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Safeguarding Cultural Property and the 1954 Hague Convention is the latest edited volume in the Heritage Matters series published by Boydell Press. In this welcome addition to the series and the broader discussion of cultural property protection, editors Emma Cunliffe and Paul Fox bring together sixteen authors, representing scholars and practitioners, to “re-examine the relevance of the Hague Convention—not from the widely studied angle of respect, but from the virtually ignored aspect of safeguarding” (p. 2). A short preface precedes thirteen chapters subdivided into four thematic sections: “Safeguarding—Reassessing the Field,” “Historical Perspectives,” “Current Issues in Legal Implementation,” and “The Hague Convention in Practice Today: Tools and Approaches.” In addition, the text of the Hague Convention and its various protocols, regulations, and resolutions are included in five appendices.

The first section, “Safeguarding—Reassessing the Field,” includes only one chapter from the editors of the volume, Cunliffe and Fox. This chapter serves as an introduction to the book and explains the rationale behind the project, rooted in the text of the 1954 Hague Convention, which charges the High Contracting Parties to “take all possible steps to protect cultural property” (p. 1). The authors examine the concept of safeguarding through the lens of cultural property protection, respect, and its role in the convention. The authors also discuss the scope of the volume and several themes throughout the book, including safeguarding and High Contracting Parties, the regime of value, general protection, special and enhanced protection, refuges, non-state groups and non-international armed conflict, and control. The chapter’s conclusion drives home the central argument of the volume that proactive peacetime preparation is the best measure to take to safeguard cultural property by emphasizing that the “better prepared a state party is in peacetime, the more likely it is that it will be able to respond with agility to both foreseen and unforeseen challenges” (p. 31). While this conclusion may not seem revolutionary, it is a salient reminder that waiting until there is a threat often results in suboptimal solutions. This message is especially relevant in the context of contemporary issues of resource allocation in fiscally and economically challenging times.

The second section, “Historical Perspectives,” includes two chapters that provide much-needed historical context to the discussion of cultural property protection from before the writing and implementation of the Hague Convention. Nigel Pollard discusses open cities and “super-refuges” from the First World War to 1954, while Philip W.
Deans uses the Imperial War Museum from 1933 to 1950 as a case study to examine protective measures from before the convention. The events of the two world wars heavily influenced the text of the convention, so these historical examinations are essential to understanding why the convention was written how it was and what that would mean for the implementation of the convention over the next seventy years.

Section 3, “Current Issues in Legal Implementation,” highlights many challenges the international community faces in implementing the convention and its subsequent protocols. Nikolaus Thaddäus Paumgartner and Raphael Zingg tackle the issue of the protection of movable cultural heritage by examining refuges, which are designated for state-owned property, and safe havens, which are established for property owned by another state. Next, Stavros-Evdokimos Pantazopoulos examines safeguarding through the interplay of the 1954 Hague Convention, the 1999 Second Protocol to the Hague Convention, and the 1972 World Heritage Convention. Finally, Kristin Hausler and Pascal Bongard investigate the role of armed non-state actors, and Paul Fox argues for the role of leadership in implementing the convention.

The final section, “The Hague Convention in Practice Today: Tools and Approaches,” shifts away from questions of legal implementation to examinations of the practical application of the implementation of the convention. Valentina Sabucco discusses cultural property protection from the perspective of risk management, arguing that more and more precise guidance is needed to mitigate risk during conflict. Brittni Bradford examines the United Kingdom’s implementation of the convention after its ratification of the convention in 2017 and argues for improved measures to prepare for the protection of museum collections. Joanne Dingwall McCafferty uses the Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Culturale’s 2003 intervention in Iraq to demonstrate the inadequacy of reactive international support. Maamoun Abdelkarim and Emma Cunliffe make a similar argument in examining Syria’s preparations for conflict and the ways those preparations affected cultural property during the conflict. Laura Albisetti and Rino Büchel present the details of Switzerland’s shelter system of refuges and safe havens as a model for emulation by the international community. Lastly, Lee Rotherham offers his view on the convention from the perspective of a military officer and combat veteran with experience in cultural property protection in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This volume is a superb addition to the Heritage Matters series and the broader scholarship on cultural property protection. The chapters are all thematically appropriate, and each adds to the conversation without going too far afield from the book’s central thesis. The arguments presented by each author are well presented and supported by concrete and relevant evidence. The recommendations for cultural property protection practitioners are logical and generally feasible for most High Contracting Parties, even in resource-constricted environments. This volume is a must-read for both academics and practitioners in the field.