

National Museums of Architecture: the Creation and Re-Creation of a New Type of National Museum in the 19th century, London and Paris

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This paper discusses the worldwide rise of national museums of architecture in the shape of architectural casts museums in the second half of the nineteenth century, through case studies chosen in Britain (the Architectural Courts at the South Kensington Museum) and in France (the Museum of Comparative Sculpture).

The two national museums were born from emulation either with independent societies or from competition between the two nations as regards the creation of museums. Cross-Channel exchanges of ideas therefore helped define different modalities of the national museum of architecture.

The study cases show that different missions were endorsed by the various museums, ranging from educational to envisioning the notion of heritage and the history of art, and the prioritization of any one mission was the result of native disciplinary context, depending on whether the collection was part of a museum of a broader scope or constituted in itself a museum in its own right.

The acquisition policies of the two museums also allow analyzing the representation of national identities on both shores of the Channel, and re-evaluate the usual distinction made between British imperialism and French nationalism to define two tendencies: an imperialistic universalism in Britain and an expansionist nationalism in France.

Introduction

The 19th century saw the rise of a new type of national museum in the Occident from the mid-19th century onwards, as evidenced by the creation of national architectural museums or collections in Europe and the United States. This international phenomenon can be broached upon by comparing early case studies in Britain and France, namely on the one hand the Architectural Courts at the South Kensington Museum in London and on the other, the Musée de Sculpture Comparée (Museum of Comparative Sculpture) in Paris. The parallel history of their collections seems to offer an interesting insight into the peculiar moment of emergence and definition of that new type of museum, which would subsequently spread across Europe. The comparison is particularly relevant in that these museums were born from cross-Channel exchanges of ideas: their respective founders were well-aware of similar initiatives in other countries, and used the reference to a foreign pre-existing museum to advocate for the creation of a national museum of their own.¹ However, the spirit of these exchanges seems to have been one of rejection more than of imitation, and each new museum stressed its difference from and superiority over the model to which it referred. In that respect, although at first sight these museums seem to form a homogenous model, a careful examination of their stories and principal features will reveal differences both structural and circumstantial. The first part of this essay will set the institutional context in which those museums emerged, and analyse the distinct relationships between private initiatives and public institutions – national museums. The second section will discuss the different aims that architectural museums decided to endorse and the relationship with the disciplinary fields of museum display, architectural education, art historiography and heritage preservation. The third part will finally address the issue of national identity as perceived through the diverging acquisition policies in both countries, owing to broader native self-representations of the nation.

Competition and Changing Institutional Contexts: from Private to Public Status

Two major national collections embodied the concept of the architectural museum in Britain and France in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first of these two architectural cast collection to be constituted in a national museum was that of the South Kensington Museum, which opened its Architectural Courts in 1872–1873 as part of the applied and fine art collection. The courts are still extant though altered, and are today known as the Casts Courts in the museum, which has been renamed Victoria and Albert Museum in 1899.² In Paris, an almost equivalent collection was put on display at the Museum of Comparative Sculpture, created in 1879 and opened in 1882 at the Palais du Trocadéro. It has been reopened once more in September 2007 after several years of rearrangement work and is now part of the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine in the same building as before.³

1 On this particular aspect, see Isabelle Flour, 'Inventions et réinventions du musée d'architecture, Londres – Paris – Liverpool, 1851–1887', in *De l'imitation dans les musées. La diffusion de modèles de musées en Europe, XIXe-XXIe siècles*, ed. by Hanna Murauskaya and Anne-Solène Rolland (Paris: L'Harmattan, forthcoming), Proceedings of the Conference held at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, 5–7 December 2007.

2 On the history of the South Kensington Museum, see in particular Anthony Burton, *Vision and Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publications, 1999); *A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, ed. by Malcolm Baker and Brenda Richardson (London and New York: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1997); Clive Wainwright, 'The Making of the South Kensington Museum', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 1 (2002), pp. 3–78.

3 On the history of the Museum of Comparative Sculpture and later Museum of French Monuments, and on the recent project of rearrangement, see the recent publication: *Le musée des monuments français*, ed. by Léon Pressouyre (Paris: Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, 2007).

Although these national institutions hosting architectural collections were dependent on governmental funding, they both had superseded private societies rooted in the preservationist movement. The preservationists would gain public recognition after the creation of these collections, with the vote of laws in favour of the preservation of historical monuments, respectively in 1882 in Britain (Lubbock's Ancient Monuments Protection Act) and in 1887 in France (the first law on Historical Monuments). One can nevertheless trace back the roots of these two national collections in the action of private societies.

The Aborted Nationalisation of a Private Collection in France in the 1850s

In France, the short-lived Société d'Archéologie Nationale, which gathered antiquaries and restorers such as Viollet-le-Duc, had first attempted in 1848 to secure premises for an existing collection of plaster casts.⁴ These architectural casts had been taken from medieval historical monuments mainly during restoration works. The promoters of this collection considered that it had a distinctive educational value to artists and artisans and was worth exhibiting at the national fine art school (Ecole des Beaux-Arts). But the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, whose academicism Viollet-le-Duc would bitterly criticize, was reluctant to admit medieval sculpture – a rival to the classical canon – and this first project failed.

It was then reactivated in 1855 by the same Viollet-le-Duc as head of an informal group of architects and restorers involved in restoration work for the Commission of Historical Monuments.⁵ The collection had grown substantially not only during restoration works but also more systematically as a result of casts being ordered by the Architectural Museum, a museum which will be discussed later in this paper.⁶ Once more, the project found no governmental support and the collection was eventually lost failing premises.

Nothing would be further achieved in that particular field in France until the creation of the Museum of Comparative Sculpture in 1879 by Viollet-le-Duc a few months before his death. While in France the government considered that supporting societies that claimed their independence was either useless or even risky, the situation was rather different in Britain. There the relationship between various museums displaying architectural casts seem to have been of a more cooperative spirit.

From Cohabitation to Competition: Independent Societies and Government in Britain

In Britain, at least two private institutions foreran the creation of the Architectural Courts at the South Kensington Museum: the Crystal Palace, which was moved and rearranged in the suburbs at Sydenham after the close of the Great Exhibition of 1851, to be reopened to the public in 1854, and the Architectural Museum which was housed at the South Kensington Museum from 1857 to 1869, and which fostered the project of a national collection of architecture.

The Architectural Museum was founded in London in 1851 by the Gothic Revivalist architect and restorer George Gilbert Scott and a handful of fellow architects.⁷ The museum took over part of the collection of a departed restorer, L. N. Cottingham, whose collection of

4 Archives des Musées Nationaux (hereafter AMN), 5HH9, Report of the Commission of Historical Monuments of 24 November 1848.

5 AMN, 5HH9, Letter by Viollet-le-Duc of 15 June 1855, and Report of the Commission of Historical Monuments of 30 June 1855.

6 AMN, 5HH9, Letter by Viollet-le-Duc of 15 June 1855.

7 For an account of the whole story of the Architectural Museum, see Edward Bottoms, 'The Royal Architectural Museum in the Light of New Documentary Evidence', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 1 (2007), pp. 115–39.

architectural casts had been sold at auction in 1851 four years after his death.⁸ As several appeals in the press had failed to obtain the acquisition by the government of Cottingham's collection, Scott and other architects had contributed towards the creation and upkeep of a collection of architectural casts. They believed that this collection, which enjoyed the support of most of the architectural profession by means of subscriptions, would be useful to the contemporary architectural output. The study of casts of gothic ornaments would help improve the quality of architectural ornaments in the revived gothic style, by educating the art-workmen who carved architectural sculptures.

For some years the Architectural Museum managed to keep its collection open to the public on an independent basis but soon the lack of funds threatened the existence of the museum. The Architectural Museum first applied for a governmental grant in 1854, but in 1856 instead of the renewal of their grant the Architectural Museum obtained temporary salvation in the shape of premises offered at South Kensington.

Indeed a new museum was to make a remarkable entrance into London's museum setting: formed around the nucleus of the Museum of Ornamental Art removed from central London, the powerful and governmental South Kensington Museum was to play a major part in the history of museums. Now known primarily as a museum of decorative arts, it gathered at its opening in 1857 a wide range of different independent collections beneath the same roof, from food or patents to educational and fine arts collections. The Architectural Museum was one of these independent museums hosted by the South Kensington to form part of this ambitiously encyclopaedic museum.

From its inception the Architectural Museum had intended to form the nucleus of a national collection of architectural art. Therefore the Architectural Museum could not miss this opportunity to complete the project, since the idea of a national museum of architecture had gained increasing appeal amongst the architectural profession. Indeed, as early as its opening in 1857, the South Kensington Museum became the tribune for a plea in favour of the creation of a national collection of architecture. An address on this topic was given in December 1857, and the lecturer was surprisingly James Fergusson, himself the director of the Crystal Palace.⁹ The Crystal Palace, opened in June 1854, housed ten monumental courts composed of architectural casts.¹⁰ Oddly enough, in his address, Fergusson, who was also a self-taught architectural historian, disqualified his own institution from a distinct role in the process of forming a national collection of architectural art, for he considered the Crystal Palace casts too heavily painted and too inaccurate to be of any scientific value and educational use. He also discredited the Architectural Museum whose display of architectural details was according to Fergusson "too exclusively mediaeval to perform, even in a limited degree, the functions of an institution to improve the taste of the nation".¹¹

This lecture by Fergusson was not followed by immediate action on the part of the South Kensington Museum whose priorities must have laid in original works of art, although casts and reproductions were often used as substitutes for originals that could not be acquired. The housing of the Architectural Museum was therefore a temporary substitute for the formation of an architectural collection of its own by the South Kensington Museum.

8 On L. N. Cottingham and his collection, see Janet Myles, 'L.N. Cottingham's Museum of Mediaeval Art: Herald of the Gothic Revival', *Visual Resources*, 3 (2001), pp. 253–87, and *L.N. Cottingham, 1787–1847, Architect of the Gothic Revival* (London: Lund Humphries, 1996), pp. 28–35.

9 James Fergusson, *On a National Collection of Architectural Art* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1857).

10 On the Crystal Palace, see Jan Piggott, *Palace of the People: the Crystal Palace at Sydenham 1854–1936* (London: Hurst, 2004).

11 James Fergusson, *On a National Collection of Architectural Art* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1857), p. 15.

But while the Architectural Museum and the South Kensington Museum had seemingly been reciprocally satisfied with their cohabitation in the first years, the claims of the Architectural Museum to become a national institution altered their peaceful relationship. As had been the case in France, the private institution was paradoxically claiming for public funding as well as independence of action on the grounds of public utility. Henry Cole, the director of the South Kensington Museum, was not prepared to see a competing institution dictate its views upon his own museum.

While the idea of a national collection of architecture was gaining momentum and provoked various proposals and public debates in the architectural press in the early 1860s, the tension between the two museums grew to the point that the Architectural Museum had to leave South Kensington and to find new premises. Henry Cole eventually decided in 1864 to create an architectural collection of his own, on principles completely different from the projects presented by the Architectural Museum. The new collection would, as it were, be half-way between the principles of the antiquarian Architectural Museum and those of the popular Crystal Palace: only monumental casts could be of interest to the general public, but they had to be indisputably faithful to the original to meet educational standards. Launched in 1864, the idea was not followed by a consistent acquisition policy until 1869 and the Architectural Courts eventually opened in 1872 and 1873.¹²

The emulation between the three existing institutions had therefore resulted in the creation of a new national collection of architecture and the end of the cooperation with the independent society. The Architectural Museum moved back to central London in 1869 and carried on its educational and specialised activities while losing a wide audience as well as public support. Ironically, in 1916 when the Architectural Museum collection ended up totally abandoned by its supporters in the architectural profession, it was taken over by the South Kensington Museum now renamed Victoria and Albert Museum and joined the upper galleries of the Architectural Courts.

International Competition and National Pride: The Founding of the Museum of Comparative Sculpture

While the national collection of architecture at the South Kensington Museum was the result of a competition between native institutions, that of the Trocadéro was the product of an emulation with Britain. As early as 1855, when Viollet-le-Duc had advocated for premises for the above-cited collection, he explicitly referred to the Architectural Museum collection while arguing that the British cared more for French architecture than France itself did.¹³ The reference to a foreign existing museum nurtured the idea that France was far behind Britain and therefore inferior: France had to fill the gap as soon as possible by creating a like museum. The argument was used again in 1879 and Viollet-le-Duc was now referring to the South Kensington Museum and the Crystal Palace in addition to the Architectural Museum.¹⁴ Nonetheless this reference did not involve admiration but rejection of the British models on the part of the French. Viollet-le-Duc thought these models could be improved, especially as regards scientific classification.¹⁵

12 On the intertwined histories of the Architectural Museum and the South Kensington Museum, see Isabelle Flour, ‘‘On the Formation of a National Museum of Architecture’’: Architectural Museum versus South Kensington Museum’, *Architectural History* (forthcoming).

13 AMN, 5HH9, Letter by Viollet-le-Duc of 15 June 1855.

14 Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Musée de Sculpture comparée appartenant aux divers Centres d’Art et aux diverses époques* (Paris: Bastien et Brondeau, 1879 [11 June]), pp. 1–2.

15 Ibid., pp. 2–3: ‘‘However, the classification of the sculptures deposited at the Crystal Palace or at the South Kensington is far from being comprehensive and methodic and, if we manage at last to gather documents of this kind suitable for study, we will have to proceed with a more severely critical attitude’’, my translation

This process of emulation was a result of rising competition between nation-states in the 19th century and could be best perceived through the development of international exhibitions which helped compare the productions of different nations, from the first Great Exhibition held in London in 1851. As one of the major roles assigned to international exhibitions was the improvement of artistic productions, those events were a strong impulse for the creation of educational institutions such as art schools and museums and for the constitution of international professional networks. Viollet-le-Duc had indeed met Henry Cole at the International Exhibition of London in 1862¹⁶, and at that of Paris in 1867 Henry Cole had furthermore set up a “Convention for Promoting Universally Reproductions of Works of Art for the Museums of All Countries” which was to have a lasting effect on the development of casts collections in museums all over Europe.¹⁷ The Convention was signed by a number of princes in Europe and various museums would carry on exchanges of reproductions for several decades. Therefore, although both national collections had had private origins rooted in the preservationist movement, they also resulted from different native histories: the national architectural collection was born in Britain from inner national competition, while that of France was born from international emulation.

Disciplinary Contexts and the Missions Assigned to Architectural Cast Museums

Other institutional differences can be pointed out as the result of native contexts rather than generic features: while in France the national Museum of Comparative Sculpture was a specialised museum independent from other art museums – it was placed under the authority of the Commission of Historical Monuments rather than that of the Direction of Museums, in Britain the national collection of architecture was part of a broader encyclopaedic and educational museum. This must have had a strong impact on the missions these museums assigned to themselves, ranging from artistic education to the making of heritage and the establishment of a scientific art history, according to the disciplinary context to which they belonged.

The Educational Value of Cast Collections

The first and foremost function of these national architectural museums was an educational role. The pedagogical role of casts in the artist’s education was rooted in the history of prior cast collections formed in the fine arts academies and schools of art. Plaster casts had always been in use and indeed some schools of art still hold them for use in teaching the drawing from the round. But the purpose of these 19th century national architectural collections was not only general teaching in drawing. In these particular cases, the cast collections were also considered as tri-dimensional repositories of models of ornament to be literally copied in the contemporary output. National museums shared this conception of the usefulness of cast collections with other independent museums such as Scott’s Architectural Museum above-mentioned or another architectural cast collection set up at the Walker Art Gallery by the Corporation of Liverpool.¹⁸

for: “Toutefois, la classification des sculptures déposées au South Kensington Museum est loin d’être complète et méthodique & si nous parvenons enfin à réunir les documents de cet ordre propres à l’étude, il faudra procéder suivant une critique plus sévère.”

16 National Art Library, Henry Cole Diaries, 22 May 1862.

17 *Fifteenth Report of the Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education* (London: HMSO, 1868), p. 24.

18 On the architectural cast collection at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, see Isabelle Flour, ‘Inventions et réinventions du musée d’architecture, Londres – Paris – Liverpool, 1851–1887’, in *De l’imitation dans les*

In the case of national museums their cast collection had however a broader educational scope, since these museums were actually part of the educational system and formed the core of a network for the diffusion of casts in schools of art.

The forerunner of the South Kensington Museum, the Museum of Ornamental Art, had been created to support educational tasks carried out in the pre-existing Schools of Design. The Museum already comprised a collection of casts, though not properly architectural, which would be further developed when relocated at South Kensington. From the 1850s onwards the museum cast collection was also the central repository for the diffusion of ornamental models through the network of governmental schools of art and of branch museums placed under the authority of the Board of Education. There were inner workshops and outer firms as Brucciani that took on the reproduction and sale of such models of ornament across the country. While this diffusion of models by means of casts had been wide-ranging and long-lasting in Britain, the French situation was not as dynamic as the British system.

Only in the 1890s and 1900s did the Museum of Comparative Sculpture become the core of a restricted scheme of diffusion decided by the government, which would then send a standard set of twelve selected casts to any recognised school of art.¹⁹ However, the reproductions workshop of the Museum of Comparative Sculpture had from the start sold casts of exhibits in the museum, but this distribution nonetheless relied essentially on orders made by individuals and schools rather than on a definite governmental policy. The Museum of Comparative Sculpture had however a proper educational scheme of a narrower scope. From 1887 onwards, the museum housed a specialised training programme for architects who were to be employed on restoration works by the Commission of Historical Monuments. This course still co-exists with the museum at present.

The Making of Heritage in the Eyes of the General Public

These two national museums also invested themselves with a mission that private museums, apart maybe from the Crystal Palace, had on the whole neglected, that of creating for the general public a tri-dimensional imagery of heritage. This had an impact on the museum display: while a strictly educational purpose could be satisfied by means of casts of fragments, the two national museums attempted to embody the very notion of heritage by reproductions of full-sized monuments. The South Kensington Museum and the Museum of Comparative Sculpture would therefore use a popular and spectacular display of monumental casts, although they were careful about the faithfulness of reproductions, unlike the Crystal Palace. Both museums therefore used, on the whole, a broad framing of the casts taken (i.e. whole portals or gateways in both museums, or even a cast of the Trajan column split in two parts at the South Kensington Museum) to help contextualise the whole monument in its broader context. In addition, photographs were placed besides the casts, so that the visitor would imagine the monument from which the casts were taken.

Moreover, the fact that museums had from their inception been conceived as repositories for masterpieces served the aims of the preservationists: reproductions helped increase the ‘exhibitional value’²⁰ of works remained unknown from the general public, and helped justify

musées. La diffusion de modèles de musées en Europe XIXe-XXIe siècles, ed. by Hanna Murauskaya and Anne-Solène Rolland (Paris: L’Harmattan, forthcoming), Proceedings of the Conference held at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, 5–7 December 2007. See also the only catalogue of this collection: Corporation of Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, *Catalogue of the Museum of Casts, Architectural and Sculptural* (Liverpool: C. Tinling & Co, 1887).

19 AMN, 5HH12, proceedings of the Sous-Commission du Musée de Sculpture Comparée of 2 October 1899, and letter to the ‘préfets’ of 3 June 1901.

20 Walter Benjamin, *L’œuvre d’art à l’époque de sa reproductibilité technique* (Paris: Allia, 2003, French translation of the 1939 version).

the need for a preservation of the originals *in situ* in promoting their reproductions at the rank of a masterpiece in the museum.

Therefore in both cases the museums were related to and in some way legitimised undertakings aimed at improving the knowledge and preservation of architectural heritage. At the South Kensington Museum, there was no formal link with preservation societies nor with the first law on historical monuments that would appear far later, in 1882 with Lubbock's Act. But Henry Cole himself had decided that the museum should be the impulse for the discovery of heritage, in a way similar to tourism and colonial conquest. Henry Cole and his museum officers had gone on what might truly be called exploration journeys in Italy, Germany, Belgium, Spain, and India.²¹ These extensive cultural visits aimed both at purchasing originals and ordering reproductions for the museum, and at preparing a tantalizingly encyclopaedic *Universal Inventory of Works of Art*, which would be published in several volumes by the museum.²² As for India, the undertaking was closely linked with a governmental institution, the Archaeological Survey of India, of which Cole's own son was an officer.²³ Some of the most spectacular architectural casts from India were also displayed as a major attraction of the London International Exhibition of 1871, the first of a series of several exhibitions organised in London by Henry Cole, who had already masterminded the London exhibitions of 1851 and 1862, and who Bonython and Burton rightly nicknamed the 'Great Exhibitor'.²⁴

At the Museum of Comparative Sculpture it was more humbly national heritage that was unveiled to the general public, and the great majority of casts was taken from buildings protected by the Commission of Historical Monuments. The network of architectural heritage surveyors set up by the Commission helped identify works to be reproduced, and very often restoration works provided additional opportunities for casting operations, without additional cost for erecting scaffoldings. The museum display also tended to contextualise exhibits, and monumental portals were gradually multiplied. Some of them were even reconstructed after some years, as was the case with the portal of the church of Moissac: at first, only a few fragments of it had been cast, and later the casting of other parts was carried out to reconstruct the portal as a whole in the museum.²⁵ The aim of the Commission was to convey to the

21 On Henry Cole's journeys in Europe, see in particular Christopher Whitehead, 'Henry Cole's European Travels and the Buildings of the South Kensington Museum in the 1850s', *Architectural History*, 48 (2005), pp. 207–34, and 'Aesthetic Otherness, Authenticity, and the Roads to Museological Appropriation: Henry Cole's Travel Writing and the Making of the Victoria and Albert Museum', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 10 (2006), pp. 1–26.

22 On this particular point, see Isabelle Flour, 'On the Formation of a National Museum of Architecture': Architectural Museum versus South Kensington Museum', *Architectural History* (forthcoming).

23 On Henry Hardy Cole's travels in India, see: Partha Mitter, 'The Imperial Collections: Indian Art', in *A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, ed. by Malcolm Baker and Brenda Richardson, pp. 222–229 (p. 225); Maria Antonella Pelizzari, 'From Stone to Paper: Photographs of Architecture and the Traces of History', in *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850–1900*, ed. by Maria Antonella Pelizzari (Montréal and New Haven: Canadian Centre for Architecture and Yale Center for British Art, 2003), pp. 22–57 (pp. 34–38); Tim Barringer, 'The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project', in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850–1900*, ed. by Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 11–27 (pp. 17–20); Isabelle Flour, 'On the Formation of a National Museum of Architecture': Architectural Museum versus South Kensington Museum', *Architectural History* (forthcoming).

24 Elizabeth Bonython, Anthony Burton, *The Great Exhibitor: The Life and Work of Henry Cole* (London: V&A Publications, 2003).

25 On the museography of the Museum of Comparative Sculpture, see Isabelle Flour, 'Style, Nation, Patrimoine: du Musée de Sculpture Comparée au Musée des Monuments Français, 1879–1937', in *Stratégies identitaires de conservation et de valorisation du patrimoine*, ed. by Jean-Claude Nemery, Michel Rautenberg and Fabrice Thuriot (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), pp. 33–41, and 'Style, Heritage,

visitor the tri-dimensional sensitive experience of architectural heritage, at a time when extensive travel was not yet allowed by the developing railway network. The making of the aesthetic value of heritage by means of its museumization was therefore the best way to publicize and justify the preservation work led by the Commission of Historical Monuments. The first law in favour of the protection of historical monuments was not voted until 1887, and at that time it was still unsuccessful to protect monuments against the right for individual owners to alter their architectural properties, however ancient they were. Some decades later, the First World War would give evidence that the museum casts conveyed not only the image of heritage, but also the commemorative values attached to it: when the cathedral of Reims was hit by German bombs in 1914, the museum casts became the support of a narrative directed to the ‘imagined community’ of the nation.²⁶ The curator of the museum placed labels mentioning that the original sculptures had been destroyed by the Germans, and this process was part of the immense international propaganda directed against the Germans, making them new ‘Vandals’ and atavic enemies of the civilization. Therefore the Museum of Comparative Sculpture had become a ‘site of memory’ in its own right, where mourning was made the cement for national cohesion against the enemy.

The Establishment of a Scientific History of Art

While the South Kensington Museum had not developed a consistent theory of art history as a museum narrative, it was though the principal goal of the Museum of Comparative Sculpture. This was a specific feature of Viollet-le-Duc’s idiosyncratic project, and casts would serve the ambition of a visual history of art without any lacks. Casts allowed the representation in the museum rooms of works of art now rendered unmovable from their original site, or rendered inaccessible by their market value or by their being already acquired by other museums.

Instead of displaying the final result of a scientific process, i.e. a taxonomy or classification of schools of art, Viollet-le-Duc rather displayed the method of art history, that is to say the comparative method that gave its hermetic title to the museum.²⁷ Viollet-le-Duc’s so-called scientific history of art was based on paradigms borrowed from antagonists theories in the field of natural history: comparative anatomy and evolutionist theories. The scheme he conceived was unsurprisingly the translation to museum display of theories he had already extensively discussed in his varied publications, such as the *Dictionnaire raisonné de*

Nation: from the Musée de Sculpture Comparée to the Musée des Monuments Français’, in *Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, forthcoming), Proceedings of the Conference held in Durham, 15–17 September 2006.

- 26 On polemics and propaganda during the First World War as regards the bombing of Reims Cathedral, see Nicola Lambourne, ‘Production versus Destruction: Art, World War I and Art History’, *Art History* 22, no. 3 (1999), pp. 347–63; Michela Passini, ‘Martirio e resurrezione di Reims. Dispute novecentesche su una cattedrale’, in *Arti e storia nel Medioevo. Volume quarto. Il Medioevo al passato e al presente*, ed. by Enrico Castelnuovo and Giuseppe Sergi (Torino, Giulio Einaudi, 2004), pp. 571–87; Yann Harlaut, *La Cathédrale de Reims du 4 septembre 1914 au 10 juillet 1938. Idéologies, controverses et pragmatisme* (Ph.D. diss., Université de Reims, 2006); Isabelle Flour, ‘Les historiens de l’art français et le vandalisme allemand: la cathédrale de Reims au coeur de la propagande de guerre’, in *Actes du 132e congrès national des sociétés historiques et scientifiques: Images et Imagerie* (forthcoming, online publication). On nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).
- 27 On Viollet-le-Duc’s schemes, see Isabelle Flour, ‘Les moulages du Musée de Sculpture comparée: Viollet-le-Duc et l’histoire naturelle de l’art’, in *L’artiste savant à la conquête du monde moderne*, ed. by Anne Lafont (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, forthcoming), Proceedings of the Conference *Le concours de l’image dans les sciences du vivant. Flore, faune, humain : formes et propos de l’illustration scientifique*, held in Paris, 15–17 March 2007. On Viollet-le-Duc and natural history, see Laurent Baridon, *L’imaginaire scientifique de Viollet-le-Duc* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996).

l'architecture française, or the *Entretiens sur l'architecture*.²⁸ The display gathered works from different schools of art in the same rooms, instead of separating the various schools of art as had been usual from the 18th century onwards. This gathering allowed the comparison of works of art distant in time and space in order that the visitor would detect the analogies in the processes of evolution in the different schools of art. The evolution he wanted to point out, which comprised the phases of archaism, classicism, and mannerism, was inspired by the notion of a 'cycle', as had been defined earlier by Winckelmann. Within the museum rooms it implied that in the first rooms medieval French sculptures were compared to classical works of art (Greek, Assyrian, Egyptian) and that in the following rooms sculptures from the end of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were compared to contemporary works from Italy, Germany and Spain.²⁹ This conception of a scientific history of art seems to have remained truly unique and did not find any echo in Britain.³⁰ Even in France, Viollet-le-Duc's project was soon to be misunderstood: as early as the opening in 1882, the comparative display was severely criticised in the press. The art critic and historian Louis Gonse, though agreeing with the establishment of French medieval architecture at the first rank of history of art, however stated: "The theory is at least ingenious but it is impossible to admit its strict conclusions. Its written version seems to be justified, but its vices are too manifest in practice [...] The analogies of style and execution are purely circumstantial; they are not at all evident nor structural."³¹ The Commission of Historical Monuments kept the elaborate comparative scheme only in respectful memory of their late master, but it was eventually abandoned in 1903 when the museum returned to a more usual display separating the various schools of art.

Acquisition Policies and Representations of the Self and the Other

A common Ground: the Preference for the Primitive

In spite of these different missions, the two national museums also conveyed different representations of the self and the other, whether explicitly or implicitly. Literature on the topic has often opposed French nationalism to British imperialism. While this is partially true, there is one ground less obvious and related to the history of taste that was common to both museums, that is the preference for the primitive.³² In this respect, these two national collections began departing from the mainstream of classical cast collections that had been

28 Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française* (Paris: Bance and afterwards Morel, 1854–1868, 10 volumes) and *Entretiens sur l'architecture* (Paris: Morel, 1863–1872, 2 volumes).

29 Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Musée de Sculpture comparée appartenant aux divers Centres d'Art et aux diverses époques* (Paris: Bastien et Brondeau, 1879 [11 June]), and *Musée de la Sculpture Comparée. 2e Rapport* (Paris: Bastien et Brondeau, 1879 [12 July]).

30 It should be noted however, that the Liverpool's collection of casts was explicitly modelled on the example of Viollet-le-Duc's Museum of Comparative Sculpture. Several large extracts of Viollet-le-Duc's two reports for the Trocadéro museum were translated in P. H. Rathbone, 'The Museum of Casts', in Corporation of Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, *Catalogue of the Museum of Casts, Architectural and Sculptural* (Liverpool: C. Tinling & Co, 1887), pp. iii-xii. However, Rathbone thought that 'the foregoing scheme, though admirable, would probably be too elaborate for this city, and besides makes no sufficient provision for the English schools of Gothic architecture' (p. vii).

31 My translation for: "La théorie est tout au moins ingénieuse; il nous est cependant impossible d'en accepter les conclusions dans leur rigueur. Elle a fort bon air sur le papier, mais ses vices sautent aux yeux. [...] Les analogies de style et d'exécution sont purement accidentelles; elles n'ont aucun accent d'évidence et de continuité", cf. Louis Gonse, 'Le Musée des Moulages au Trocadéro', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 26 no. 301 (1882, July), pp. 60–72 (pp. 63–66).

32 Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive: Episodes in the History of Western Taste and Art* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2002).

widespread for two centuries. The Architectural Courts at the South Kensington Museum and the Museum of Comparative Sculpture both focused on the illustration of the relationship between architecture and its sculpted ornamentation, and the overall goal pursued was to foster a style of architecture in which ornament would be closely intertwined with its architectural structure. This particularly echoed long-lasting theories of organicism in architecture evolved from the Renaissance onwards.³³ Therefore rather than a preference for classical sculpture in the round easily separated from its architectural context, these two national collections would particularly reflect the taste for the primitive, be it distant in time (medieval) or distant in space (oriental).

At the Museum of Comparative Sculpture, the acquisition policy favoured from the start medieval architecture, which represented about 80% of the collections, and particularly 13th century French architecture, as it was considered by Viollet-le-Duc the best period of Gothic style.³⁴ While Viollet-le-Duc's museum never intended to embrace oriental architecture, there was another cast museum in the Trocadéro: the Indochinese Museum, which displayed original sculptures as well as casts from Indochina. Although funded by the government this museum did not have the same pretensions to become a national museum and had always encountered great difficulty to sustain itself. Therefore the parallel between oriental and medieval architecture at the Trocadéro was the result of chance instead of a purpose-built scheme.

On the contrary at the South Kensington Museum, both occidental and oriental casts were acquired by the same institution and paralleled in the two Architectural Courts: one of them was devoted mainly to casts taken in India, and the other court gathered medieval and to a lesser extent modern casts, from various European countries.³⁵ There remained at the South Kensington Museum a collection of ancient and Renaissance classical casts, but it was displayed apart and did not belong to the Architectural Courts. Although one of the Courts is now dedicated to Italian Casts, they supplanted the Indian Casts in the 1880s – therefore these did not belong to Cole's initial grand design for the Architectural Courts.

Besides this overall similarity between the two museums as regards the taste for the primitive, the attitudes towards the representation of the self and the other were quite divergent in both museums. As will be seen, in that respect, the usual distinction between nationalism and imperialism should be balanced by another opposition between inclusion and exclusion.

Gothic Revival and Nationalist Ideology

As well as Scott's Architectural Museum, Viollet-le-Duc's museum focused on medieval architecture, as a result of the Gothic Revival in which they were both rooted. But in the case of the Museum of Comparative Sculpture, the glorification of medieval architecture presented a less practical utility and a more ideological stake, i.e. demonstrating the greatness of national art. While the South Kensington Museum also comprised casts of medieval

33 Caroline Van Eck, *Organicism in Nineteenth-Century Architecture: an Inquiry into its Theoretical and Philosophical Background* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura Press, 1994).

34 For example, in 1883 there were only 71 casts of foreign works out of a total 358. In 1910, 276 of 1805 casts were of foreign works. See *Catalogue des sculptures, appartenant aux divers centres d'art et aux diverses époques, exposées dans les galeries du Trocadéro* (Paris: Palais du Trocadéro, 1883) and Camille Enlart and Jules Roussel, *Catalogue général du Musée de Sculpture Comparée au Palais du Trocadéro (moulages)* (Paris: Picard, 1910).

35 For a list of items displayed in the Architectural Courts at their opening, see John Hungerford Pollen, *A Description of the Architecture and Monumental Sculpture in the South-East Court of the South Kensington Museum* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1874).

architecture, it did not over-represent English architecture as compared to the other schools of art.

On the contrary, at the Museum of Comparative Sculpture the core of the collection was made up of casts of national architecture. Against all expectations the comparative display was not meant to be encyclopaedic in any way. The comparison first served the definition of ‘national art’, of the Self against the Other: labels of different colours were placed alongside the casts: yellow labels for ‘French’ casts and grey labels for ‘foreign’ casts.³⁶ Therefore the coloured labelling helped the visitor to include and unite the several regional schools of art ‘in one bundle’, in Viollet-le-Duc’s words, i.e. French art, and to exclude the other schools of art as ‘foreign’, in the same way as the coded colours on a map delimit a country from its neighbours.³⁷

In addition, the display largely favoured French art which held the lion’s share of the collections and as it were ‘crushed’ the antique and foreign schools of art by its numerical superiority and monumental size. Not only were the French casts more numerous than the others, they were also the very core of the museum narrative: it was the only school to pursue, in the eyes of the visitors, a complete cycle without any phase of decline (whereas all other schools of art, even the Greek school that was the indisputable canon of art, were supposed to have known their decline era more rapidly than the French school did).³⁸

The superiority of French art could therefore be perceived through the duration of its cycle as compared to the short-lived other schools of art, according to Viollet-le-Duc’s history of art. Louis Gonse could therefore write at the opening of the museum in 1882: “Sculpture represents – with architecture, of which it is only the complement – our national art. From the beginning of the 11th century to the present, the chain is unbroken; there are no ups and downs in its evolution; it conserves all its vigour and extends to all branches; the art of sculpture is our purest, surest glory”.³⁹ This largely reflected the nationalistic way in which history of art was written in France. Moreover the comparison served the establishment of hierarchies. Surprisingly enough, some acquisitions were even decided in this perspective, even though the works of art were considered to be inferior in quality: such was the case of some of the Italian casts, which were acquired because they were thought to be inferior to French art: “The statue of Charles of Anjou is the illustration of the state of art in Italy in the 13th century. This is indeed by far inferior to sculptures made in France at that time. [...] The comparison will serve to make clear to the public that in the 12th and 13th centuries French sculpture was by far superior to Italian sculpture.”⁴⁰

36 Archives du Musée des Monuments Français (hereafter AMMF), Proceedings of the Sous-Commission du Musée de Sculpture Comparée, 26 April 1882.

37 Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Musée de Sculpture comparée appartenant aux divers Centres d’Art et aux diverses époques* (Paris: Bastien et Brondeau, 1879 [11 June]), p. 6.

38 On Viollet-le-Duc’s conception of the museum display, see Isabelle Flour, ‘Les moulages du Musée de Sculpture comparée: Viollet-le-Duc et l’histoire naturelle de l’art’, in *L’artiste savant à la conquête du monde moderne*, ed. by Anne Lafont (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, forthcoming), Proceedings of the Conference *Le concours de l’image dans les sciences du vivant. Flore, faune, humain : formes et propos de l’illustration scientifique*, held in Paris, 15–17 March 2007.

39 My translation for: “La sculpture représente, avec l’architecture, dont elle n’est d’ailleurs que le complément, notre art national. Depuis le commencement du XI^e siècle jusqu’à l’époque actuelle, la chaîne est ininterrompue; l’évolution n’a point d’éclipse; la sève conserve toute sa vigueur et s’étend dans tous les rameaux; l’art de la sculpture est notre gloire la plus pure, la plus certaine”, cf. Louis Gonse, ‘Le Musée des Moulages au Trocadéro’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 26 no. 301 (1882, July), pp. 60-72 (p. 70).

40 My translation for: “la statue de Charles d’Anjou est la constatation de l’état de l’art en Italie au XIII^e siècle. Cette statue est en effet inférieure de beaucoup aux statues faites en France à cette époque [...] La comparaison qui en résultera ne servira qu’à mieux faire comprendre au public qu’aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles

From its inception the Museum of Comparative Sculpture held a definite nationalistic viewpoint based on the historic greatness of national art, where the South Kensington Museum or the Architectural Museum had had more universalistic views. Even the Architectural Museum, though focused on Medieval Architecture, admitted substantial collections of continental gothic casts, and the museum display did not intend, be it implicitly or explicitly, to establish hierarchies in favour of English architecture.⁴¹ If the Architectural Museum had conveyed nationalistic ideas, it is only to be found in the way it was thought that Britain was the country where the Gothic style would best be revived. Therefore, as national pride could be recovered in the present, the Architectural Museum did not need to rewrite the history of art in a biased way. It could without challenging the British self-esteem admit that the past continental styles of gothic were better or at least as good as the English Gothic.

Imperialist Universalism Versus Expansionist Nationalism

The acquisition policy of the South Kensington Museum was the exact contrary of that of the Museum of Comparative Sculpture. It was genuinely based on universalistic principles, even though the classical casts were kept aside from the architectural casts: one could argue that the size of the casts prevailed in the choice of their location, and the monumental space dedicated to the mediaeval and oriental casts was far from lowering their value. Moreover, within the two Architectural Courts, Mediaeval and Oriental Architecture were paralleled and placed on an equal footing, even though the parallel helped define by contrast the Orient as opposed to the Occident. Both medieval and oriental architecture were submitted to the same process of appropriation, which can be identified with actual imperialism in the case of India and with a form of cultural imperialism or pseudo-imperialism in the case of European heritage.

Malcolm Baker and Maria Antonella Pelizzari have described the same kind of appropriation by means of photographing, casting, publicizing and exhibiting the heritage of other nations, which operates in two directions: first the museumization of works of art previously unknown gave these exhibits the status of a masterpiece; then in return, these newly established masterpieces attributed to the imperial museum the glory of having discovered and publicised the world's universal heritage and of having spent so much time and money on the making of these masterpieces.⁴² This dialectical process can also be sensed in the dual experience that the visitor could have when visiting the Architectural Courts: first the visitors rambled amidst these overwhelming casts and were literally dominated by their monumental size; then when the visitors went to the upper gallery, they could in turn dominate this compendium of the world's heritage, without physically leaving the centre of the Empire.⁴³ The beauty of the casts therefore reinforced the power of the Empire: the Other

la sculpture française était bien supérieure à la sculpture italienne", cf. AMMF, Proceedings of the Sous-Commission du Musée de Sculpture Comparée of 13 November 1880.

41 See the two catalogues of the Architectural Museum for the scope of its cast collection: Architectural Museum, *Catalogue* (London: Joseph Masters and Co, 1855); Royal Architectural Museum, *Catalogue of Collection* (London: Royal Architectural Museum, 1877).

42 Malcolm Baker, 'A Glory to the Museum: the Casting of the 'Portico de la Gloria' ', *V&A Album*, 1 (1982), pp. 101–108 and 'The Establishment of a Masterpiece: the Cast of the Portico de la Gloria in the South Kensington Museum, London, in the 1870s', in *Actas simposio internacional sobre o Pórtico da Gloria é a arte do seu tempo* (Santiago de Compostela: Xunta de Galicia, 1988), pp. 479–99. Maria Antonella Pelizzari, 'From Stone to Paper: Photographs of Architecture and the Traces of History', in *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850–1900*, ed. by Maria Antonella Pelizzari (Montréal and New Haven: Canadian Centre for Architecture and Yale Center for British Art, 2003), pp. 22–57.

43 Tim Barringer, 'The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project', in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850–1900*, ed. by Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 11–27 (p. 19).

was integrated in the narrative of British imperialism to glorify the dominating Self, whose role was symbolically and implicitly embodied by the museum itself.

At the Museum of Comparative Sculpture another form of imperialism would appear and would not try to integrate the Other in its conception of the Empire. The main character of the imperial narrative in France would be the colonizer rather than the colonized. This conception of the Self once more found justifications in the history of art, as was written in France. The museum would gradually exclude all the foreign casts in the early 20th century. In 1937, the metamorphosis of the Museum of Comparative Sculpture into the new Museum of French Monuments (Musée des Monuments Français) made this latent orientation more manifest.⁴⁴ In the course of this reorganisation, the great majority of antique and foreign casts was evicted from the permanent display. However, some of the foreign casts were kept, but only those that exemplified the influence of French art abroad. This was the climax of an acquisition policy that had begun three decades ago, with purchases of casts in Sweden, Cyprus, Italy, Syria, etc., which were identified by the museum curators as ‘French’ and were justified historically either by transfers of religious communities or by the Crusades. Paul Deschamps, the curator that had visited the Frankish castles in Syria and Palestine, had even taken part in the Colonial Exhibition of 1931: he wrote an essay on these castles for the Exhibition catalogue and a model he had ordered for the Museum was also exhibited in the Colonial Exhibition.⁴⁵ This was part of a historical narrative on the continuity of the French colonization since the Middle Ages. In the museum, alongside the exhibition of a separate room devoted to the Crusades, Deschamps had also deployed his vision of a grand national art throughout the centuries, by displaying a full set of maps showing the expansion of French art beyond the usual boundaries of France.⁴⁶ His vision of the ‘grande France’, which was based on the exclusion of the Other, and focused on the expansion of the Self, was therefore totally opposed to the universalistic imperialism of the South Kensington.

Narratives of the nation were divergent and rooted in particular native historical contexts: while it would not be justified to carry on opposing French nationalism to British imperialism, it could be stated that British imperial narratives integrated the Other to glorify the Self, while French imperial narratives excluded the Other to define the dominating Self.

Conclusion

The concept of the national museum of architecture emerged in the 19th century as the result of concerns arising within the architectural profession and the field of heritage preservation.

44 On the significance of the reorganisation of the Museum of Comparative Sculpture into the Museum of French Monuments, see Isabelle Flour, ‘Style, Nation, Patrimoine: du Musée de Sculpture Comparée au Musée des Monuments Français, 1879–1937’, in *Stratégies identitaires de conservation et de valorisation du patrimoine*, ed. by Jean-Claude Nemery, Michel Rautenberg and Fabrice Thuriot (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008), pp. 33–41, and ‘Style, Heritage, Nation: from the Musée de Sculpture Comparée to the Musée des Monuments Français, 1879–1937’, in *Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, forthcoming), Proceedings of the Conference held in Durham, 15–17 September 2006.

45 Paul Deschamps, ‘Les Croisades et l’expansion française dans le bassin de la Méditerranée’, in *Les colonies et la vie française pendant huit siècles* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1933), pp. 1–51. On the Colonial Exhibition of 1931, see in particular Catherine Hodeir, ‘Un musée permanent pour une exposition éphémère?’, in *Le Palais des Colonies. Histoire du Musée des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2002) pp. 23–41.

46 Isabelle Flour, ‘Style, Nation, Patrimoine: du Musée de Sculpture Comparée au Musée des Monuments Français, 1879–1937’, in *Stratégies identitaires de conservation et de valorisation du patrimoine*, ed. Jean-Claude Nemery, Michel Rautenberg and Fabrice Thuriot (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008), pp. 33–41 and ‘Style, Heritage, Nation: from the Musée de Sculpture Comparée to the Musée des Monuments Français, 1879–1937’, in *Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, forthcoming), Proceedings of the Conference held in Durham, 15–17 September 2006.

Architects and preservationists first responded to the demands of their professional activities, and sought governmental funding on the grounds of general interest. But in order that national institutions be established, there remained to find a kind of display that could be attractive to the general public, and not only useful to specialists. The nationalisation of architectural museums was made possible by adapting the mode of exhibition of architecture, in a monumental and impressive scale. While some of the missions (education, publicization, vulgarization of knowledge) assigned to these architectural museums can be applied to other architectural museums and even to other types of museums, the representation of national identity is always the result of a native alchemy that adapts to the disciplinary field to which it belongs. That is one of the interests of comparing not only national museums from different countries, but also their representation of national identity. As narratives of the Self and the Other often find in the past justification for present action, the alleged continuity of an 'imagined community' is founded on historical facts specific to each nation, and therefore while nationalism has been a widely shared ideology, it has always taken varied shapes in order to adapt to native historical and disciplinary contexts.