

BOOK REVIEWS

Selma R. Holo, *Beyond the Prado: Museums and Identity in Democratic Spain*. Pp. 222. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and New York 1999. ISBN 1-56698-921-4. \$39.95. Reviewed by Eduardo Caruz Arcos.*

The conventions of the book review generally require that the reviewer address a recently published work. Additionally, the reviewer usually chooses a domestic work, because the examination of a foreign book brings added difficulty. Sometimes, however, a reviewer must indulge a pressing need to communicate, and to share a new discovery with colleagues and people interested in a particular subject. *Beyond the Prado: Museums and Identity in Democratic Spain* is a discovery that merits breaking with review conventions.

Long before this writing, Selma R. Holo's 1999 book became familiar to scholars in the field as one of many standard search results. When I first learned of the title through bibliographic research, I was more surprised that this subject had been approached in the English language than by the content itself. My original curiosity about the book was to remain unsatisfied for a time because of the bureaucratic difficulties of acquiring it in Spain. It was not until a year later that, working in the library of an American university, I found a volume tucked among other Spanish museum reference books. I can still remember the emotion that attended this second, and more meaningful, discovery. Some books allow the reader the excitement of predicting, after reading only a few lines, that the revelation of a great amount of information is only as remote as is the time that it will take to leaf through its remaining pages.

Why read this book? To answer this question is the essential purpose of a review. The first step toward that answer requires a more precise definition of the book's intended audience. In the well-known library in which I found it, *Beyond the Prado* had been classified, following all indicia of common sense, in a reference section for museums; indeed, in the subsection for Spanish museums. Undoubtedly, the monograph will serve as a valuable reference work for Spanish museological scholars. Nevertheless, the content fully exceeds the bare outlines of the subject suggested by such a placement; the book stands on its own as a study informed by political science and sociology, proposing an analysis of the Spanish sociopolitical structure and examining the cultural roots of its development. Holo's reflections are addressed not only to historians and curators, but also to specialists from many other fields, including scholars of law. This broad appeal is only the first significant reason to recommend the book.

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A second reason is the attractiveness of the structure and formal elements of the book. The style of writing, as the author acknowledges, is “unofficial,” in that she does not write a historical or conceptual book. On the contrary—in a manner deemed pretentious by continental jurists, but true to the typical pragmatism of many American writings—Holo aspires to defend her reasoning deductively, through the selection of several case studies.

Through this accessible style, the reader is exposed to the valuable perspective of a foreigner, who visualizes Spanish political and cultural reality in its purity, surprising and fascinating the native reader with an objective and impartial approach difficult to achieve. Given the book’s appearance and impact, the reader can’t help but be reminded of romantic nineteenth-century travel books, which described Spain in a fantastic and nonchalant manner as a world of contrasts. In *Beyond the Prado*, the author describes present-day Spain as at a new phase of democracy, and she references other modern democracies to suggest a transition toward increased liberties. Holo’s well-informed selection of contents, in addition to her sensibility and absence of prejudgment, proves a profound and praiseworthy knowledge of the Spanish politics and culture.

The starting point of her analysis is an illustration of the relationship in Spain between the museums, the consolidation of a plural identity, and the establishment of democracy through a decentralized political structure. Indeed, museums, identity, and democracy are seen as interrelated, the diffusion and preservation of culture, as well as the material objects in museums, being integral to the substratum of every political organization:

This book, while recognizing that the vitality and diversity of museums in Spain could not exist without a sustaining democratic environment, proposes that the vitality and diversity of present-day Spain itself owes something to the contributions its museums have made to the active reconstruction of the various identities of its citizens. These museums, new and renewed alike, have raised fundamental questions about Spanish culture, society, and identity, and by doing [so] have, in subtle but significant measure, helped create an engaged, open, and stable nation that has regained the respect of the world. (p. 2)

The work is divided into two different sections, the titles of which, “The Long Arm of the Center” and “The Power of the Regions,” grab and hold the reader’s attention. The first section analyses the role of the state museums in the new democratic Spain. Madrid, of course, functions as a center, but Holo also explores the many other regional centers beyond the capital that comprise “el Sistema Español de Museos.” Of interest is her attempt to trace the different conceptions of the museum—and by extension, of culture—from the socialist period to the new political era inaugurated by the victory of the Conservative Party in 1996.

Holo reviews the ways in which new museums, like the Reina Sofia and the Thyssen-Bornemisza, assumed a leading role in the socialist era, while the Prado Museum, “the Magnificent Invalid,” made static progress. The recent and sincere efforts toward the Prado’s renovation are then used as an example to describe the diversity of the state cultural politics and the attempt to transform the museum into a reflection of a new democratic and plural society, open to the world. The accounts of the Museo Sefardi in Toledo and the apparently paradoxical role of the military and ecclesiastical museums are equally telling about the evolution of Spanish society and its retreat from the old preconstitutional way of thinking.

Despite the quality of the book’s first section, the second section, addressing power in the regions, is even more interesting in my view. It is no easy task to explain the territorial balance of powers achieved by such Constitutional expressions as “Estado compuesto” or “Estado de las autonomías” in the Spanish democratic era. Nonetheless, Holo clearly explains the problem of the “nacionalidades y regiones.” She also tackles the issue of liberties and civil rights, the treatment of which was one of the great historical challenges for the Constituent Assembly. More than twenty years later, this problem, and more particularly, this aspect of Spanish culture and political tradition, has yet to be resolved. Doubts and differences related to civil rights and liberties have an enormous, sometimes excessive intensity and resonance in the cultural sector. Some Spanish cultural policies have taken on the search for identity as a leitmotiv. The achievement of the balance between the center and the regions has always been difficult and is reflected in the museum institution whose rooms reflect the diversity and complexity of the Spanish identity. “Notwithstanding this constructive environment,” Holo notes, “museums have occasionally sorely tested center/periphery relationships” (p. 16). These tensions are explored through the example of the varying approaches of Spain’s museums. The Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, for instance, is described as a proud manifestation of the absolute autonomy of state cultural influence. Other museums, such as the Museo Nacional de Arte de Cataluña, strain to demonstrate the richness of its old national culture. Still others, like the Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias or the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, have finally achieved a balance with the center. Finally, institutions like the two Planes Generales de Bienes Culturales de Andalucía or its prestigious Instituto Andaluz del Patrimonio Histórico display a reflective experience of culture.

Without a doubt, the case studies of the museums’ experiences, deeply diverse and in many ways in conflict, are good examples of the problematic legal distribution of the authority to run museums, libraries, and archives in Spain. Those interested in this legal issue will find the needed documentary support in the book to adequately interpret the constitutional clause of Article 149.1.28, a complex paragraph that confers to the state exclusive power to the state museums “sin perjuicio de su gestión por las Comunidades Autónomas.” Delimiting the exact mean-

ing of *gestión* (management) requires a dispassionate and primarily realistic approach; that approach is to be found in the pages of this book.

I would like to conclude by pointing out that the main contribution of this work is to emphasize the narrow relationship between democracy, diversity, and museums. The knowledge of the plural, heterogeneous, and complex nature of the democratic Spain demands that we “go beyond the Prado—to any randomly chosen museum anywhere in any of the seventeen regions—to grasp the power of this phenomenon” (p. 199). How better to close this reflection than with the words of the author: “the role of the museum as institution in constructing the identity of the present-day Spaniard is richer, more reciprocal, and more varied than it has ever been before” (p. 199).

Colin Renfrew, *Loot, Legitimacy and Ownership: The Ethical Crisis in Archaeology* (Duckworth Debates in Archaeology) Duckworth, London 2000. ISBN 0-7156-3034-2. £9.99.

Neil Brodie, Jenny Doole, and Peter Watson, *Stealing History: The Illicit Trade in Cultural Material*. McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge 2000. ISBN 1-902937-10-4. £8.00.

Neil Brodie, Jennifer Doole, and Colin Renfrew (eds.), *Trade in Illicit Antiquities: The Destruction of the World's Archaeological Heritage* (McDonald Institute Monographs). McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge 2001. ISBN 1-902937-17-1. £25.00.

Reviewed by Daniel Graepler*

For many years, issues surrounding the worldwide problem of illegal excavations and illicit trade in archaeological artifacts have been most actively debated in the United States. Recently, however, Britain has become an increasingly active contributor to these discussions. If it can be said that the tone of Britain's contributions was once set primarily by representatives of the London antiquities trade, then it is also the case, at least since the “Sotheby's affair,” that critics of the status quo have now gained the upper hand.¹ The most important political result of this shift was the decision of the British government, announced in March 2001, to sign the UNESCO Convention of 1970. Although the concrete legislative measures that will follow from this resolution remain unclear, there is no question that the announcement carries great political importance. With this decision, Europe's arguably most important “market nation” has broken ranks with the opposition

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