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Peter R. Schmidt, Roderick J. McIntosh. *Plundering Africa's Past.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. xiii + 280 pp. $44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-33040-6; $27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21054-8.

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The cover photograph of Schmidt and McIntosh's edited volume shows a person with a cloth-covered face seated behind a headless terracotta figurine. The handle of a hoe and a lantern beside the person strongly suggest that the figurine was just pulled out of the ground. The "plundering" in the book title would seem to focus on the tragic process of looting objects from archeological sites in Africa and trading them as commodities on the international market for profit and status. The volume, however, is about much, much more.

Plundering Africa's Past is about preserving Africa's cultural heritage today and for the future. It examines the value of cultural heritage and why a culture's heritage–its values, traditions, technological practices, and beliefs that are manifest in many tangible ways–should be protected and preserved. In this volume, the visible products of cultural heritage are not just archeological artifacts, but include archaeological sites, ethnographic objects, sacred sites, historic buildings, historic districts, and whole communities which try to maintain long-standing traditions in a rapidly changing world. The nineteen authors discuss a large number of terrible stresses on Africa's cultural heritages and offer an even more exhaustive list of concrete ways to combat them. Fortunately and very importantly, the resolutions proposed are not just theoretical, but are often founded on tested practices that make for very interesting reading.

Although the chapters in *Plundering Africa's Past* are not grouped by theme or other method, it is clear upon reflection that the sequence of chapters is not random. Furthermore, the editors carefully tie together the book by using numerous cross-references between chapters on a wide variety of topics.

The first two chapters introduce the broad scope of the plunder of Africa and set the ethical and philosophical underpinnings for who has the right to Africa's past and heritage. Schmidt and McIntosh provide a comprehensive overview of the numerous problems involved in preserving and conserving Africa's cultural heritages. These include inadequate laws, poverty, lack of public knowledge and understanding in Africa and abroad, civil strife, ailing museum systems, and the desire for wealth and status by Westerners and Africans alike. Schmidt and McIntosh also review some of the actions that must be taken to combat the resulting loss and destruction. These include making museums relevant to the African public, educating a wide range of groups in Africa and abroad, creating and/or strengthening African and international laws concerning cultural heritage and resources, promoting regional and international cooperation, and encouraging media attention. Schmidt examines why a culture has a right to its past, how this relates to basic human rights, and why this human right is not universally acknowledged. He also suggests strategies for such claims to be heard.

The illicit trade in African antiquities on the international market, either looted from archeological sites or stolen from museums, is the subject of the next four chapters. Looted sites and empty museums are the unseen prices paid by Africa for the objects that appear most often in Western art auctions and dealers' shops. That these costs are incalculable and the context of the objects are lost forever is presented in the numerous examples by Prott, McIntosh, Brent, and Sidibé. They further suggest that legal action, shame, media attention, and cooperation at national and international levels are effective ways to combat the trade. Papageorge, Kouroupas, and LaGamma, U.S. federal representatives involved in such issues, then broaden the discussion to the loss of both archeological and ethnographic objects. They present some of the means by which the United States is trying to help prevent their loss and protect them in place. These include implementation of import controls on illegally traded archeological objects from Mali into the United States using the Cultural Property Act and the 1970 UNESCO Convention, education of U.S. diplomatic staff against contributing to such illicit activities, and increased security in African museums.

Issues pertaining to the continuity and use of African material culture to the present day is presented by the next group of authors. Nkwi focuses on the disappearance of important objects used by a community in Cameroon, changes in local attitudes about the use and care of those objects, and the need for good conservation practices if and when such objects are returned. Drewal, jegede, and Posnansky, when examining the people, practices, and attitudes involved in various cultural institutions in Africa, make visible the complex web of factors that contribute to the destruction of cultural heritage. These include underpaid, poorly trained, and under-motivated museum staff, weakened university systems that pay little attention to cultural heritage, corrupt government agencies with no management plans and inadequate budgets for national museums and cultural programs, and public suspicion about the roles of museums in their countries. jegede, in fact, notes a general feeling in Nigeria that museums are government shrines; the objects they encase are government property that are inactive and irrelevant to social life in Nigerian communities. Each of these authors, however, draws on his own experiences to offer ways to reverse the downward spiral of cultural loss.

Musonda, speaking from a different perspective, observes that many Westerners view African art as inanimate objects without notable function in African cultural systems. He believes this attitude is fostered by poor interpretations of these objects in Western museums. How can the trade in African archeological and ethnographic objects be curtailed if similar objects are usually presented to the Western public as exotic commodities without robust meaning in Africa?

The next group of authors turn the reader's attention to the loss of cultural heritage, both very ancient and quite recent, through the serious damage to archeological and historic period sites and buildings. Mturi, Karoma, Kusimba, and Wilson and Omar offer compelling examples of such destruction through government and museum mismanagement, lack of education among rural communities, poverty, and collaboration of government with business for unbridled development. Lessons gleaned from what has and has not worked to reverse this trend will help build a better complement of protective strategies in the near future.

The final chapter by Brandt and Mohamed is particularly sad and noteworthy. Will a country like Somalia, recently devastated by civil war and totally lacking in laws to protect and preserve its cultural past (let alone Rwanda, Burundi, and Zaire), ever be able to rebuild its very rich heritage and move on in the world theater with respect and dignity? The authors hope so and offer some legal and organizational suggestions on how it might be done.

All of the chapters in *Plundering Africa's Past* are well-balanced, well-written, and interesting. I have only a few additional suggestions for this excellent edited volume. First is the need to recognize that many of the solutions offered to improve the plight of archaeological objects in African museums and sites are not often practiced in the United States and other Western countries. These include comprehensive inventories of collections–complete with photographs, well constructed collections policies and museum management plans, and inclusive inventories of sites at regional levels. Unfortunately, most American archaeologists or African archaeologists trained in the United States are not taught basic practices of archeological curation. They will have little idea of how to help in such operations if asked. It is therefore imperative that American-trained archaeologists deficient in these areas of expertise work with well-trained curators and art historians when they provide advice to their African colleagues.

My second observation is that it might have been helpful to provide a little more comparative perspective on the difficulties and strategies involved in protecting and preserving cultural heritage in other parts of the world. For example, one more article could have detailed the long road traveled to develop and enforce national legislation on cultural resource protection in the United States and the lessons learned. Laws and regulations now exist to protect archaeological sites and objects from development and looting on U.S. federal lands, to mandate repatriation of human remains, funerary objects, and sacred objects to Native Americans long denied of their cultural heritage, and to encourage responsible curation of archaeological objects. The struggle to educate the U.S. public about the benefits of archaeology and investing in their history is another adventure with a considerable number of ups and downs. Similar insights might well have been provided by a colleague from Central or South America.

Plundering Africa's Past should be required reading for all archaeologists, historians, art historians, museum curators, and government officials involved in the cultural heritages of Africa, as well as most countries and continents with a disappearing past. This requirement is not a hardship; I expect that most readers will find themselves wanting to read every chapter. Readers will also find themselves wanting to get involved in one or

more of the many possible solutions offered in this volume. A list of resolutions unanimously agreed upon at the 1993 Carter Lecture, upon which this volume is based, are listed in Schmidt and McIntosh's introductory chapter and provide excellent guidance on how to get started.

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