summary of the “architectural archaeology” that the best architectural fieldwork now employs in the analysis of old buildings. Readers will, however, find more than a thorough summary of the changes Charlestonians made to their courthouse over the course of its several careers. The larger purpose of this book, the one that lies beyond reconstructing the evolution of the building, is explaining how this building and its stewards responded to changes in architectural taste, judicial practice, and community needs. Lounsbery achieves the second purpose by exploring the arrangement and use of space in the courthouse. Reconstructed plans and elevations amplify his discussion of how the courthouse functioned, how space within it was apportioned for public, court, and administrative use. Lounsbery’s explanation of how the building acquired more open circulation and greater public access as it evolved from statehouse to courthouse is perhaps the most significant contribution his book makes to the study of American architecture.

Lounsbery might have said more about the late-twentieth-century political dynamics that shaped discussions of the future of the courthouse, but that is a small omission given what the book has already accomplished. The research summarized here saved one of the nation’s most significant eighteenth-century buildings. Not many books about old buildings achieve that measure of success.

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Surveys

Françoise Choay
The Invention of the Historic Monument
Translated by Lauren M. O’Connell

The Invention of the Historic Monument is the English translation of Françoise Choay’s important 1992 publication, Allégorie du patrimoine. It is a thought-provoking gloss of the history of the historic monument from the Renaissance through the present.

Choay states with conviction that “the birth of the historic monument can be located in Rome around the year 1420” (17). She then goes on to trace somewhat sketchily the notion’s development through the quattrocento. The second chapter treats what Choay calls “the age of the antiquarians,” from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Here she demonstrates how historic buildings were increasingly “the subject of an immense effort of conceptualization and inventorying” (41) in published works. Antiquarians simultaneously expanded the scope of their endeavors to include medieval architecture. While the antiquarians Choay treats are principally French and English, in chapter 3 she concentrates solely on “The French Revolution” and its impact on the conceptualization of historic monuments. She argues that it was at that moment that antiquarians’ “abstract iconographic conservation . . . gave way to actual conservation” (63–64). Here Choay’s story becomes familiar. More implicitly than explicitly she challenges recent scholarship on the revolutionary period in arguing against the prominent roles customarily accorded to Alexandre Lenoir and the abbé Grégoire in the construction of the buildings of the pre-revolutionary elites as parts of a national patrimony rather than the despised remains of oppressive institutions.

Instead of emphasizing the singular contributions of these men, she situates them within an evolving mentality of the historic monument.

In chapter 4, “The Consecration Phase: Institutionalization of the Historic Monument,” Choay devotes thirty-four pages to the period 1820 to 1960. France is again central, but theorists from elsewhere in Europe also play important roles in Choay’s account, among them Alois Riegl, John Ruskin, and Camillo Boito. In chapter 5, Camillo Sitte and G. Giovanni are presented as key theorists of “The Invention of an Urban Heritage.” Giovanni is less well known and his apparently influential work is not translated; his inclusion here is therefore welcome. He seems worthy of the restoration “to his legitimate place on the historical stage” (132) that Choay proposes; Giovanni had already predicted by 1913 the end of dense urban central cities and the expansion of urbanization as a result of new communication and transportation technologies. His contribution to preservation was his insistence on the continued relevance of the old cities on this new landscape.

In the central portion of the book, Choay treats material that has been the subject of a great deal of scholarship since the original appearance of the text. The French preservation movement has been studied in a number of books by Dominique Poulot, including Patrimoine et modernité (Paris, 1998) and by Franoise Bercé in Des monuments historiques au patrimoine (Paris, 2000). Even at the time the book was published in French, another comprehensive study of historicism in France, edited by Pierre Nora and entitled Les lieux de mémoire had already appeared, and it too has subsequently seen an English edition, Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past (3 vols., New York, 1996-1998).1 Nora’s project has virtually defined discussions of historicism in France, and one might have expected Choay to have responded to it in some way. (She cites in the bibliography only Nora’s 1974 Faire de l’histoire, vol. 2, coedited with J. Le Goff). A
dialogue between Nora and Choay might have been interesting, given both the tensions and affinities between their approaches. As Nora has written, “My intention was to substitute case studies for general historical developments.” Choay, in contrast, is less interested in detailing how particular historic monuments were consecrated than she is in sketching evolving conceptualizations of the very notion of the historic monument. She writes, “Above all, the preservation of ancient monuments is a question of mentality” (99). The concept of mentality is one that she comes back to repeatedly, as is the historical concept of the “longue durée,” asserting, for example, “Borne along by the momentum of the longue durée, the cognitive value of the historic monument remained firmly attached to it during the period in question [1820–1960]” (84–85). The result of Choay’s dual emphases on mentalities and the longue durée is that changes in thinking about historic monuments sometimes seem to transpire without agents.

Choay accounts for the emergence of the historic monument by the condition of modernity itself: “. . . the rupture of industrialization remained . . . the uncrossable dividing line between a ‘before’ to which the historic monument was relegated, and an ‘after,’ where modernity began” (83). A second historical divide, “the advent of the electronic era” (166), informs the later, more prospective, parts of the book. The sixth chapter, “Historic Heritage and the Contemporary Culture Industry,” and the epilogue, “The Competence to Build,” assess monument making in the postwar period. Choay chronicles some skepticism in the expansion of the definition of historic monuments to include, for example, industrial sites, vernacular architecture, and entire urban and rural landscapes. “Inflation” is the term Choay uses (with some historical appropriateness) to describe the growth since the 1960s of the international application of Western concepts of preservation, of the kinds of buildings that can be considered worthy of preservation, of the audience for historic sites, and of the sheer numbers of historic monuments. Choay ends by diagnosing, in psychoanalytic terms, the widespread interest in historic sites in the West: “. . . selective observation and treatment of historical heritage no longer tends to create a dynamically assumed cultural identity, but appears to be replaced by passive contemplation and the cult of generic identity, in which we may readily identify the signs of narcissism” (165). At their worst, claims Choay, historic monuments compound the alienation brought about by the mediations of technology, which may contribute to “the impending advent of homo sapiens prostheticus” (173). It can certainly be agreed that historic monuments have often been used for ideologically specific purposes, encouraging belief in the status quo rather than critical reflection on social, political, and other conditions. However, there are many examples (unrecognized by Choay) of public historians in both Europe and the United States who have used historic sites to provoke critical thought. Colonial Williamsburg, for instance, has introduced discussions of slavery into what began as a purely celebratory historical presentation. Beginning in the 1980s, under the direction of Cary Carson, Rex Ellis, and Reginald Butler, Colonial Williamsburg aggressively researched the overlooked history of African-Americans in the city and sought ways of interpreting their lives to the public. Similarly, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum makes palpable the hardships of immigrant life in New York City. Such institutions use historic monuments not just to celebrate history’s victors, but to highlight the injustices that have been suffered by racial and ethnic minorities and other groups.

Choay’s laudable call for progressive historic monuments that would encourage critical thinking about the contemporary situation rather than passive acceptance of it suggests the great range of her thinking on the topic of preservation. Indeed, the book’s English title seems rather too precise and at the same time too historical, suggesting as it does a more developed account of the emergence of the idea of the historic monument than is actually delivered. The virtually untranslatable title of the French original is much closer to the avowed spirit of this study which is ultimately allegorical rather than historical.

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Notes

Eric Fernie
The Architecture of Norman England

Eric Fernie’s The Architecture of Norman England is a landmark in the study of Romanesque architecture. Expansive in its range, the volume includes both secular and ecclesiastical buildings and considers major monuments as well as more rarely discussed structures such as parish churches and monastic buildings. Divided into four major sections, it treats Norman architecture on a range of scales, from detailed elements such as capitals to its larger architectural context.

The book’s opening section, “The Period,” briefly discusses the historical context of Norman England. In this case, “context” is used to mean primarily the architectural rather than the political, social, or liturgical environment in which the buildings were produced. The heart of Fernie’s study, however, is the lengthy second section entitled “The Buildings.” Here the architecture of Norman England is divided by building type. Each one is introduced by an