Historical Papers
Communications historiques

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Volume 8, Number 1, 1973

Kingston 1973

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030769ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/030769ar

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Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0068-8878 (print)
1712-9109 (digital)

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Cite this article

Greene, C. M. (1973). The Preservation of Historical Monuments Under the July Monarchy. *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, *8*(1), 229–250. https://doi.org/10.7202/030769ar

THE PRESERVATION OF HISTORICAL MONUMENTS UNDER THE JULY MONARCHY

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"When we received our legacy, when our generation, at the beginning of the Empire, entered into possession of the world's stage, the eighteenth century, its evening over, was already behind, far behind us. An immense abyss, the Revolution, separated us from it. The whole past, a past of many centuries, and the eighteenth century like the rest, had been swallowed up by it."[1] So François Guizot expressed the need felt by Liberals in post-Revolutionary France to restore a sense of historical continuity which the eighteenth century had tended to discount and the Revolution to deny. If their own era could be reunited with the past and the Revolution put into the context of an historical evolution, perhaps it would be possible to reconcile the divisions created by the Revolution and the sterile and dogmatic debates concerning it which dominated the Restoration and prevented the restoration of national unity.

Such an historical reorientation was the task which the group of young historians with which Guizot was associated set itself. They were particularly identified with the Romantic newspaper, *Le Globe,* founded in 1824, and included, in addition to Guizot, Barante, Rémusat, Mignet, Quinet, and Theirry. The *Globe* circle included a number of Romantic intellectuals, such as Ludovic Vitet, an author of historical plays, and Prosper Mérimée, who were to be the first and second Inspectors general of historical monuments.

A characteristic of all these men was that they were members of the revolutionary generation. Even Barante, the oldest, had been born only in 1782. None of them had any real memory of the Ancien Régime, and they had reached maturity about the time of the restoration of the Bourbons. They were nearly all liberals and Romantics, inspired with Benjamin Constant's ideas of constitutional monarchy, yet, unlike Constant, rejecting classical principles and hoping that Romanticism would free them from the strangulation of the classical past.

They had two basic aims which they hoped history might solve: the creation of national unity or community, and the development of some theme which would tie together all the nation's history. The

answers they found had been suggested in the works of Mme. de Staël, in her distinction between the ancient southern European civilization and the modern Christian civilization of the north, and in her identification of the struggle for liberty as the central theme of French history. However, they developed these ideas much farther than she had ever done.[2]

This is not the place to deal in detail with the development of this historical reorientation, but it seems pertinent to mention the syntheses of two of the major contributors, Augustin Thierry and François Guizot. Thierry's express aim was objectivity, and he clearly condemned past historians for using history to support their own philosophical and political views, making of history "what is really a romance, a monarchical romance in one century, a philosophical romance in another."[3] There is need only to note that, as Stanley Mellon has so brilliantly shown, in fact history was one of the major weapons of the political opposition under the Restoration.[4] Thierry warned that, "if it is absurd to transform into a gallant and chivalric court the *leudes* and *ghesels* of the Frankish kings, it is no less so to carry back to the time of the Germanic invasion the needs and passions which excited the Third Estate at the end of the eighteenth century. Because that numerous part of the population, designated today by the name of the middle class, attaches a very high price to its right to intervene in the government of the state through national representation, it is not necessary to conclude that it has always thought, wished, and felt the same way. . . . It was not until all the particular constitutions of the cities of France had been successively destroyed or enervated by the invasion of the central power that the need of a general constitution, of a national constitution, made itself felt and rallied all minds toward a common object."[5] One might almost suppose he were criticizing Guizot.

Thierry was a determinist. The past had to be as it was; the historical process was its own justification; no moral judgement upon it was really possible. Chateaubriand, whose novel *Les Martyrs* had profoundly influenced Thierry, was horrified, expostulating that his ideas would justify all the excesses of history, even the Terror.[6] Still Thierry's conception of French history had an epic grandeur about it, and by showing each phase of that history as a necessary and inevitable one, it could perhaps reveal an historical national community, a true nationality, in which all the dissident factions could share.

In this search for such a national history, Thierry turned instinctively toward the north, toward the Frankish rather than the Gallic France. Gallo-Roman civilization had been more Roman than French, imported by a conquering army and absorbed by a conquered people.

For those who felt France's cultural roots lay in the south, national distinctions were not particularly significant. Like the Philosophes they believed that the absorption of classical civilization by the Gauls had been a major step forward in France's development. Because of his emphasis on the Franks, Thierry has been accused of writing racialist history, but this is unjust. He was searching for that point at which the French first became aware of themselves as a distinct nationality, when they began to establish their own political institutions. That point he identified with the coronation of Hugh Capet in 987, the commencement of a truly national dynasty, "the end of the reign of the Franks and the substitution of a national royalty for a government founded by conquest. From that time, in effect, the history of France becomes simple; it is always the same people whom one follows and whom one recognizes, despite the changes which take place in custom and civilization. The national identity is the foundation on which the unity of the dynasty has rested for so many centuries."[7] The new dynasty did not create this new nation; rather the dynasty was the result of a transformation which had taken place before 987 and created a new entity known and thought of as France. It geographical extent was not complete, but the idea existed, and that was the crucial point.

If Thierry established the point at which a national history could begin and from which it was possible to trace the gradual evolution of specifically French institutions and culture, Guizot most notably supplied the theme that dominated that evolution, the rise of the Third Estate, which in his mind was really synonymous with the bourgeoisie. "No one is unaware of the great role which the Third Estate has played in France; it has been the most active and most decisive element in French civilization, the one which has, in the last analysis, determined its direction and character. . . . the Third Estate has progressively been extended, risen, and, having undergone powerful change, has overcome and finally absorbed, to all extents and purposes, all the other [classes].

"Thus, under whatever aspect one looks at it, whether one studies the progressive formation of society in France or that of government, the Third Estate is an immense fact in our history. It has been the most powerful of the forces presiding over our history.

"This fact is not only immense; it is new and unique in the history of the world. Until modern Europe, until our France, nothing similar to the history of the Third Estate is to be found."[8]

The struggle of the Third Estate began against the aristocracy, and then, having conquered the aristocracy through its alliance with the monarchy, it combatted that very absolute monarchy which it had

helped to create. Guizot identified the point at which that struggle began, the communal revolts of the twelfth century, when the bourgeoisie rose up against their feudal overlords and gained protection and self-governing charters from the king. He admitted that there were communes throughout Europe, but only in France were they dominated and led by the Third Estate. Thus did Guizot expand Mme. de Staël's thesis of the struggle for liberty to the struggle of the Third Estate and also defend the revolution of 1789 against the menace of the Ultra politicians.

The work of both Thierry and Guizot was vastly expanded under the July Monarchy, when Guizot initiated the "Comité des documents inédits sur l'histoire de France", and Thierry became director of the section relating to the history of the Third Estate. Such research led historians into those formerly disdained Middle Ages in the search for both French and bourgeois origins, and it made the medieval period central in Franch history.

Among the documents for that research, which were in any case fairly rare, were the buildings, the physical remains of the civilization. An official circular of the Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques in 1839, sent out to encourage the completion of an inventory of ancient buildings or "monuments historiques", explained that during the Middle Ages buildings performed the function of the written word after the invention of printing, a thesis developed at length by Victor Hugo in *Notre Dame de Paris*, a novel critically important in popularizing the cause of historical monuments. The circular went on to say that "the size of the construction, the character of the work, the nature and the choice of symbols . . . . become a revelation for the historian and bring out facts which the dead letter of written documents do not allow him to perceive."[9]

Ludovic Vitet expressed succinctly the belief in the value of architectural evidence, which was the foundation of the monumental movement, when he wrote, ". . . architecture becomes for us an almost invariably faithful reflection of the events for which society is the theater, [and archeology], by revealing to us through monuments the state of the societies which saw them built, gives us one of the best means of investigation, one of the surest instruments of historical criticism."[10]

Medieval buildings, formerly treated with contempt, and about which very little in fact was known, now assumed a new importance, and not simply because of their age, but, according to new theories about Gothic architecture, because they were not only the first truly

French architectural expression, but the first bourgeois expression as well.

In approaching medieval buildings, one of the major problems was that so little was known about them. As records were investigated, it became clear that the first structure in the Gothic style was probably the abbey church at Saint-Denis, or at least its west front, narthex, and apse. The last was begun in 1137 and consecrated in 1144. While many of the elements of the Gothic were derivative, they were first combined in a coherent and systematic fashion here, on the outskirts of Paris, in the heart of the Ile de France, which Thierry considered the heart of France itself.

Not only was the place significant, but the time as well. In his course on European civilization at the Sorbonne in 1828, Guizot had picked as the turning point in the history of the development of European nations the failure of the attempt by Gregory VII (1073-1085) to submit all governments to his own. That failure Guizot attributed to a series of new forces, among which were the examining spirit introduced by Abelard, the enfranchisement of the communes, the election of magistrates by the people, the unification and industrialization of the high and low bourgeoisie, and the separation of the temporal and spiritual powers.[11] Could some connection be made between this political turning point and the architectural change that Gothic represented? It could be, and it could even by symbolized by the history of Saint-Denis itself.

While Saint-Denis was an abbey, and its church had been built by an abbot, Suger, it was not an ordinary monastic establishment but a royal abbey and the shrine of the patron saint of France. The church was the royal sepulcher, as it was to remain until 1789. Nor was Suger an ordinary abbot either, but a materialistic, learned, and politically ambitious prelate whose phenomenal rise in the Church had been due to his close friendship with Louis VI, whom he served loyally, even as regent while the king was on crusade. At the commencement of the new construction the court had gathered and tossed jewels into the excavation. In a very real sense Saint-Denis was symbolic both of the nation and of the rise of royal power.

But the case did not rest on such symbolic evidence alone. Liberal historians had been drawn to the study of the communal revolts of the twelfth century, in which the bourgeoisie had risen against their feudal rulers and formed alliances with the royal power. The cathedrals, frequently damaged or destroyed in the revolts, were subsequently rebuilt, nearly always in the newly fashionable Gothic. As Vitet reminds us, at least three of the earliest Gothic cathedrals, those at

Noyon, Laon, and Soissons, were built directly as a result of the destruction of the former buildings during communal uprisings. Other cities where Gothic cathedrals were built early were characteristically those which enjoyed royal charters and where there was a large and dominant bourgeoisie. In fact, the building of large cathedrals became a sort of competition between bourgeois cities. A new type of building also came about as a result of royal charters, the *hôtel-de-ville*, almost always designed in the Gothic style and a symbol of bourgeois autonomy. There seemed little reason to doubt that the efflorescence of architectural activity of the twelfth century was intimately connected with the rise of the bourgeoisie to power, or that the Gothic style was peculiarly bourgeois, as the Romanesque had been clerical. Some even denied that the Gothic was clerical at all and claimed that the cathedrals, while having a religious function, were really meant as symbols of lay power. This was suggested by the anti-clerical tone of some of the decoration. Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc even went so far as to claim that the cathedral was "only a hall, a basilica, a meeting place for the citizens, in the center of which were the altar and the bishop's throne, the cathedra."[12] The historian may doubt the accuracy of some of this analysis, but it is indicative of the anti-clerical tone of the new enthusiasts for Gothic and indicates that the new interest in medieval architecture was by no means the result of a Catholic revival. There was Catholic interest in Gothic at this time, most notably that of Montalembert, and it emphasized the Christian character of the style, as might be expected. Montalembert was a member of the Commission des monuments historiques as well. However, it was not until the decade of the 1840's that neo-Catholicism played any significant role in the movement.

Vitet asserted that the spirit of the twelfth century had been one of increasing secularization as well as of emancipation from the power of feudal authority. "Society, which until that time had been exclusively monastic, aspired for the first time to become lay. The temporal power of the Church, after having reached its highest point, was being secretly undermined." While religious faith was as fervent as ever, it was no longer considered the sole Property of the Church, "it too, one might say, was becoming secularized. It was being admitted that faith might be found outside the cloister; the University of Paris believed that and proclaimed itself as good a Catholic institution as the Church; in a word, lay society, at the same time that it attempted to constitute itself and to surround itself with guarantees between itself and purely temporal powers, began to perform for itself everything which had been up to that time the exclusive appanage of sacerdotal society."[13] Secularization was believed to be a major part of the revolution that had

produced both the communes and the Gothic style, which were thus expressions of the lay spirit.

Vitet believed that the development of Gothic had been an architectural revolution, rather than an evolution, and that it represented not only a secular but a national victory. Romanesque he thought "exotic and sacerdotal; — born of dogma and not of the soil, of faith and not of customs; it reigned by right of ecclesiastical conquest." Gothic was distinguished by its structural forms — the pointed arch, the ribbed vault, the flying buttress, and the large areas of glass. Most particularly it used in its decoration native flora and fauna rather than stylized copies of classical design like Romanesque. Indigenous decorative forms may seem a rather unimportant distinction, but for Vitet and others who wished to see Gothic as the national architecture, they gave it its true character.

Vitet's *Monographie de l'église Notre-Dame de Noyon,* published in 1845 in the "Collection des documents inédits sur l'histoire de France", is in many ways the *summa* of the liberal archeological movement. There he tried to prove that the innovative spirit of the twelfth century produced a political, social, and intellectual revolution that was one of the earliest triumphs of the forces of the future over the forces of reaction, "of reason against authority, of the bourgeoisie at its birth against the feudality in its decline, of popular and living language."[14] In an era of such general upheaval, architecture could not remain unaffected. The form a new architecture took was, he thought, unimportant; what mattered was "that it form a new style, that this style be associated with the old by several common elements, but that it be distinctive in certain singular elements and by an originality which was visible and striking."[15]

However, more than the appearance of Gothic was distinctive, it appeared to some of those who studied it from the point of view of its construction. It was, above all, a rational and functional architecture, happily illustrating those admirable bourgeois qualities of rationalism and practicality. While both Romanesque and Gothic builders faced the problem of roofing large areas with fireproof stone vaulting, Romanesque builders solved it by constructing monolithic vaults on massive walls to form a heavy, inert structure. Romanesque churches were low in order to assure that the walls would bear their load, and dark, because so little of the wall's strength could be sacrificed for windows. Gothic architects, on the other hand, had used sophisticated engineering principles to construct light vaults resting, not on the walls, but on ribs which in turn carried the weight to columns or piers set in the walls. These piers were in turn supported on the exterior by flying

buttresses to counteract the outward thrust exerted by the vaults. Since all the weight was carried on the piers, the walls themselves were reduced to the function of a screen, and taste became practically the only limitation to the size of windows. They were completely functional buildings, comparable to the steel and glass buildings of the twentieth century.

No one was more tireless in setting forth this functionalist theory of the Gothic than Viollet-le-Duc, France's, and possibly the world's, greatest student of Gothic architecture and minor arts. His *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* remains the most comprenshive work on the subject. His *Entretiens sur l'architecture* is quite possibly the first plea for functionalism, and both Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier have given him full credit as a progenitor of modern architecture. Not only did he cite Gothic, but he called for the use of its general principles in the new materials available in his own time, in particular cast iron which he claimed medieval architects would have used had they had the opportunity.

As one of the most energetic of the nineteenth century restorers, Viollet-le-Duc has often been considered simply a Romantic despoiler of ancient buildings, but, far from advocating a return to the styles of the past for esthetic or other reasons, he hoped that the examples of France's great Gothic buildings, restored to purity, would inspire his contemporaries to create a new style reflecting the needs and resources of the modern world and based upon the medieval principle of allowing function to determine form. By returning to what he thought to be the last really creative and indigenous architecture, one could perhaps continue from it along that path that had been closed when the absolute monarchy imposed neo-classicism and killed the national style.

For Gothic had been a truly national style — not only had it been French in origin, but it was, according to Viollet-le-Duc's patron Mérimée, a style adaptable to different national cultures, so that there developed different national Gothic styles. "Given back into the hands of laymen, architecture was modified without hesitation into particular styles where there existed distinct nationalities." This he felt had not been true of Romanesque, in which "the feeling of nationality had been absorbed to the profit of a religious coterie," and it certainly was not true of the neo-classical styles. Only in Italy was neo-classicism indigenous and therefore the national style.[16]

Thus the theory which connected Gothic monuments to the origins of all that nineteenth century liberals most esteemed was complete.

Gothic was the result of the decline of clerical dominance and religious fanaticism, of the growth of nationalism and rationalism, and of the rise of the bourgeoisie. The great cathedrals, formerly rejected as symbols of superstition, had now become emblems of the awakening of the mind and spirit which had begun in the twelfth century and culminated, it was hoped, in the constitutional monarchy. Viollet-le-Duc said that the cathedrals were "the true base of our national unity, the first germ of the French genius. To our cathedrals is attached the whole of our intellectual history; . . . they were a part of a development in the arts which is equalled only by Greek antiquity."[17]

These historical and esthetic ideas naturally complemented the political philosophy of the July Monarchy, for indeed they were products of the same forces. Whatever legitimacy Louis Philippe could claim was the result of historical evolution by which he was the heir both of the Ancien Régime and the Revolution. Like the liberals themselves, he was impassioned with history and historical monuments. The July Monarchy was to be perhaps the most historically oriented regime in France's history, and Louis-Philippe himself the most historically minded ruler.

One afternoon the king was inspecting the cartoons for some historical tapestries he had ordered. Several depicted the Algerian victories of his reign, surrounded by immense figures of Fame. Unhesitatingly he rejected them, saying, "Your figures of Fame are too large; what then will be the size of those you intend for Marengo, Austerlitz, or Wagram! Let us remain what we are; we will not be less significant. On Napoleon's side there are the brilliance of victories and the grandeur of conquests; on mine there are the comforts of peace and the benefits of liberty. Represent industry and agriculture protected, monuments completed and restored, immense public works undertaken, the sciences and arts encouraged; place opposite them Peace, resting on the sword of France, and Law dominating every position, including mine, and I dare to hope that posterity will recognize the principle characteristics of my reign."[18] No more typical statement could be found of the ideals of Louis-Philippe, whatever the reality may have been, and he was perfectly justified in claiming the preservation of monuments among the conspicuous achievements of his reign.

In fact, the king himself took a particular interest in restoration. From his own civil list he spent 33,396,706 francs for the restoration and preservation of buildings belonging to the Crown, including 346 875 in the last five months of 1830 alone. Most of this was spent on various royal châteaux — Pau, Compiègne, Fontainebleau, the Louvre, the Tuileries, Saint-Cloud, Meudon, Neuilly — more than twelve million

devoted to Versailles alone.[19] If one looks for them, the signs of the bourgeois monarch are everywhere in those that remain of these chateaux, often recognizable by the initials L-P carved into the decoration.

He tried to create at Versailles a "temple of historical impartiality", and hoped "that this palace would present to France the recollections of its history and that the magnificence of Louis XIV would serve as a frame for our national glories."[20] The great bronze letters across the facade reading "A toutes les gloires de la France" were put up at his command, and express his hope that at Versailles memories of both the white and tri-colored flags would be brought together, as they were in the paintings he commissioned for the Galerie des Batailles, celebrating all the great victories of French history. In addition, he donated one million francs for the publication of an historical study of Versailles.[21]

In addition, of course, he completed Napoleon's Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile and his column at Boulogne and built the emperor's tomb at the Invalides, all without any indication of his own name or reign. "Louis XIV disdained the memory of François I and of Henri IV, Napoleon that of Louis XIV, the Restoration the great achievements of Napoleon. For the first time, a sovereign had a deep enough feeling for his country to mingle in his own heart all the great things it had produced."[22]

These extensive personal achievements might along have been enough to make Louis-Philippe remembered as the restorer of France's historical monuments, but they were not his most significant accomplishments in that respect, for he made the government itself the patron and protector of national history and of historical monuments by integrating them into the administration, as they have remained ever since.

The Comité des documents inédits sur l'histoire de France, established in 1834 in Guizot's ministry of public instruction, was perhaps the grandest of all historical institutions established under the July Monarchy, for the scope of its activities was very wide. In 1837 it was reestablished as the Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques and was then divided into two sections, one for the arts and history, the other for the sciences. Each section was thereupon further broken into committees, one of which was the Comité historique des arts et monuments. Its interest was less in the preservation of the monuments themselves than in the preservation of their memory and history. The committee was to "search for and publish all unedited documents relative to the history of the arts among the French; to make known all monuments of art in France, of every type, religious, military,

and civil, [and] to have designed and engraved noteworthy works of architecture, painting and sculpture in stone, marble, and wood, to preserve them for the future."[23] In the course of carrying out these instructions the committee carried on a constant inventory of the nation's historical remains.

As far as preservation was concerned, however, the most important committee was the Commission des monuments historiques, established in the Ministry of the Interior by the Comte de Montalivet in 1837. Its foundation was the logical result of the appointment of Ludovic Vitet, at age twenty-eight, as the first Inspector-general of Historical Monuments, an appointment made in October 1830, and which was followed in 1834 by the establishment of the Service des monuments historiques, an agency which undertook repairs and restoration and trained workmen to carry out such undertakings. It is due to the Service that France today is so well supplied with men skilled in the arts of medieval construction.

As Inspector-general, Vitet made yearly trips to different areas of the country, carefully searching for unknown monuments, assessing the condition and needs of buildings, investigating libraries, museums, collections of artifacts, and so on. Each trip was followed by a report to the Minister of the Interior, which was published and enjoyed considerable popular success. Vitet was succeeded in 1834 by Prosper Mérimée, who held the post until 1860, while Vitet went into the Chamber as a deputy from 1834 to 1851 and was appointed to the Conseil d'Etat in 1836. In addition he was the councillor to the new Commission. The other original members of the Commission were the deputy the Comte de Montesquiou; the deputy and Norman antiquarian August Le Prevost; Baron Taylor who was director of the Théâtre français, librarian of the Arsenal, and editor of the volumes of *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France;* the architect Caristie who had restored the Roman arch of triumph in Orange; Duban, the architect of the Ecole des Beaux-arts and Mérimée as secretary.

The Commission des monuments historiques was to determine the criteria by which the value of monuments might be assessed, to classify monuments, and to allot funds for their repair or restoration. The allotting of funds for such purposes was not in fact an innovation of the July Monarchy, for funds for restoration had been included in the national budget since 1818. During the Restoration, however, they had been used exclusively for Roman ruins, especially those at Arles, Nîmes, and Orange. These projects were still incomplete by the time of the July Revolution, and they involved great expense due to the

necessity of buying the buildings that had been erected within the Roman theatres and arenas. Although in 1835 the report on the budget noted that the government's attention was turning toward monuments of the Middle Ages, several years were to pass before they received substantial financial assistance.

The regular budget of the Commission was relatively limited in relation to the expenses of preservation and restoration. In 1837 it amounted to only 200,000 francs, but by 1848 it had quadrupled. It was raised during the Second Empire to something over one million francs, and reached its highest point during the nineteenth century in 1882 at 1,630,000 francs.[24]

Special laws passed by the Chambers were necessary for the credits to undertake large restorations. This meant in effect that the Commission did not have control over some large projects for which funds were requested by other government agencies and that its freedom to allocate money was restricted for large projects of its own. The Chambers were perfectly capable of voting funds for projects not approved by the Commission, and did so notably in the case of the church of Saint-Ouen in Rouen. Here the Ministry of Cults requested an appropriation for the restoration of that large High Gothic church, and for the demolition of its incomplete Renaissance facade, which was to be rebuilt in the style of the rest of the building. The Commission, and many others, protested the design for the new facade, but the Chambers voted funds for the project anyway, in the credit of 2,276,000 francs established by the law of June 22, 1845. This fund was to be divided among Saint-Ouen, the amphitheater of Arles, and the château of Blois.

The Commission might classify buildings, but it had very little control over them. Even buildings by various branches of the government itself were beyond its control, being the responsibility of the Inspection générale des bâtiments civils, which had in large part destroyed the church of Saint-Denis in its incompetent attempts to restore it. Frequently this led to serious degradation, since monuments were transformed for utilitarian purposes. Cloisters were frequently used as stalls for horses, for instance. The Palace of the Popes at Avignon was a caserne for the army engineers until the twentieth century; the abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel was a prison until the Third Republic; the unique brick Gothic church of the Jacobins at Toulouse was used for the storage of munitions. Private buildings were of course subject to abuse, and even to demolition, and the Commission was powerless to intervene. This was true even when the Commission had spent money to restore a building, since it remained

the property of its owner. The only alternative was the purchase of the monument by the Service des monuments historiques or some other branch of government. Such sale could not be forced, however, and from the start the Commission had urged passage of a law allowing expropriation of historical monuments for the sake of public utility. There was some reluctance on the part of the Chambers to consider historical monuments worthy of the invasion of the rights of property on their behalf, but nevertheless, an expropriation law was passed in 1841. Its effect was negligible, however, since funds were often unavailable, and the properties involved were often valuable. The city of Paris was unable to meet the purchase price of the Hôtel de la Trémoille, one of the last three surviving medieval mansions in Paris, and it was sold for demolition in 1841. The expropriation law would not have been effective in this case. Not until 1887 and 1889 were laws concerning classification passed which had teeth in them. They provided for contracts between the state and the proprietor, the one promising to furnish funds for restoration and preservation, the other to refrain from making any alterations without the approval of the Commission. However, even then, it was a voluntary contract, and the owner could refuse classification. In the case of conflict over the classification of government buildings, the final decision was left to the Council of State.

Since so many of France's historical monuments are churches, it is important to realize that, if they were in current use for religious purposes, churches were the responsibility not of the Commission but of the Ministry of Cults. Not surprisingly, the Ministry's attitude toward the buildings was different from that of the Commission, since it believed that the interests of art should be secondary to those of religion. When clerical functions demanded alterations in a structure they were generally carried out. Mérimée attempted to attach the Commission des monuments historiques to the Ministry of Cults as well as to that of the Interior, but the suspicion that it would not serve the interests of religion was one of the reasons alleged for the rejection of this proposal. In March 1848 the Commission des édifices religieux was created to superintend the maintenance of church buildings, and both Mérimée and Viollet-le-Duc were members. In this way policies regarding church buildings were coordinated with those of historical monuments in general. Under the Second Empire Viollet-le-Duc was made architect of the archdiocese of Paris and advisor to several other dioceses. With the separation of church and state in 1905, classified religious monuments came under the authority of the Monuments historiques.

During the July Monarchy, however, churches were subject not only to alteration for religious purposes, but also to restorations carried out by clergy who were often more enthusiastic than knowledgeable. By the 1840's there had developed considerable Catholic interest in medieval architecture, especially in the Gothic, although it was motivated by the belief that medieval architecture was Christian rather than national and bourgeois. Montalembert had been a leader in the identification of Gothic with Christianity, following the path laid out by Chateaubriand. It is quite true, as he pointed out, that classical styles were pagan in origin, while Gothic was not, and he cited as well the tripartite emphasis in Gothic architecture.

Enthusiasm for medieval styles developed to such a degree that courses in archeology were offered in a number of *petits séminaires,* and many bishops urged their parish clergy to attend them. These courses offered really the first formal instruction in medieval architecture, since the classically oriented educational and cultural establishment, engaged in a new battle of the ancients against the moderns, refused to acknowledge the value of medieval buildings. The Académie des beaux-arts was relentless in its opposition, as it was to any esthetic change during the century. In fact, in 1864, the Beaux-arts establishment utilized the students' opposition to the Empire to force the resignation of Viollet-le-Duc from the chair of history and esthetics at the Ecole des beaux-arts to which he had been appointed by the Emperor.

The clerical interest in the Gothic resulted in the replacing of baroque altars and furniture in churches with new medieval designs, the installation of colored windows, and sometimes rather crude restoration and repainting of interiors. A few new churches were built in the Romanesque or Gothic styles, both because they were Christian and because they were less expensive to construct than classical buildings. Toward the end of the July Monarchy the church of Sainte-Clotilde was erected in the Faubourg Saint-Germain as a model of neo-Gothic architecture, but its success was diminished by the failure of the Paris municipal council to vote adequate funds. Except for Sainte-Clotilde and the Anglican church, built in 1833, there was little new Gothic church construction in Paris, however, and not much elsewhere, since France was already well endowed with churches, while religious devotion was declining and the population increasing only very slowly. In fact, it would be true to say that France did not undergo a Gothic revival such as England experienced during the same period, and throughout the nineteenth century. New building tended toward the neo-classical and the florid baroque of the Second Empire, fostered by the monopoly of the classical Ecole des beaux-arts over the training of architects.

During the July Monarchy classification was the major responsibility of the Commission des monuments historiques. Indeed, this is the great period of classification, and by 1840 1090 buildings had been classified. The number increased more slowly after that, and some had to be declassified because alterations had destroyed their value.[25] Each year Vitet, and later Mérimée, made a tour of a particular region and returned with information upon which decisions were made as to value and need for funds.

One of the Commission's aims was to establish the criteria for a methodical system of categories, but this was difficult because of its ambiguous terms of reference, differences between value and need, and conflicting interpretations of what historical monuments were. There was no clear definition of an historical monument. In the budget of 1831 it was defined simply as "a monument whose conservation is of interest for history or art." The Commission soon established that historical interest alone would not merit classification in most instances, unless one wants to consider the classification of megalithic monuments as generally historical. A ministerial circular of 1841 stated that "classification established that a building is interesting architecturally."[26] With the exception of the Jeu-de-Paume in Versailles, classified in 1848, and one or two others, not until the twentieth century were a few buildings of historical importance but little artistic merit given classification.

Generally speaking there were three categories into which the Commission divided monuments: those which were of significance and in great need of funds; those which were of importance but not in immediate need; and those which were not of enough importance to merit allocations. Mérimée claimed in his report to the Minister of the Interior in 1843 that the criteria for distinguishing deserving monuments were their artistic value, their material condition, and the resources of the community. These criteria were sometimes mutually conflicting and ignored historical importance altogether.

The resources of the community might seem to be of little importance, but given the limited funds at its disposal, the Commission could sometimes make better use of its funds and preserve more buildings by making up the difference between the cost of a project and the amount that could be raised in the community, either in the form of grants from local governments, private donations, or public subscriptions. For example, in the case of the restoration of the church of Vic le Comte (Puy de Dôme), the Commission allocated only 5,000 of the estimated cost of 76,000 francs. 16,000 francs were donated by the commune; 12,000 were raised by voluntary contribution; 4,000 were

given by the Ministry of Cults; 10,000 were donated by the king's sister Mlle. Adelaide; and 13,000 were in the form of gifts of labor and materials from the people of the commune.[27] These gifts in kind, of which this is only one example, recall the spirit with which the faithful built the churches orginally and demonstrated the extent to which the enthusiasm for restoration had penetrated the general population. Mérimée took care to make that point in his 1843 report and claimed that local contributions nearly always matched the funds allocated by the Commission for a given project.

In order to encourage such public support, the Commission sometimes contributed to the restoration of buildings which were not of the first rank. In the case of the church of Notre-Dame d'Alençon, which was much admired in its locality, a subvention was granted despite the fact that it was not a monument of any great artistic merit.[28]

Frequently buildings which were not of the highest importance were nevertheless in urgent need of repair if their collapse was to be avoided. In such cases the Commission had to take into consideration in making its decision that a negative judgement might result in the monument's disappearance. Sometimes it remained firm and sometimes not, but the material condition of the edifices frequently necessitated compromise with the criterion of esthetic value.

But even the interpretation of esthetic value led to conflicts. There were two basic positions about the proper way for the commission to allocate its funds, preservation and restoration. The aim of the supporters of preservation was the structural maintenance of as many of the most important buildings as possible. They did not envision, or even desire, restoration to an earlier condition. Mérimée and Viollet-le-Duc were supporters of restorations. It was their idea that funds should not be allocated to every building in need of them, but that large amounts of money should be spent to restore a few *monuments types,* buildings which exemplified the unity and harmony of a particular style and by extension the coherence of the civilization which built them. Such projects would have as their goal the restoration of the structure to its original state, or even, it appeared, to a perfect stage of completion which might have been originally conceived but never carried out. Like museum pieces, these restorations would portray the various stages of the evolution of French architecture, and of French civilization.

The idea implied that buildings might be chosen from all historical periods, but in practice it appears that no allocations were made for post-Renaissance buildings until 1895, when a grant was made for repairs to the private houses in the Place de la Concorde.[59] Perhaps

the Commission agreed with the thesis proposed by Victor Hugo in *Notre-Dame* that, after the introduction of printing, which more or less coincided with the introduction of the neo-classical styles, architecture was no longer the popular means of expressing ideas, but became simply a luxurious indulgence of the wealthy and thus indicated little or nothing about the general culture of a period.

The first important medieval structure to undergo the process of restoration to a state of original purity as a *monument type* was the church of the Madeleine at Vézelay, which Viollet-le-Duc directed and which made his reputation at the age of twenty-six. Indeed, when he was appointed to the position, through the influence of his uncle Etienne Delécluze with Mérimée, he had never before undertaken such work, and it was not the idea of the Commission that he should do so. Funds were originally allocated simply to preserve this transitional, part-Romanesque part-Gothic abbey church which had been condemned and was threatened with demolition. It was to become one of the longest and most expensive restorations of the century; begun in 1840, it was completed only in 1859, at a cost of 504,925 francs.[30] Going well beyond the original conception and forcing the Commission to bend to his will, Viollet-le-Duc not only preserved the building but restored it to what he felt was its state when Saint Bernard opened the Second Crusade there. In restoring what *may* have existed, he felt no compunction about destroying additions which definitely *did* exist but conflicted with the original unity.

The restoration of Vézelay established Viollet-le-Duc's reputation, but it also exacerbated the conflict between the ideas of restoration and preservation, which was continued as a result of the next great restoration, the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris. There had been a public clamor for the project for some years before the commission was finally awarded in 1845 to Viollet-le-Duc and Lassus, who had recently restored the Sainte-Chapelle. Since Lassus died shortly thereafter, Notre-Dame can be considered Viollet-le-Duc's work. As at Vézelay, many of the features of the original building had disappeared through age, reconstruction, and vandalism. Much had been added that was of some historical and artistic value, such as the magnificent baroque choir donated by Louis XIV. Some of the reconstruction was itself medieval — the great clerestory windows in the nave and the flying buttresses, for instance — and these were left, although Viollet-le-Duc couldn't resist the temptation to change four bays of the fenestration to the original design. But all the post-medieval alterations were removed, and as much as possible Notre-Dame was restored as a *monument type*. The gargoyles and grotesques which have now become

symbols of the cathedral and of Paris were wholly new creations. The crossing spire, which had been demolished in the eighteenth century, and of which no detailed pictures existed, was replaced with one that would seem to resemble the original very little, beautiful though the new one is. The major sculptured figures on the facade were designed by Viollet-le-Duc to replace those that had been lost, largely through vandalism during the Revolution.

Had he restored the building, or had he recreated it to resemble the cathedral of Hugo's novel? Had he revived it or destroyed it? These questions are still debatable, and are debated, for Viollet-le-Duc has been both roundly condemned and lavishly praised for his work at Notre-Dame. The question is perhaps irresolvable.

The period of the July Monarchy and the Second Empire was the era of great restorations and of the dominance of Viollet-le-Duc, who brought the conception to a climax with his restorations of the city of Carcassonne and of the château of Pierrefonds, the former as a typical example of a medieval fortress town, and the latter as the type of feudal fortress. Carcassonne as it is today bears little resemblance to what remained of it before the restoration, and it has been perhaps the most criticized of all his restorations, though he could point to architectural, historical, or cultural evidence for everything he did there. Pierrefonds was a virtual recreation from the ruins left after the chateau was mined by Louis XIII, and it was meant as a summer palace for the Prince Imperial. It is magnificent, but somehow false and sterile, yet again Viollet-le-Duc can either point to actual remains upon which the result is based or can convince the reader that each detail fulfills a necessary function in the life and duties of a great feudal lord.[31] Viollet-le-Duc's strength was his vast knowledge of the life and customs of the civilization which had built the monuments, and it was this connection with past French civilization which had helped to produce the interest in historical monuments in the first place.

Nevertheless, whether these restorations were accurate or not, it cannot be denied that to accomplish them much was destroyed, and the question remains whether it would have been better to have retained the alluvial deposits of the ages, in the interest of history. Mérimée gave a moderate opinion in a discussion of the restoration of the church of Boulogne (Seine). To this fourteenth century edifice there had been added a sixteenth century porch, in the Renaissance style, which was in bad condition. Some would have insisted on its demolition in the interest of stylistic unity. Mérimé however admitted that it was "graceful" but found it "badly placed". "If it were in good condition, if it could be repaired at little expense, the Commission

would have been the first to suggest its conservation. But ought one to spend a great deal of money to reconstruct it? In the sixteenth century, when the porch was built, there was a very prononced taste for a certain style of architecture, and men cared nothing for the style which had preceded it. Today there is no definite taste, no exclusive conviction. . . . To rebuild that porch would be to reproduce with a light heart an error which was very excusable in the sixteenth century, but which in the nineteenth would be a kind of ridiculous idolatry of the past."[32]

That the desire for stylistic unity was shared by the public is indicated by the example of Saint-Ouen in Rouen, which indicates the dangers implicit in the idea. There were others in the preference for the Gothic style of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries known as High Gothic or *rayonnante.* Viollet-le-Duc among others defended this particular stage of architectural development as having perfected and refined the principles of the Gothic and as representing the most vital and creative period of medieval civilization. It is indeed the style and the period of most of the great cathedrals and of the great majority of medieval monuments. It was felt that Gothic later declined into decadence, as did the civilization, and the signs of this decay may be seen in the ornamental excesses of the late or *flamboyante* Gothic. Needless to say, the long periods of construction common in the Middle Ages resulted in most buildings displaying signs of several styles, as does even the cathedral of Chartres, which is considered exceptionally pure.

The controversy over the cathedral of Moulins indicates some of the difficulties arising from this sort of distinction. In 1842 the bishop of Moulins had requested the extension of the nave of the fifteenth century cathedral by three bays. Lassus drew up plans calling for the demolition of the existing nave and its reconstruction in the preferred High Gothic style. Significantly Mérimée approved of this proposal. The distressed bishop objected that the new nave did not accord well with the fifteenth century choir, to which Lassus replied by proposing that it too be demolished and rebuilt in the earlier style. This was not accomplished fortunately, so something of the original building remains.[33]

The instance of the cathedral of Moulins is extreme perhaps, but such an extreme is implicit in the idea of the restoration of *monuments types.* Which was the more ridiculous idolatry of the past, the preservation of all changes wrought in a building during the centuries, the re-creation of features which it was presumed once existed but which had been replaced long ago, or the creation of details which had never existed but which might have been conceived by the original

architect? Should the object of restoration be to produce a monument typifying the ideals of a society at the time of its conception, or should it be to show how a developping society had reflected the changes it underwent by the changes it made in its buildings? There were, and are, many who would disagree with the conclusions reached by Mérimée and Viollet-le-Duc. The Comte de Gasparin, chairman of the Comité des arts, took a diametrically opposite position. He even felt that the ravages of the revolution should be allowed to remain. In reference to the replacement of the statues in the gallery of kings on the facade of Notre Dame, he believed that "one ought rather to leave the places empty. Is that vacancy not an historical fact worthy of interest? Why have the large statues been pulled down and the small ones respected? Why were the kings and bishops viewed with a less friendly eye than other persons? By leaving things in their present condition one preserves an historical fact; by changing them one destroys that fact and is almost infallibly exposed to error."

It is hard to deny the force of de Gasparin's argument. For what purpose was the Commission des monuments historiques working? What was historical about a monument? Was not its historical value one of the reasons for its preservation? If so, in what did that historical value consist?

The minutes of the Commission's meetings do not suggest that it gave this question sufficient consideration, nor did the Chamber of Deputies, which had to vote the funds for the great restoration projects. By restoring and completing monuments, they were in fact trying to deny the fact that they had remained incomplete. By giving them stylistic unity they demolished the additions of later centuries which could provide historically valid evidence of their own. It was almost as if they were trying to transfix a moment in time, to give a physical reality to the past, a medieval past. And many of the men either on the Commission des monuments historiques or influential with it had expressed ideas concerning the Middle Ages and the Gothic architecture it produced which were not primarily esthetic but religious, historical, nationalistic, social, or political, in other words ideological. One cannot help but suspect that their decisions about the preservation and restoration of historical monuments were strongly influenced by their ideas of history and its development, even though explicit statements to that effect cannot be found in the minutes of the Commission. The whole liberal historical thesis had been so completely absorbed that it formed an almost unconscious part of their outlook.

While Viollet-le-Duc held firm historical opinions about nationalism and the bourgeoisie, in addition he had a passionate concern for

Gothic architecture for the sake of its functionalist principles, and he quite openly and explicitly wished his restorations to be examples for creating a new architecture. As a foremost opponent of the neo-classical art establishment centered in the Ecole des beaux-arts, a battle in which the support he received from Napoleon III was more of a liability than asset in the end, his story is both connected with and distinct from that of the monumental movement. However, he too was a product of his age and its historical ideology.

The July Monarchy and the Second Empire, which rested upon similar historical conceptions, mark the age of the great projects of restoration. While the Commission des monuments historiques has far more responsibility, and a great deal more money, today than then, not since the early years of the Third Republic has it aimed at doing more than preserving what remains of France's past. The idea of restoration was a product of the controversy over the Revolution and of the historical theory developed by the liberals in the attempt to resolve it.

NOTES

[1] François Guizot, "Notice sur Madame de Rumford", *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1859-1863) II, p. 398. This was written in 1841.

[2] Mme. de Staël, *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la révolution française* (Paris, 1845), 9-10; and *De l'Allemagne* (Paris, 1857), pp. 144-45.

[3] Augustin Thierry, *Lettres sur l'histoire de France* (Paris, 1866), p. 411.

[4] Stanley Mellon, *The Political Uses of History: A Study of Historians in the French Restoration* (Stanford, California, 1958).

[5] Thierry, *Lettres*, p. 413.

[6] François René de Chateaubriand, "Considérations sur les auteurs français qui ont écrit l'histoire depuis la Révolution", in Louis-Pierre Anquetil, *Histoire de France depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à la mort de Louis XVI* (nouvelle éd.; Paris, 1838), I, XV.

[7] Thierry, *Lettres*, p. 181.

[8] Quoted in Georges Lefebvre, *La Naissance de l'historiographie moderne* (Paris, 1971), p. 177.

[9] Le Comte de Salvandy, "Circulaires relatifs à l'envoi d'instructions rédigées par le comité", in Xavier Charmes, ed., *Le Comité des Travaux historiques et scientifiques (Histoire et documents)* (Paris, 1886), II, p. 94.

[10] Ludovic Vitet, *Monographie de l'église Notre-Dame de Noyon* ("Collection des documents inédits sur l'histoire de France", 3ème série, Archéologie) (Paris, 1845), p. 125.

[11] This course of lectures formed the basis for Guizot's *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe* (Paris, 1828) and his *Histoire de la civilisation en France* (1829, 1832)

[12] E.E. Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIème au XVIème siècle.* IV (Paris, 1859), p. 413.

[13] Vitet, *Notre-Dame de Noyon*, p. 121

[14] Ludovic Vitet, *Rapport à M. le Ministre de l'Intérieur sur les monuments, les bibliothèques, les archives et les musées des départements de l'Oise, de l'Aisne, de la Marne, du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais* (Paris, 1831), p. 10. note 1.

[15] Vitet, *Notre-Dame de Noyon*, pp. 119-121.

[16] Prosper Merimee, from an article in *Le Moniteur universel* of 30 December 1854, reprinted in Merimee, *Lettres a Viollet-le-Du (Documents inedits) 1839-1870): Articles du Moniteur universel 1854-1860*. Pierre Trahard ed., (Paris 1927), p. 224.

[17] Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire*, II (Paris, 1856), p. 285.

[18] Marthe-Camille, Comte de Montalivet, *Fragments et Souvenirs*, II (Paris 1900), pp. 260-261.

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 265-275

[20] *Ibid.*, lxiii, p. 188.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 265.

[22] Alexandre de Laborde, *Versailles ancien et moderne* (Paris, 1841), préface.

[23] From the decree establishing the Comité historique des arts et monuments, quoted in Ernest Pariset, *Les Monuments historiques* (Paris, 1891), pp. 35-36.

[24] Paul Léon, *La Vie des Monuments français: destruction, restauration* (Paris, 1951), p. 166.

[25] Paul Verdier, "Le Service de monuments historiques. Son histoire: organisation, administration, législation", in *Congrès archéologique de France: XCVIIème session tenue à Paris en 1934* (Paris, 1935), I, pp. 84-85.

[26] Quoted in Léon, *Vie*, p. 129.

[27] Archives of the Commission des monuments historiques, minutes of the meeting of March 12, 1842.

[28] *Ibid.*, minutes of the meeting of March 10, 1843.

[29] Verdier, op. cit. I, p. 158.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 93

[31] Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire*, article "Château".

[32] Archives of the Commission des monuments historiques, minutes of the meeting of May 26, 1860.

[33] *Ibid.*, report submitted by Mérimée, to the Commission des arts et édifices religieux, May 22, 1851, and report to the Minister of Cults, March 31, 1860.