

**France and the *Patrimoine* of the Empire:
Heritage Policy under Colonial Rule**

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The UNESCO World Heritage roster currently lists sixty-nine sites in the countries that made up the French empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The built sites include Roman ruins in Algeria, royal palaces in Benin, Crusader castles in Lebanon, the old towns of Djenné in Mali and Luang Prabang in Laos, the imperial tombs of Hué in Vietnam, the medinas of Marrakesh and Essaouira, the Kairouan mosque complex in Tunisia, the island of Gorée in Senegal and of course Angkor Wat in Cambodia.¹ The UNESCO roster provides an entry-point for a consideration of the *patrimoine* in the former French colonial world; of the attitudes and policies of French authorities to the preservation or destruction of the material heritage of the pre-colonial era; and of the creation of a new material heritage by the colonialists. As Penny Edwards remarks in her study of the place of Angkor Wat in the French and Cambodian imaginary, the government officers, archaeologists and other social scientists and members of learned societies concerned with heritage in the French empire “were among the many nineteenth-century pioneers of the concept of a global heritage subsequently enshrined in the statutes of UNESCO.”²

A detailed analysis of heritage sites and policies in the colonies – France claimed the world’s second largest overseas empire, covering eleven million square kilometres and encompassing one hundred million people – is not possible here. The aim is to provide a brief overview, with some specific examples, in order to show three things: the ambivalence of the French to pre-colonial heritage but their setting in place of an enduring infrastructure of historical conservation and preservation; the determination of the French to use the extant material heritage for cultural and

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¹ For the full list, see <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list>>

² Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945* (Honolulu, 2007), 80.

political benefit; and the efforts of the French to mark the conquered territories with a new patrimonial heritage, which then became a legacy for independent states.

As background, it is worth remembering that the nineteenth century saw a rediscovery of France's own architectural and cultural *patrimoine*.³ New museums created in the capital and the provinces joined the Musée du Louvre, established in 1793.⁴ The Gothic gained popularity with the Romantic era, typified by Viollet-le-Duc's controversial restoration of cathedrals. The government established the first national commission on historical monuments in the 1830s. Baron Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris during the reign of Napoleon III – sewers, boulevards, the Opéra – transformed the “city of light.” In the late 1800s, a regionalist wave swept France, most visible perhaps in Provence and Brittany, with the creation of folklore societies and museums. France's overseas empire, assembled from 1830 to 1919, provided further terrain for exploring the alluring cultures of the nation's new imperial “provinces.”

France's expansion indeed made a vital contribution to the extension of the nation's cultural heritage, as objects from abroad entered French collections and as France appropriated their cultures into its world-view. Voyages to the South Pacific filled the Muséum d'histoire naturelle with new species of flora and fauna. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt provided short-lived political gain, but long-lasting cultural imports: Egyptian names graced Parisian streets, sphinxes and obelisks appeared in public squares, and the Louvre made room for Bonaparte's booty in a *musée égyptien*. Exotica moved from private cabinets of curiosity to public institutions – the navy museum, the ethnographical museum established at the Trocadéro in 1878 to house the “curios” and “fetishes” of the “primitive” societies, and large private collections, such as Emile Guimet's museum of Asian art installed in Paris in 1889. Imperialism brought the empire home to museums and also to the exhibitions that punctuated national life from the 1860s onwards, culminating in the grand Exposition coloniale internationale held in 1931. Imperialism created or expanded new fields of study, including the generic *sciences coloniales* and specific disciplines: Egyptology, Oceanic and African studies, anthropology, ethnography and ethnology, and (in the old sense of the word) Orientalism. Institutions such as the Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), chartered in 1900, played a vital role in the world of imperial research. A network of *instituts coloniaux*, *écoles coloniales* and

³ *Patrimoine* was linked originally to preservation and veneration of religious relics, and to the “patrimony” transmitted in wills and deeds from one generation to another. The ancien régime had relatively little sense of conservation of historic sites, monarchs and bureaucrats willingly destroying the old to make way for the new. After 1789, revolutionaries targeted for destruction symbols of the old regime, especially royal and religious sites, prompting orders in 1792 to preserve works considered of artistic (but not necessarily simply historical) value. The phrase “monument historique” seems to have dated from these years, in a 1790 publication by Aubin-Louis Millin, *Antiquités nationales*. Confiscation of royal and noble holdings enriched new public museums, such as the Muséum d'histoire naturelle (opened in 1793), a Musée des monuments français (established to conserve stone carvings) and the Musée du Louvre. Indeed, opposition to the ravages of the Revolution prompted new interest in patrimony. In 1810, a ministerial circular ordered prefects to carry out an inventory of chateaux, abbeys and tombs; the inventory continued until 1862. In 1830, Prime Minister François Guizot created the post of “inspecteur général des monuments historiques,” a post soon held by Prosper Mérimée. A “Comité historique des arts et des monuments” followed in 1834, becoming the “Commission des monuments historiques” three years later. See J.-P. Babelon and André Chastel, *La notion du patrimoine* (Paris, 1994). On museums, the best introduction is Dominique Poulot, *Patrimoine et musées: l'institution de la culture* (Paris, 2001).

⁴ The standard English work is Daniel Sherman, *Worthy Monuments: Art Museums and the Politics of Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

musées coloniaux grew up, and learned societies, missionary orders and lobby groups spearheaded research on the new colonial world.⁵ Studies of the *outré-mer* rebounded in France, as Daniel Sherman has shown, seen by a close connection between studies of “primitive” and “exotic” societies abroad, and rural and peasant societies at home; the ethnology of the provinces and the colonies shared many epistemological and methodological bases. A coming-and-going of ideas, policies and influences linked metropole and empire.⁶

But what of the material heritage – old and new – in the colonies? Some of it was shipped to France, objects acquired by hook or crook to fill the new museums. Most of it remains there, now part of the French heritage, though sometimes the subject of claims for repatriation. Meanwhile, the French came to see themselves, through their role of colonial masters, as guardians of the heritage of the countries they governed, exporting metropolitan notions of heritage, conservation, exhibition and the *mise en valeur* of cultural sites into the colonies. In doing so, the French arrogated to themselves godlike powers to create, preserve or destroy heritage in the countries they conquered, and colonialists marshalled military might, engineering and technological skill, scholarship, subventions, labour and every other means available to shape and reshape the *patrimoines* over which they acquired authority. Although creation, preservation and destruction intertwined – the razing of old buildings provided vacant land for erection of new edifices that might later be classified as worthy of preservation – that schematic tripartite division offers a framework for a bird’s-eye exploration of French heritage policy in the colonies.

Destruction often accompanied conquest, the pulling down of old symbols of authority a wilful attack on the pre-colonial order. This vandalism represented the least subtle of attempts to establish French overlordship and pacify local populations, to undermine the potency of traditional political or religious elites, and to replace old monuments with triumphant signs of European sovereignty. Claims to eliminate insalubrious and unhygienic *quartiers*, to promote progress through urban renewal, and to accommodate the infrastructural needs of the colonial society helped to legitimise such work. Wholesale development necessitated the elimination or containment of much that the French considered unhealthy, unprofitable, unsafe and unmodern: much, in their view, that was indigenous.

Hanoi provides one example.⁷ The French razed the Bao Thien Pagoda (built during the Ly dynasty, which ruled from 1000 to 1225) in order to take land for a Catholic cathedral, a building that would look at home in the French provinces. They pulled down an eighteenth-century temple to provide a site for the Hanoi city hall,

⁵ On French colonial museums, see Robert Aldrich, “Le musée colonial impossible,” in *Culture post-coloniale*, Pascal Blanchard and Nicolas Bancel, eds. (Paris, 2007), 83-101, and *ibid.*, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums and Colonial Memories* (London, 2005). On the general topic of collection and display of non-European works, see Benoît de l’Estoile, *Le goût des autres: de l’Exposition coloniale aux arts premiers* (Paris, 2007), and Maureen Murphy, *De l’imaginaire au musée: les arts d’Afrique à Paris et à New York (1931-2006)* (Paris, 2009). On the EFEO, see Pierre Singaravélou, *L’École française d’Extrême-Orient ou l’institution des marges (1898-1956): Essai d’histoire sociale et politique de la science coloniale* (Paris, 1999), and Catherine Clémentin-Ojha and Pierre-Yves Manguin, *Un siècle pour l’Asie: L’École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1898-2000* (Paris, 2001); on the *instituts coloniaux*, Laurent Morando, *Les Instituts coloniaux et l’Afrique* (Paris, 2007).

⁶ Daniel J. Sherman, “‘Peoples Ethnographic’: Objects, Museums, and the Colonial Inheritance of French Ethnology,” *French Historical Studies* 27:3 (2004): 669-703.

⁷ William S. Logan, *Hanoi: Biography of a City* (Sydney, 2000); Philippe Papin, *Histoire d’Hanoi* (Paris, 2001); Georges Boudarel and Nguyen Van Ky, eds., *Hanoi: City of the Rising Dragon* (Oxford, 2002); France Mangin, *Le Patrimoine indochinois: Hanoi et autres sites* (Paris, 2006).

with other pagodas and historic buildings removed for the post office, customs house, chamber of commerce and a match factory, among other public works projects. The rooms where scholars lodged while preparing for examinations to gain appointment as mandarins (in the Temple of Literature) were confiscated for a military barracks. Most of the old citadel, built in defence of the city in the early 1800s (ironically with the aid of French engineers using Vauban-inspired plans based on classical French fortifications), was demolished from 1894 to 1897, leaving only one tower, which still stands today. The citadel, as William Logan points out, posed no military threat to the French, but “seems to have been destroyed because it represented the wrong symbolism – the old Vietnamese imperial regime.”⁸

Destruction, in Hanoi and elsewhere, nevertheless sometimes provoked opposition, and not just from indigenous people. France Mangin, author of one of the best studies of heritage in the colonies, quotes a moving letter from Sergeant Frédéric Garcin, who took part in the conquest of Hanoi in the 1880s, in reaction to the destruction of the pagoda inside the citadel: “Here is one of the masterpieces of Annamite [Vietnamese] architecture!... With what art these fantastic animals have been sculpted! What a dramatic aspect they give to the pagoda! And yet we treat the Annamites as savages!... Are we the product of such a grand civilization, we who in such a monument have set up weapons magazines and vulgar artillery emplacements? Who knows where the fine Buddhas have gone? ... What would even the least pious of us say if, in France, an invader similarly profaned our cathedrals?”⁹ Garcin was powerless to combat the vandalism, but others were not deaf to such sentiments. In 1886, soon after the establishment of the French protectorate, Governor-General Paul Bert set up an Académie Tonkinoise to promote and preserve Vietnamese culture; though short-lived, it stood as precursor to later initiatives. In the first years of the protectorate, Gustave Dumoutier also published a pioneering study of the architecture and inscriptions of the city’s temples.

In 1891, plans by the new city council of Hanoi (on which Frenchmen held a majority) to clear land provoked ire from the Vietnamese emperor’s representative and also from the colonial Director of Indigenous Affairs: a difference of opinion which Logan interprets as indicative of French ambivalence about indigenous societies and the merits of destruction versus preservation. The Résident Supérieur, the top French official for Tonkin, eventually ordered destruction to cease and issued an edict proclaiming, “Demolition of monuments, destruction of gardens, etc. having a religious or historic character may not be undertaken before an inquiry has been carried out on the suitability of the measure.... I insist on questions of this type not being decided hastily or without time for me to obtain the advice of the Annamite authorities, which is indispensable to the matter.” The creation of the EFEO in 1900, in part, responded to Governor-General Paul Doumer’s desire for expert advice on heritage and conservation, and the institute mounted a campaign to save the one remaining city gate in Hanoi. In 1906, the French published a list of protected monuments in the city, and in 1924, they applied throughout Indochina a 1913 metropolitan law on historic monuments.¹⁰

In other colonial outposts, destruction nevertheless continued, with the aim of extending conquests, pacifying rebels or creating space for urban expansion. Arguments about such actions also continued. For instance, Abdelmajid Arrif has documented debates in Morocco in 1949 that positioned a heritage official against an

⁸ Logan, 80.

⁹ Quoted in Mangin, 61.

¹⁰ Logan, 84-87.

urban planner. The former defended the architectural and spatial inviolability of the casbah, while the latter advocated modernisation of the medina with roadways and functionalist buildings.¹¹ The disagreement not only exemplified the division of opinion among the French, reflecting varying views of the “ancient” and the “modern,” but also underlined the seigneurial role of the French in redesigning the built landscape of the colonies.

Though they destroyed much *in situ* and made off with loads of archaeological remains, artwork and crafts taken to Europe, the French also proved preservers of the patrimony of colonised countries, as shown in Mangin’s example of Hanoi. Another case study comes from Nabila Oulebsir’s volume on heritage policy in Algeria, which the French transformed into their major settler colony. Only three years after the conquest in 1830, the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres pronounced on the benefits of studying the Roman monuments of North Africa, and a commission carried out an inventory of classical sites there from 1840 to 1842. In 1845, the government appointed an Inspector of Public Buildings for the conservation of historic monuments.¹² The focus was overwhelmingly on Roman sites – French colonials claimed to be liberating North Africa from Arab rule and restoring European civilization in the Maghreb. The antique ruins thus constituted not only a European inheritance in North Africa, as Oulebsir and Patricia Lorcin have shown,¹³ but they also provided a genealogy that legitimised French control. By the late 1800s, a cultural current of *Latinité* stressed the ancestral and contemporary links between Europe and North Africa, and the *Algérianiste* school (with Albert Camus a latter-day exponent) posited the creation of a new hybrid society in the French outpost. This inspired French archaeologists to explore Roman ruins, devise plans (never realized) for a grand museum of Algerian Roman antiquities in Paris, and take interest in dramatic sites such as Caracalla’s arch at Djémila. Only tardily, however, did the French pay such attention to the Berber and Arabic heritage and Islamic edifices. Then in the early twentieth century, they began to incorporate Islamic motifs (often Hispano-Mauresque ones rather than Algerian ones, however) into building design, a hybridisation that the colonials thought of as representing the new *métis* culture emerging in the Maghreb, but that typified a variation of imperial imposition.

Colonial ideology and heritage policy came together in a somewhat different fashion in Southeast Asia. Penny Edwards has provided an analysis of the way in which the French preserved, restored and used Angkor Wat and other temples of Cambodia, making them into the most recognized symbol of the French overseas empire, but also erecting them into a central pivot in Cambodian identity. The French explorer Henri Mouhot “rediscovered” Angkor, the novelist and travel-writer Pierre Loti celebrated it in *Le Pèlerin d’Angkor* published in 1903, the EFEO spearheaded research and conservation, the French government forced Siamese authorities to cede to Cambodia the area in which Angkor was located (which had been occupied by the Thais since the late 1700s), and models of Angkor Wat starred at the colonial exhibitions in Marseille in 1906 and 1922, and most dramatically in a flood-lit reconstruction in Paris in 1931. The French vaunted Angkor as an integral aspect of Khmer culture, Buddhist religion and the Cambodian monarchy inside its protectorate, with work at cleaning away the jungle overgrowth and stabilising the

¹¹ Abdelmajid Arrif, “Le paradoxe de la construction du fait patrimonial en situation coloniale: le cas du Maroc,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 73-74 (1994): 153-66.

¹² Oulebsir, *op. cit.*

¹³ Patricia M.E. Lorcin, “Rome and France in Africa: Recovering Colonial Algeria’s Latin Past,” *French Historical Studies* 25:2 (2002): 295-329.

structures of Angkor evidence of benevolent French interest in resuscitating a once grand but now degenerated civilisation. The centrality of Angkor in the Cambodian world-view became a legacy to the post-independence governments in Phnom Penh.¹⁴

Elsewhere in the empire, too, the French preserved, restored and rebuilt, though conceding little attention to built sites in Oceania and sub-Saharan Africa; they deemed few of those in ‘primitive’ countries worthy of the concern lavished on the Roman ruins of Algeria or the Angkorean sites of Cambodia. One exception is the mosque of Djenné, in what is now Mali, another iconic building of the empire that, like Angkor Wat, was shown off in miniature at the 1931 Paris exposition (and which, incidentally, inspired a lookalike mosque in Fréjus, the metropolitan headquarters of the troupes coloniales). The “Great Mosque” in Djenné was a large adobe edifice ornamented with three towers and a series of projecting stakes that served both as decoration and as platforms for the annual replastering of the building. A French writer, René Caillié, enthused over the thirteenth-century mosque when he visited the city in the 1820s. However, that mosque soon was left to decay into a ruin; Djenné had recently been conquered by a native African expansionist, Sekou Amadou, a religious purist who disapproved of its flamboyant style. He built a new mosque, and it was this house of worship, now also dilapidated, that the French found (and found architecturally wanting) when they took over the Soudan in 1893. In 1907, they sponsored the restoration of the historic mosque, with a return to the style of the older building. The example shows that what exactly would be preserved and restored in the colonies was not always so straightforward, even when the French committed themselves to heritage protection.¹⁵

The borderline between preservation and creation in this case is somewhat vague, and throughout the empire the French made a point of creating a new colonialist heritage side by side with the pre-colonial sites. Gwendolyn Wright, Zeynep Çelik and others have written about the vast urbanistic programmes by which the French made or remade colonial cities, from the great capitals such as Rabat, Hanoi and Dakar down to smaller ones such as Phnom Penh and Papeete: city-building formed a vital part of empire-building.¹⁶ Styles evolved, again pointing to

¹⁴ Edwards, *op. cit.*, and “Taj Angkor: Enshrining *l’Inde* in *le Cambodge*,” in Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee, eds., *France and “Indochina”: Cultural Representations* (Lanham, Md., 2005), 13-28. The famous episode in which André Malraux, future Minister of Culture, was arrested for ‘souveniring’ sculptures from Angkor Wat illustrates the French attraction to exotic art, willingness to engage in destruction and profiteering, and also (somewhat ironically) the *mise en valeur* of these objects in European museums and art markets.

¹⁵ Jean-Louis Bourgeois, “The History of the Great Mosques of Djenné,” *African Arts* 20:3 (1987): 54-92.

¹⁶ There exists a considerable literature on colonial urbanism. See, in particular, Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago, 1991), which looks at Morocco, Indochina and Madagascar. On Algeria, see Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997). Algiers, Saigon and Dakar are subjects of chapters in Robert J. Ross and Gerard J. Telkamp, eds., *Colonial Cities: Essays on Urbanism in a Colonial Context* (Dordrecht, 1988). Jacques Soullou, ed., *Rives coloniales: Architectures de Saint-Louis à Doula* (Paris, 1993), looks further at sub-Saharan Africa. Nezar AlSaayid, *Forms of Dominance: On the Architecture and Urbanism of the Colonial Enterprise* (Aldershot, 1992) offers studies of North Africa and Pondicherry. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Odile Goerg, eds., *La ville européenne outre-mer: Un modèle conquérant (XVe-XXe siècles)* (Paris, 1996), provides an overview of Africa. On spa towns, see Eric T. Jennings, *Curing the Colonizers: Hydrotherapy, Climatology, and French Colonial Spas* (Durham, N.C., 2006). See also several articles in *Historical Reflections* 33:2 (2007), in particular: Seth Graebner, “Contains Preservatives: Architecture and Memory in Colonial Algiers,” 259-276; Michael G. Vann, “Building Colonial Whiteness on the Red River: Race, Power, and Urbanism in Paul Doumer’s Hanoi, 1897-1902,” 271-

the dynamic nature of colonialism and its building projects. In the nineteenth century, the Beaux-Arts style dominated, as seen in the municipal theatres of Hanoi and Algiers, bank buildings, government offices and hotels.¹⁷ Later, as already mentioned, a hybridised style became popular – Hanoi and Algiers again provide good models of the integration of Asian or Arabic motifs into public buildings in the 1920s. Still later, modernism arrived with Art Nouveau and internationalism. Although some of the colonial edifices were functionalist and stylistically uninspired, architects of many of the public buildings (and private residences) sought grandeur befitting imperial ambitions. Since the French thought that their colonial reign would be unending, these constructions were meant to mark the landscape with signs of the French imperium and also to create a permanent patrimony for both the colonising and the colonised.

In addition to buildings, the French erected monuments and other *lieux de mémoire*. In front of the grand mosque of Algiers, in the mid-1800s, they erected a five-metre tall equestrian statue of the Duc d'Orléans, heir apparent to King Louis-Philippe, who had fought in the conquest of Algeria; the duke turned his back to the mosque, no doubt an intentional gesture. Statues of French political leaders, overseas explorers and governors, and settler pioneers dotted the colonies, the product of the “statuomania” that affected Third Republic France. After the First World War, the French erected war memorials as avidly in the empire as they did at home, memorialising both the European and indigenous troops who died in battle. The prominent position given to such constructions – in Madagascar, for instance, the *monument aux morts* was sited on a hallowed reserve of the former monarch – underscored both the French position and the cult of memory attached to the Great War.¹⁸ Particularly in Algeria, where monuments included a pompous public memorial dedicated to the “glory” of French colonisation, such sites not only reinforced French dominion but also made foreign cities and towns look more like those of the French homeland.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, independence rendered these monuments redundant; the French “repatriated” many of them, and nationalists removed or destroyed others. Some sites, such as the notorious Maison Centrale prison of Hanoi, where many anti-colonialists were incarcerated, became newly consecrated as national *lieux de mémoire* after the colonial era ended.

Buildings and monuments served as powerful physical and metaphorical signs of the French presence and of the pre-colonial culture that was preserved. There were further ways that the French created and institutionalised heritage in the colonies. They created national parks and forest reserves, a subject that has attracted the

98; Eric T. Jennings, “Urban Planning, Architecture, and Zoning at Dalat, Indochina, 1900-1944,” 327-58; and David Nelson, “Defining the Urban: The Construction of French-Dominated Colonial Dakar, 1857-1940,” 225-55. Recent books include Mark Askew, William S. Logan and Colin Long, eds., *Vientiane: Transformations of a Lao Landscape* (London, 2007); Milton Osborne, *Phnom Penh: A Cultural and Literary History* (Oxford, 2008), and Carla Eddé, *Beyrouth: Naissance d'une capitale, 1918-1924* (Paris, 2010).

¹⁷ See, for example, Michael E. McClellan, “Performing Empire: Opera in Colonial Hanoi,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 22 (2003): 135-66; Srilata Ravi, “Modernity, Imperialism and the Pleasures of Travel: The Continental Hotel in Saigon,” *Asian Studies Review* 32 (2008): 475-90; and Elizabeth A. Foster, “An Ambiguous Monument: Dakar’s Colonial Cathedral of the Souvenir Africain,” *French Historical Studies* 32:1 (2009): 85-119.

¹⁸ Eric Jennings, “Madagascar se souvient: les multiples visages du monument aux morts du Lac Anosy, Antananarivo,” *Outre-Mers* 350-351 (2006): 123-40.

¹⁹ On the colonial and post-colonial constructions of Algiers, see Zeynep Çelik, “Colonial/Postcolonial Intersections: *lieux de mémoire* in Algiers,” *Historical Reflections* 28:2 (2002): 143-62.

attention of Caroline Ford and other scholars.²⁰ They set up a legal and administrative framework for conservation. They introduced new technologies for preservation and restoration (such as the anastolysis technique used for repairs at Angkor). They founded universities and research centres, and they set up museums.

Museums figure among the enduring creations of the Europeans (just as non-Western artefacts became some of the most treasured objects in Western collections). In 1838, a one-room museum opened in Algiers, followed by museums in Cherchell in 1840, Constantine in 1852 and Tlemcen in 1857. In a neat happenstance, when the French deported political prisoners to Algeria after the revolution of 1848, some were obliged to transform a Roman ruin into their own detention centre – a group of the prisoners and warders manifested an interest in archaeology and set up a museum there. By 1897, the French had created a museum of antiquities in Algiers; for the centenary of *Algérie française* in 1930, they built a grandiose art museum, a museum of ethnography and prehistory, and a military museum.²¹ In Southeast Asia, the French were also keen museum builders – they opened a museum of Cham art in Da Nang in 1900, then one in Hanoi in 1902, Phnom Penh in 1908, Hué in 1923, Saigon in 1929 and Thanh Hoa in 1936. A museum was opened in Tunis in 1886 just five years after the French established a protectorate there – indeed the French had despatched an archaeological team to Tunisia even before the takeover with the intention of competing with German archaeologists.²² (The scramble for Africa was also a scramble for Africa's heritage.) They set up a museum in Damascus, in the mandated territory of Syria, in 1936. In sub-Saharan Africa, they opened a short-lived historical museum in Saint-Louis (in Senegal), and in 1936 (the time of the Popular Front and the establishment of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris), they set up the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN), a research institute in Dakar commissioned to house a museum. Although IFAN amassed a collection of 10,000 objects and held several temporary exhibitions, a proper museum did not open until after Senegal gained independence in 1960. IFAN nevertheless had established branches in several cities, sometimes with tiny museums – in Porto-Novo in 1957 and in Niger in 1959 – which became the embryos for post-independence national museums; that of the Ivory Coast traces its origins to an arts centre set up in 1942.²³

This tallies up to an impressive record of museum building, but as with the preservation of monuments, French political considerations and Eurocentric

²⁰ See Anne Bergeret, "Discours et politiques forestières coloniales en Afrique et à Madagascar;" Claire Bernard, "Les débuts de la politique de reboisement dans la vallée du fleuve Sénégal (1920-1945);" Guéhi Jonas Ibo, "La politique coloniale de protection de la nature en Côte-d'Ivoire (1900-1958)," in *Revue française d'histoire d'Outre-mer* (hereafter RFHOM) 298 (1993): 23-47, 49-82, and 83-104, respectively; Marlène Buchy, "Histoire forestière de l'Indochine (1850-1954): Perspectives de recherche," *RFHOM* 299 (1993): 219-50; Frédéric Thomas, "Ecologie et gestion forestière dans l'Indochine française," *RFHOM* 319 (1998): 59-86; and Caroline Ford, "Reforestation, Landscape Conservation, and the Anxieties of Empire in French Colonial Algeria," *American Historical Review* 113:2 (2008): 341-62.

²¹ Oulebsir, 92-97.

²² Myriam Bacha, "Les institutions patrimoniales de la Tunisie au début du protectorat: un projet scientifique au service de la colonisation?," *Outre-Mers* 95:356-357 (2007): 139-50.

²³ Anne Gaugue, "Musées et colonisation en Afrique tropicale," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 39:3-4 (1999): 727-45. On IFAN, see Philip J. Ravenhill, "The Passive Object and the Tribal Paradigm: Colonial Museography in French West Africa," in Mary Jo Arnold, Christraud M. Geary and Kris L. Hardin, eds., *African Material Culture* (Bloomington, 1996), 266-82; Agbenyega Adedze, "Symbols of Triumph: IFAN and the Colonial Museum Complex in French West Africa (1938-1960)," *Museum Anthropology* 25:2 (2002): 50-60; and Marie-Albane de Suremain, "L'IFAN et la 'mise en musée' des cultures africaines (1936-1961)," *Outre-Mers* 95:356-357 (2007): 151-72.

perspectives were never absent. Museums in North Africa and Southeast Asia were established primarily to display works of ancient times – Roman and to some extent Islamic art in North Africa, Bronze Age, Cham and Angkorean art in Southeast Asia – and generally not more recent or contemporary *objets d'art*. The highlight of the art museum in Algiers was Impressionist and post-Impressionist European art,²⁴ while the art museum in Hanoi featured works produced, under European influence, at the local *École des Beaux-Arts*.²⁵ Plans for sub-Saharan African museums envisaged the display primarily of “traditional” ethnographic objects in a presentation underlining their function in local societies. Colonial museums aimed at edifying and instructing Europeans and “natives.” A 1954 publication put it this way: “IFAN, with this museum, is not trying to satisfy the simple curiosity of the art lover. It targets Europeans as well as Africans, residents [of the colony] as well as foreigners. It allows an assimilated elite [*élite évoluée*] to return to their origins. It suggests to the Europeans – in particular, to those recently arrived – a better understanding of the mentality and of the people of this county, a fairer appreciation of their savoir-faire and their potential.”²⁶ Museums were meant to keep old traditions and crafts alive. They were also intended to provide destinations for tourists, the clients of a rapidly developing business in the colonies.²⁷ Ancient artefacts and picturesque ethnographic objects could not but express the “then” – of great old societies now decayed, or primitive societies not yet evolved – compared to the ‘now’ of French art, architecture and urbanism.

The post-colonial fates of the French colonial heritage is mixed, but much has survived; in Hanoi, for instance, the Musée Louis Finot remains the national museum, now with socialist realist art juxtaposed with the Beaux-Arts works. Another fine old French building has become a museum of national history, though its narrative of colonialism, not surprisingly, differs from that of the French era.²⁸ French archaeologists and restorers returned to work in Cambodia after being expelled (and seeing their local colleagues massacred) under Pol Pot. The EFEO carries out research at centres from Pondicherry to Ho Chi Minh City. In Damascus, the Frenchman who devised a plan for urban renewal in the 1930s continued to work on redevelopment until the 1970s. In sub-Saharan Africa after independence, financial wherewithal was not available for conservation; until fairly recently, according to Alain Sinou, only a very few Africans took an interest in colonial-era buildings that recalled the “bad old days.”²⁹ Some countries are nevertheless now rediscovering the colonial heritage; the Congo has built a grandiose tomb and monument for Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, the French conqueror of the Congo basin, in the city that still bears his name. The Institut Français d’Afrique Noire remains open, conveniently renamed the Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire to keep its old initials. Restored

²⁴ Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880-1930* (Berkeley, 2003), ch. 10.

²⁵ See Arnauld Le Brusq, “Les musées de l’Indochine dans le processus colonial,” *Outre-mers* 95:356-57 (2007), 97-100.

²⁶ *Institut Français d’Afrique Noire* (Dakar, 1954); quotation from 114-15.

²⁷ See Ellen Furlough, “*Une leçon des choses*: Tourism, Empire, and the Nation in Interwar France,” *French Historical Studies* 25:3 (2002): 441-73.

²⁸ Claire Sutherland, “Repression or Resistance? French Colonialism as seen through Vietnamese Museums,” *Museum and Society* 3:3 (2005): 153-66.

²⁹ Alain Sinou, “Enjeux culturels et politiques de la mise en patrimoine des espaces coloniaux,” *Autrepart* 33 (2005), 13-32; this issue contains articles on several heritage sites in the former French empire. See also a special issue of *Outre-Mers* 350-351 (2006) on “Sites de mémoires” in overseas France, edited by Robert Aldrich.

pre-colonial buildings are highlights for visitors to Hanoi, Luang Prabang, Rabat and elsewhere.

With all the justified criticisms that may well be advanced of France's patrimonial policies in the colonies and the destruction and the use (and abuse) of heritage to justify colonial overlordship, some credit must also be given. French authorities compiled inventories of historic sites. They classified sites for conservation and preservation and passed laws that protected natural and built features of the landscape. They carried out archaeological digs and pioneered anthropological and ethnographical studies. The French set up learned societies and published countless academic works devoted to heritage, with such institutions as the EFEO and IFAN centres of scholarship, and they opened numerous museums. Conservation and creation was selective to be sure. Not surprisingly, more of the grandiose elite architecture of pre-colonial times was saved by comparison with vernacular structures. Some restoration work proved maladroit,³⁰ and various sites suffered damaged or continued deterioration.³¹ Debates about conservation outlived the French mandate, for example, on whether the ruins of Angkor should be stabilised, left covered by jungle overgrowth, cleared, or even restored to an "original" version.

Western perspectives on such conservation issues as "authenticity" have varied from those of other continents. William Logan has pointed out that the "perceived lack of authenticity, or integrity, is mainly a problem for traditional conservationists from the West:" "This bears on differing conceptions of heritage authenticity, where a sharp contrast exists between the Western and East Asian (including Vietnamese) approaches. The traditional Western approach ... emphasises the authenticity of the *physical fabric*... [while] the East Asian approach ... put a much higher emphasis on showing reverence for the monument and its symbolism by maintaining the condition of the building or even reconstructing it, and on preserving the craft skills required to restore traditional buildings. In other words, the intangible aspects of a building's or site's history, including mythical and iconic factors, are given greater status in determining significance."³² Similar questions concerning ownership, means of display, conservation and access arose and continue to be discussed with regard to artefacts preserved in museums.

The heritage preserved by the French incarnated the antique histories of cultures fallen into decay (or societies that Europeans thought remained primitive), and the new colonialist heritage that the French created embodied the modernist achievements and ambitions of the colonialist order. Heritage policy formed part of colonial policy, mirroring its ideas and ideologies. Yet the French, through destruction, preservation and creation, established a culture of patrimonialism that they bequeathed to the newly independent countries when the Tricolour was lowered, and the museums, restored buildings, World Heritage sites and still-standing monuments – as well as the counter-colonial sites of memory created by the nationalists – give evidence of this legacy.

³⁰ In Vientiane, the restoration of a Laos chedi in 1900 provoked ridicule when the architect, Pierre Morin, replaced the curved, pointed indigenous structure atop the base with what was dismissed as a "Norman tower." See William Logan, "Land of the Lotus-eaters: Vientiane under the French," in Asker, Logan and Long, eds., 93.

³¹ See, for instance, the case of Caracalla's arch at Djémila, in Oulebsir, 78 and 96.

³² Logan, *Hanoi*, 61, 63.