Big Water
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CULTURAL PATRIMONY—be it tangible/material or intangible—has played an integral role in the cultural and political processes associated with state building across the Triple Frontier and throughout the modern world. Patrimonial “goods” (Portuguese: bens culturais; Spanish: bienes culturales) delimit national territories in space and time. They reify national memories, canonize national cultural traditions, and monumentalize national heroes. In Latin America, especially after the 1930s, the appeal of “national cultural patrimony” has justified the existence of agencies, laws, and professionals charged with heritage protection. Nationalist causes have marshaled themselves to the defense of sites and artifacts imperiled by the ravages of time, violence, oblivion, foreigners, and “bad” citizens. The social movements that organize around cultural preservation have served as powerful mechanisms in the identity politics of national belonging. Heritage and nation, in short, share vital life support systems.

Yet the interdependence of patrimony and nation has been strained, and at times constrained, by the ascriptions of “universal,” “global,” and “world” value to patrimonial goods known historically as “national” cultural treasures. The 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, better known as the World Heritage Convention, and the attendant appeal of “world heritage” (Portuguese: patrimônio da humanidade; Spanish: patrimonio de la humanidad) have raised vexing questions for sovereign
nation-states seeking to maintain claims to cultural and political goods of exceptional *universal* value located within national borders.

Such questions include the following: Does a convention signatory effectively relinquish control over national treasures to a supranational authority when it submits to the rules that govern world heritage? How do the social movements that have historically worked within a phenomenon known by British geographer David Lowenthal as “the heritage crusade” adapt to shifting sociocultural landscapes where the appeals to universal heritage originate in local and foreign governments, multilateral financial institutions, and transnational advocacy networks as well as the central state? The cultural nationalist and the cultural historian are left to question whether the advent of a multilocal politics of world heritage has rendered apart the historical interdependence of the national and the patrimonial.

In this chapter I explore such questions, focusing on the interaction of national, local, regional, and global histories of preservation and conservation, frontiers and borders, travel and tourism, and regional (re)integration in and across the Triple Frontier. The Jesuit-Guarani mission system is the primary case study, but the wider discussion encompasses the complex meanings and practices of cultural patrimony in a multilateral trading bloc known as Mercosul/Mercosur.

**A SHORT HISTORY OF THE JESUIT-GUARANI MISSION SYSTEM**

The Jesuit-Guarani mission system is shorthand for a chain of missionary settlements established along the middle and upper branches of the Paraná River watershed between the late sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries. The Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) granted the Spanish Crown sovereignty over all of Paraguay, as the Paraguay-Paraná-Uruguay watershed was known, but matters of governance were in practice fluid across time and space. Under the Spanish Hapsburgs, the Society of Jesus received royal sanction to administer the remote hinterlands of the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers for the express purposes of Christianizing local indigenous groups and fixing imperial territorial boundaries. Under the Jesuits, a network of agropastoral settlements known as reductions (Portuguese: *reduções*; Spanish: *reducciones*) was established to evangelize the Guarani, a seminomadic indigenous group who occupied the region. The oldest
reductions were established in the contemporary Paraguayan departments of Misiones and Itapúa, west of the Paraná River. Construction on the easternmost settlement, São Miguel Arcanjo (contemporary Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil), began after 1687. At the system’s height, reached in the middle of the eighteenth century, thirty reducciones were home to about 150,000 Guarani. Throughout the active phase of missionary life, the reductions faced the ongoing challenges of predatory secular Spaniards who resided on the margins of the Jesuit settlements as well as from slave raiders striking out from Portuguese America. Although the feature-length motion picture The Mission (1986) portrayed the Society of Jesus as the benevolent protectors of Indians and indigenous life, episodes of Guarani resistance to the missionary priests were an essential feature of rule throughout the Jesuit period.

The missions began to exhibit signs of systemic stress in the 1740s due to disease, Indian flight, and violent clashes with outsiders. Indian upheaval (especially the Guarani War) followed by the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from Portuguese America (1759) and Spanish America (1767), caused significant disruption to mission society, accelerating economic decline. Over the last quarter of the eighteenth century, thousands of mission Indians abandoned the settlements to enter regional labor markets controlled by criollos and peninsulares. Others struck out into receding frontier. The reductions progressively emptied.¹

Depopulation east of the Uruguay River accelerated after 1801, when Luso-Brazilian troops seized the seven settlements between São Borja and São Miguel. Population dislocation quickly extended westward as the wars of independence fragmented the former Jesuit province into a contested, porous international border region. Effectively abandoned following progressive sackings, several of the reductions were swallowed up by an encroaching subtropical forest. For the small, impoverished, multiethnic population that took up residence on lands near the dilapidated settlements, the vestiges of the missionary structures were sometimes repurposed for civil construction.

Largely forgotten by the early national leaders in Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, and Asunción, the mission region was occasionally visited by itinerant travelers in the decades following national independence. French naturalists Aimé Bonpland (1773–1858) and Auguste de Sainte-Hilaire (1779–1853) toured the district in the 1820s and 1830s. The German physician Robert Avé-Lallemant (1812–1884) visited in 1858. The following decade, Martin de Moussy (1810–1869), another French naturalist, journeyed from the River Plate and envisioned a
region ripe for commercialization. In 1863, the French-born priest who became vicar of São Borja, João Pedro Gay (1815–1891), published one of the first social histories of the district, *Historia da República jesuíta do Paraguai*. The following year, Alfred Demersay (1815–1891) published a two-volume history informed by studies of tobacco and yerba mate cultivation in Paraguay.²

Foreigners tended to see past the national boundaries that national mapmakers periodically tried to impose on the Paraná-Uruguay watershed. Gay, for instance, found it impossible to write a history of the reductions located in Brazilian territory without writing a larger history of the entire mission region. “As I set myself to the work of writing a general history, I found it impossible to avoid engagement with the other Jesuit settlements, which share a history with the Seven Settlements situated east of the Uruguay.”³ Nonetheless, when the accounts circulated as published texts among the lettered classes in Rio and Buenos Aires, they were integrated into emergent mental geographies of nation. It is precisely these kinds of texts—serialized in newspapers, circulated as promotional pamphlets, and included in the official journals of national historical academies—that Benedict Anderson identifies as central to the imagination of territorially bounded national communities.⁴

After 1880, when the conditions for colonization and commercialization improved, a new class of educated men—land surveyors, railway engineers, and scientists—journeyed to the remote region to assess opportunities for development. Their personal impressions and technical reports cast nationalizing hues on a region erroneously imagined to be an underpopulated *tierra de nadie*.⁵ Cultural figures joined these liberal professionals in projecting the missions into the mental maps of lettered nationhood.⁶ Rioplatense author-diplomat Horácio de Quiroga (1878–1937) elevated the missions into the Argentine national literary consciousness. Vicente Gambón (1857–1925), the first Jesuit priest to return to the Argentine missions since the mid-eighteenth century, rhapsodized about the deep roots of the Catholic faith in the region, from the distant colonial period to the recent settlements of devout Polish immigrants residing a short distance from the former mission at Apóstoles.⁷ Overseas, Scottish historian R. B. Cunningham Graham (1852–1936) published his melodramatic *Vanished Arcadia* (1901).⁸

The material and cultural mapping of the mission region continued into the first decades of the twentieth century thanks to improved transportation and communication networks, the regularization of property rights, and market integration. Yerba mate, tobacco, and sugar cultivation became mainstays of the
regional economy, while grains and fruits were cultivated for local consumption. Certain ethnic-cultural changes accompanied the expansion of capitalist relations. In Paraguay, a mestizo regional culture was gradually replaced by a hybridized Guarani culture. In Argentina, Eastern European immigrant enclaves took root among the mixed native born of the humid northeast. In Brazilian territory, European settlers established a foothold among gaúcho agriculturalists and ranchers. Throughout the region, small bands of Guarani Indians moved among and across natural and man-made frontiers. With the regularization of border controls and the introduction of national institutions including schools and military service, the multiethnic residents of the mission region were increasingly drawn into parallel but distinct spheres of Brazilian, Argentine, and Paraguayan national belonging.

MISSION RESTORATION AND POST-1930 CULTURAL NATIONALISM

The preservation of the ruined reducciones was a minor concern for national elites in their projects of integration and modernization. As the Brazilian ethnographer and future National Historical Museum founder Gustavo Dodt Barroso (1888–1957) famously lamented, the Brazilian intellectual and popular classes lacked a “cult of nostalgia.” In the coastal capitals, urbanization swept aside historical sites. At the far margins of national territory, colonial-era structures crumbled in silence. Locally, in places such as Santo Ângelo, resource-poor municipal governments allowed stones from mission ruins to be used in public works. In nearby São Borja, where new communities with no connection to the missionary period had sprung up directly on the former mission lands, the remaining vestiges of the former reductions were basically erased from the landscape.

However, the idea of a formal preservationist stance toward the missions circulated episodically after 1880. Argentine ethnographer Juan Bautista Ambrosetti (1865–1917), who visited Misiones Province on several occasions in the 1890s, mused that the restored ruins might be turned into a destination for porteño tourists. Land surveyor Juan de Queirel (1849–1907) came to a similar conclusion in publications that circulated in the capital at the turn of the twentieth century. Ambrosetti and Queirel received little support, but the preservationist imagination endured.
Even if preservation had occupied a more important place in national or regional political imaginaries, any potential preservationist effort would confront the reality that all of the mission settlements had fallen into a state of advanced ruination; some had been razed to the ground only to be rediscovered through later archaeological excavation. The handful of sites that retained significant vestiges of colonial-era construction had been overtaken by vegetation. Struck by the exuberant vegetation that had overtaken the ruins at San Ignacio, Argentine art theorist Julio E. Payró (1899–1971) observed in 1937, “the spectacle that the most prominent ruins of Misiones is neither friendly nor picturesque: it is grave, intense, and dramatic like primordial beauty.”

The conditions for preservation shifted gradually amid the globalized tumult of 1929–1930. In Argentina, a coalition of conservative civilians, desperate to shore up the faltering export economy, allied themselves with army officers and overthrew the ruling Radical party. In Brazil, army officers joined a civilian reformist coalition led by Getúlio Vargas (a native of São Borja) to overthrow the oligarchical republican party establishment. Although the immediate measures taken by these self-styled “revolutionary” movements differed greatly, in time, both took advantage of the disruption in the liberal order to promote economic diversification, import substitution, and political reform. Each coalition also articulated a language of cultural mobilization that envisioned the defense of “national” interests and a strengthened central state. The call to defend *lo nacional*–*el nacional* legitimated new cultural practices and institution building that would soon have a direct effect on the mission region, particularly through the mechanism of historical preservation.

The incipient preservationist movement benefited from calls for the defense of national traditions and the enlargement of the state responsibilities that accompanied the regime changes. In Brazil, official preservation took its modern form in 1933–1934, when Vargas approved petitions to designate Ouro Preto a national monument and to establish the Inspetoria dos Monumentos Nacionais (Inspectorate for National Monuments), the first federal agency of its kind in South America. By November 1937, the Brazilian president–dictator had authorized a comprehensive preservation law, Decree-Law 25. In Argentina, where commemorative statuary and other monuments to fallen heroes had been a major part of bourgeois cultural practice for several decades before 1930, the historical preservationist movement came out of legislative attempts to give the national government the authority to designate national monuments and historic places. Under the guidance of the prominent porteño historian Ricardo
Levene (1885–1959), a series of preservationist laws were enacted between 1938 and 1943.

Working independently of one another, federal preservationists in Brazil and Argentina put the Jesuit-Guarani missions near the top of their respective national agendas. The Brazilian Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (SPHAN), created in January 1937, designated the Sete Povos as “national historical and artistic patrimony” in 1938. (Note the irony: these “national” historical sites had been part of Spanish America until 1801, when they were sacked by Luso-Brazilian troops.) The Argentine Comisión Nacional de Museos, Monumentos, y Lugares Históricos (CNMMLH), founded in 1938, extended similar recognition to the ruins at San Ignacio Miní and Santa Maria la Mayor two years later. On both banks of the Uruguay River, the legal designation of patrimony was quickly followed by the arrival of federal agents who set out to survey the ruins for stabilization and restoration.

São Miguel and San Ignacio Miní—where significant sections of the original reductions had survived warfare, pillage, and time—received the lion’s share of official attention from the Brazilian and Argentine governments, respectively. East of the Uruguay, modernist architect Lucio Costa made a preliminary survey of the seven reductions in 1937 in preparation for inscription in the official registries created under Decree-Law 25, known as the Livros do Tombo. Finding the ruins on the verge of collapse, he proposed an urgent plan for stabilization. A detailed restoration of the church façade was carried out three years later under the supervision of Brazilian architect Lucas Mayerhofer. In the meantime, local vicar João Hugo Machado received authorization to collect mission-era religious artwork that had scattered throughout the region since the eighteenth century. Machado faced suspicion and occasional threats of violence from private individuals who did not wish to relinquish artifacts. At San Ignacio, Argentine architect Mario Buschiazzo (1902–1970) drafted the plans for restoration of the main church and surrounding buildings in 1938. Restoration work was completed in 1946. A small federal museum opened at each location. (Architectural idioms varied; the Brazilian museum exhibited elements of modernism whereas its Argentine counterpart was in the colonial revival style.) In both instances, the restored ruins quickly became architectural showpieces in a national collection of patrimonial treasures that was widely promoted by federal preservationist agencies as proof of national civilization, past and present.

The logic of national boundaries was clearly evident in the way in which stabilization and reconstruction efforts proceeded in Brazil and Argentina. The
technical surveys conducted by Costa and Buschiazzo, as well as the promotional information circulated in the press, turned on a politics of place (and placing) that recognized certain ruins as national historical monuments. Lucio Costa’s trip to Rio Grande do Sul took him within fifty kilometers of the closest Argentine missions. Nevertheless, his reports submitted to Rodrigo Melo Franco de Andrade, director of the Brazilian preservationist agency, like those submitted by Buschiazzo to Levene, made only passing reference to the transnational history of the mission ruins, plotting instead the reductions relative to national boundaries. This mapping of “Brazilian,” “Argentine,” or “Paraguayan” missions would have been alien to Jesuit and Guarani alike during the missions’ classical period and strange to the region’s nineteenth-century residents. The logic of preservation, highly informed by the logic of national borders, nonetheless allowed for a preservationist cartography that adhered to current national political boundaries and projected such boundaries into the past. Preservation was at the leading edge of cultural nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s, delimiting the national territory in space and time.

Aside from a handful of professional preservationists, the restored ruins at San Ignacio and São Miguel were initially seen by very few citizens from outside the immediate region. Annual visitation to the Museu das Missões in São Miguel averaged just 3,250 for the period 1944–1947. By 1956, monthly visitation to San Ignacio rarely exceeded 700. Two decades later, San Ignacio still registered a modest 8,900 annual visitors. Nevertheless, the monumentalized missions afforded nationalists of all ideological stripes the ability to claim the missions as the anchors and the limits of the national past.

“NATIONAL” MONUMENTS AND LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND UNIVERSAL HERITAGE

By 1945, a handful of professionals working for federal preservationist agencies provided general oversight of the ruins while locals tended to the monuments’ day-to-day upkeep. Local priests would sometimes contribute to the preservation of religious artifacts that had been scattered throughout the region. All major conservation efforts, as well as visitor services and signage, were coordinated by federal employees outside of the mission region. Official meaning was ascribed from the national capital onto the locality. The actual work of preservation was handled by local caretakers drawing a modest federal wage,
volunteers, and small-scale entrepreneurs who tried to make a living off of the tourist trade. Indeed, artisans, laborers, merchants, and educators residing near the ruins were the principal custodians and memory keepers of these national monuments for several decades following historical registry and restoration. The relations between professional preservationists headquartered in the national capital and caretakers in situ were symbiotic and complex, providing multiple opportunities for a micropoliticking of preservation that had important effects on day-to-day life at a heritage site.

This dynamic of micropoliticking of the 1940s through the 1960s helped routinize and structure national historical monument status at the local level. The terms under which locals could avail themselves of national monuments for local purposes became the primary vehicle for local-federal relations during this period. In comparison with the grandiose rhetoric about national monuments espoused by national elites, the actual subject matter of federal-state correspondence of the postwar period might seem inconsequential: when the local parish would be able to use the mission grounds for the procession of the town’s patron saint; who would be authorized to sell postcards and other tourist materials on the mission grounds; whether a community soccer field might be relocated to a site farther away from the rear of the cloister at San Ignacio. An especially curious dynamic began in late 1952 as caretaker Patricio Barrios sought permission to pasture two cows and a horse within the mission compound walls. After submitting a hand-drawn map of possible sites near the caretaker’s modest house located at the edge of the mission grounds, Barrios received approval. Three years later, however, Barrios was denied permission to grow yerba mate for distribution among local laborers who cared for the ruins.18 In 1968, another caretaker secured permission to maintain a cow on the mission grounds but on the CNMMLH’s condition that the animal not be seen by the visiting public.19

The strength of the nation-state, not to mention the national state, would not turn on these small-bore matters of soccer pitches, cow pastures, and domestic horticulture. The SPHAN and CNMMLH continued to claim supreme control over the mission ruins designated as national historical sites. However, the contours of national belonging, particularly for locals living among patrimonial sites, often turned on the resolution of such “minor” issues of daily sustenance and the uses of space understood to be of some public utility. The negotiations of such issues enlisted locals of modest means into a heritage crusade that would take a transnational turn in the last quarter of the twentieth century.
Several developments taking place the 1970s created new possibilities for a politics of preservation that would reorder the high cultural nationalism of the 1930s and 1940s and the micropolitics of the 1950s and 1960s. First, regional interests began to make claims to the missions that competed with preexisting national and local claims. These regional interests—state and provincial political parties, regional intellectuals, and regional economic development agencies—saw in the missions the material necessary to articulate a subnational identity somewhere between the national and the local. Second, the field of preservation experienced internal renewal. Finally, the emergence of transnational heritage movements resulted in an opened-ended (re)integration of the mission system in overlapping, but not necessarily complementary, networks of preservation, identity, tourism, and development.

The first major change—rising claims to national patrimony articulated at a regional level—might be seen as an extension of the earlier practices. For example, in December 1969, the governor of Misiones designated the ruins of Santa Ana, Concepción, Mártires, San Javier, Apóstoles, and San José to be provincial historical landmarks. Two years later, the governor requested the jurisdictional transfer of San Ignacio to the provincial government, citing the federal government’s inattention to the ruins.\(^{20}\) The governor’s actions mirrored measures taken by the federal governments of Argentina and Brazil in the 1940s, when newly empowered federal agencies asserted legal and moral control over imperiled heritage sites owned by nonfederal actors.

In 1970, San Ignacio’s Comisión Municipal de Turismo sought authorization from the CNMMLH to hold a monthly folkloric mass on the mission grounds.\(^{21}\) The request continued a long tradition of locals seeking concessions from the federal government to make local use of a national landmark. The key difference was that a local tourism council intended to use the mission grounds to stage a regional folkloric show for tourists, hiring Indians from Argentina and Paraguay to perform scenes that were supposed to capture the cultural essence of the entire mission region. The CNMMLH denied the request, characterizing the folklore show as inappropriate for a national monument. State, municipal, and private interests persisted, later winning concessions from national preservationist agencies to organize theatricalized son et lumière spectacles. Parallel new cultural centers, tourist information booths, and museums run by regional actors also narrated the ruins, their folk, and their pasts.

The economic implications of a regionalized heritage crusade were measurable: tourism to the mission district increased dramatically in the 1970s, when
a visit to the reductions came to be marketed as an ideal destination for automobile tourism as well as added value to a trip to Iguazú Falls. In 1974, Brazil’s Touring magazine published an attractive photospread promoting car travel to the district. Similar stories followed in major dailies of the Brazilian southeast, especially in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, where the mission district and eighteenth-century Guarani hero Sepé Tiaraju became icons of gaúcho identity. In 1975, the riograndense secretariats of tourism and education established a commission to turn São Miguel into a major tourist destination featuring a son et lumière spectacle and other attractions. In the meantime, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) extended assistance to the Argentine, Brazilian, and Paraguayan governments to develop an accord on tourism in the Misiones-Iguazú region. The political implications were equally important. In Misiones, local actors formed a local preservationist league, the Asociación Cooperadora de la Reducción Jesuítica de San Ignacio Miní, in 1976, inserting an element of voluntarism into a politics that has historically been highly associated with lettered elites who held civil service jobs. By early 1980, regional interests joined forces with the CNMMLH and the venerable Asociación Estímulo de Bellas Artes (founded in 1876) to lobby against a hydroelectric dam planned on the Paraná River near Corpus. Fearing that the dam’s reservoir might have an adverse effect on the ruins at Candelaria, Santa Ana, and San Ignacio, these varied actors secured the attention of the foreign ministry. The development of regional heritage crusade opened spaces for new forms of political participation and engagement that occupied an intermediate space between national and local politics.

Finally, the cultural implications of a regional heritage were considerable: a distinct misionero/missioneiro identity took more definite form throughout the region, where regional party politics, school textbooks, and local rituals exalted a mythology of the missions that made the ruins a sacralized place while elevating Jesuit brother Montoya, Sepé Tiaraju, and the Uruguayan caudillo Andresito Guaçurarí into regional heroes.

Another impulse for change, of equal importance to the forces of regionalization, emerged within the field of preservation, where a new generation of specialists proposed a renewal of established practices, especially through multilateralism. In Brazil, a small group of reform-minded conservationists rallied around Aloísio Magalhães (1927–1982), the director of the Centro Nacional de Referência Cultural (CNRC), who advocated a number of radical changes to traditional principles and practices of heritage conservation. Informed by
innovations in social anthropology, these reformers envisioned a politics of preservation that looked beyond monumental edifices to the social contexts that produced and maintained patrimonial goods. In 1978, Magalhães envisioned a new politics of patrimony that involved a four-stage process of identification, classification, restitution to the community, and collective reflection. This process differed from the traditional idea that patrimony was an imperiled cultural relic that had to be “rescued” by high priests of patrimony (i.e., professional architects, historians, and engineers) and venerated by a faithful populace.\(^\text{26}\)

Like their predecessors, Magalhães and his allies maintained a certain nationalistic logic in their advocacy for reforms: the official preservation agency held the right to protect and preserve symbols of a national cultural calling. Patrimony remained a privileged vehicle for national integration. (Clearly in dialogue with the developmentalist ideology that reigned under military presidents Geisel and Figueiredo, Magalhães found cultural integration to be compatible with economic integration.) The CNRC drew on the rhetoric of loss that has been an essential discursive device for Brazil’s pioneer generation of preservationists.\(^\text{27}\) The differences lie in the functionality of preservation, as patrimonial goods became cultural referents rather than sacred objects. That is, the social context of the production and use of a patrimonial good mattered just as much as the formal artistic attributes. This logic opened opportunities for a more pluralistic politics of preservation, decentering the built environment and its enthroned interpreters and opening up possibilities for a more inclusive politics of patrimonial usage and appreciation.

An innovation of equal importance was Magalhães’s willingness to adopt a multilateral approach to cultural preservation that sought collaboration from sub-, supra-, and transnational actors. Magalhães took a special interest in winning the attentions of the World Heritage Committee, a UNESCO division operating under the provisions of the 1972 World Heritage Convention. The reasons for courting UNESCO support were self-evident: the committee had the specific charge to assist national preservation agencies in protecting unique cultural and natural treasures. Through the World Heritage Fund, the committee had the ability to extend emergency financial support for the stabilization and restoration of imperiled sites. Well-managed world heritage sites were eligible for far greater financial support through international development programs, corporate philanthropy, and the exploding heritage tourism industry.

Brazilian and UNESCO officials had engaged in low-level discussions about a World Heritage designation of a Brazilian site since 1978. Curiously, the
Jesuit-Guarani missions were not part of an initial list of potential sites developed by the Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (IPHAN) director Renato Soeiro shortly after Brazil signed on to the World Heritage Convention on July 2, 1977. Magalhães, on the other hand, recognized that conditions were promising to fast-track UNESCO recognition of the missions. (Soeiro’s successor drew on various proposals to link the Brazilian missions to transnational heritage and tourist circuits that dated back to an Organization of American States [OAS] meeting held in Quito, Ecuador, in 1967.)

In February 1981, Magalhães met with the governor of Rio Grande do Sul and declared his plan to see São Miguel included on the World Heritage List. UNESCO responded by sending Robert di Stefano, an Italian specialist in architecture restoration, to assist in a comprehensive survey of the ruins. Magalhães died unexpectedly soon after his historic announcement in Porto Alegre, but his intention to win World Heritage status for the missions was carried forward by his successor Marcos Vinícius Vilaça and the government of Rio Grande do Sul with continued UNESCO support.

As a Brazilian World Heritage bid took shape, the ministers of culture for Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay met in Posadas to discuss possible coordination of preservationist strategies throughout the mission region, including a world heritage bid that included sites located in the constituent nations. Multilateral arrangements among the authoritarian regimes in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Paraguay had already been established in areas of security and countersubversion (notoriously), tourism, infrastructure, and energy. What distinguished the 1981 meeting in Posadas and its Plan de Acción was an emergent politics of multilateral cultural preservation that had few regional precedents. At Posadas, historical preservation, economic development, and tourism were discussed as issues that did not correspond to conventional political jurisdictions (i.e., municipal, state/provincial, federal). These issues required new political institutions capable of administering a transnational heritage network as well as a new mental mapping of the place that projected the missions as regional heritage rather than three distinct collections of national historical treasures.

The paradox, of course, was that the overlapping regional, multilateral, and transnational dimensions of cultural integration were channeled through familiar national governmental actors. That is, the preservationist agenda set in Posadas—as well as future multilateral agreements related to the integration of regional patrimony in the mission region—was negotiated by representatives of federal preservationist agencies, ministries of foreign affairs, and national
economic development agencies. The concerns of local and regional actors (e.g., representatives of municipal and provincial governments, protectionist leagues, the Catholic Church, history associations, and citizens’ organizations) were not wholly excluded from the discussions at Posadas, but they had to be subsumed into the positions adopted by the official representatives accredited by the central governments. As a procedural matter, then, patrimony was still heavily weighted toward the central state even at a moment of ascendant multilateralism.

Another procedural problem raised by the Plan de Acción concerned the integration of thirty specific localities, each with its own micropolitics, into a transnational patrimonial network that would be administered under stringent and consistent technical standards. The limitations of rural poverty and inexpertise were ever present. The previous half century of preservation efforts had demonstrated that the local populations of the mission region could come to see their interests as tied to the defense of national patrimonial sites, but not necessarily in ways that immediately corresponded with experts who followed national and international preservationist standards. International conventions

![FIGURE 6.1 Jesuit Reduction and World Heritage Site, San Ignacio Mini, Misiones, Argentina, 2001. Courtesy Daryle Williams.](image-url)
such as the Venice Charter (1967) made specific provisions for accommodating local concerns. However, these same international conventions set technical standards for professional competence that proved difficult to replicate at the local level, particularly in regions with limited economic and educational opportunities. A strict multilateralism was apt to institutionalize a power structure under which locals without access to international resources might encounter increasingly limited opportunities to participate in the administration of patrimonial sites.

**TOWARD A HISTORY OF WORLD (AND OTHER) HERITAGE**

The procedural challenges raised in the formulation of the 1981 Plan de Acción did not impede the progress of multilateral collaboration. Argentine, Brazilian, and Paraguayan officials continued to discuss further coordination of preservation, tourism, and economic development in the mission region. UNESCO, joined by the OAS, continued to encourage collaborative work. By 1983, the governments of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay had agreed on the outlines of a five-year, US$28 million international campaign to raise funds for conservation and restoration work in the mission region.  

UNESCO, meanwhile, played a significant role in moving forward the multilateral agenda of securing a world heritage designation in the mission region. The Brazilian and Argentine representatives to the World Heritage Committee received specific instructions to coordinate preservation efforts. And, on the premise that the Jesuit-Guarani mission system might be the first multinational entry on the World Heritage List, UNESCO offered technical assistance to restoration projects in progress. (Some officials at the International Council on Monuments and Sites wanted to see a bid that included Jesuit missions throughout South America.) Multilateral protectionism became a self-actualizing project as multilateral resources were made available for multilateral projects, which in turn required multilateral coordination.

The success of this external reward system was mixed. UNESCO could readily adopt a transnational posture toward cultural heritage, but preservationists working within local, regional, and national contexts found it difficult to act and think beyond nation. This is not surprising given the close historical relations between patrimony and the nation.
A draft version of the Brazilian proposal to designate São Miguel as a world heritage site is illustrative. The proposal, prepared in the final month of 1982, readily acknowledged that the Jesuit “state” transcended modern political boundaries. It located the mission system within the global phenomenon of colonialism. The authors accurately anticipated that a World Heritage designation could only be won with language noting the exceptional universal qualities of the proposed site. Thus, São Miguel ruins were characterized as globally unique in its artistic and architectural features. Nevertheless, the draft still traded on nationalist precepts. The Brazilian proposal invoked conventional language about the exceptional artistic, architectonic, and historical features of São Miguel as a Brazilian historical landmark and said little about the missions in Argentine and Paraguayan territory that exhibited similar characteristics. The disposition of the Brazilian proposal was never made contingent upon Argentine and Paraguayan actions, although the Brazilians were well aware that the World Heritage Committee wished to consider the missions as a group. In a moment of multilateral collaboration, the Brazilian delegation still guarded the right to act independently.

The Argentine and Brazilian governments ultimately failed to complete all required application elements on the same time schedule and opted to make separate submissions to the World Heritage Committee. The committee agreed to consider the bids independently, though the representatives of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) continued to envision a single regional heritage designation. The Brazilian application for São Miguel was the first to win approval in late 1983. Argentina’s application to include San Ignacio Miní, Santa Ana, Loreto, and Santa Maria La Mayor on the World Heritage List was approved the following year. (The inscriptions of the Paraguayan missions at La Santísima Trinidad de Paraná and Jesús de Tavarangue came in 1993.)

In Brazil, the news of the winning bid was extremely well received at the national, state, and local levels. In a moment of self-congratulatory exuberance, the national secretary of culture, Marcos Vinícius Vilaça, stated that the world heritage designations were a global stamp of approval for federal preservationist efforts that dated back to the 1930s. For Vilaça, then, World Heritage legitimated the long-established defense of national heritage. The riograndense establishment was equally enthusiastic about the World Heritage designation, filling the regional newspapers with celebratory ads and announcements that paired photos of the ruins at São Miguel, line drawings of Sepé Tiaraju, and
plugs for local businesses, commercial associations, and social clubs.36 RBS, the main television station in Rio Grande do Sul, proclaimed “That which was ours is now for everyone / that which had passed is now eternal / Missões. Now Universal Patrimony.” The municipal government of Santo Ângelo congratulated the citizens of the municipality for their hard work in protecting

São Miguel das Missões
Patrimônio do Município de Santo Ângelo
Patrimônio da História Gaúcha
Patrimônio da Cultura Brasileira
agora PATRIMÔNIO DA HUMANIDADE

Once the celebrations ended, the obligations of universal heritage became a matter of very local politics. The effect of São Miguel’s universal status was felt immediately in Santo Ângelo, where citizens residing in the environs of the São Miguel mission were instructed by municipal authorities to vacate residential and commercial constructions built adjacent to the ruins. The newly designated World Heritage site may have “belonged” to an unbroken chain of social actors that began in the home of every santo-angelense and ultimately expanded to include all humanity, but locals living on the perimeter of the missions were not to have use of lands that sat too close to universal heritage.

Before world heritage status, the disposition of land in the Villa de São Miguel was a matter adjudicated at the local level. In the 1960s, for example, SPHAN officials reached an agreement with locals to stop using a small cemetery located on the mission grounds. The government had legal powers to compel the locals to cease burials on federal property, but the matter was resolved in a more informal manner, as the SPHAN helped locals identify an alternative burial site. When World Heritage came to the region, however, the question of securing a no-build zone around the ruins became a matter of greater urgency and visibility. Local custom and federal law continued to guide negotiations over land usage. However, all parties came to be aware that international preservationist standards might influence the resolution of land disputes.

World Heritage, then, altered the established rules of micropolitics. The key distinction to be drawn from earlier incarnations of micropoliticking was the presence of a new actor—humanity (humanidade)—who enjoyed certain legal and cultural “rights” in determining how the missions would be protected and performed. The World Heritage Convention and its attendant international
treaties as well as the growing body of international preservationist standards helped shaped the parameters of the permissible in World Heritage sites.

On-the-ground usage of Brazilian patrimonial sites could still remain a function of evolving relations among educated professionals from outside the region, municipal authorities, local caretakers and craftsmen, entrepreneurs, and neighboring landowners. In the case of São Miguel, relations post–World Heritage inscription came to include a group of Mbyá-Guarani families who settled near a water well located at the edge of the mission compound between 1989 and 1994. With the consent of the national preservation service authorities, the families initiated a small trade in indigenous artifacts sold to visitors within the mission complex. Subsequently settled about thirty kilometers away but still active in the commercialized performance of indigeneity on mission grounds, the Guarani became integral participants in the micropoliticking of Brazil’s principal mission-era landmark.36

“Humanity” could be no more than a mere chimera in the prolonged negotiations to fix the precise boundaries of the no-build perimeter at São Miguel or the settlement of Guarani families in São Miguel and the regulation of craft sales at the heritage site. Yet federal officials, municipal authorities, and local residents might still invoke World Heritage when justifying their stance toward zoning, social development, cultural tourism, and land rights. Their positions were typically backed up by federal law, municipal authority, and local custom—that is, by national and subnational powers. Supra- and transnational authorities had precarious standing. Nevertheless, the rights and responsibilities of world heritage gradually became part of the political vocabulary of space and time in São Miguel.

The local arrangements brokered in Brazil were not so easily reached in Argentina, where the World Heritage designation stoked political and social tensions. On the one hand, CNMMLH officials in Buenos Aires continued to harbor suspicions that locals were disinterested in protecting the ruins and would continue to be an impediment to the World Heritage process. Carlos Onetto, the architect designated by the CNMMLH to survey the missions during the preparatory stages of the 1993 UNESCO bid, reported that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to overcome “the consensus in the region that the Jesuit settlements are largely condemned to disappear.”37 According to Onetto, multilateralism was bound to fail as long as locals in the province of Misiones shirked their responsibility to assist the federal government and the international community in protecting the ruins. Such an argument fit a long tradition of national-level
preservationists criticizing “bad” local citizens who failed to assume their patriotic responsibilities and rise up in defense of national patrimony.

Municipal and provincial officials, on the other hand, were suspicious of the CNMMLH—which most closely represented the interests of the World Heritage Committee—in questions of land use, economic development, and visitor services. Under the context of an ever-expanding collective ownership of the missions, regional hostility toward the federal government increased steadily after San Ignacio and Santa Maria received world heritage status in 1984. By February 1992, the provincial secretariat of culture bluntly informed CNMMLH president Jorge Hardoy that “all questions related to the Jesuit ruins should be under the jurisdiction of the province of Misiones.” The provincial government of Misiones demanded the defederalization of a national historical treasure.

In response to provincial opposition to federal oversight, Carlos Saúl Menem, president of Argentina between 1999 and 2009, indicated an openness to provincialize the ruins while maintaining their status as national historical monuments. Hardoy, who opposed provincialization, responded with language typical of a nationalist position:

Cultural patrimony belongs to “all Argentines” [Patrimonio cultural es de “todos los argentinos”], it is an asset that stands to the totality of Argentines as a referent on par with the Buenos Aires Cabildo, or the Casa de Tucumán, and it falls on the Nation to oversee its preservation and conservation in the same manner done to the present.

In his fixation on the idea that the central state should divest from all but the most essential government functions, Menem did not necessarily discount Hardoy’s foundational vision of nation and patrimony, but the guiding ideology of menemismo stressed decentralization, globalization, private initiative, and mass consumption in federal cultural policy. In this mindset, the president decreed the provincialization of San Ignacio ruins in late July 1992. Misiones governor Ramón Puerta and local leaders in Posadas celebrated the measure as a victory for regional self-determination.

Yet provincial control did not necessarily relieve provincial authorities of the entanglements of national heritage. The CNMMLH and Dirección Nacional de Arquitectura (an agency of the public works ministry) continued to assert moral, financial, and technical authority over the provincialized heritage. In late
1995, an earthmoving project associated with the construction of interpretation centers at Santa Ana, Loreto, and Santa Maria la Mayor caused serious damage to the archaeological ruins at Santa Ana. Also damaged were a cluster of modest houses occupied by indigenous families at the edge of the mission compound. The provincial archaeologist Ruth Adela Poujade turned to the local press to denounce the physical damage to provincial heritage sites, casting aspersions on architects who worked for a joint federal–provincial technical commission. Town authorities from Santa Ana also decried the damage, calling (ironically) for federal intervention. The executive council of the CNMMLH, with which provincial authorities had a history of tense relations, conceded the need to have on-site a trained architect and an archaeologist who resided in the region to supervise subsequent work. 42 (Lost in the public debate was the fate of the indigenous families whose residences had been affected.)

At face value, world heritage had a modest influence on the disputes between the provincial government and the Menem administration. The World Heritage Convention could accommodate patrimonial sites administered by entities other than federal governments, but the World Heritage Committee was not equipped to broker disputes between federal and provincial authorities. World Heritage came to matter, though, in certain key ways, particularly in strategies adopted by various actors seeking external funds for restoration projects as well as identity politics.

In the first instance, the mantle of World Heritage was an important asset in securing aid from international entities, including the government of Spain, the IDB, the American Express Company, the University of Naples, and UNESCO. To varying degrees, each expressed interest in supporting a systematic restoration at San Ignacio and new restoration and archaeological work at Loreto, Candelaria, and Santa Ana. Once it became clear that the World Heritage designation could be used to leverage funds and technical assistance from bilateral and multilateral actors interested in attaching their names to the World Heritage movement, federal, regional, and local officials scrambled to establish their claims to the World Heritage site. Ironically, the necessities of presenting a united front to outside funding entities tended to encourage a reconciliation of sorts between federal and provincial authorities, who collaborated on several projects undertaken in the early to mid-1990s.

The financial and political incentives for collaboration steadily increased once the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay began to implement the provisions of the Treaty of Asunción, the 1991 agreement to create a
regional common market known as the Mercado Comum do Sul (Mercosul, known in Spanish as “Mercosur”). Culture, which had little weight in the original scope of the Asunción agreement, became more integral to the document between the years 1992 and 1995, as the ministers of culture of the Mercosul member states formally agreed to place cultural integration on equal footing with economic liberalization and the consolidation of democratic governance. “Mercosul Cultural,” as the process and end result of cultural integration was dubbed, quickly adopted the Jesuit-Guarani missions as a top priority.

In March 1996, fifteen years after the first multilateral discussions to designate the missions as a regional cultural unit, representatives of the governments of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay returned to Posadas and signed an agreement creating the “Proyecto Misiones Mercosur Cultural.” The missions were quickly integrated into various promotional campaigns developed by the Mercosul Cultural working groups, including the International Jesuit-Guarani Missions Tourist Circuit.

The motives for placing the missions at the top of the Mercosul Cultural agenda were fairly obvious: the mission region encompassed three of the four original Mercosul member states. (Uruguay would soon be included when Colonia del Sacramento was linked to the missions through the International Jesuit-Guarani Missions Tourist Circuit as well as the World Heritage List.) For two decades before the formation of the Mercosul bloc, the mission region had been the site of various international development projects, especially in hydroelectric power generation. Speaking directly to the aspirations of an integrated cultural bloc, the mission region had a shared history, especially during the Jesuit and independence eras; the region was home to thousands of Guarani speakers who crossed national boundaries; and, finally, the region enjoyed the unusual honor of winning the world’s first transnational World Heritage site designation. The missions offered a ready-made model for cultural integration that transcended the boundaries of nation-states. Among the most enthusiastic supporters of Mercosul Cultural, the missions actually prefigured regional integration.

The administrative and financial aspects of cultural integration followed a pattern established in the 1980s: multilateral resources most readily flowed toward projects and actors exhibiting the ability and willingness to act multilaterally. UNESCO, understandably, was especially supportive of the multilateral cultural initiatives among the Mercosul member states. In early 1997, UNESCO’s director general threw his support behind an Argentine proposal pending with the IDB, writing,
The primacy ascribed to the mission sites by the culture ministers of the Mercosur member states, in addition to the human and economic resources directed by the respective nations toward the preservation of the invaluable heritage, demonstrate a political will to strengthen subregional integration through cultural initiatives. UNESCO, for its part, supports these endeavors through its broad cooperation with the member states to achieve full development, not solely in the preservation of monuments but above all the development the community found throughout the far-flung territory where the Jesuits originally established the missionary settlements.43

The Argentine bid for IDB support proved to be unsuccessful, but it encouraged Argentine officials, especially in the CNMMLH, to continue to seek out multilateral funds for ongoing restoration and archaeological works as well as regional development projects that included heritage tourism.

The enduring conundrum of regional integration propelled by multilateral funds was the disconnect between projects with strong multilateral backing and locals living in the immediate mission zone. Ana Maria Gorosito Kramer, an anthropologist who led the provincial heritage service in Misiones in 1998, has observed that well-intentioned projects with multilateral funding, such as the Muro Piloto program, failed to excite locals. Although UNESCO officials extolled the importance of local communities to the preservation process, the on-the-ground politics of preservation often ended up alienating residents who lived with the missions. It appears that space for securing material concessions and bargaining rights won by locals during the micropoliticking of the 1940s through the 1980s, was slowly eroded by heritage projects that relied on multilateral funding sources and international organizations. The ensuing dilemma, then, was how locals might fully enjoy their “rights” to local heritage sites that belonged simultaneously to the nation, the Mercosul member states, and to all mankind.

WORLD HERITAGE ACROSS THE TRIPLE FRONTIER

The entanglements of heritage and participatory democracy prove central to mapping the place of power in patrimony in the Mercosul bloc. On the one hand, the transnational heritage movement has created mechanisms for fairly democratic engagements among multiple actors who have participated in international summits, multilateral agreements, site studies, ethnographies,
and restoration projects. Somewhat kitschy, the son et lumière spectacles at São Miguel and San Ignacio still do the hard work of evoking nationalist fantasies embedded within a transnational imaginary. (Such folksy boundary crossing reinforces the type of border crossing that links the missions together as an experience for the car and motor coach tourist.) At São Miguel, the negotiation over the administration of world heritage released democratic urges among government officials and everyday citizens that afforded space for the indigenous actors who had been written out of the history of the mission region since the nineteenth century. Transnational heritage has democratized the impulse to embrace and protect heritage sites of universal value and local meanings. In Misiones, on the other hand, locals have chafed at various episodes of exclusion from decision-making processes. Their frustrations suggest that the expanding heritage crusade is not, by definition, inclusive. Nonetheless, even in San Ignacio, the world heritage movement has enabled locals to assert a certain degree of symbolic, economic, and administrative power over patrimonial sites long claimed by national elites in distant Buenos Aires.

The question to ask is what are the implications for governance and sovereignty, especially when heritage designation emanates from and reflects supranational political jurisdictions? How do central states, which continue to maintain preexisting claims to national monuments, make ideological and administrative accommodations to the legal, financial, professional, and discursive demands created in transnational heritage movements? How, in turn, do subnational and transnational actors use centralized preservationist laws and administrative structures to pursue preservationist agendas that may or may not coincide with federal objectives? What, then, does World Heritage mean for the enduring power of the nation-state and the writing of its histories in the age of globalization?

Various sociocultural movements organized for environmental protection, indigenous rights, and just wages are an integral part of the political culture of the Mercosur/sul member states. The Jesuit-Guarani missions have the potential to organize new, unprecedented movements organized around cultural preservation. The research questions include the following: What influence does world heritage have on preexisting and new social movements? Does the sociology of world heritage preservationism tend to box in grassroots heritage crusades? In the case of Mercosul, is it possible to envision a sociocultural movement organized around cultural patrimony that operates within and beyond national borders?
The research completed for this chapter strongly suggests that all patrimonial designations that have followed the original national categories—and their attendant political and social meanings—have been additive. That is, claims made by municipal and regional governments, UNESCO, Mercosul, foreign governments, and multinational corporations have not superseded the preexisting national status of the missions’ ruins. The 1992 political crisis surrounding the provincialization of the ruins in Misiones was a unique moment when powerful political interests organized around a logic of denationalization of patrimony. The Menem administration’s resolution—ceding administration of the missions to the provincial government while maintaining the ruins’ national monumental status and the technical standards of World Heritage—was a largely unhappy experiment. It was also a cautionary tale.

Global patrimony may, in fact, reinforce certain older political arrangements in that federal heritage agencies find themselves at a distinct advantage relative to regional and local actors in the administration of world heritage. The central state retains its privileged place outside of the national state when seeking technical and financial support from abroad.

The poetics and politics of patrimony, nevertheless, have shifted significantly with the addition of new claims that emerge out of transnational designations. These new claims present complex problems in the meaning of the “national” and the “patrimonial.” World heritage pushes heritage outside the confines of the nation—symbolically, politically, and socially—and presents new opportunities for the reterritorialization of identities, social and economic development, and cultural hybridization. By their very nature, universal and transnational heritage (e.g., the International Jesuit-Guarani Missions Tourist Circuit, the Maya Trail, Routes of Santiago de Compostela) invite a broad range of actors and organizations to make national heritage sites their own through claims and acts of preservation and conservation, collaboration and dispute, commercialization, and, finally, scholarship about the past and its makers.

NOTES

This chapter is dedicated to John D. Wirth (1936–2002), the late Gildred Professor of Latin American Studies at Stanford University and a passionate student of Mercosul integration. An earlier version appeared as “Além da história pátria? As missões Jesuítico-Guarani, o Patrimônio da Humanidade, e outras historias,” Revista do Patrimônio 34 (2010): 281–301. The original research was made possible
by a Rockefeller Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Humanities and the Programa de Investigaciones Socioculturales en el Mercosur-Instituto de Desarrollo Económico y Social (Buenos Aires, Argentina).


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