

A concise, engaging, yet somewhat limited introduction to a thematic hot potato

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Abstract:

Markus Tauschek's *Kulturerbe* is one of the latest offerings from Reimer's *Kulturwissenschaften* series and serves as a general introduction to *Kulturerbe* (cultural heritage) from the perspective of cultural anthropology. The author begins by addressing the apparent ubiquity of cultural heritage, its definition, the history of its usage (mostly within the German speaking sphere), its inextricable entanglement with monuments, conservation initiatives, museologising, memory, UNESCO, and world heritage. He also considers the material and immaterial implications of the forms taken by cultural heritage, not to mention questions of ownership, the relationship it has with tourism and, finally, the emerging field of critical heritage studies. In bringing together such a broad array of themes crucial for the understanding of such a thematic hot potato in such a short volume, this work is an achievement in the field of short introductory texts.

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Kulturerbe opens with the example of the campus of Christian Albrechts University of Kiel, a particularly unsightly post-war build which was given protected monument status in 2008, in spite of the practical difficulties that conservation legislation would cause for those who used the building (13). Tauschek's choice of opening example is an excellent one for highlighting the ubiquity of heritage conservation and the challenges it can present for those who negotiate their lives around it on a daily basis. In particular, the author demonstrates to the reader the strangeness that examples of heritage conservation can take. Kiel Campus is, of course, not the great UNESCO flagship conservation project of Borobudur, nor still the Great Pyramids at Giza - both classic examples that leap to mind when one thinks of protected architectural heritage - but a seemingly unexceptional mass of concrete modernism.

A combination of the deeply ambiguous term 'culture,' and the highly politicised term 'heritage' (with its inseparable notions of identity, legitimation, and sentimentality), cultural heritage is a conceptual field of tension that causes controversy and conflict (13). Controversy is never far away in Tauschek's account of the term's multifaceted usage, be it in the form of the conflict for heritage as a resource (21), as a means of giving something significance and meaning (94), or as a construct of tourists, often at odds with the local perspectives and interests (174-177). The rediscovery of cultural heritage by each successive generation adds new layers to the dynamic form that this ever evolving concept takes. Looking at this through the lens of cultural anthropology, the author does very well in providing a structured and critical synthesis of the current state of affairs.

There is a good balance to be found in the writing style, and the author shows strength particularly through his ability to write simultaneously dense yet clear and engaging summaries, such as that for the UNESCO and ICOMOS international heritage legislation initiatives (96-115). The same could be stated for the author's discussion of cultural property (139-161), however, it is here that several of the volume's shortcomings manifest. Chief amongst these is the nature of the examples used throughout the work. As a general rule, Tauschek gravitates towards using somewhat Eurocentric examples, many in particular from Germany. Though the term that the author addresses in the book, *Kulturerbe*, is a German one and the book is meant for

a German speaking audience, the author himself makes clear throughout that the core concept is now a global one and not uniquely German. The result is that although the examples utilised well illustrate the themes to which they are attached, the general geographic and therefore contextual limitation seems somewhat inconsequent, if not parochial.

Furthermore, following the book's narrative on the globalisation of cultural heritage, one would think that there is only one, maybe two agents responsible: UNESCO and ICOMOS. It is the case that much international heritage legislation, particularly World Heritage Status, traces its origins from the work of UNESCO. Tauschek's summary of UNESCO's work in this regard is both succinct and informative, but there is an oversight in the author's history of the globalisation of heritage conservation initiatives. This oversight is the absence of the League of Nations. The idea of there being a common cultural heritage of all mankind, a globally applicable concept of heritage, does not originate in the discussions held by the UNESCO committee that met in London in culturally ravaged post-war 1945. The idea was first brought internationally to the fore by UNESCO's predecessor organisation, the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation and the international intellectual networks with which it worked (chiefly at their Athens conference in 1931). Though in practical terms their work's impact was limited by the Second World War, the legacy of their efforts and the role of the interwar period in the global theoretical development of the idea of world cultural heritage should not be ignored.

In summary, though *Kulturerbe* is a good introduction to the field that will provide readers with a solid overview of the current academic stand and an introduction to the debates concerning cultural heritage, I recommend that it be read alongside works such as Falser and Juneja's (eds.) *Kulturerbe und Denkmalpflege transkulturell* (transcript 2012) and Laurajane Smith's *Uses of Heritage* (Routledge 2006). These works more consequently deal with the concept of cultural heritage in global and transcultural contexts, which combined with Tauschek's concise summaries should provide those interested with a solid foundation from which to engage further with this field.