

IMPERIALISM, ART AND RESTITUTION

EDITED BY JOHN HENRY MERRYMAN. PP. IX + 267, FIGS. 9. CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, NEW YORK 2006. \$75. ISBN 0521-85929-8 (CLOTH).

Over the past decades, the political issues surrounding the appropriation of antiquities and archaeological and ethnographic artifacts by western powers have increased dramatically, with growing demands from both indigenous peoples and nation-states for the return of culturally significant objects. Museums in North America, Australia, and New Zealand, in particular, have become sensitized to the debates, and many have been rethinking their roles and relationships with the cultures their objects represent. Yet the arguments surrounding restitution are complex, raising questions relating to identity, ethics, authority, power, and legal ownership. Perhaps nowhere are such complexities more carefully exposed than in this volume edited by Merryman.

The book emerged from a conference in 2004 that examined, in Merryman's words, "the return, or not, of great works of art and antiquity that were taken from their sites during the Age of Imperialism and are found today in western museums" (1). The subject is considered by a range of legal specialists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and museum professionals. While most of the debates around restitution have been concerned with the problematic acquisition of objects by museums, as Merryman remarks, "the museums' side of the discourse has scarcely been audible" (2). This volume attempts to rectify the imbalance by including the voices of museum professionals—James Cuno, the former director of the Courtauld Institute of Art in London and the director of the Art Institute of Chicago, and David Hurst Thomas of the American Museum of Natural History add to the debate.

The book has nine chapters, many of which offer contrasting perspectives. The first few explore broader issues. Cuno, for example, presents his "View from the Universal Mu-

seum." His institution signed the "Declaration of the Importance and Value of Universal Museums" in 2003, and he evidently favors the retention of antiquities and works of art by major world museums. Cuno argues that museums have been entrusted with the responsibility for preserving objects for all time. By contrast, Talat Halman, Turkey's first minister of culture, expresses the "View from the Source Community," condemning museums in North America and Europe for concealing stolen objects and proposing a new system of ethics and worldwide collaboration. In the following chapter, Boyd advocates an open approach to repatriation requests, stressing the importance of collaboration between dealers, collectors, and museum professionals.

Many of the arguments in the book are constructed around the biographies of high-profile objects, and the juxtaposition of opposing arguments for and against restitution works exceptionally well. St. Clair's authoritative account of the history of the Parthenon/Elgin sculptures examines the different meanings attributed to the marbles as a result of shifting political and ideological landscapes. St. Clair favors the "scattered fragments" being united in one place, namely Greece, proposing new forms of trusteeship "tailor-made to the needs of the monument in the 21st century" (96). Merryman, by contrast, forwards the case for retention of these sculptures, positing a series of coherently argued reasons why they should stay, for the time being, in the British Museum.

Two chapters are devoted to one of the best known of Egyptian antiquities: the bust of Nefertiti in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin. The conference organizers requested that Kurt Siehr and Stephen Urice, both of whom have legal backgrounds, take opposing positions on whether the bust should "stay or go." Siehr

presents the case for return; Urice advances reasons, both legal and nonlegal, for it to remain in Berlin.

In Brown and Bruchac's review of the Native American Graves Protection and Reparation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990, the complexities, confusions, and costs of the restitution process are addressed with evident sensitivity. In particular, the problems of accurate identification of cultural affiliation and the legal status of claims are explored. Brown and Bruchac's conclusions question both NAGPRA's requirements to place sensitive sacred material on public view and the notion that all things can actually be returned to their original sources.

In the final chapter, Thomas' discussion of three case studies highlights the relationships between Native Americans and scientific communities—Kennewick Man/*Oyt.pa.ma.na.tit.tite* (The Ancient One), the Willamette Meteorite/*Tomanowos* (The Sky Person), and *Kwáday Dän Ts'ínchi* (Long Ago Person) or KDT. Thomas explores the processes of cooperation among Native Americans, archaeologists, and museums curators and the resolution of property claims. Such disputes, he notes, ultimately boil down to who has the power to control ancient history.

The use of the term "art" in the title of the book is somewhat misleading. The volume clearly does not examine traditional art forms such as paintings or modern sculpture. Most of the chapters focus on objects of archaeology and ethnography; human remains and meteorites are also discussed. In this sense, words such as "cultural treasures" would have worked

better, providing the readership with a more accurate indication of the contents.

This volume is an important addition to the growing literature on a highly topical subject. Rather than advocating one particular agenda, the book is concerned with the mechanics—and particularly the legal mechanics—for resolving cultural heritage disputes. It is refreshing in its desire to present often conflicting points of view. The strength of the volume is in the detailed documentation of case studies. There are stories of custody battles, tensions, and legal problems of ownership, while the lives of fascinating and famous objects are eloquently traced. The multiple names by which many of the things are referred to attest to the variety of meanings and interpretative frameworks placed upon them (e.g., Parthenon or Elgin marbles, Kennewick Man or *Oyt.pa.ma.na.tit.tite*). The book is well conceived and well constructed and, perhaps more than any other, serves to expose the sheer complexity of the restitution debate. It will no doubt attract a wide audience and is relevant to students of many disciplines—museum studies, archaeology, anthropology, art history, cultural studies, politics, international law, and classics.

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