

archives are beyond the scope of this historical analysis and as such are essentially marginalized. Although Nowożycki does not study other types of archives in the United States in great detail, the reader will come away with a basic understanding of practices as followed by government archives. Any archives can apply these practices, from selection to processing, and user access and conservation. Most of these steps are similarly practiced in Poland; one point of divergence is the American practice of reappraisal and deaccessioning.

Through his thoughtful research, Nowożycki adds to the international body of knowledge concerning archives. As an academic overview of NARA, Nowożycki's *Teoria i praktyka archiwistyki USA* serves as a thoroughly researched handbook. It is particularly useful for a researcher who is not familiar with the American system but is interested in understanding why and how certain records created by the US government are available, while other records are not. Working with researchers from abroad at the Polish Museum of America, different expectations arise as to what services we should be offering, as well as how those services should be provided. Although differences exist in nongovernment archives and are not explored in this book, there is value in explaining the American perspective. There is also value in understanding that the profession on both sides of the Atlantic has more similarities than differences.

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Polish Museum of America

NOTES

- ¹ Richard Morris, William McCain, and Charles Paape, "Reviews of Books," *American Archivist* 5, no. 1 (January 1942): 40–45, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.5.1.16p470612452h3pr>.
- ² Edyta Targońska and Teresa Sromek, *Guide to the Polish Museum of America Archives Collections* (Warsaw: The Head Office of the State Archives; Chicago: The Polish Museum of America, 2019).

The Monumental Challenge of Preservation: The Past in a Volatile World

By Michèle Valerie Cloonan. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2018. 280 pp.
Hardcover. \$30.00. ISBN 978-0-2620-3773-0.

The preservation of cultural heritage is a subject for specialists, often highly qualified with years of experience in the field. Yet, it affects the lives and aspirations of a great part of humanity. At the heart of this important book by Michèle Valerie Cloonan is the fact that objects from the distant past can be

very much alive and active in our political present. A famous example, which Cloonan discusses, is the monumental Buddhas of Bamiyan, which stood for nearly 1,500 years until they were destroyed in a concerted effort by the Taliban in 2002. This was not simply an instance of religious iconoclasm, but also a rebuke to the idea of shared global cultural heritage. The same can be said of the even more destructive activities of ISIL in Syria. As Cloonan also points out, monuments can become a rallying point for violent fundamentalists, as statues of Confederate soldiers have become for white supremacist groups in the United States. In such cases, the government itself can initiate the removal of a monument.

The Monumental Challenge of Preservation is divided into six thematic sections: “Context,” “Cultural Genocide,” “Approaches to Preservation,” “Information or Object?,” “The Greening of Preservation,” and “Enduring, Ephemeral Preservation.” It is a broad sweep of the field, taking in digital preservation and environmental issues as well as the more traditional themes in the fields of conservation and preservation. An ambitious survey like this would usually take the form of an edited volume by several contributors. The fact that this is the work of a single author is impressive and also gives the book a thematic focus and consistency of tone that makes one thankful that Cloonan undertook this monumental authorial task.

The discussion of cultural genocide is particularly clear, moving, and important. Cloonan makes an eloquent case for understanding the destruction of cultural objects as part of the more general concept of genocide. She points out that the concept of genocide, as developed by Raphael Lemkin, includes the destruction of culture. However, this definition was not accepted by several countries, notably those with recent histories of bringing Indigenous cultures close to destruction, such as Australia and the United States. Thus, the idea of cultural genocide came to stand apart from the central definition of genocide as a form of organized mass murder. Yet, recent events such as the destruction of the ancient ruins of Palmyra in Syria raise the question of what we should be most concerned about—the killing of people or the destruction of their monuments. Cloonan argues that this is a false dichotomy, quoting a 2012 paper by the former director general of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, who wrote that “. . . there is no choice between protecting human lives and safeguarding the dignity of a people through its culture” (p. 64).

If there is an absence in this generally thoughtful and excellent publication, it is marked by relatively little discussion on how much of the culture that is preserved in Europe and the United States is the direct result of the colonization and exploitation of the cultures from which the objects came. This may be partly a result of Cloonan’s choice not to focus on Asia and Africa. She deals insightfully with the culpability of European colonial powers for the political

instability in Syria and Lebanon; for example, showing clearly how short-term profit rather than long-term planning was behind decisions made by Britain and France in the early twentieth century. This is an essential element in any understanding of the rise of fundamentalism and the destruction of cultural heritage in these regions.

Yet, the colonial past is also an issue for cultural objects that are held in museums under no immediate threat. Many of the collections held in European countries from Africa and Asia are the result of the activities of colonial explorers and administrators, from lawful purchasing to outright looting. Such objects have been preserved and cared for by generations of conservators and curators in Europe, but what does this matter in the face of claims for restitution of a country's lost cultural heritage? On the whole, these professionals have a genuine care and concern for the objects with which they work, but, increasingly, they are also aware of the objects' questionable provenance. European claims to preserve fragile materials for posterity are not always reliable either; an example being the Buddhist cave murals that were removed and transported to Berlin in the early twentieth century, only to be destroyed by bombing during the Second World War.

Cloonan touches on this issue in chapter 11 with a brief discussion of the famous bust of Nefertiti in the Neues Museum in Berlin, as part of a case study of attitudes to cultural preservation there. But this is now an urgent issue facing all major museums. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to portray individual collectors as essentially benign. In chapter 5, "Collecting as Preservation," Cloonan celebrates the role of collectors in amassing and cataloging antiques, especially books and manuscripts, from the Renaissance forward. While this collecting activity certainly furthered the aims of the European Enlightenment to bring the whole world to the scholar's study, it was also inextricably linked with the colonial activities of the major European powers. We may celebrate the fact that so many of these collections have become more widely accessible through donations to public institutions (pp. 96–98), but this does not change the fact that most were removed from communities where they originally had their use and meaning.

In chapters 7 and 8, Cloonan discusses several cases of digital solutions for damage and loss. She rightly argues that a digital "copy" only preserves part of the cultural information embodied in an object. Moreover, it raises a range of questions about what we prioritize for preservation through digitization, what standards we try to put in place, and how long can we expect these "copies" to last. As others have pointed out, the term "copy" is itself misleading in the context of digital preservation. The digital image or recording is not a copy of the object or performance, but something essentially different; it is not a surrogate, merely something that offers us a limited amount of information about the object or

performance. Still, these digital images and recordings are immensely valuable in that they can themselves be copied and almost endlessly disseminated.

It would also have been good to acknowledge here concerns about what has become known as “digital colonialism.” This phrase highlights the fact that wealthier nations hold the technologies and the resulting digital data, while poorer countries, many of which have historically been subject to colonial occupation, provide the content. If the digital images and 3-D reconstructions of manuscripts, statues, and paintings come to reside on the servers of wealthy countries, are cataloged according to the standards of these places, and are distributed through their website architecture, control of global heritage and its interpretation will continue to be skewed in this direction. Digitization is not in itself virtuous, and digital projects must be scrutinized in terms of what they contribute to the communities that provide them with content.

In chapter 9, “Sustainable Preservation,” Cloonan makes the case for considering cultural preservation part of what she calls “the environmental movement” (p. 156). She discusses reactions to increasing urban development by nineteenth-century writers such as John Ruskin and William Morris, and the development of such ideas as national parks and other initiatives to preserve the natural world. She concludes that “. . . it seems likely that scholars, policymakers, and citizens will continue to find links between the environmental movement and the preservation of cultural heritage” (p. 173). While this statement is no doubt true, it lacks the sense of urgency the current climate emergency presents us with. The impact this is having on cultural heritage is clear and present for those most affected by the increase in floods, fires, and rising sea levels, and there is no need to look further to find links between preservation and environmental issues.

In *The Monumental Challenge of Preservation*, Cloonan covers a vast subject concisely and insightfully. Her commitment to the task of cultural preservation and a career of thinking about what this means are evident on every page. With the speed of change in the world today, in terms of political strife, technological developments, and the growing climate emergency, those committed to preserving our global cultural heritage will continue to face new challenges. Not all of these challenges are discussed in the book, but Cloonan’s contributions here are to communicate the ways in which cultural preservation is an issue for all of us, in our unpredictable and constantly evolving world, and to provide a resource for understanding how the history of preservation and questions about what and how to preserve have brought us to where we are now.

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