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World War Two Iconoclasm: The Destruction and Reconstruction of memorials to Queen Victoria and Edward VII on the French Riviera

Gilles TEULIÉ

- 1 The Chinese dissident artist Ai Wei Wei has written: “The extermination of a nation’s collective memory and its ability for self-reflection is like a living organism’s rejection of its own immune system”.¹ His observation underlines the vital necessity for a group to preserve its memorial heritage. Losing it would, he implies, be lethal to the members of the group. The representation of people or events displayed or erected in such a way as to be commemorated by future generations is probably as old as humanity. To the expression “collective memory” used by Ai Wei Wei, Jay Winter prefers “collective remembrance” as the latter “points to time and place and above all, to evidence, to traces enabling us to understand what groups of people try to do when they act in public to conjure up the past” (Winter 5). Among these “traces”, monuments, memorials, plaques and statues have a powerful symbolic meaning for the people who erected them and are part of the urban cultural landscape of their descendants who may have forgotten the origins and the meaning of such tokens of the past, or perhaps do not care about them, unless they are targeted by invaders who seek to destroy them. In this case, they may come to treasure them as a heritage which needs protecting in order to preserve the memory and cultural foundations of their society.
- 2 This paper aims to examine the ideological struggle over the destruction and reconstruction of statues in times of conflict, seen as an attempt to destroy memory and enforce forgetting on the one hand, but on the other to embody cultural resistance and continuity, ‘lest we forget’. To borrow Cherry’s terms, there is “dislocation” of the monument by the invaders, but not “relocation” (Cherry 665), as the familiar urban site where the statue was originally erected is generally preserved. A key aspect this article

sets out to explore is the significance of re-erecting a monument after it was destroyed by the enemy and particularly how memorial reconstruction links the authorities, the populace and the past. Jay Winter reminds us that “States do not remember; individuals do, in association with other people” (Winter 4). Through the three examples that follow, this article will attempt to understand the causes and consequences of the destruction of statues of historic British monarchs on the French Riviera during the Second World War.

Monarch	Location of the monument	Date of erection	Date of destruction	Agency	Date of re-erection
Queen Victoria	Nice	1912	1944	German army	1946
King Edward VII	Cannes	1912	1941	French Fascist party	1945
Queen Victoria	Menton	1939	1944	Italian army	1960

- 3 The story of these statues, from their commissioning by the municipal councils to their erection, is important as it enables us to grasp what was at the back of the minds of those who took the decision to erect them. It is within the socio-cultural and political context of that time that we can understand why and how the French people concerned by the toppling of their statues came to terms with the acts of vandalism.

1. “Victoria the Good” in Nice

Statue of Queen Victoria in Cimiez, Nice, 2012



AUTHOR PHOTO

- 4 Queen Victoria is said to have longed for Nice while on her death bed, declaring: “Oh, if only I were at Nice, I should recover” (Nelson 1). Nice is the place she appreciated most of all the French seaside resorts as out of nine stays in the Alpes-Maritimes and the Var, her last five sojourns were in Nice. To commemorate her visits, a monument was built by local sculptor Louis Maubert and inaugurated on 12 April 1912 in front of the Regina hotel, in the Cimiez Quarter. The young girls of the statue represent the four cities of the Riviera the queen stayed in, that is Nice, Menton, Grasse and Cannes. The project was aired on 21 January 1909, when the mayor of Menton, François Fontana, summoned his town council to present the subscription launched by the mayor of Nice to put up a memorial dedicated to Queen Victoria. The proceedings of the meeting recorded that the memorial committee voiced the different benefits that Queen Victoria had brought to the French Riviera and subsequently invited all the coastal cities to manifest their gratitude by participating in the erection of a monument in honour of Queen Victoria’s memory.² The mayor added that Cannes had voted a 2,000 franc contribution, Antibes 500 francs, and that he would like Menton to donate 1,000 francs. He justified this by arguing that Queen Victoria had chosen Menton as the destination for her first visit to the French Riviera and that she was so fond of the place. The Menton council duly voted the contribution. In a letter dated 10 January 1912 addressed to the Président du Conseil des ministres, Raymond Poincaré, the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes, André de Joly, announces that the joint Nice-Cannes project is underway. We also learn that the town of Cannes wanted to unveil a statue to King Edward VII. The municipal council of Nice led by its mayor Honoré Sauvan resolved, on 27 March 1912, that it was time for the statue of Queen Victoria to be inaugurated. The *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 23 March 1912, reproduced

a picture of the statue before it was unveiled. The caption states “French Monument to ‘Victoria the Good’” and “the above beautiful memorial is shortly to be unveiled at Nice. It has been subscribed for largely by French residents on the Riviera”. Interestingly the correspondent of *The Standard*, a London-based newspaper, wrote to the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes from the Hotel Cecil in Nice in a letter dated 25 March 1912, that the city of Nice would greatly benefit if wide publicity was given in England to the event and if British journalists, those of *The Standard* in particular, were officially invited. Likewise, on 28 March, the *Daily Mail* requested permission for its correspondent to attend the ceremony. British press articles, such as one in *The Times* dated 9 April 1912, or another by H. Villiers Barnett in the *Continental Weekly* on 4 April, noted that the double unveiling was a tribute to Anglo-French friendship:

Next week two monuments to two of the greatest English monarchs will be unveiled on the Côte d’Azur. Nice thus honours Victoria the Great; Cannes thus honours Edward the peacemaker; both are the expression of French homage; both are proof of that Cordial Understanding which the great queen desired and the great king cemented. It is a telling story in the Concord that subsists between our two nations. In it, we distinguish the theme of a true harmony resolved at last out of prolonged dissonances; and the pleasure of it is scarcely to be expressed in language. Both at Nice and at Cannes the act of homage is spontaneous. It is the sincere and the graceful expression of French respect and affection for these unforgettable great rulers and though its incidence is local, its official recognition and approval by the government of France has endowed it with the character of a National demonstration of French goodwill towards England.

- 5 On 1 April 1912, B. Fred (director of the Fred Film Company based in Nice) asked for permission to access the premises of the inauguration in order to film the event. An identical request was made on 8 April by the firm CFC (Entreprise Générale de Prises de Vues Cinématographiques). On 22 June 1912, the mayor had a special fund voted by the municipal council as he wanted the event to be a “great celebration”. The Anglo-French festivities were scheduled for 12 and 13 April 1912. The organisational details show how substantial an event this inauguration was seen to be at the time and suggest that the British Press thought it was worth covering. An article from *The Daily Mail* (28 March 1912, p.8) states that there would be major celebrations for “Easter on the Riviera” called the “Entente Cordiale Fêtes”. The article specifies that “Special festivities are being arranged in connection with the inauguration of the monuments to the late Queen Victoria at Nice and the late King Edward VII at Cannes on April 13” including a “review of combined English and French fleets, grand regattas, procession of carnival queens, review of troops, firework displays, etc.” Other details are given which explain that most of the French Riviera resorts (Nice, Monte Carlo, Hyères, Cannes, Beaulieu) would be “en Fête”, that two special excursion trains were to leave from Charing Cross in London at 2.50 on 4 April, and at 12.20 on 5 April from Paris, and the Royal Navy would send a flotilla comprising the *Good Hope*, the *Lancaster* and the *Hampshire* under the command of Commodore Sir Douglas Gamble.
- 6 On the day of the inauguration, Raymond Poincaré, President du Conseil, and Alexandre Millerand, the French Minister of War, were present as well as the Minister of the French Navy. The mayor was happy to state, in his inaugural speech, that from local beginnings the unveiling of the monument to Queen Victoria had become a national, if not an international, event: “and Nice can derive glory from the initiative, as it is a piece of national history which is inscribed in the glorious pages that our local history is full of.” He then adds that “the governments of the two nations have wished to be associated in

this imposing celebration and I am proud and honoured to be able to welcome, in this favorite dwelling-place of the English colony, his Excellency Sir Francis Bertie, ambassador to His British Majesty.” The inaugural address enables us to grasp what the monument was about:

As I gaze upon this monument, it calls to mind years from long ago, of which I have kept a deep and indelible memory. In the faithful features that the sculptor has brought so happily back to life, I can see once again this venerable physiognomy full of sweetness and kindness, with a little bit of that melancholic severity which are given to those who bear the strong responsibilities of power.

- 7 The mayor, as might be expected of a host, praises the British monarch the statue is celebrating. But in doing so, he places himself in the position of a witness to the queen’s visit. He thus embodies the living link between the flesh and bone queen and her marble effigy. This enables him to share with his British audience, who were wont to call their queen “mother to her people” (*Victoria Daily Times*, 26 January 1901), the image of a woman “full of sweetness and kindness”. This proximity to the queen is partly intended to appeal to the British delegation listening to his speech, but also to project the idea to a wider public that though the speaker is a Frenchman, he has the same sentiments towards the queen as her loyal subjects, even so far as to suggest that she was the adoptive queen of the people of Nice:

She was a Great Queen to her people. For our town, which she appreciated particularly, she was “the good queen”. Charming because of her simplicity, happily avoiding the severity of etiquette, she loved to wander the leafy paths of these green hills in a small carriage which she drove herself, often stopping at the house of some inhabitant in order to drink a glass of milk or to buy flowers and fruits that young girls from the countryside would ingenuously bring to her.

- 8 The speech is also destined for the French public, including those republicans who might not be too keen on the idea of monarchy. He shows that the queen was simple in her manners and did not behave like a haughty blue blood. The sacredness of the statues is underlined in the rest of the speech which emphasises that it would make of British visitors to Cimiez pilgrims:

Now, thanks to this monument, Queen Victoria will live eternally on this hill of Cimiez which she loved so much. Foreign visitors, especially English people, will doubtless not miss the opportunity to make a devoted pilgrimage here. Through this animated marble, they will find again the revered figure of the queen who has devoted her life to the grandeur of her people and who leaves after her an imperishable page in the history of her country.

- 9 The mayor may have had in mind the British tourists who would be encouraged to come to Cimiez and spend their money in Nice which is consistently presented as an anglophile city. Among the tourist souvenirs available to British visitors were postcards of the monument to Queen Victoria. In the postcard, we have not just a medium of communication but another form of commemoration, particularly when the postcard refers to a specific monument and the caption cites the day of its inauguration. One such example was published by Edition Giletta, a well-known Riviera postcard publisher of the early 20th century. The card represents “NICE-CIMIEZ. Excelsior Hotel Regina. Monument to H.M. Queen Victoria. Inaugurated on 12 April 1912”.

2. French postcard, *circa* 1912

PRIVATE ARCHIVES

- 10 Kristen Belgum remarks that “nation-states have erected monuments to display their power and legitimacy in material form” (457). She then wonders how monuments that are seen by very few people can contribute to the building of a nation: “To be effective as national emblems, they had to be made accessible to a much larger population” (458). Her answer is that for the millions of non-visitors the contact was mediated through the popular press. As the sms or email of their day, I would argue that these postcards also had a commemorative function, as shown by another postcard published in *Nice* (Mus & Gimelo Eds) to celebrate the “Fêtes Franco-Anglaises” in 1912 which displays the statues in Nice and Cannes side-by-side. Indeed, the card that cites the date of the unveiling of the monument participates in the commemoration by re-enacting its dedication. Through the postcard, those who weren’t there were given a feel for what the event was like. This explains why some postcards representing the statue bear the date of the inauguration where others do not. As it was important for people to remember that consecration through a sense of place, the postcard was there to help them locate it in geographical, historical and affective terms. In the case of a statue that has been demolished, the postcard endures as evidence of a lost landmark and the commemorative process continues through the visualization of the monument, as we shall see below in the case of Menton.

3. French postcard, *circa* 1912



PRIVATE ARCHIVES

2. The first monument to Queen Victoria in Menton

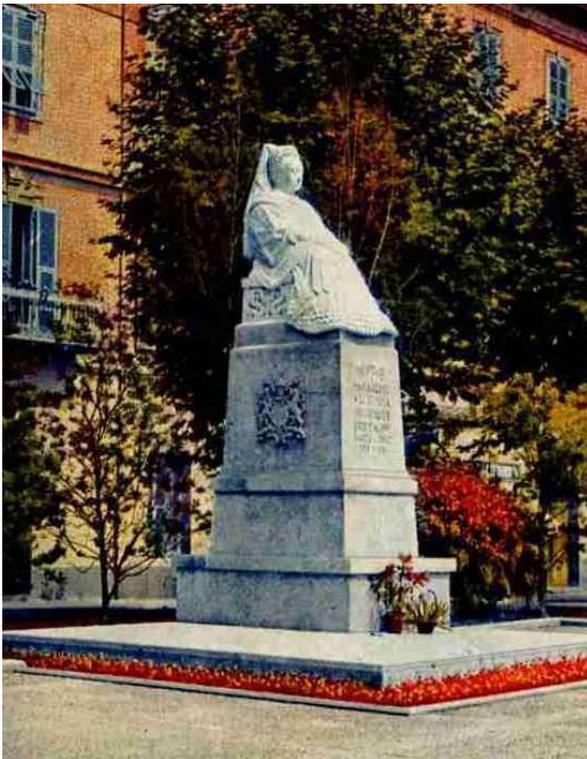
4. The Menton statue of Queen Victoria, now destroyed



© Archives de la ville de Menton

- 11 The first attempt to honour the visit of Queen Victoria to Menton took place in 1905 with the creation of a Franco-English committee presided by Sir Thomas Hanbury, an English resident in Menton. Sir Thomas seems to have been determined to commemorate the queen's visit as he had already had a fountain built in Garavan near the "red rocks" to preserve the memory of the royal visitor. The Committee promoted two projects: one would be the erection of a statue in the new triangular square in the Baie de Garavan (now Square Victoria) or the construction of a "Hall Victoria" in what is now the Jardin Elisée Reclus, as a meeting place for the English colony of Menton. Neither of these projects had been completed by the time of Sir Thomas' death in 1907 and they were shelved. Yet in 1909 Menton donated 1,000 Francs so that the city of Nice could erect a monument to Queen Victoria. This gesture must have inspired a later mayor of Menton, Jean Durandy. On 20 May 1937, during a meeting of his municipal council, he read a letter from Mr Gern, a sculptor in Menton, who proposed to build a statue for the town from a model he had made "to the memory of Queen Victoria of England". The project was accepted. On 6 April 1938, Charles Gern submitted an estimate to the council for a statue in the finest Carrare marble. A convention was signed between the mayor and the sculptor granting the latter the sum of 105,000 francs. The Alpes-Maritimes department participated financially by granting 20,000 francs so that the funding target could be reached. The statue, made of white Ravacione marble from Carrare, was unveiled in Menton on Easter Monday 10 April 1939.

5. French postcard, *circa* 1938



Éditions d'Art Munier Montluet Nice "50 MENTON Monument de S.M. la Reine Victoria de Grande-Bretagne, Impératrice des Indes"

PRIVATE ARCHIVES.

- 12 The ceremonies of inauguration were partially postponed because of the political tensions that were to lead to the Second World War. The lavish reception scheduled to take place on the evening of Sunday 9 April in honour of the British officers was cancelled after *HMS Malaya* was urgently ordered to set sail for Malta. Some of the ceremonies took place regardless: in his inaugural speech, the mayor declared that “the venerable men of Menton today hold in their hearts the unforgettable vision of the monarch who, every day, when they were young, would come and go among them without parading, so simple, so respectable, so good, as she had always lived”. The mayor had not been a witness to the visit of Queen Victoria which took place in 1882, contrary to the mayor of Nice in his inaugural speech in 1912. Yet he used the same rhetorical device of evoking the senior citizens of Menton who had remembered seeing the queen when they were children. What seems important in both cases is that the statues (Nice 1912 and Menton 1939) should not be unveiled without contemporary witnesses of the queen, lest the chain of remembrance be broken and the commemoration become disembodied. What is more, through reverence for the “venerable men of Menton” he was also able to attest, just like the mayor of Nice some 27 years earlier, that the queen was a “good” or people’s queen. He concluded in a similar vein: “As for me, I wish, that within this stone, could be summed up all the vitality and all the courage of two peoples closely united in the preservation of peace”. The inauguration in Nice in 1912 celebrated the recent “Entente Cordiale” between Britain and France, the inauguration in Menton in 1939 celebrated the alliance that had led the two countries hand in hand through the First World War. The destruction of the Menton monument just a few years after its unveiling would enable the two nations to commemorate another common cause.

3. The symbolic executions of Queen Victoria and Edward VII

6a.b.c. Repaired damage on the statue of Queen Victoria in Cimiez, Nice





AUTHOR PHOTOS, 2012.

- 13 The Nice memorial was vandalized by German soldiers and the marks are still visible today. Only a few pieces of the statue were damaged and most of it remained intact, giving the impression that it was a spontaneous act committed by the soldiers of the Wehrmacht, not an official one ordered by high-ranking officers. It seems more probable that individual soldiers took to desecrating the statue without the heavy equipment needed to do so (the head and an arm were broken off among other features), though symbolically it is significant that the British monarch should be beheaded like her deposed forbear Charles I, as if Queen Victoria had been executed for “high treason”. If so, the gesture is not without precedent, such as the symbolic beheading reported in *La Croix Illustrée* in its edition of 9 June 1907 which shows a rioting Indian crowd with the severed head and crown from a statue of Queen Victoria.³

7. French newspaper (1907) captioned "Rebellious Hindus breaking a statue of Queen Victoria



- 14 An interesting parallel is to be drawn with the fate of another royal memorial on the French Riviera: the statue of Edward VII, which was unveiled in 1912, taken down during the Second World War and re-erected after the conflict. The Newspaper *Le Littoral* (15 April 1912) reports that the unveiling ceremony was conducted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Président du Conseil, and that selected VIPS were present, among them the Grand Duke Michael of Russia, the French Minister of the Navy Delcassé, the French War Minister Millerand, and Sir Francis Bertie, the British Ambassador to Paris. Michael of Russia had created the Committee for the erection of the monument in 1911, a year after the death of King Edward VII. The statue was made by sculptor Denys Puech. It was inaugurated on 13 April 1912, the day after that of Queen Victoria, leaving time for the same VIPS to travel from Nice to Cannes.

8. The now destroyed statue of Edward VII dressed as a yachtsman



**FRENCH POSTCARD WITH AN ENGLISH CAPTION PUBLISHED IN CANNES
PRIVATE ARCHIVES**

- 15 The statue in Cannes was pulled down in 1941 by the “Doriotistes”, a French fascist militia which followed Jacques Doriot (1898-1945). The re-inauguration of Queen Victoria’s restored statue took place in Nice on 24 May 1946 and was presided over by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, while the repaired statue of Edward VII was unveiled in 1945 in the presence of the British Ambassador, M. Duff Cooper.⁴ Where the statue of Queen Victoria in Cimiez is concerned, the sculptor Joseph Gazan (1891-1985)⁵ was asked to repair it after the war (he had to recreate the head, the arm and several other parts that had been damaged). Symbolically, the German act of iconoclasm was erased from memory by the re-enactment of the unveiling ceremony. As in Cannes, the restoration of the statue and the new inauguration might be said to be part of a “recoding” process, to recreate the bond that the Nice population had with the British monarch. We see a similar process engaged in Menton. Yet the fact that, contrary to Nice, the statue of Queen Victoria in Menton was completely destroyed, enabled the municipality to rethink the project and adapt it to new preoccupations.

4. Genesis of the new Menton monument

- 16 When Hitler allowed Mussolini to occupy the Alpes-Maritimes, the statue of Queen Victoria in Menton was destroyed and thrown into the sea by the Italian troops. After the war, on 27 October 1945, the municipal council of Menton led by Mayor Pierre Prenthou Dormy, decided that: “a monument will be erected on the same spot as that chosen in 1938.” Three days later the committee for Queen Victoria’s Monument also held a

meeting at which the mayor declared “the objective is to repair tentatively the indignity done by the ‘fascist hordes’, by affixing a plaque until Menton has regained its former status as a seaside resort.” A fortnight later on 15 November 1945, the mayor wrote to the British Council in Nice that

as stated during the meeting when you kindly received me, I have the honour to confirm that a Committee has been created in Menton in order to redress the injury done to the memory of H.M. Queen Victoria and to our city by the destruction of the statue that Menton had erected to this Great Queen of England [...] Yet, without waiting for the erection of the new monument, a plaque will be affixed to the base of the statue which remains intact in the square. The text will be as follows: “On this spot, the statue of Queen Victoria that the city of Menton had unveiled in 1939 in memory of the kindness that this Great Queen had manifested towards Menton a long time ago, will be erected once again. The Municipality, elected in 1945 after the Liberation, has decided, with the agreement of the population, that the unveiling of this plaque is a first step towards repairing the outrage done to one of the United Nations, and to Menton, when the statue was destroyed by the Fascists”.

9. Plaque fixed by the Menton municipality on the pedestal of the statue of Queen Victoria in 1945



© Archives municipales de la ville de Menton

- 17 The text was approved by the British Embassy in Paris. A member of the town council, Serge Bernstam, wrote to the mayor of Menton on 31 October 1945 stating he was sorry he could not attend the “committee’s meeting” as he had to go to his mother’s grave in St Raphaël. He thus wrote a manuscript letter to state his position on the matter of Queen Victoria’s statue:

An idea might be for the town of Menton to write to the King of England or to the British government, stating the people in Menton were proud of the statue they had of Her Royal Highness Queen Victoria which reminded them of the visits that the noble and illustrious monarch had paid to the city years ago, and that,

unfortunately, the Fascists had found nothing better to do in order to take revenge than to destroy it and dump it in the sea. It should also be added that Menton, a martyred town that was stricken, bombed, and looted, does not have the resources to collaborate in the restoration of what is a great loss, and this is why, as there is an ardent desire to repair as soon as possible this odious act of vandalism, the town council thought to appeal to England's great generosity in order to obtain an art work, a bust, or a statue of Queen Victoria by an English sculptor. It seems to me that the English would be honoured by such a proposal that would flatter their national pride.

- 18 The counsellor added in a *postscriptum* that he would like to suggest a text for the plaque that the mayor wanted to unveil before a new statue was erected: "The fascists threw the statue in the sea. Liberated Menton will repair this outrage", or in another suggestion "Liberated Menton does not forget and will repair this outrage done by the fascists to this monument". In *The Ethics of Memory* Avishai Margalit argues that "mental scars last longer than physical scars, and the effects of insults and humiliation last longer than mere physical pain" (117). The counsellor's reaction shows his determination to salve the symbolic affront to his town. Its chosen form recalls French sociologist Jean-Yves Boursier's observation that the inscription for posterity aspires to the writing of history (Boursier 2) – in this case, a collective rewriting of history to reverse the act of iconoclasm. In the event, the final text selected for the plaque was less vengeful than the proposed versions above. *Nice Matin*, in its edition of 13 October 1945, reminds its readers of the episode, ironically stating that the first "courageous" act committed by the invading Italian troops in 1940 was to vandalize the statue of Queen Victoria in the square of the Quai Laurenti. The article adds that the project was not to re-erect the original statue, first of all because it was of questionable taste, but also because it had been blown up and the pieces thrown into the sea in the "Sablette", somewhere inside Menton harbour. Another press clipping from the Menton Archives relates that the statue was broken by "fascist vandals" when the Italian "conquerors" invaded Menton. The journalist explains that the Italians, after the war, were ashamed of what they had done and that they tried to exonerate themselves, as seen in the Italian newspaper account which claimed that the statue had been demolished by a truck accidentally reversing into it. A different justification was cited retrospectively, in 1990, by the Italian "commissaire civil" in charge of occupied Menton during the war, Guiseppe Frediani, who wrote in his memoirs:

One night in 1942, when the Garibaldian occupation plans of Nice were being formed, some intruders pulled down Napoleon III's bust. I deplored the act and had the bust fixed and put back. The demolition of the monument to Queen Victoria, which had been erected in a provocative way in front of the house in which Kruger, the heroic defender of the Boers, died in exile, was carried out as a just and comprehensible reaction of the Italian occupation troops. (Panicacci)

- 19 President Paul Kruger had lost the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) to the British under the reign of Queen Victoria and he had indeed stayed in exile in Menton, in the Garavan area, not far from the location where the statue had been erected (yet contrary to Frediani's account, he died in Switzerland, not in France).

10. Portrait of Queen Victoria on the new Menton monument



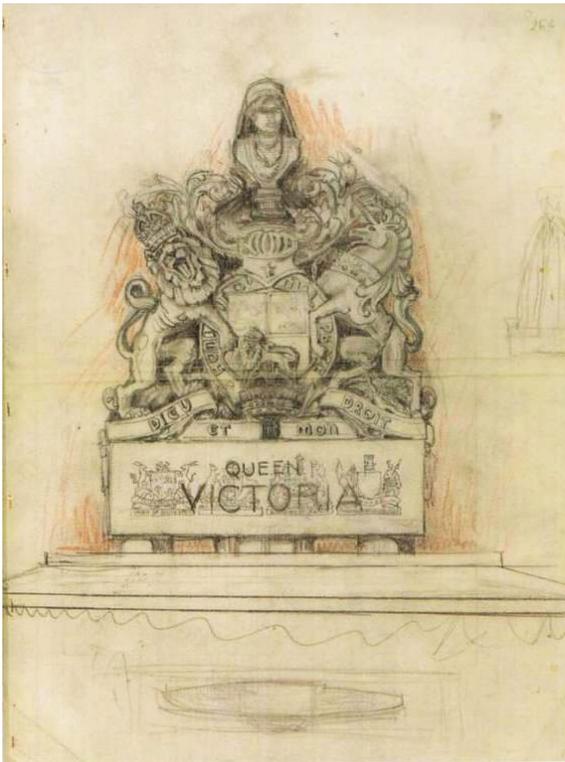
AUTHOR PHOTO, 2012.

- 20 Lieutenant-Colonel A.R. Thackrah, the English resident in Menton, and Vice-president of the committee for the new monument, was asked by the mayor to contact the Royal Mint in London to acquire an official portrait of the queen. He received six pictures of the queen which he sent to the mayor, explaining in his letter (August 20 1946): “though a bit severe they are nonetheless historically accurate”. He also stated that the coincidence was that “these are the same pictures that were used for the reconstitution of the statue in Cimiez”, which was inaugurated in Nice a second time in 1946. Questions are raised about how the queen should be represented: as a younger woman, or as she was when she first came to Menton in 1882 (Letter of the mayor to Lt-Col Thackrah, August 24 1946)?⁶ The municipality had planned to organize celebrations for the unveiling of the new statue, but as the mayor explained in a letter to Radio Monte Carlo “for various reasons, in particular the small number of English persons currently residing on the Coast, we have decided to postpone the construction and consequently the inauguration of the monument to Queen Victoria” (Feb 18 1947). We may infer from the remark that the mayor wanted the unveiling to attract British tourists. The news of the project however spread and the mayor had to answer a letter from the Prince of Battenberg in which he explained that the municipality had decided not to make an exact replica of the previous monument, which had not been particularly appreciated by the Royal Family, but to build a new one to a completely different design, dedicated both to Queen Victoria and to the “heroic participation” of the British people in the war (1 October 1947). Once again, a living link to the British people was deemed necessary for the commemoration to be meaningful: the mayor wrote on 14 February 1948 that the presence of two British battleships in the Bay of Menton would be a good public advertisement for the new

monument. A competition was therefore opened on 10 October 1948 for “architects and French artists” to design a new monument:

The architects will naturally have first to be inspired by Queen Victoria’s visit to Menton, and all the blessings that she spread around her, but also by the events that led to the destruction of the monument and its reconstruction. They will try to evoke Britain’s heroic resistance, alone against the invader, but mainly to symbolize what Franco-British friendship has done in the history of this last quarter of a century for peace and understanding between our two peoples.

11. Sketch by sculptor J. Gazan for the new monument



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- 21 Perhaps due to a disappointing response to the tender, on 7 April 1949 the committee declared that none of the competitors had met the requirements and the competition was shelved without a winner. For a few years, the project lay dormant, but with the revival of tourism in Menton, Mayor Francis Palmero wrote a note on 5 June 1954 to the French Department of War Damages requesting funds to rebuild the monument. He explained that the statue was meant to commemorate Queen Victoria’s presence in Menton, but also to “pay a tribute to the English colony which brought about Menton’s fame as a tourist resort”. He added that the prosperity of Menton was inextricably linked to its British residents and it was “unacceptable” for the English-speaking community in Menton not to see the monument replaced. He concluded that it was also an economic issue as the town still hosted numerous British tourists, but that the state also shared in the benefits of this foreign presence through the foreign currency earnings which entered “the general economic circuit”. He concluded that the reconstruction was therefore a necessity. The mayor may have been encouraged in his memorial project by a letter dated 22 September 1955 written by Tony Mayer, the cultural attaché to the French Embassy in London, who wrote explaining that a member of the Royal Family might come to Menton the following

year. He added that he had always been struck, each time he came to town, by the sad sight of the “mutilated pedestal which supported, before the war, Queen Victoria’s effigy”. He went on to ask: “wouldn’t it be possible to put this statue back, and on that occasion, to celebrate in a spectacular way the Entente Cordiale?” The mayor answered on 8 October 1955 that he fully agreed with the idea and he explained that, thanks to war damages paid by the French government (nearly 2 million francs), he had already asked the sculptor Joseph Gazan, the author of a statue to George V in Nice, to design a new project; he would be pleased if a member of the Royal Family could unveil the new monument. The municipality duly voted the reconstruction of the monument on 26 May 1956. Thereafter, things seem to have gone smoothly. Gazan’s project was submitted to Queen Elizabeth to seek the approval of the Crown. The queen acquiesced and returned a picture of Queen Victoria, to ensure that the likeness would be perfect. The sculptor Joseph Gazan wrote to the mayor on 15 May 1957 that the monument was nearing completion: he reported it was 2m50 high, 3m wide and 0m75 in depth. A subscription was launched to cover the cost of the tender to the tune of three and a half million francs. One of the first subscribers was René Coty, the former French President. The San Remo Rotary Club donated 200,000 francs. The President of the British Association of the Alpes-Maritimes Ernest F. Harris wrote to Mayor Francis Palmero that he wished to offer 50,000 francs because “you have been so generous, both in your attitude and in your actions to my country, and to my countrymen who live in Menton, that I feel that I may say that you have made the ‘Entente Cordiale’ in your city a living reality” (29th August 1959). Joseph Gazan completed the monument in October of the same year.

- 22 The success of the subscription points to a motivating factor that vies for preeminence with concerns about collective memory: financial considerations related to tourism. The plan to build the Menton monument was first announced by the town council on 30 November 1945, but it was to be erected when the time was right, that is “as soon as the town of Menton recovers its normal tourist development and a sufficient amount of money has been obtained through subscription”. By 5 June 1954, the project was still seen as having “economic, touristic and diplomatic consequences”. Yet the owner of the Hotel Balmoral in Menton complained to Mayor Palmero in a letter dated 22 February 1960, that the numerous British tourists that had been coming to his hotel for many years, and who represented 40 % of his customers, were deeply disappointed not to have received any official invitation from the town council. Although he understood seats for the ceremonies were scarce, he could have given the names of six or seven invitees among the most distinguished of his British residents had he been asked to. He adds: “I was a witness to their disappointment and had to listen to their complaints ... Which I forward to you”. He concludes by saying that he did his best to alleviate their hurt by inviting six British sailors from *HMS Tiger*, one of the British Navy ships sent to Menton for the celebrations, to share in his guests’ dinner. How the mayor responded to this letter is not known, but we see that the tourist trade was at the heart of the preoccupations of the people of Menton. Just how far the issue of the financial impact on tourism influenced members of the Menton town council concerned with the re-erection of the monument to Queen Victoria is hard to say. Yet the fact that the project was carried through by successive mayors and town councils, whatever their reasons, reveals a broad consensus over the focus of collective memory.

12. Inauguration of the new Menton monument to Queen Victoria, 21 February 1960



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- 23 On the day of the inauguration, on 21 February 1960, two British battleships, *HMS Tiger* and *HMS Zest*, were present in the bay of Menton along with several other French battleships. A service was held at *St John the Evangelist*, the Menton Anglican Church. Reverend Gardener addressed those attending both in French and in English and declared that Queen Victoria was for British people a great queen, and that he and his fellow compatriots were proud and honoured that her reign and her memory should be commemorated once again in Menton. He added that Victoria was not the only local reminder of home, as he lived on the *Avenue Edward VII* and, whenever he took a stroll by the sea, it was on the *Promenade George V*: “Each step evokes a name from home, which fills me, and my fellow Englishmen with joy and thankfulness”. It is reported that the French Air Patrol came from Salon de Provence to perform a fly past, as they do for exceptional national or international events, and a huge crowd attended the various ceremonies. The monument was unveiled by Lady Patricia Ramsay, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria⁷, and the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes. Lady Ramsey gave an eloquent speech in which she evoked the monumental statue of Queen Victoria in front of Buckingham Palace, thus symbolically linking the British presence on the Côte d’Azur to a worldwide network of Victorian memorials. She congratulated the sculptor, Joseph Gazan for the remarkable resemblance of the medallion, of an “eloquent simplicity”, to her grandmother whom she remembered well. She reminded the audience that Gazan was the author of the statue of King George V in Nice and that he had also been entrusted with the repair work to the statue of Queen Victoria in Cimiez. In a lyrical speech, the mayor asserted that the earlier statue of Queen Victoria had been a casualty of the war as much as any actual victim. He explained that the city was deeply wounded: “up to the very

heart of this square which is open to the sea of Athens and Rome, dominating that Mediterranean Sea where our common civilization was born”. He went on to put the unveiling of the new monument into perspective, declaring: “Now that this monument is rebuilt, harmony is restored; this is the fruit of a victory, the benefit of a same ideal.” He concluded by celebrating the artist and his subject: “The sculptor, Joseph Gazan, whose talent is so full of sincerity and faith, presents us the legendary Queen Victoria, Great Lady of the 19th century, such as she was known by the people of Menton.”

- 24 Yet, he added, the monument also had drawn its inspiration from recent events. It stood as a tribute to the character of the British people: “[it] evokes their courage, their indomitable firmness, while they were the only ones remaining on the battlefield, and Winston Churchill could only offer them ‘blood, toil, tears and sweat’.” The monument becomes a reminder of past ordeals and of the subsequent local resistance of the inhabitants, hence its semantic shift from being a peacetime *lieu de mémoire* to ‘good’ Queen Victoria to that of a Second World War memorial: “It is part of that heritage”, according to the mayor of Menton, “always threatened, that we must defend with resolution and serenity, because, like Shakespeare we know that ‘Truth has a quiet breast’”.

13. The new Menton monument to Queen Victoria, 2012



AUTHOR PHOTO

- 25 Trans-generational transmission was at the root of the process of re-erecting the monument: “the generation of the people of Menton contemporary with the visit that Queen Victoria made here in 1882 transmitted to its descendants the cult of remembrance of this gracious queen, and her descendants, in a momentum of deferential recognition made a point to reproduce in that stone mutilated by war, the respected

effigy of their glorious visitor”. Discursively, restoring the link between past and present allows the act of iconoclasm to be exorcised.

14. French postcard of the Statue of Queen Victoria, Nice



PRIVATE ARCHIVES

5. Conclusion

- 26 Desecrating a monument strikes a powerful symbolic blow not only to the memory of the figure or event it represents, but to the communities which erected it and to their descendants, who in wartime may be placed, like the inhabitants of the occupied French Riviera during the Second World War, in the position of a defeated people unable to protect their cultural heritage. Under these conditions, acts of iconoclasm are a sort a retrospective war waged on the past and the dead. The destruction may be cathartic for the occupiers, but it is experienced by the occupied as a form of collective humiliation. Jay Winter, when speaking of “cultural memory” states that “it is time to consider monuments not solely as reflections of current political authority or a general consensus [...] but rather as a set of profound and yet impermanent expressions of the force of civil society [...]” (Winter 140). The common denominator in our survey of the memorials to British monarchs on the French Riviera is the way that civil society was impacted by and reacted to the destruction of these monuments. The symbolic aggression toward the French population of Cannes, Nice and Menton compounded and amplified the physical aggression of invasion and occupation, triggering after the Liberation a movement to undo and repair the damage done. As Cherry puts it: “The re-setting or demolition of monumental statuary bespeaks a desire not only to obliterate the individual commemorated, but to recast the history which that individual and the statue has to

signify and to rewrite the history of the space in which it is situated” (664). The resulting “iconoclasm”⁸ (Latour) plays out ultimately as a struggle over narrative, involving the erasure and restoration of local and national history. The instrumentalisation of Queen Victoria’s image in that struggle has seen history repeat itself since the Second World War in acts of iconoclasm internationally in disputed territories and postcolonial contexts. On 12 July 1963 Queen Victoria’s statue in Quebec was blown up by the Liberation Front of Quebec (FLQ), just a few months after that of General Wolfe (29 March 1963). Heated debate ensued over whether the statue should be erected again as nationalists pointed out that it should honour Francophone history and culture, not a “foreign” queen. On April 10, 2015, it was Queen Victoria’s statue in Port Elizabeth that was vandalized with green paint during the “Rhodes must fall” campaign to topple colonial statues in South Africa.

- 27 Desecrating a monument may also be a gesture of provocation and rebellion by disaffected youth, exemplified in such incidents as the toppling of a First World War statue in Huddersfield in 2004 and its daubing with the anachronistic slogan “long live Hitler”, or the widely circulated image of a student from Sheffield urinating on a war memorial (Shipman). Public symbols and particularly national symbols such as flags, portraits or monuments become then transitional objects that protestors use to express their anger or frustration when they cannot confront a real person who is the object of their loathing. The monument is subjectified as a scapegoat and society, along with its contested values, becomes embodied in it. Desecrating the monument is a form a rejection of society’s mores and the act of iconoclasm is committed as much against a sacralised space as the object that occupies it. In the violation of that space, the damage inflicted has to be commensurate with the suffering the perpetrator feels. Jean-Yves Boursier states that “the monument also delineates a sacralised field to such a point that graffiti and other inscriptions are always felt as savage acts, as insults to memory, equivalent to desecrating a grave” (2). The act of reconstruction then looks to reverse the process by going back to a pre-war Edenic time, when harmony prevailed, before chaos was visited on the community by the iconoclast bent on destroying memory. As the mayor of Menton put it: “Now that this monument is rebuilt, harmony is back”. Harmony and chaos and their aesthetic projection are fundamental structural elements of the social psyche. As an auxiliary of war, iconoclasm is received as a symbolic offence that has to be reversed and repaired, if not punished.

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NOTES

1. Posted July 28 2006. As the blog was shut down by Chinese authorities in 2009, the texts were collected and published in *Ai WeiWei's Blog* (Ambrozy ed.).
2. The archive material for Menton, Nice and Cannes is to be found in the Archives of the Alpes-Maritimes in Nice. I have translated all quotations from the French originals.

3. My translation. The original caption reads: “Les Hindus révoltés brisent une statue de la reine Victoria”.
 4. Broken once again by a strong gale it was not repaired a second time. A bust offered by British tourists and the Holloway sanatorium near London was unveiled in Cannes on 13 October 1951 (Mlr).
 5. Gazan was trained at the École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs in Nice. He was awarded First Prize by the École des Beaux Arts in Paris in 1910.
 6. The final project for a monument to Queen Victoria in Menton would be approved by Queen Elizabeth II in 1956, but she asked for a better representation of her ancestor to be sent to the sculptor from the Royal Mint in London, as reported by the British ambassador to Paris in a letter to the mayor (19 Apr. 1956) and by the British Consulate General in Nice in further letter to the mayor (29 May 1956).
 7. Lady Ramsey was the daughter of Victoria’s third son, Prince Arthur, and Princess Louise Margaret of Prussia.
 8. Defined as “when there is uncertainty about what is committed when an image – from science, religion or art – is being smashed”.
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ABSTRACTS

This essay explores the process linked to the desecration and subsequent rebuilding of monuments erected on the French Riviera to commemorate the British monarchs who had a positive influence on the development of Menton, Cannes and Nice as coastal resorts. When two statues of Queen Victoria and one of Edward VII were either defaced or completely destroyed during the Second World War, French agencies, to varying degrees, wanted to restore the statues to their rightful place. Although the examples used in this essay all had different operating modes, I argue that they nonetheless were motivated by similar factors which reveal a pattern to wartime iconoclasm and help explain its impact on postwar commemorative policy.

Cet article explore le lien entre la destruction et la reconstruction de monuments érigés par les Français sur la Côte d’Azur afin de commémorer les monarques britanniques qui ont eu une influence positive sur le développement des villes de Menton, Cannes et Nice comme stations balnéaires. Lorsque deux monuments de la reine Victoria et un du roi Édouard VII furent partiellement ou complètement détruits pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, les Français, à divers degrés, voulurent remettre les statues à leur place. Je souhaite démontrer qu’en dépit de l’éclectisme du mode opératoire des exemples que j’examine, ils ont tous étaient mus par les même motivations, ce qui peut permettre de mettre en place un schéma plus global pour comprendre pourquoi l’iconoclasm mémoriel est un élément central des politiques mémorielle d’une nation.

INDEX

Keywords: iconoclasm, memorials, Queen Victoria, Edward VII, French Riviera, commemorations, World War Two, Entente Cordiale

Mots-clés: iconoclasme, monuments, Reine Victoria, Édouard VII, Côte d'Azur, Commémorations, Deuxième Guerre mondiale, Entente cordiale

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