

Heritage, Decolonisation and the Field: A Conference

German Historical Institute London and UCL Institute of Archaeology

26th and 27th January 2018

Supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, German Historical Institute London/Max Weber Stiftung and the UCL Institute of Archaeology

The development of heritage as a distinctive, international field of governance regulated through institutions like UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM and the IUCN is closely linked to practices of decolonisation and fieldwork. Taking cultural heritage alone, anthropologists, archaeologists, architects and engineers worked across the decolonising world in countries like Egypt, Indonesia and Pakistan making the development of this new form of governance a reality; so too did experts from area studies, government survey agencies and philanthropic organisations. This work helped to (re-)constitute the fields that these practitioners were connected to, creating new disciplinary assemblages, new forms of knowledge, and rearranging the relationship of fieldworkers to the places where they laboured. At the same time, this process was not simply a product of decolonisation; in fact, it had its origins in knowledge practices which were often closely connected to practices of colonial governance and the complex administrative relationship between colonies and metropolises. These older, colonial practices were simultaneously reconstituted and entangled within these newly emergent disciplinary assemblages and knowledge practices as decolonisation gathered pace.

Yet despite increased interest in the histories and practice of cultural and natural heritage, there is little understanding of how their interconnection with decolonisation and the field actually took place. How did these three things work together to make heritage governance a reality? How did decolonisation shape the form of that governance and the sorts of fieldwork that took place? How, vice versa, did these forms of fieldwork and governance shape decolonisation, and how also did colonial practices play a role? Moreover, how (if at all) do the answers to such questions vary across time and space? If we are to understand the relationship between heritage, decolonisation and the field—and, by extension, the development of heritage governance itself—providing answers to these questions is a necessity, as is considering the methodologies which we might use to make these answers effective.

This conference invites papers which address these questions from a range of disciplinary perspectives, and which in particular use international, comparative, or global case studies to do so. We are interested in papers that take the field of ‘heritage’ as one which is intentionally broad and contingent, encompassing both ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ heritage and the diverse range of institutions by which it is governed (museums, herbaria, zoos, regional, national and international historic preservation agencies etc). The organisers (William Carruthers, Andreas Gestrich and Indra Sengupta, German Historical Institute London; Rodney Harrison, AHRC Heritage Priority Area Leadership Fellow, UCL Institute of Archaeology) welcome abstracts of no more than 400 words, which should be submitted to carruthers@ghil.ac.uk by 31st May 2017. Financial support will be prioritised for those participants without their own travel funds and early career researchers.