

**DAAD Summer School**  
*“Dialogue on Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis”*

**RUINOPHILIA: THE FASCINATION FOR RUINS**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ruinophilia has known a rise in popularity in the last century. While most people might be more aware of ruinophilia as an internet sensation, it has actually been around and made known its presence far before the invention of the internet, through literature. Authors like J.J.R Tolkien and Petrarch all were fascinated by ruins and decayed castles, which were all incorporated in their works.

Ruinophilia is the fascination for ruins. "Ruin" means literally "collapse", something that is destroyed either by the passage of time or by human intervention such as wars or pollution, etc.

## 2. RUINOPHILIA AS A GLOBAL TREND

A lot of people nowadays have formed a sort of an online "trend", that consists mainly of posting pictures showing decayed buildings and monuments around the world that are intended for social media pages, blogs and romantics.

Many examples of that can be found through the internet such as blogs (medium.com) completely dedicated to showcase the "beauty" of decay, or a café in Budapest where local residents and tourists flock the so called "ruin pubs", dilapidated houses that have been furnished with old junk and turned into bars awaiting renovation.

Even in Tweeter, ruinophilia has its own hashtag and its own page where people display and share their love for ruins.

Countless exhibits around the world hold as their main theme the ruinophilia. Just this past year in Italy, in Rome such an exhibition. "*Rovine. La forza delle rovine*" ("Ruins: the power of ruins"), is the title of a wonderful exhibition that has recently opened at Palazzo Altemps, Roman National Museums. The exhibition portrays the fascination aroused by physical remains of past civilization, whether sculpture, architecture, inscriptions, fragments or ruins, in almost all cultures throughout the centuries. This subject certainly deserves the attention of professionals and all those interested in cultural heritage conservation.

## 3. RUINOPHILIA AND NOSTALGIA

The word "nostalgia" comes from two Greek roots, nostos meaning "return home" and algia "longing." Nostalgia has most of the times been connected time and time again with the fascination for ruins.

While half-destroyed buildings and architectural fragments might have existed since the beginning of human culture, ruinophilia did not. There is a historic distinctiveness to the "ruin gaze" that can be understood as the particular optics that frames our relationship to ruins. Contemporary ruinophilia relates to the prospective dimension of nostalgia, the type of nostalgia that is reflective rather than restorative and dreams of the potential futures rather than imaginary pasts.



Figure 1. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

## *Ruinophilia: the fascination for ruins*

A sense of melancholy co-exists with an awareness that these ruins offer up an exercise in memory. A great virtue based on the self-consciousness entrusted to humankind, memory is what makes humans special in the animal kingdom: we can reflect on our history, thereby challenging the millennium and the ravages of time.

Most ancient monuments have suffered similar fates over time: they have been toppled by earthquakes, quarried for stone, and despoiled by human hands. Some have been reclaimed by the grasping fingers of the jungle, buried beneath the silt and mud of wandering rivers, or engulfed by desert sands. Yet many of them still endure, visible symbols of man's greatest successes against the inexorable, corroding powers of time and nature.

### **4. RUINOPHILIA IN POMPEII**

A fascination with ruins has not always been with us. It presumes, for one, a linear notion of time, in other words the idea that the past is irrevocably lost. Pompeii from that point of view presents great interest among architecture experts, archaeology majors and students. The excavation of Pompeii is still ongoing to this day – a process that has taken almost three centuries – and people remain just as captivated by the city's eerie ruins as they were in the 18th Century.

An ruin "lust" has been developed for the ancient and relatively newly excavated city of Pompeii. The city alone presents an interesting topic of choice when it comes in ruinophilia.

As it is already known rather than being buried under lava and rock, the settlements and populations were engulfed in a monumental cloud of ash and debris, and over 2.000 people perished. Both towns remained abandoned for thousands of years, until explorers rediscover the site in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, perfectly preserved under a thick layer of dust. Buildings were intact, bodies were preserved as they fell and everyday objects littered the streets.

Many scholars say that the excavation of Pompeii played a major role in the neo-Classical revival of the 18th century. Europe's wealthiest and most fashionable families displayed art and reproductions of objects from the ruins, and drawings of Pompeii's buildings helped shape the architectural trends of the era. For example, wealthy British families often built "Etruscan rooms" that mimicked those in Pompeian villas.

It is a monument one of a kind and the fact that it still manifests the past in the present and in the future further excites ruin enthusiasts, practically embodying the preservation of the ancient, the past, and gives hope that the fragility and ultimate decadence can be avoided.

### **5. RUINOPHILIA IN MODERN TIMES**

The increase in ruin enthusiasts is also contributed by the never ending warfare that has shown no signs of subsiding. This combined with the global and environmental pollution which affects monuments and the preservation of artifacts has made the love for the ruins a much more immediate concern than just a simple interest. Scientists are showing an ever growing concern for the inevitability that earthquakes and natural disasters inexorably destroy almost all human creations. It is perhaps also inevitable that human creations are lost due to human conflicts. What is inconceivable is that there are those who intentionally destroy these precious rests of human memory, as is happening in Syria and Iraq today.

One of the most severe and looming threats to ancient heritage is posed by the byproducts of industrial contamination of the environment in which archaeological sites endure. In recent decades, as Greece has experienced substantial economic expansion and development, pollutants and heavy vehicle emissions from the booming modern city of Athens have contributed to acid rain in the region which has affected the Parthenon. The chemical transformation soaks deeper into the marble on these vital monuments, pieces of them have begun to crack and fall off, with structural collapse a possibility.

As far as Pompei is concerned both Pompeii and Herculaneum face conservation issues. For both cities, excavation has brought with it deterioration, as both natural forces and human activity (whether accidental or deliberate) have played their part in the slow disintegration of the sites. Problems range from paintings being

exposed to light and buildings being worn away by weathering, erosion and water damage to inappropriate excavation and reconstruction methods to outright theft and vandalism. These facts only further induce the need for ruinophilia and how this fascination can turn into a benefactor of ancient monuments such as the Parthenon and the city of Pompeii.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Even people who are unimpressed by the archaeological sites or the ingenuity of the ancient for their ability to create things that have endured for so long, virtually unchanged for thousands of years. In this era of virtual reality, when it seems possible to render the physical world obsolete, it is both amazing and somehow comforting to know that humans can leave behind evidence of their culture and history — a legacy, in short — that will remain long after they are gone.

Our job is to have a better understanding of ruinophilia either as a trend or as means to protect and secure our monuments around the world.



*Figure 2. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX*

## Reference

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# RUINOPHILIA, The Fascination For Ruins



Abstract photo of an abandoned house

# Introduction

Ruinophilia has known a rise in popularity in the last century. Ruinophilia is the fascination for ruins. “Ruin” means literally “collapse”, something that is destroyed either by:

- the passage of time
- by human intervention such as wars or pollution, etc.

Ruinophilia has held an aesthetic, a moral and an emotional impact in almost every known country of the world since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Every country has its history and its ethnic monuments that are fascinating a large number of people. In Greece for example one of those can be considered the Parthenon, in Italy that can be Pompei.

# Ruinophilia



Abandoned modern building

# Ruinophilia As A Global Trend



Cafe, ruin-pub in Budapest

# Ruinophilia as a an internet sensation

A lot of people nowadays have formed a sort of an online “trend”, that consists mainly of posting pictures showing decayed buildings and monuments around the world that are intended for social media pages ,blogs. Many examples of that can be found through the internet such as:

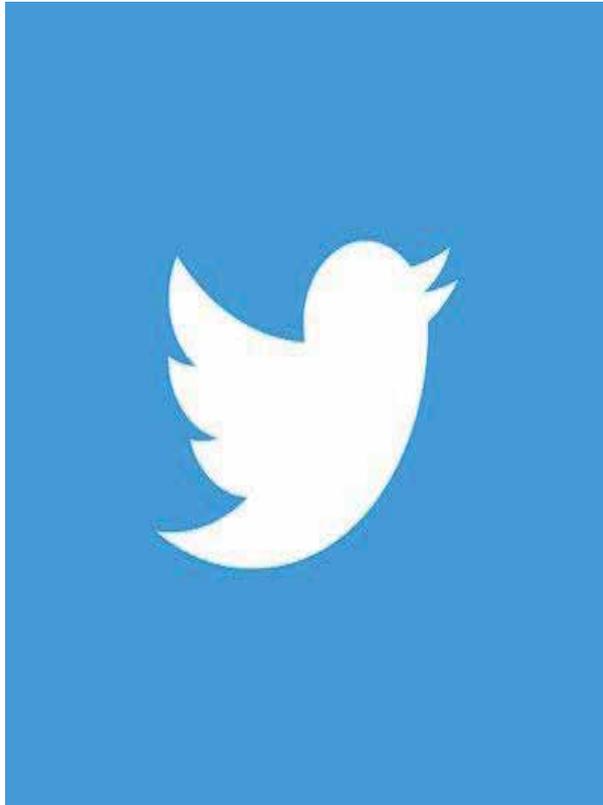
- blogs (medium.com) completely dedicated to showcase the “beauty” of decay, or
- a cafe in Budapest where local residents and tourists flock the so called “ruin pubs”, dilapidated houses that have been furnished with old junk and turned into bars awaiting renovation,
- Twitter, where ruinophilia has it’s own hashtag,
- exhibits around the world hold as their main theme the ruinophilia.

# Ruinophilia As An Internet Sensation



An Abandoned Theater

# Ruinophilia As An Internet Sensation



The Twitter logo



«Rovine. La forza delle rovine»

# Ruinophilia And Nostalgia



Ruins of an old home

# Ruinophilia And Nostalgia

- The word “nostalgia” comes from two Greek roots, nostos meaning “return home” and algia “longing.” Nostalgia has most of the times been connected time and time again with the fascination for ruins. Contemporary ruinophilia relates to the:
  - prospective dimension of nostalgia, the type of nostalgia that is reflective rather than:
    - restorative and dreams of the potential futures rather than imaginary pasts.
    - a sense of melancholy co-exists with an awareness that these ruins offer up an exercise in memory.

# Ruinophilia In Pompeii



Ruins in Pompeii

# Ruinophilia In Pompeii

A fascination with ruins has not always been with us. It presumes, for one, a linear notion of time, in other words the idea that the past is irrevocably lost. Pompeii from that point of view presents great interest among architecture experts, archaeology majors and students. An ruin “lust” has been developed for the ancient and relatively newly excavated city of Pompeii. The city alone presents an interesting topic of choice when it comes in ruinophilia.

- Many scholars say that the excavation of Pompeii played a major role in the neo-Classical revival of the 18th century.
- wealthy British families often built “Etruscan rooms” that mimicked those in Pompeiian villas.

# Ruinophilia In Modern Times



Ancient city of Palmyra in Damascus

# Ruinophilia In Our Times

- The increase in ruin enthusiasts is also contributed by:
- the never ending warfare that has shown no signs of subsiding.
- the global warming
- and environmental pollution which affects monuments and the preservation of artifacts has made the love for the ruins a much more immediate concern than just a simple interest.

# Ruinophilia In Our Times



Destroyed temple in Syria

# Ruinophilia In Our Times

In recent decades, as Greece has experienced substantial economic expansion and development, pollutants and heavy vehicle emissions from the booming modern city of Athens have contributed to acid rain in the region which has affected the Parthenon.

- As far as Pompei is concerned both Pompeii and Herculaneum face conservation issues. Problems range from:
  - paintings being exposed to light
  - buildings being worn away by weathering,
  - erosion,
  - water damage to,
  - inappropriate excavation and reconstruction methods to,
  - outright theft,
  - vandalism.

# Conclusion

Even people who are unimpressed by the archaeological sites or the ingenuity of the ancient for their ability to create things that have endured for so long, virtually unchanged for thousands of years. In this era of virtual reality, when it seems possible to render the physical world obsolete, it is both amazing and somehow comforting to know that humans can leave behind evidence of their culture and history — a legacy, in short — that will remain long after they are gone.