, and the resistance still offered by indigenous peoples today.

Part Three ‘Recasting Heritage’ is the final piece of *A Companion to Heritage Studies*; it begins with ‘Limiting Heritage’ covering chapters 22 through 27. These chapters discuss the

limitations of current conceptions and practices of heritage. Including, failing economic feasibility, the shortcomings of UNESCO, the exploitation of heritage for political ends, deficiencies in UNESCO's approach to indigenous peoples, and specific UNESCO failings in Africa. 'Holistic and Inclusive Heritage' follows, in Chapter 28, Aygen and Logan discuss their expectations to see Asia play an increasing role in the heritage sector. In Chapter 29, Nic Craith and Kockel consider integrating tangible and intangible heritage. Drawing from her masterful *Uses of Heritage*, (Smith 2009) Laurajane Smith and co-author Gary Campbell conceptualize affect as 'The Elephant in the Room' when it comes to heritage and museum studies. Chapter 31 bridges the gap into the next section 'The Ethics of Heritage' carrying on to include chapter 34. These chapters advocate for cosmopolitanismⁱ, reconciliation, and dialogue. The final section 'The New Heritage Studies' contains three remaining chapters. These chapters are forward looking, to the future of the heritage field and necessary changes to policies, laws, and academic training. They will be of particular interest to heritage specialists.

As far as this author is aware, no other work in heritage rivals *A Companion to Heritage Studies* in scope or contemporaneity. It succeeds in the editors' goal of providing an international perspective of the current state of the field. I would be remiss not to mention that the text focuses quite heavily on an international perspective, concerning itself primarily with international phenomenon, such as UNESCO World Heritage Sites and top-down management strategies. The editors acknowledge this international focus and stress the need for "heritage from below" (Robertson 2012) but argue that the international level has a richness of discourse and the interplay between "periphery" and global scales is profitable. The editors' assessment is correct, but in an already lengthy work such as this, I feel that the decision not to devote more attention to local level heritage questions on their own terms was an error. Nonetheless that was not the editors' intent and the collection of works they have gathered and arranged are remarkable as an exemplar of the current state of the field. *A Companion to Heritage Studies* should be sought out by any specialist in the area of heritage studies, and especially by educators who would benefit from access to a range of works on diverse heritage topics to entertain and inspire students.

ⁱ See (Meskell 2009) for more.

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