The many possibilities of debating German heritage

Review of:

Kristina Jõekalda, Krista Kodres, eds, *Debating German Heritage: Art History and Nationalism during the Long Nineteenth Century*. Special issue of *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi*. 2014, vol. 23, no. 3/4.

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Debating German Heritage: Art History and Nationalism during the Long Nineteenth Century is a special edition of the journal of the Estonian Society of Art Historians, 'Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi', an Estonian journal that publishes studies of visual art, architecture, design and visual environment. This issue is based on a seminar of the same name held at the Estonian Academy of Arts in Tallinn in September 2013, hosted by the Institute of Art History, the Estonian Academy of Fine Arts and the Graduate School of Culture Studies and Arts. The seminar addressed the subject of heritage and art historical knowledge production in relation to nationalism, with a particular focus on their inter- and transnational character. As most of the essays in Debating German Heritage were presented at this seminar, the focus of the publication is similar. In the introduction, authors Kristina Jõekalda and Krista Kodres explain that the volume focuses on questions of heritage, identity and the writing of art history, stating: '...the volume intends to offer insights into various cases of Eastern and Central European art historiography in which special emphasis is placed on the German "connection". When reading the essays, it is evident that the German heritage mentioned in the title is therefore to be interpreted in a broad sense, as the publication discusses the wider Germanophone area, the Baltic region as a whole as well as case studies regarding specific countries, including Estonia, Latvia, Poland and the Czech republic.

Debating German Heritage contains an interesting and varied compilation of essays, offering insights into the dynamics of heritage preservation and nationalism in the long nineteenth century in the Germanophone area. The authors approach their subjects from diverse entry points such as the construction of canon, historical societies, preservation practices, and competing national and regional narratives. Heritage, and particularly architectural heritage, takes centre stage as an important part of processes of national, regional or ethnic identity building. The issue is governed by two central themes: first, the use of art history as a tool in the legitimisation of national states or ethnic groups fighting for their own identity, and second, the relationship between Germany and the Baltic States. The first theme is strongly related to the development of nationalist narratives and changing borders in the nineteenth century. These developments made it essential for groups and

¹ Kristina Jõekalda, Krista Kodres 'Debating German Heritage: An Introduction'. *Debating German Heritage: Art History and Nationalism during the Long Nineteenth Century*. Special issue of *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi*, 23: 3/4, 2014, 55.

nations to define themselves and granted particular importance to the ownership of heritage and the way it fitted into the construction of a history. All the essays contain examples of how appropriation, celebration or negation of arts can be used by scholars who sought to interpret Baltic, Medieval, Czech or art in general to suit their own agenda. The second major theme, the relationship between Germany and the Baltic States, especially gains significance in the discussions concerning the second half of the nineteenth century. From the essays by Ulrike Plath, Kristina Jõekalda and Mārtiṇś Mintaurs, it becomes clear that the changes in the relationship between Tsarist Russia and Germany had a considerable impact on the future Baltic States and the Czech Republic in terms of processes of identification and appropriation. A special place in this volume is reserved for the Baltic Germans, who had migrated from the German area to the Baltic States over the centuries and who held an exceptional political and social position in the nineteenth century.

Through its focus on Eastern Europe, the special edition ties in with the increasing interest in the historical and contemporary development of Eastern European art history and the growing body of literature on the subject over the past decade.² When Debating German Heritage is reviewed in relation to this body of literature, it is clear that it complements the existing scholarship by offering recent insights into historical heritage studies from the point of view of the budding nation states and offers new venues of exploration in the study of heritage. The combination of heritage studies, nationalist ideologies and Eastern Europe particularly has been gaining attention as well. The topics and main themes of Debating German Heritage have also recently been approached from a very similar point of view in Heritage, Ideology and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe. Contested Pasts, Contested Presents (2012).3 This volume, edited by Matthew Rampley, focuses on much of the same geographical area and heritage practices as *Debating German* Heritage. However, since Heritage, Ideology and Identity discusses markedly different case studies and takes the twentieth century as its focal point, rather than the nineteenth century, the two publications could be considered as complementary volumes and make equally interesting contributions to the field of scholarship. Moreover, as Debating German Heritage discusses the nineteenth century with special attention to transnational dynamics in the Germanophone area with regards to heritage, it sets itself apart from other recent publications on similar topics.⁴

The volume opens with an introduction by Kristina Jõekalda and Krista Kodres with a discussion of the main themes, followed by the essay by Hubert

² Just few examples of works in expanding body of the work that touches upon on the subject: Hans Belting, *Art History After Modernism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. Piotr Piotrkowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe*, 1945-1989, Edinburgh: Reaktion Books, 2011. Matthew Rampley, Thierry Lenain, Hubert Locher, eds, *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, Leiden: BRILL, 2012. Matthew Rampley, *The Vienna School of Art History*, Philadelphia: Penn State Press, 2013. Mária Orisková, *Curating 'Eastern Europe' and Beyond: Art Histories Through the Exhibition*, Pieterlen: Peter Lang Verlag, 2014

³ Matthew Rampley, eds, *Heritage, Ideology, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe: Contested Pasts, Contested Presents,* Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2012.

⁴ As in the volumes already noted and see also Astrid Swenson, *The Rise of Heritage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Locher: 'The Idea of Cultural Heritage and the Canon of Art'. Locher reviews the development of the idea of the valuation of an established canon in the framework of nationalism and how this related to preservation of heritage. Winfried Speitkamp's essay, 'Heritage Preservation, Nationalism and the Reconstruction of Historical Monuments in Germany during the Long Nineteenth Century' follows that of Locher and offers a more specific introduction to the other themes of the book through a discussion of the use of heritage in the support of nationalist narratives and the role of reconstruction and conservation in these processes. The first of three essays to review the subject of Germany and the Baltic States is by Ulrike Plath, who offers a comprehensive discussion of the creation of *Heimat* in her essay 'Heimat: Rethinking Baltic German Spaces of Belonging'. The second is by Kristina Jõekalda. In 'Baltic Identity via German Heritage' she analyses how Baltic identity was constructed and deconstructed through art historiography by scholars in the Baltic and broader Germanophone area. The last author to tackle this subject is Mārtiņś Mintaurs. In 'Heritage for the Public? The Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Altertumskunde in Riga and the Protection of Architectural Monuments in the Baltic Provinces 1834-1914' Mintaurs gives an overview of the development of heritage protection and conservation debates in the Baltic Provinces, illustrating his ideas with a discussion of the activities of the Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Altertumskunde. A geographical sidestep is made in the next essay by Marta Filipová, in 'Writing and Displaying Nations: Constructing Narratives of National Art in Bohemia and Austria-Hungary'. Filipová looks at Bohemia and Austria-Hungary with particular attention to the creation of a Czech nationalist narrative of art. Finally, in 'Art Historiography during World War I: Kunstschutz and Reconstruction in the General Government of Warsaw', Beate Störtkuhl chronologically and topically closes the volume with an exploration of the practices of heritage protection and reconstruction between 1914 and 1918. Taking the destruction of Warsaw and the *Kunstschutz* activities Polish area as a case study, Störtkuhl reviews the varying practices and motives of heritage preservation during and after the war.

Both of the essays by Hubert Locher and Winfried Speitkamp are closely related to work they have previously published, and demonstrate their extensive knowledge of their subjects.⁵ In 'The Idea of Cultural Heritage and the Canon of Art' Locher reviews the historical conceptualization of cultural heritage as a scholarly subject and as a political tool. He argues that the choices made in the development, promotion and appreciation of particular monuments are strongly related to the

⁵ The formation of art history as a discipline and subsequently the development of the 'canon' has previously been studied by Locher in, amongst others, Hubert Locher, Kunstgeschichte als historische Theorie der Kunst, 1750-1950, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010 and in the essay 'The Idea of the Canon and Canon Formation in Art History' in Matthew Rampley, eds, Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks, 29-40. Speitkamp has written and edited extensively on the subject of heritage preservation in the German area. Publications that are closely related to the topic in this book are: Winfried Speitkamp, eds, Die Verwaltung der Geschichte. Denkmalpflege und Staat in Deutschland 1871–1933, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996. Winfried Speitkamp, eds, Denkmalsturz. Zur Konfliktgeschichte politischer Symbolik, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997.

narratives that the monument is perceived to support, especially in a nationalist vein. Locher discusses the concept of 'heritage' extensively, reviewing its original connotations as a legal and proprietary concept, as well as the more modern applications such as Pierre Nora's landmark concept Lieux de Memoire and the German concept of *Erbe* as heritage. Not just the concept of heritage has changed over time, as Locher eloquently demonstrates: ideas about the value of heritage have also changed. From the nineteenth century onwards, concepts of a national art tradition impacted the valuation of heritage and shaped the way scholars viewed art and architecture. The subsequently changing views on the world of art led to the differentiation between a national canon and a more universal valuation of certain artworks, altering art historical practice considerably. Noticeably, in the case of German art, it became a point of pride for German art historians to see German art validated in the same way as the venerated Italian and French art – a sentiment that resonates throughout all subsequent studies in *Debating German Heritage*. Throughout his essay, Lochers connects the political influence at the root of art history in the nineteenth century to the way it supported national identity and how, conversely, the possibility of a unified human history featured as the backdrop to the display of magnificence of national arts. While the main premise of the essay may seem an intuitive fact, Locher skilfully manages to present an intricate and comprehensive reading of the history of national appropriation of art and so creates a framework for understanding the general themes of the publication.

In the next essay, 'Heritage Preservation, Nationalism and the Reconstruction of Historical Monuments in Germany during the Long Nineteenth Century' Speitkamp convincingly argues that the long nineteenth century in Germany was a time of creation and construction of monuments, rather than the often perceived period of loss. Moreover, the construction of heritage happened both on a governmental level and on a more public level. The growth of governmental protection of heritage in the nineteenth century was preceded by the development of historical organizations that formed an early foundation for the interest and preservation of heritage. Through the efforts of these historical organisations heritage and the physical landscape in which it was situated, entered in to the construction of collective memory. Over time, a more institutionalized effort incorporated monuments and heritage into larger localized narratives and a scholarly interest led to debates on principles of preservation and restoration of monuments and heritage. Speitkamp's essay is illustrated with engaging examples that were incorporated socially and politically into historical narratives, including the cathedral in Cologne, the Marksburg castle and his leading example, the Höhkonigsburg. Especially this last example and its dual appropriation by the French and German authorities illustrates his main point by displaying the carefully constructed nature and variable utilization of heritage from the perspective of the nation state. In all, Speitkamp's essay points to the artificiality of historical narratives, arguing and illustrating the fact that heritage was historically subjected to various and changing interpretations over time, something clearly illustrated in the essays that follow.

After these introductory essays, Ulrike Plath's study is the first of three to address the subject of the Baltic States, offering insights into the variable interpretation of the concept of *Heimat* and constructed nature of this 'emotional

space of belonging'. Introducing this complex concept, she states: 'The German term *Heimat*, meaning home, homeland, the land or private place or birth, is an emotional space of belonging with unclear contours, sometimes meaning the territory of a nation or an empire, sometimes a region, and sometimes a just a private memory that gains, in every form, importance with growing spatial and temporal distance'.7 She argues that it is possible to differentiate between the development or construction of *Heimat* from 'above and below', i.e. through the state and through the peoples themselves, and contends that this differentiation will help to study *Heimat* as the multifarious concept it is. Tying it to the stages of migration between the German and Baltic states in the long nineteenth century, Plath shows that Heimat played an important role in the construction of identity and power for those living in the Baltic area, as it offered a more or less stable basis for identity at a time when the Baltic region was in a political and national flux due to changing relationships with the 'motherland' Germany and the tsarist Russian 'fatherland'. However, when studying the creation of *Heimat* from above and below, it does become clear that it was by no means a uniform concept. The creation from above, or the political creation, of Heimat hardly left any space for transnational views, creating a highly politicized space in reaction to growing conflicts. In contrast, the regional construction of Heimat, or the creation from below, focused especially on this transnationalism as a consequence of migration, displacement and changing political boundaries. As such, the Baltic German Heimat from below was created in various ways, ranging from folk songs and games to journalism, literature and poetry. Plath dedicates part of her essay especially to these activities, presenting Heimat as a 'taskscape'. She distinguishes the various tasks that make up the taskscape of Heimat: teaching Heimat, walking Heimat, depicting Heimat, suffering and playing *Heimat*. This division in the taskscape is a clear illustration of Plath's argument about the creation of Heimat from different levels, as some of these tasks are decidedly governmental while others are individual. Overall, she decisively shows that the Heimat, both constructed from above and below, was a fragmented and complicated concept due to its non-uniform and sometimes unstable shape. Moreover, she illustrates that there are various ways through which Heimat could be constructed and that it was certainly an important part of the Baltic German experience in the long nineteenth century. The differentiation in the level of creation of *Heimat*, as illustrated by Plath, is an interesting notion and offers potential for the study of variations in nationalist thought originating from different parts of society.

In 'Baltic Identity via German Heritage? Seeking Baltic German Art in the Nineteenth Century', Jõekalda continues the focus on the Baltic region by reviewing the ways in which Baltic German and German authors appropriated the subject of Baltic art in their construction of art history. Taking the 'discovery' of medieval heritage as an exemplary component of identity construction, she draws lines

⁶ Ulrike Plath. 'Heimat: Rethinking Baltic German Spaces of Belonging'. Debating German Heritage: Art History and Nationalism during the Long Nineteenth Century. Special issue of Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi, 23: 3/4, 2014, 55.

⁷ Ulrike Plath. 'Heimat: Rethinking Baltic German Spaces of Belonging'. Debating German Heritage: Art History and Nationalism during the Long Nineteenth Century. Special issue of Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi, 23: 3/4, 2014, 55.

between the development of art historical scholarship and the dynamics between Baltic Germans and the German motherland, looking at the need to distinguish between the two identities. Jõekalda's study addresses this 'discovery' in relation to the colonial situation to explore whether the German origins of the art historical discipline can be said to lead to a situation of 'double colonization' in Baltic art history. Perceiving art history to be an essentially German invention and practice, due to its initial development in Germany, she views the appropriation of Baltic art in support of German narratives as a colonialist act. Moreover, she argues that the focus of German scholars on medieval art and architecture was a consequence of the fact that the Middle Ages were perceived as an era in which the Baltic States were an 'independent' area. The German scholars colonized this 'independent' art history, aiming to reinforce the German art historical identity by its appropriation. The combination of the German discipline of art history with this colonial act, Jõekalda argues, may be perceived as double colonization. Yet, while it is a very interesting idea and although the application of colonial and postcolonial theory to this history may indeed lead to some interesting results, Jõekalda's exploration of the idea warrants a more extensive discussion than the essay features. Even though she examines the nuances of the situation to some extent, a precise explanation of the existence of the 'double colonization' in actual art historical writing remains absent. She does, however, successfully demonstrate that Baltic art history, to a certain degree, benefitted from the colonial link to German heritage, as the 'colonial self-consciousness' supported the specific character of Baltic art and, by extension, the development of a Baltic identity. As such, the notion of a double colonization remains an interesting hypothesis and Jõekalda's application in combination the incorporation theory from literature and film studies certainly makes the essay worth reading.

Mārtiņś Mintaurs closes the section on the Baltic German theme with his essay 'Heritage for the Public', offering an analysis of the efforts of architectural preservation in the Baltic German region in the long nineteenth century. His case study centres on an historical association, the Gesellschaft für Geschichte und *Altertumskunde* in Riga and the development of policy, theory and practices regarding heritage preservation surrounding it. The nineteenth century, hallmarked by the development of industrialization and nationalism, locally fostered an increased emphasis on community, which played an important role in the changing valuation of monuments and heritage and subsequently impacted the way that restoration and conservation were approached. Mintaurs discusses these valuation and restoration practices in the context of the struggles in the Baltic area regarding identity creation and political power by both German and Baltic parties. The establishment of more centralized heritage care in Germany and Baltic provinces relied on the development of an efficient infrastructure, in the form of (governmental) organisations, legal frameworks and scholarly interest. This only came about after an increased attention to monuments developed into a more institutionalized and more structured interest over time, taking the shape of publications and local historical associations. One such organization is the Gesellschaft für die Geschichte und Altertumskunde (GGA) in Riga. The GGA was at the centre of key developments in the further institutionalization of heritage preservation and was instrumental in many of them. Yet, as Mintaurs illustrates, the association was without financial means and limited in their conservation activities. Furthermore, despite its efforts, heritage preservation remained relatively informal until the turn of the twentieth century. At this time, increased calls for the preservation of architectural heritage led to extensive debates on the restoration and conservational methods and, finally, a more institutional practice of heritage preservation. In all, Mārtiṇś Mintaurs gives an insight into the process of institutionalization of heritage preservation, astutely showing how ideas about heritage conservation, restoration and reconstruction changes over time and that even amidst nationalist tendencies, some parties managed to prioritize heritage above all else.

The essay 'Writing and Displaying Nations: Constructing Narratives of National Art in Bohemia and Austria-Hungary' by Marta Filipová assesses the tensions between German and Czech art historians in their aim to incorporate Czech art in support of their narratives. Studying art historical writing and exhibitions, Filipová shows that German and Czech art historians clashed when it came to the understanding and interpretation of Czech art. According to German scholars, Czech art was fundamentally German in origin, either made by German artists or imitations of German art. The writing by German art historians was countered by Czech art historians who created a different narrative, namely that Czech art went back historically to the 'originally' medieval Czech period in Bohemia, which they considered an era of 'an elevated cultural level', and attributing to the art essential 'Slavic' qualities. Like in the essay by Jõekalda, medieval art became a main point of strife because of its perceived original independence of the region. As such, while German scholars tried to foster a narrative that would support their recently unified nation, the Czech scholars sought to create one that would support their aim to become recognized as a separate ethnic people with its own characteristics and history. Filipová's second case study, about the appropriation of Czech art in exhibitions, shows a slightly different image. While she convincingly argues that exhibitions were a stage of conflict regarding national identities where tensions in the construction of different identities were displayed, it turns out that in this case of it was mainly Czech scholars and producers of the exhibitions who appropriated the art and culture of the region. Through displays of art, folk culture, artefacts, and architecture, Czech culture was brought together to create a unified narrative of 'Czech-ness'. While in following the success of the Czech efforts German scholars and producers also used exhibitions as a stage for their political claims, they focussed rather on the German presence in the Bohemian region, rather than appropriating Czech art. Overall, Filipová's essay effectively complements that by Jõekalda and shows that German and Czech art historians, in exhibitions and in writing, both aimed to create national or local narratives that capitalized on the perceived absence or presence of Czech historical and contemporary identity.

The last essay 'Art Historiography during World War I 'Kunstschutz and Reconstruction in the General Government of Warsaw' by Beate Störtkuhl engages with the topic of heritage preservation during the war between 1914 and 1918. Störtkuhl's essay analyses the development and political intricacies behind the development of the *Kunstschutz* efforts during this time. Reviewing the various actions by the German government in several theatres of war, Störtkuhl demonstrates the variety of political and social motives for heritage preservation.

The destruction of heritage in the initial stages of the war provoked the condemnation of various governments and international bodies. Consequently, the German authorities devised a way to counter these criticisms and to relieve the pressure on the monuments and heritage by creating a Kriegsdenkmalpflege, a coherent effort for the preservation of monuments in wartime. The call for a preservation program for historical monuments and art in 1915 was translated by the occupying powers in Poland into the *Kunstschutz* program. Störtkuhl gives various examples of the German administrations' efforts through the Kunstschutz to preserve and rebuild, paying attention to housing, reconstruction of monuments and the actual preservation of historical heritage. The administration aimed to collaborate with the local Polish institutions in its efforts, for example in the competition for the urban reconstruction of the city of Kalisz, destroyed by German groups in 1914. This reconstruction was widely advertised and was an important case for the reconstruction efforts during the war. Yet Störtkuhl questions whether the nationalist considerations given to this reconstructions, as evident in the documentation, were of a Polish or a German nature. As such, on the one hand the Kunstschutz activities did achieve the preservation of heritage and set standards for the preservation and restoration efforts during war. On the other, all activities were politically or even strategically motivated and must be scrutinized with regards to ulterior motives. Störtkuhl's epilogue offers some ideas for further research along these lines: 'Thus, the World War I *Kunstschutz* activities can be seen as a key stop on the road which led from nineteenth century ideas and controversies on "national art" to the destructive instrumentalism of art historiography in the National Socialist period.'8 Even though it is an exploratory essay, Störtkuhl's work engages with and argues against some ongoing assumptions on the nature of the heritage preservation during this period, such as the extent of physical efforts on the part of the German administration in the safeguarding of architectural monuments, and pushes at the boundaries of existing scholarship.

Overall, there are only two areas that might be improved in this special issue, both concerning contextualization. First of all, while scholarship on the relationship between Germany and the Baltic States is a core feature of this issue, these studies are only sparingly contextualized. The introduction and the essay by Ulrike Plath offer some background on this topic, yet this gives only a glimpse into this complex historical relationship of the area and the particular status of the Baltic Germans. For the reader who is not familiar with this distinct history, a more extensive discussion of this framework would have been welcome. Second, the publication runs the risk of somewhat overemphasizing the sway nationalist tendencies held over art historical scholarship, especially when considering the great span of time under scrutiny. While the focus on nationalism and art is a productive one, it somewhat overlooks developments in the nineteenth century towards a more rigorous art history and a universal art historical scholarship, both of which interacted with the issues of art historiography that are mentioned in

⁸ Beate Störtkuhl. 'Art Historiography during World War I: *Kunstschutz* and Reconstruction in the General Government of Warsaw.' *Debating German Heritage*: *Art History and Nationalism during the Long Nineteenth Century*. Special issue of *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi*, 23: 3/4, 2014, 181

several of the essays. Moreover, although Hubert Locher does address the development of a universalist art history through the handbook of Franz Kugler, this development was broader and more persistent than the efforts of Kugler alone. Though the scope of a special edition is not extensive enough to consider all contextual developments, the ideas of a rigorous or objective and universal art history were major developments in art history in the nineteenth century and indicate an important, more nuanced, view of art history as a truly transnational scholarship, rather than just a political tool.⁹

However, aside from these minor opportunities for improvement, the volume proves to be a well-researched and thorough contribution to the field of heritage studies. The essays in Debating German Heritage are invariably well researched, often innovative in their approach and pleasant to read. The collective of essays decisively shows the ways in which heritage became an anchor of identity in the uncertain circumstances of the long nineteenth century, used by both government organisations as well as by the public. This special edition also demonstrates the various interpretations of art history and heritage, as well as the acts of appropriation of both over time. The temporal parameter of the long nineteenth century is evidently a productive choice, as the range of the essays shows the changes in ideas and concepts over time and a large interdependency of the development of art historical practices and historical events. Overall, the authors in Debating German Heritage propose new views on the study of heritage, its constructed and contested nature, contributing to existing scholarship a whole range of interpretations of the relationship between art history and nationalism as well as some innovative approaches to the subject. Moreover, this special edition has certainly created an opening for future scholarship on its subjects. The interdisciplinary nature and the various entry points of the authors make it a volume that is worth reading for a broad audience with an interest in art history, heritage and studies of nationalism.

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⁹ This is illustrated for example by Dan Karlholm in Dan Karlholm, *Art of Illusion: The Representation of Art History in Nineteenth-century Germany and Beyond,* Pieterlen: Peter Lang Verlag, 2006.

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