

Heritage Studies: Stories in the Making
edited by Meghan Bowe, Bianca Capeneti, Ian Dull &
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‘Heritage’ is a word we often hear used but which can be very difficult to define. It can be anything from our shared past and shared environment to which we have attached value and which we wish to preserve, conserve, maintain and nurture in some way. The term ‘heritage’ is deployed in time and again in day-to-day life as justification for everything from saving wildlife to preserving oral histories, rescuing ancient remains to conserving red-brick Victorian factories. It carries a financial value: things in our environment can be ascribed as ‘heritage assets’ and fortunes spent to preserve and conserve them. Moreover, heritage generates tourist income, underpinning economies in many countries, Scotland included.

Heritage is also often controversial and political. One group’s heritage can be another’s insult. The ‘heritage’ value of many world-famous sites may seem relatively unproblematic – enshrined in international agreements as a UNESCO World Heritage Site – but what value do we put on ‘intangible heritage’, such as folksongs, dances, endangered languages, traditional knowledge passed from parent to child? What of the entangled religious landscape of the Old City of Jerusalem? *Heritage Studies: Stories in the Making* edited by Megan Bowe, Bianca Capeneti, Ian Dull and Jessie Lipkowitz presents the reader with a series of fascinating papers at the forefront of this current interdisciplinary debate in Heritage Studies, positioned at the intersection of archaeology, anthropology, history, art history, environmental studies and planning.

This book is divided into three themed parts, with two papers in each. Part one takes up the theme of ‘Thinking about Heritage’ and presents two papers which underline the complex political issues with which heritage intersects. Using the Old City of Jerusalem as a case study, Britt Baillie evaluates the current approaches to

valuing heritage assets in a dynamic, contested environment where claims to the history and archaeology of the landscape are fundamental to competing claims of political and religious legitimacy. Jerusalem is the archetypal contested landscape, where archaeological excavations have been allegedly used as a tool to undermine Palestinian neighbourhoods, where ancient claims to land and property still resonate in the present and violence is an ever-present threat. The paper offers critique of the current methodologies by which heritage assets are evaluated, and calls for an approach which values the dynamic nature of living heritage, over static, politicised, top-down approaches which conceive of the past as ‘safely dead’.

The theme of modern political and economic ambition leading to the destruction and undervaluing of ancient places and traditions comes through strongly in the second paper. Shadia Taha uses the example of the ancient port city of Suakin in Sudan to show how modern economic development can often overlook the needs and potential of places with great beauty, tradition, and history. The construction of a new port has led to the near dereliction of the medieval port of Suakin, which has its own distinct set of traditions, cultures, and history. Yet through ethnographic research Taha has gathered evidence that the intangible heritage of Suakin is a great source of pride to the remaining inhabitants.

Part two of this volumes reflects on ‘Heritage as Process’ and focusses on the display of heritage in a museum setting. Anne Inscker’s paper examines the changing perceptions of the public to one museum collection: artefacts from the temple of Diana at Nemi, Italy. These objects, deriving from a Victorian excavation, were displayed with great pomp at the time of discovery. Over the decades perceptions shifted, and they were relegated to dusty store cupboards, until in recent years they once again became the centrepiece of a new museum display. This paper highlights how attitudes to heritage assets can be very fluid, as values shift, so does the worth we place on heritage.

A similar theme is explored by Charlotte Andrews, whose paper explores the process behind the curation of an exhibition on the maritime history of Bermuda at that country’s National Museum. This paper shows how the curation process is entwined with the creation of value in the exhibit itself. Taking a reflexive view, the process of interacting with the local community to gather material and stories, building a narrative, and creating outcomes is seen as fundamental to the curation process itself. Heritage is a process of negotiation between researchers, stakeholders

and the local community whose past is being represented. The museum becomes a microcosm of the society it depicts.

Part three explores the theme of 'Heritage as Agenda'. Maria Kagiadaki writes on the subject of the use of heritage sites in Greece as spaces for art installations and performance. The use of these spaces is seen as very important, both to showcase the spectacular historical sites of that country, but also to keep the spaces relevant to modern culture. In the difficult financial circumstances in which that country finds itself, use of heritage sites in this way also provides much needed revenue, but also comes with problems of maintenance and conservation. Another problem is one of interpretation: is there a danger that monuments may lose their meaning as historic artefacts, and instead be seen only as convenient venues for art openings and music events?

The final paper in this volume, by Jamie Hampson, examines the topic of rock art sites. Rock art sites and imagery in Australia, Southern Africa, and the United States are often sacred to indigenous peoples, presenting a tangible link to a shared past. Efforts are ongoing to involve these traditional communities in the protection and management of these sites, and to educate others on the value and meaning of these places. Often these sites are focal points for political movements promoting the rights of indigenous people. However, the imagery of this art is often replicated and sold with little or no respect or financial reward to the cultures who value them.

In sum this is a valuable collection of papers for anyone interested in the fascinating and developing field of heritage studies. Issues are explored in depth and clarity, and an eclectic series of case studies highlight broad issues which affect heritage studies in general. This volume serves as an excellent starting point for anyone with an interest in the heritage sector, as although the case studies are drawn from around the globe, the question 'who owns the past' is a universal one.