
Reviews

All the King's Horses: Essays on the Impact of Looting and the Illicit Antiquities Trade on our Knowledge of the Past, edited by Paula K. Lazrus & Alex W. Barker, 2012. Washington (DC): Society for American Archaeology; ISBN 978-0-932839-44-2 paperback US\$26.95, Kindle: £8.04 & US\$12.00; iv + 164 pp., 10 figs., 1 table

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As American newspapers report the almost inevitable move towards rejection of unprovenanced antiquities by institutional collections and the just as inevitable swift U-turn regarding orphaned artefacts, this book edited by Lazrus and Barker provides a timely and welcome addition to the growing literature on the illicit antiquities trade. As most publications have moved ever more towards the vitriolic and condemnatory, associating the illicit trade in antiquities with the illegal trafficking of drugs, arms and even people-trafficking (Efrat 2012), it is refreshing to read a collection of essays that takes a more pragmatic and balanced approach, reflecting the predominantly American market-driven audience to which the book is primarily aimed. Rather than screaming of the rape of culture from the outset, even the subtitle of the book is almost ashamed to whisper of looting and any possible involvement in an illicit trade, whereas most publications in this area of academic archaeology shout at the reader with an almost righteous glee that they are going to reveal to the reader the salacious details of the deprived acts contained within.

Lazrus and Barker's introduction sets out the reasoned argument for preserving archaeological artefacts in context, rather than seeing them simply as artistic objects. They attempt to reconcile this view with the aims of the acquisitive art museum and rival claims of source cultures. In stating that the archaeologist is not responsible for exclusivity of access, however, this reviewer at least feels that the editors overstep the mark slightly and fail to recognize both the exclusivity of field archaeology to a privileged few professionals and the contribution of the private collector in making antiquities widely available through public exhibition. This is a common failing of the anti-trade literature in general and the editors should at least be commended for trying to structure a reasoned argument that addresses all sides of the debate on who has the rights of access to the physical remains of the past.

The main content of the book consists of eight essays by contributing authors addressing various aspects of the illicit antiquities trade. Commendably, this volume is, if perhaps not the first, then the most current to remind us that this

debate is not all about multi-million dollar artworks. That the illicit antiquities trade is mostly made up of small, common, low-value artefacts has been largely lost in previous works on the subject, which prefer the headline-grabbing references to cross-border smuggling of unique south Italian vases and Classical sculpture (Felch & Frammolino 2011). The focus of the current volume is very much on reminding the reader that these are rare occurrences and that the archaeological record as a resource suffers being undermined equally by the sheer scale of the market for Greco-Roman coinage and low-value antiquities: a problem previously raised by Tubb and Brodie back in 2001 and then seemingly forgotten.

The individual contributions begin with Brodie and Contreras's contribution on the digital imagery of Google Earth, and how access to modern satellite photography has revealed the extent to which looting is threatening the survival of the very archaeological record itself. The stated aim of the authors is 'a preliminary evaluation of the potential of Google Earth for producing quantitative data that might be used to investigate the comparative economics of the antiquities trade' (p. 9). A noble sentiment in itself, but within the introductory paragraph the authors rapidly descend into the highly emotive and partisan language of 'looting', 'misinterpretation', 'decontextualized artefacts', 'criminal involvement', 'disrespect', 'corrosive effects' and so on, leaving little hope for a scholarly and balanced interpretation.

Similarly, another British contributor, David Gill, contributes yet another review of the Metropolitan Museum's Euphronius Krater saga. The author has inexplicably renamed the artefact 'the Sarpendon Krater'. The Met's attribution was based on the artist responsible for decorating the world's first million-dollar antiquity. The apparent renaming of the vessel, for which we are given no background context, seems to be unnecessary and appropriately enough for a wine-mixing vessel, largely sour grapes. The trade knew this antiquity as the Euphronius krater, therefore archaeologists must come up with an alternative to deflect any publicity from its previous association. As Sarpendon is but the subject, this conscious renaming appears to be otherwise redundant. After all, it bears no relation to a previous collector (e.g. the Gayer-Anderson cat in the British Museum). Gill's article repeats the well-trodden path of the Krater from Greece, to the Met and back again, with an inexplicable and superfluous change of identity (something the trade is all too often accused of) along the way.

The Classical theme is continued with Dyson's contribution which presents a historical perspective on the changing attitudes to the collecting of Classical sculpture from ancient plunder to the modern antiquities market, via Renaissance Classicism. As a post-processual archaeologist, Dyson is clear to point out that Western adoption of Classical

antiquity as a cultural ideal is 'not without its own interest'. However, his essay is aimed at differentiating between historical approaches to artefacts and the current market approach. Here we have an author who acknowledges the current state of affairs, but pragmatically tries to draw our attention back to the valuable contribution of the 'orphaned' object to other areas of academic research not recognized by many close-minded archaeologists who can only think in terms of provenience or archaeological context.

German's article on the creation of Minoan and Mycenaean civilization is intended to reveal the extent to which de-contextualization can corrupt our understanding of past civilizations. However, choosing the historical excavations of Arthur Evans somewhat undermines any potential argument against the effects of modern looting on current archaeological interpretation and knowledge.

Rodrigues's chapter on Australian shipwreck sites reminds us looting is not just a problem on land-based archaeological sites. There is an extensive market for shipwreck artefacts, seen as particularly enigmatic because of their rescue from almost certain oblivion. The shocking statistics show that there is nothing at all romantic about the wanton destruction wrought by unthinking (or worse, deliberate) removal of artefacts from the sea floor. The focus of most works on looting focus on land-based archaeology and Rodrigues's contribution is a welcome addition to the literature.

While some authors see the illicit antiquities trade as a high-end market and bemoan the loss of context for ancient art, Elkins reminds us that the majority of the antiquities market is made up of small collectors buying Greco-Roman coins which are not only relatively cheap, but plentiful to the point of almost unending supply. Placed in the context of the largest institutional collections Elkins reveals how large the current trade is, but assumes this to mean a continuing supply without really justifying the assumption. Still, this is a welcome contribution to the broadening debate and helps to place the higher-value artefacts in the context of the scale of the market overall.

The chapter by Brodie and Kersel is a review of the 'James Ossuary' case and the way in which it relates to the Israeli antiquities market. The case has already been detailed in depth in Burleigh's book, in a useful account of the Israeli antiquities market, making this contribution somewhat superfluous.

The book concludes with a short contribution on Native American archaeological artefacts, just to remind its audience that the problem of looting is closer to home than other chapters may lead us to believe. Early's contribution reminds us that the problem with the market in illicit antiquities is not solely about the exploitation of the poor by the rich, although she outlines a definite pattern of movement of artefacts from South and Meso-America to the northern United States. She reminds us that ultimately, without context, the market itself is at risk from fakes and forgeries as context is the ultimate determining factor of authenticity. A debate in a short epilogue follows, which the reviewer for one would have welcomed as a more in-depth study in the form of a main contribution, rather than an endnote.

In such a slim volume, designed to ease the American archaeological community into the question of illicit antiquities and sovereign rights, it seems overall that an opportu-

nity has been missed. While the language is generally more conciliatory than previous publications, it appears to be an unwelcome step towards the one-sided and vitriolic debate, influenced by British archaeological perspectives. While not unwelcome, future volumes would hopefully tend toward maintaining the balanced view which the editors clearly hoped would pervade the current volume as a welcome introduction to a hotly debated issue likely to inflame passions on both sides. The major weakness of the volume as a whole is the opportunity missed to raise current concerns about contemporary looting, rather than focusing too much on historical cases which maintain a one-sided anti-trade bias whilst undermining the intended impact of the book as a whole. A further opportunity has been missed to give an academic voice to the antiquities trade in order to respond to the accusations laid at its door. Something not possible or not considered necessary by the editors.

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