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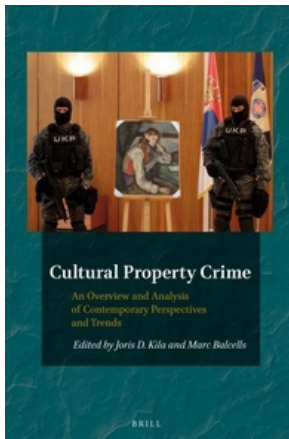
Online Journal in Public Archaeology

INDEX

Editorial	1
Jaime Almansa Sánchez and Elena Papagiannopoulou	
Local Communities' Perceptions of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Resources in the Mtwara Region of Tanzania	7
Festo W. Gabriel	
Archaeology, Politics, Entertainment and Dialogue: Polish (Digital) Public Archaeology	33
Alicja Piślewska	
Blogging about the End Times: Dealing with the Fringes of Archaeology	67
Johan Normark	
Of Pyramids and Dictators: Memory, Work and the Significance of Communist Heritage in Post-Socialist Albania	97
Francesco Iacono and Klejd L. Këlliçi	
Punk, DIY, and Anarchy in Archaeological Thought and Practice	123
Colleen Morgan	
<i>Points of You</i> Settling the differences and enabling change: toward a more inclusive management of archaeological sites in Athens	147
Helen Stefanopoulos	

Review Faking Ancient Mesoamerica / Faking Ancient Andes David S. Anderson	151
Review Where the wind blows us Lisa K. Rankin	157
Review Archaeology, Heritage and Civil Engagement Alexandra Ion	163
Review Archaeology, the Public and the Recent Past Jaime Almansa Sánchez	169
Review Blogging Archaeology David Mennear	175
Review Arqueología Pública en España Ana Pastor	183
Review The Past in the Present Stelios Lekakis	191
Review Cultural Property Crime Ignacio Rodríguez Temiño	203

REVIEWS



Ignacio RODRÍGUEZ-TEMIÑO

**Cultural Property Crime:
An Overview and Analysis of
Contemporary Perspectives and Trends.**

[Joris D. Kila and Marc Balcells (Eds.)]

Brill

ISBN: 978-9-00428-053-3

380 pages, 2015

Over the last twenty-five years, archaeological publishing has been enriched with books on archaeological looting, the illicit trafficking of archaeological objects and other forms of Art Crime. Today we are lucky to have access to a wide range of publications on the subject, including the collection *Heritage and Identity: Issues in Cultural Heritage Protection* published by Brill. This collection has shot to the top of the essential reading list, even though only the first three volumes have been published. It is important to highlight the work of the editors, Joris D. Kila and A. Zeidler, whose excellent choice of titles should be recognised. The first two volumes, written and coedited by Professor Kila, were dedicated to the protection of cultural heritage in times of war, or when affected by violent social conflict. However, the third volume broadens the scope to cover different types of art-related crime, while still including situations of war where the lack of state stewardship or legal owners favours looting, theft and illicit trafficking, and even the iniquitous

destruction of cultural heritage, as Kila himself reminds us in his contribution to the book.

Joris D. Kila coedited this third volume, *Cultural Property Crime*, with Marc Balcells, a Spanish criminologist known for his work on culture-related white-collar crime. His contributions to the book give us a fascinating insight into the subject.

This collaboration was the fruit of Balcells' earlier contribution to *Cultural Heritage in the Crosshairs*, edited by Kila and Zeidler.

While some years ago archaeological looting and the illicit trafficking of archaeological objects were issues principally dealt with by British and American authors, the international arena has now become more cosmopolitan, breaking with this monopoly. The series *Heritage and Identity: Issues in Cultural Heritage Protection* is a magnificent example of this.

The book is divided into seven sections of contributions: Art Theft, The Relationship between Cultural Heritage Crimes and Organized Crime; Fakes and Forgeries; Art and White-Collar Crime; Armed Conflicts and Cultural Property; Archaeological Looting; and Art Vandalism. It is impossible to provide a brief review of all the contributions made, but we can say they correspond to a variety of fields such as archaeology, art history, anthropology, criminology, and journalism.

The contributions related to investigative journalism are particularly interesting in so far, as they refer to criminal cases, something to which we are not so accustomed in the archaeological field.

Overall, the book provides a kaleidoscopic vision of what we know as Art Crime, offering a balanced combination of theory and practice, using both current and historic cases.

Both the theory and the analysis of practical cases highlight the inadequacy of national and international legal frameworks for combatting a plague that is becoming inextricably linked to other forms of organised crime and phenomena, such as the manufacture of replicas; now a lucrative national industry in far-eastern countries such as China.

The book shines a spotlight on the problems and provides possible solutions, although stopping these gaps will not prevent the appearance of new forms of criminal activity that affect cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage is one of the most valuable legacies we have to leave for future generations. However, such value always implies a degree of avarice, of contempt for others by those who feel superior, of racial and cultural hatred, of the desire for financial gain by exploiting something unique by making reproductions of the original, of the unhealthy desire to gain notoriety by damaging cultural goods. All these passions are the dark side, the underbelly that, like a curse, is always linked to things that produce aesthetic pleasure and give us a better understanding of who we are.

This book has given us a new insight into the thinking of those who use their intellectual and professional capacity to try to keep the dark side at bay. Like the previous volumes, this new book is essential reading. We shall await the new volumes of the *Heritage and Identity: Issues in Cultural Heritage Protection* series with bated breath.

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