German Inventory and Heritage –
A fateful genesis from history,
politics and science

by

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This essay is the second in an occasional series to deal with the inventorisation and protection of buildings in Europe. It follows Monique Chatenet's contribution on France, published in these Transactions *in 1995. Dr Wulf's close analysis of the genesis of heritage management and preservation in Germany is particularly pertinent at a time when many countries emerging from the former eastern bloc are faced with the issues of national pride and identity which have characterized the developments which he describes.*

The consideration of heritage protection in Germany began in the late eighteenth century. At that time, the German Empire was a political monster consisting of about 300 more or less sovereign parts, only loosely held together, without much authority, by the Austrian emperor. The remembrance of this history is still alive in Germany today, influencing political and cultural life and decisions in many ways, including heritage protection and preservation, which themselves reflect and are informed by attitudes to history. So it is not by accident that the German heritage has two sources. As an independent discipline with its own methods, categories, goals and institutions it may be considered as the child of historicism. As a movement that is founded on the consciousness of the differences between the present and the past, it is a descendant of the age of enlightenment which developed and articulated these ideas. Without these two sources, the idea of responsibility for the remains of the past would not have been conceived. It was the fundamental change in the appreciation of art and history in the last third of the eighteenth century, especially by the educated, that laid the basis for the historicism of the nineteenth century and the serious and critical discipline of *Denkmalpflege*.

For us, the most famous example of the new thought and vision is Goethe's hymn *Von deutscher Baukunst*, written in 1771, a treatise that he dedicated to the cathedral of Strasbourg and its architect Erwin von Steinbach. Goethe's emotional

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presentation demonstrates his knowledge of the current Parisian architectural theories and a new and significant changing of importance in the term *Denkmal*, by which he means no longer the single memorial object - intended from its inception to memorialize - but the whole church and its history which acquires over time the quality of being a memorial, without the prior knowledge or intention of the artist or his employers. The church as a whole documents their ideas and craftsmanship.

Goethe's treatise was quickly forgotten, superseded for the intellectual public by the classically influenced ideas of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, not to be rediscovered until the recognition of its importance by the German romantics. So the first German protective legislation, in Kassel (1779), Bayreuth (1780) and Prussia (1794) employed a traditional idea of the monument, although the legislation included astonishingly strict rules against demolition and made it a duty of all authorities to preserve the objects and to document activities.

Only the protection laws in Baden (1812) and in Hessen-Darmstadt (1818), influenced by the architects Weinbrenner and Moller, reflected a new attitude. At first slowly, but more swiftly with the impact of the Napoleonic wars and their devastation, the emphasis on classical art and history began to be redirected towards the German past and its remains.

The romanticism which grew vastly under the influence of such German intellectuals as Friedrich Schlegel was during the early nineteenth century fuelled by the concept of the sublime, as defined in the aesthetics of eighteenth-century England, as a result directing intense attention towards German history and its monuments. These seemed to be highly threatened. Not only had many of them been destroyed during the Napoleonic wars - in Cologne for instance, forty-seven churches had been demolished by the French troops - but far more were in ruins because of a lack of interest and the absence of preservation. With the liquidation of the German Empire in 1803, all clerical lands and rights were dissolved and properties secularized. Numerous churches were left without use. They were demolished and degraded to quarries. A new pathos, which combined nationalism with a new religiosity, created a kind of feeling and mentality which led eventually through many, highly conflicting stages to modern heritage protection. But first of all it led to the formulation of *Nationaldenkmälern* as objects of national integrity and pride, reflecting a glorious past, when the German Empire was united and mighty in the middle ages.

The history of the first of these *Nationaldenkmäler*, the Marienburg in Eastern Prussia near Danzig is significant (Fig.1). This large and beautiful castle had been the main seat of the Teutonic Order until 1457 and subsequently had been changed and partly ruined. In 1799-1803 some drawings of the castle made by the architect Friedrich Gilly were published (Fig.2). The public response to these was so intense that the planned destruction of the castle was stopped in 1804 after fervent discussions, and in 1813, the year of the Battle of Nations at Leipzig, the restoration of the monument was agreed. This put the object into a totally new category; new aspects and interests dominated the old, making the Marienburg an affair of historical science, heritage protection and preservation to some; illustrative of a
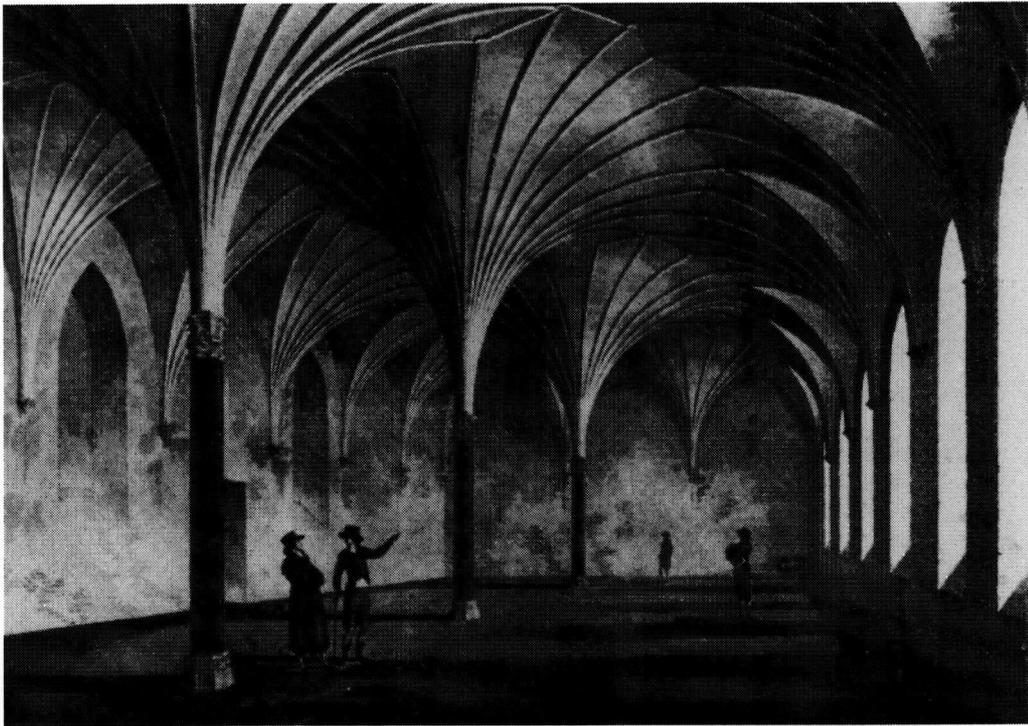
Fig. 1
The Grosser Remter of the Marienburg - perspective to show the proposed
reconstruction
(F. Frick after F. Gilly, 1799)

popular conception of history and current politics to others. The castle is therefore one of the earliest and most important examples of the German heritage to demonstrate all problems, especially historical manipulation. It is one even today for the Polish nation after its demolition in World War II by the Russians.

The second example, the cathedral of Cologne, is even more important, for nowhere has the transformation from a ruin to a *Nationaldenkmal* taken course in such a dramatic way with such grave consequences for the entire country during the whole century. Without the discussions and conflicts about it, the technical knowledge for all kinds of future restorations would not have been achievable in such extensive ways and neither would neo-gothic architecture have gained its ever increasing popularity.

The problem of the cathedral of Cologne was not so much a case of preservation and partial rebuilding, as one of complete reconstruction (Fig.3). At the end of the late middle ages the active construction works on the cathedral had come to an end. In *c.*1800 the existing building was a gigantic fragment more or less in ruins, so that even the archbishop considered demolition. Then, Friedrich Schlegel's
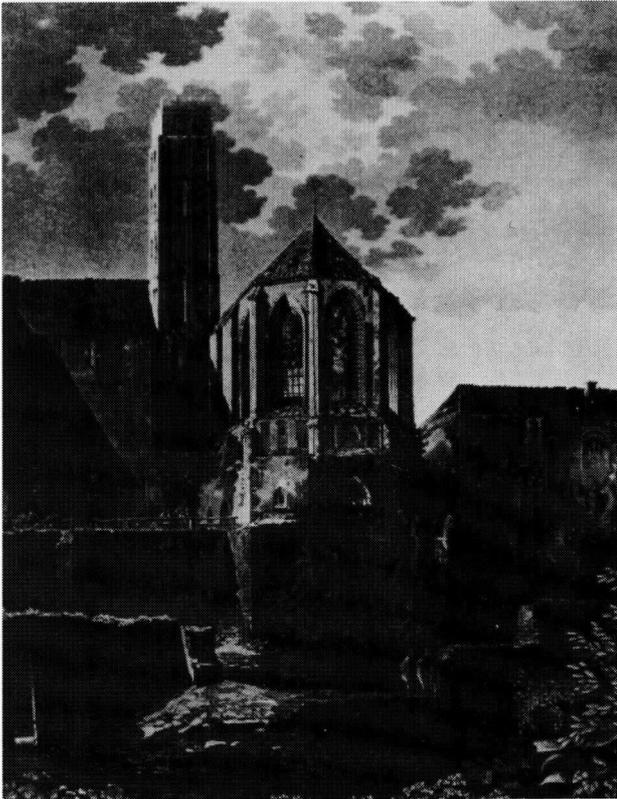
Fig. 2
The Church of the Marienburg in 1798
(F. Frick after F. Gilly, 1799)

Grundzüge der gotischen Baukunst directed the public's attention to the fact that the gothic was an architecture beyond the scope of popular architectural theories, which were based on the classicism which lay at the heart of the country's old feudal system. The gothic style by contrast could be presented as an architecture of freedom, interpretable also in Germany as a national style. Influenced by the political situation in Germany after the defeat of Napoleon in 1814, the public considered completing the building as a monument to a new German unity. Even the Prussian crown prince, the later King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, was infatuated with the idea.

In 1808 Sulpiz Boisserée had taken the measurements of the church and made drawings. It was Sulpiz himself too, who found in 1816 in Paris the original plan of the south tower, after Georg Moller had identified other, previously unknown plans. Discussions about the significance and meaning of the project continued until 1842, when King Friedrich Wilhelm IV himself took part in the laying of the foundation stone (Figs.4-5). The rebuilding of the cathedral had become part of a political restoration in Germany. Remarkably, this adoption of the building as an object imbued with significance for the greatness of German history and art, and its past unity, was suddenly called into question following the realisation that the architecture of the cathedral of Cologne was in many ways following the French Amiens. Heinrich Heine, at first a supporter of the reconstruction, by 1844 disapproved of it when he recommended its continued use as the horse stable to which the French troops had earlier degraded it.

By far the most important German architect of the time also was the most important conserver of his country's heritage. Nobody has done more for the idea of heritage protection and in such a well devised and visionary manner than Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841). He was also the first to recognize monuments as

public property, their preservation therefore a matter of public interest. For the Prussian *Oberbaudirektor* Schinkel the public was synonymous with the state, for which he saw a new and continuous responsibility for the protection and preservation of monuments, as he wrote in a report in 1832.

Schinkel also saw the subjective practice and the arbitrariness prevalent in the administration of monuments. He wanted therefore the form of organisation that is current in Germany today: the ministry as the highest authority, with an official body of employed experts. He believed that heritage preservation should become a regular profession.

But more crucial than the establishment of an administrative body was Schinkel's recognition of the importance of survey and inventorisation, for the existence, quality and situation of objects must be known before they can be protected effectively. Conse-

Fig. 3
The interior of the Cathedral of Cologne - perspective to show the proposed reconstruction
(after a drawing by G. Moller, 1811-13)

quently Schinkel initiated an inventory for objects, dating from before the mid-seventeenth century, based on criteria that appear to us now to be remarkably wide-ranging and modern. He regarded even townscapes as historical evidence and therefore worthy of protection. Schinkel proposed a survey of immobile as well as of mobile objects, to be carried out by a staff of volunteers with some specific local knowledge and education in history and the arts. The results would be documented in catalogues - the predecessors of our present inventories. Unfortunately this plan proved to be an absolute failure in realisation, because Schinkel had overestimated both the enthusiasm of the people he had thought of for the work as well as their qualifications.

Schinkel recognized also that restoration works had to be done in as careful and conservative a manner as possible; so he rejected reconstruction, because 'that
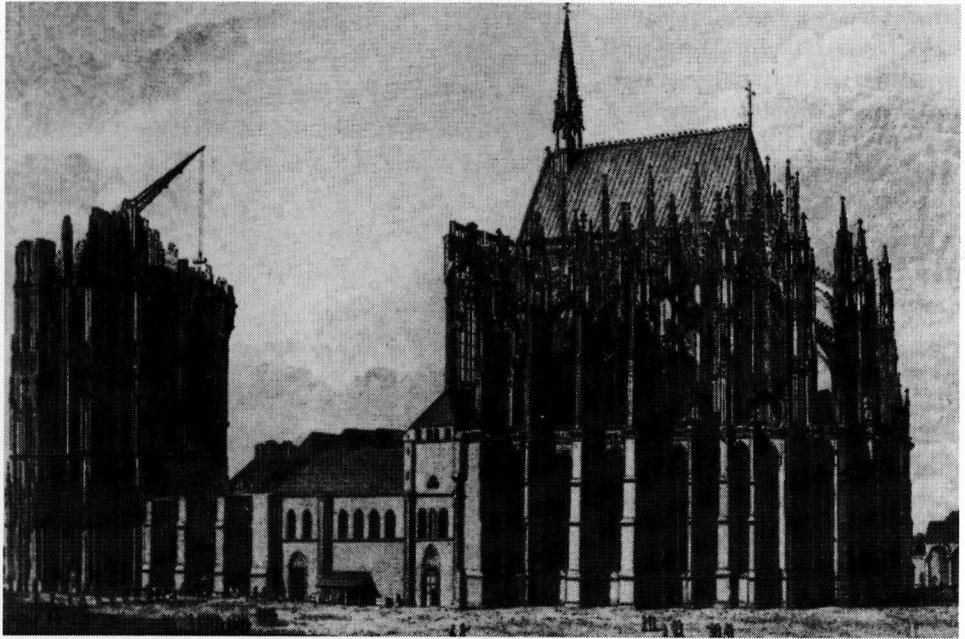
Fig. 4
The Cathedral of Cologne prior to the beginning of reconstruction in 1842
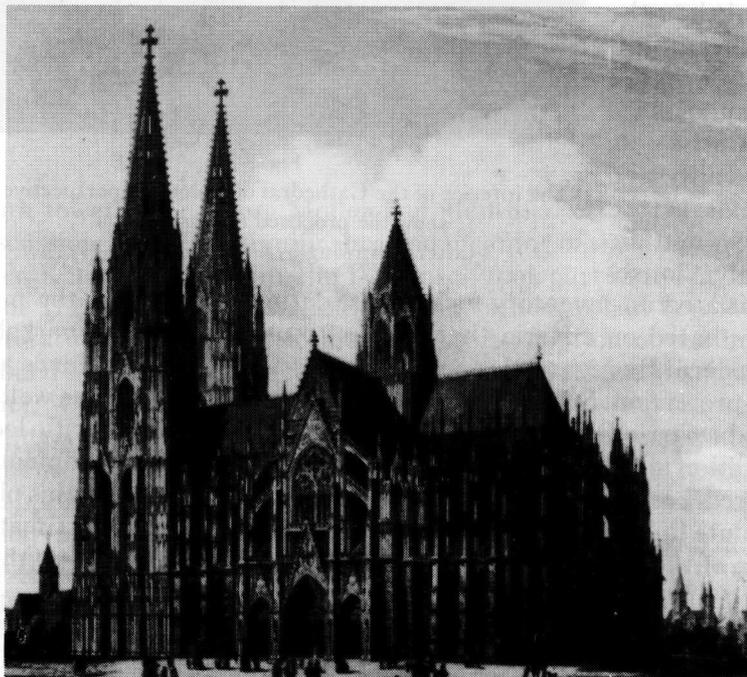(J. Poppel after E. Gerhardt)

Fig. 5
The Cathedral of
Cologne -
perspective to show
the proposed
reconstruction
(Chr. Buttendörfer
after A. Quaglio,
1842)

restoration is to be called the most perfect, that cannot be perceived after the improvement of the essential defects'.

But as important and prophetic as Schinkel's ideas about the heritage perhaps might have been, there was only small immediate effect. It was not until 1835 that competence in questions of monuments protection in Prussia changed from the buildings board (administration) to the ministry of culture. Schinkel's friend Franz Theodor Kugler criticised the situation in Prussia after a journey through France, where the effectiveness of dealing with the heritage had much impressed him. In Ferdinand von Quast, Prussia had from 1843 an apparently strongly placed conservator, but in effect he was quite powerless, because he lacked a large enough professional staff.

In 1858, von Quast criticised the desire in heritage protection to re-create the past after the idea of the present taste in a highly ahistorical manner. In the following years many more complaints were made about the loss of monuments and their appearance through ambitious and totally improper restorations.

One of the most important critics, probably Ludovic Vitet, reported in *Försters Allgemeine Bauzeitung* in 1852, in an article signed only 'LV', his analysis of the situation in Germany and noted that it was not sufficient for restoration to be ambitious and enthusiastic; knowledge about the history and development of the monument itself was required. It is significant that it was a Frenchman, who was given the job of formulating his impressions and ideas, because unlike Germany, in France there existed a capable official monuments preservation administration. Vitet had been in charge there since 1830 as *Inspecteur des Monuments Historiques*, followed by Prosper Mérimée in 1834. Attention in Germany was soon after directed towards France and Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, who started in 1835 as *auditeur* in the *Commission des Monuments Historiques* and followed Vitet as inspector, was to become synonymous with heritage protection, with a large influence on the German situation.

Viollet-le-Duc's idealistic ideas about the reconstruction of original structures were of pre-eminent importance for a tendency in Germany, which had begun earlier, but became more and more wide-spread in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was restoration carried out without an historical basis which aimed to achieve a picture of the monument at its time of construction. This tendency of *vandalisme restaurateur* resulted in the damage and loss of numerous monuments, comparable with the activities in England of Sir George Gilbert Scott. The controversal ideas of his antipode John Ruskin, first revealed in 1849 in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, remained unheard in Germany.

It took until the end of the century before a proper debate about methods of restoration began. It is manifested in the ruins of the old Palatine Palace of Heidelberg and culminated in a vigorous argument about its rebuilding. Once more the initial idea was political. The palace had been in ruins since its demolition by French troops in 1689 and 1693 (Fig.6). Following victory over France in 1871 many people saw in the ruin a national shame. They called for reconstruction (Fig. 7). The controversy between supporters of a rebuilding and their opponents engaged
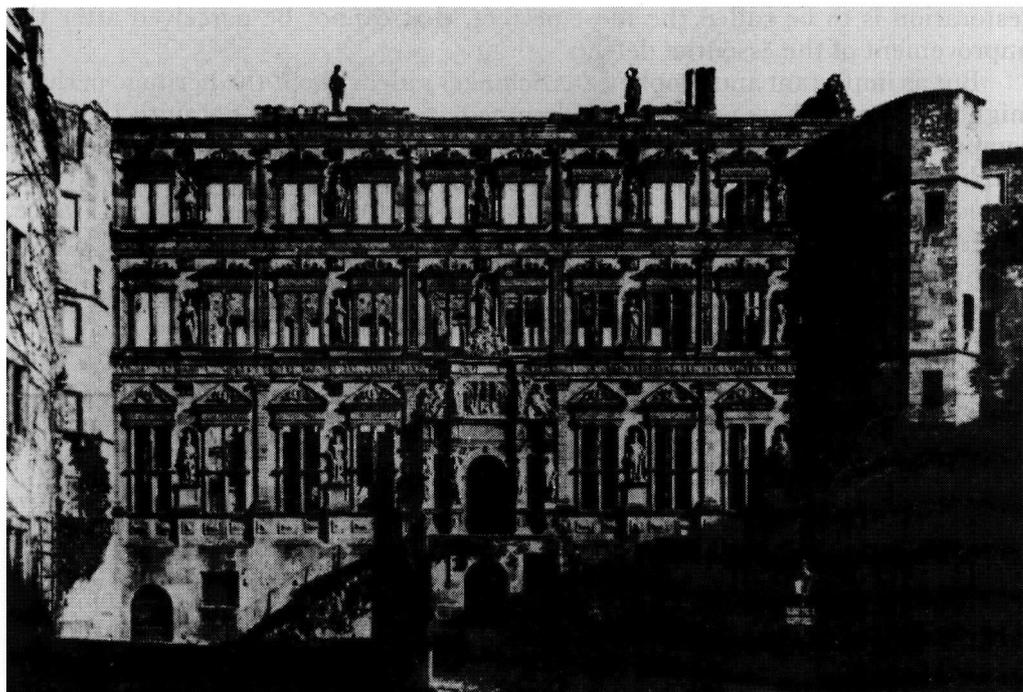
Fig. 6
The ruined Palatine Palace of Heidelberg, Ottheinrichsbau

all parts of the public, before the vehement argument at last resulted in a common agreement, that was articulated by Georg Dehio, who had been very much engaged in the controversial discussion: 'Konservieren, nicht restaurieren'. This formula - the first duty being to preserve the monument - incorporated the ideas of almost all the important German conservators and art historians and it became the principal guideline for heritage preservation in Germany in the twentieth century.

Meanwhile the nineteenth century had seen the definition of the principles of the documentation of monuments on the basis of different interests and various inventory forms. Beginning with Friedrich Gilly's book, illustrated with aquatints, on the castle of Marienburg, and the opus about the cathedral of Cologne by the brothers Boisserée (1823), the monuments monograph was born, to be followed by numerous other volumes about different objects up to the present day. The extensive work by Dehio and Bezold, *Die kirchliche Baukunst des Abendlandes* (1884-1901), is a splendid example of the type of corpus which continues to be produced on, for example, urban houses (*Das Deutsche Bürgerhaus*, since 1959), church bells (*Der Deutsche Glockenatlas*, since 1959), inscriptions (*Deutsche Inschriften*, since 1942) and, within the international context, stained glass windows (*Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi*, since 1955).

The topographical inventory provided the professional answer to the problem

Fig. 7
The first
proposal for the
reconstruction
of the Palatine
Palace of
Heidelberg
(C. Schäfer,
1900)
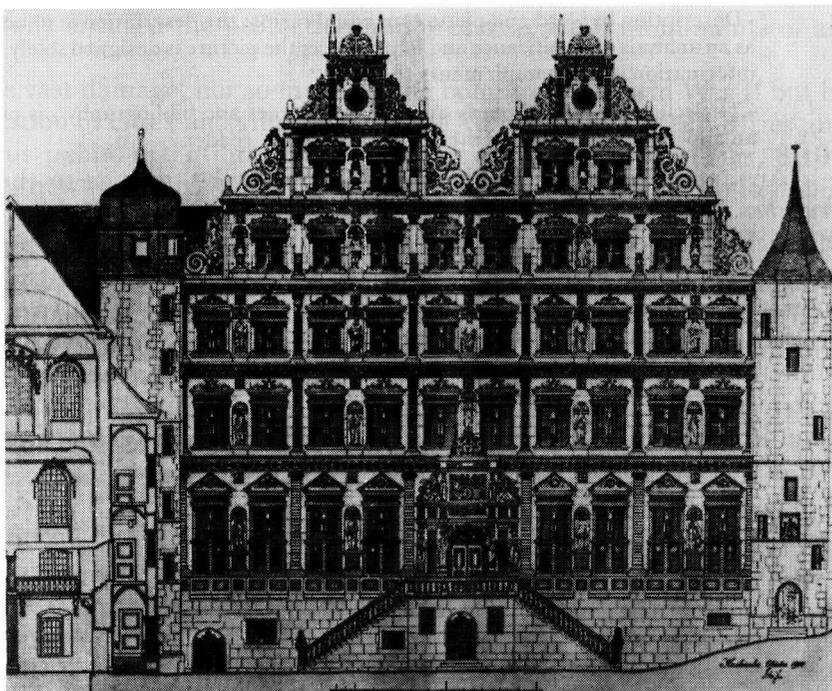
of listing monuments, following the failure to achieve the desired effect by employing laymen. This serious enterprise is the most advanced form of German monuments documentation up to the present. The ambitious scientific method has attempted to describe the monuments in a more and more comprehensive way. This approach eventually brought it into crisis, because of the extensive time and resources required to achieve results. The first volume, *Die Baudenkmäler im Regierungsbezirk Cassel*, came out in 1870, just after Hessen - Kassel had become a Prussian province. It was followed in 1877-92 by *Kunst und Altertum in Elsaß-Lothringen*, after the annexation of this territory. Both examples demonstrate the political interest in attempting to forward the integration of the new parts of the country by asserting a common historical identity. In this work Paul Clemen defined those principles about inventorisation that have become fundamental:

- The character and value of the ancient object: the monument is to be interpreted as an important historical source.

- The completeness of presentation: the inventory should document all known and defined monuments.

- The topographical approach: the object is regarded as part of an ensemble such as a town or a village.

- A hierarchical structure: the objects are to be evaluated and described in terms of their historical and artistic importance, with monumental buildings such as churches being placed first.

- Description by word and picture on equal terms: the description is to be regarded as an analysis of significance and importance; the picture is designed solely to provide information which complements the text.

- The scientific and scholarly apparatus - sources and bibliography - is provided in an appendix as a basis for the orientation of the reader.

An important place in the German inventory belongs to the *Handbuch der deutschen Kunstdenkmaler,* which was founded in 1900 by Georg Dehio, the first edition of which appeared in 1905 and has continued up to the present in a series of regularly revised volumes. The 'Dehio' offers a rapid coverage of the most important monuments of art and architecture, utilising the most up-to-date research findings. It was the model for Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's *Buildings of England*. In this tradition, numerous volumes of *Kunstdenkmälerinventare* have been compiled about different territories in Germany – the latest about Bamberg in Bavaria and Schwäbisch-Gmünd in Baden-Württemberg, both of which are multi-volume works in progress. But discussion about their future is now open.
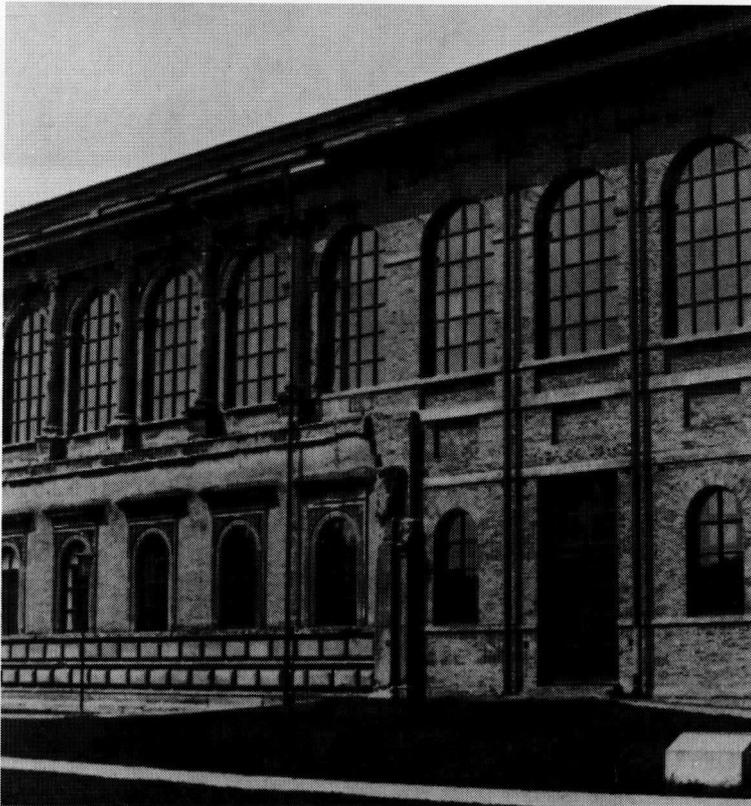
The other tendency initiated during the nineteenth century was the enactment of legislation for monuments protection in various German territories. The laws and regulations of *c*.1800 were followed by laws in Bavaria in 1835 and Lübeck in 1837-8. Prussia further organized its heritage protection by decrees in 1892 and 1904, and by the law of 1909; Sachsen enacted legislation in 1894, Hessen in 1902, Braunschweig and Oldenburg in 1911, and Hamburg in 1921. After that, the constitution of the Republic of

Fig. 8
Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Detail of the south façade after rebuilding in the 1950s

Weimar generally ensured the protection and preservation of monuments of art and history.

It took the vast damage, not so much by the bombing of World War II but by the modernisation of cities and villages after the War in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, to focus public attention on the huge loss of monuments (Figs. 8-10). Consequently a new legislative wave, that all federal states of the Federal Republic of Germany went through, began in the seventies.

The German Democratic Republic had enacted heritage protection legislation in 1952, but the effect of the law always depended on political interest, which was small, and material resources, which were poor. Since unification, the new federal states, coming out of the former GDR, have given themselves their own new protection laws, largely adapted from those of the western federal states.

The new legislation has afforded a new strategy for inventorisation, since not all objects to be protected were known. As in other countries the answer was rapid survey. On this occasion the process had to reflect the increase in the number of eligible objects that had followed the discussions of the early twentieth century, carried out in Germany by Alois Riegl and Georg Dehio about the conception of the monument as a material historical document in the most far-reaching sense. Beyond that it had to be borne in mind that the evolution of monuments involves the consideration of the public interest, allowing for the interpretation of the important qualities of the object by experts without having recourse to a plebiscite.

Currently, evaluation is done autonomously by the inventory departments in the federal states, based on survey work. Generally, it does not have to be approved by a higher political authority. If necessary, revision of these decisions to protect may possibly be done by the courts, advised by neutral experts.

Economic life in the nineteen-fifties was characterised by boom as rebuilding took place in the extensively war-damaged cities; the sixties were marked by even bigger booms in modernisation, changing the individual and characteristic appearance of cities and villages, as they adapted to modern economic conditions and methods of production.

The 'monuments topography', begun in 1980, was developed as a means to explain to the public why objects were considered to be worthy of protection. This documentation went beyond the limited information produced for listing and provided comments on the quality and importance of individual monuments and sites, not only in terms of their intrinsic value, but also in the context of their geographical situation, their historical development and in their relation to each other and their surroundings. This series of published volumes has become quite popular in Germany and has been adopted by many *Landesdenkmalämter* to complement their monuments lists.

Some remarks about the organisation and staffing of inventorisation and documentation in the *Landesdenkmalämter* will conclude this essay. Inventory generally forms part of the duties within a *Landesdenkmalamt*, organised as a department, and is in close contact with the staff responsible for practical preservation work. This connection, with its potential influences, is often not without consequences for the

Fig. 9
Prinzipalmarkt, Münster, before its destruction in World War II (1885/90)

Fig. 10
Prinzipalmarkt, Münster, after rebuilding in 1960

objectives of the inventory. Dependent on the size of the federal states, the staff of a department varies from two to twenty; it may include art, architectural, technical and garden historians, as well as experts in folklore and urban planning. The larger departments also have their own technical equipment and staff for photography, photogrammetry and graphics. Some years ago this technical staff was increased by the addition of computer specialists, responsible for the operation of the databank, although this technology is still not very much in use in survey and documentation work. At present, Germany looks enviously at such large, well organised and computerized documentation centres as are run by the French *Inventaire Général* or the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England.

Most of the large amount of information, gathered over more than 200 years by German heritage specialists is not only dispersed in various places, but it is also poorly organised and out of the reach of both the public and the professionals. An integration and making available of these important treasures for the purposes of monuments inventory, documentation and preservation is very much needed. The generation of a databank system for this purpose is now one of the most important requirements of the German inventory.

For improvements such as this and to increase the popularity of the heritage we need to have the public interest, political engagement and the example of prominent persons who identify themselves with the inventorisation and preservation of monuments. This seems to be a tradition in England, exemplified for instance by the practical work of the National Trust, and by the example of such eminent persons as His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales who gives an imprimatur to heritage activities.

The history of German heritage protection and inventory reflects German history in many ways, above all the many breaks and discontinuities in the political and cultural tradition. The treatment of the demolished Frauenkirche in Dresden, rebuilt forty years after the end of the War and some years after the breakdown of the German Democratic Republic is symptomatic. By reconstructing the lost original, we risk forgetting history and thereby ignoring it. The discussion about the ideology of restoration recalls the arguments of a century ago about the Palatine Palace of Heidelberg. This discussion is not finished; perhaps it will never end.

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