CLOONAN, Michèle Valerie. *Preserving our heritage: perspectives from antiquity to the digital age.* London: Facet. 2015.
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The huge time-scale for content coverage, from the 7th century BC to the 21st century AD (interestingly, given the American provenance of the book, the BCE / CE terminology has not been used), would initially seem to justify this hefty tome, weighing in at six hundred and ninety-three pages long and in a large, unwieldy paperback format. Michèle Cloonan has given herself a hard task in attempting her goal of creating an interdisciplinary anthology of "key readings" (Cloonan, 2015, *xv*) to inform both student and heritage professional in the field of preservation and conservation. There are ninety works divided between eleven thematic chapters, the largest of these being 'Preservation in Context: Libraries, Archives, Museums, and the Built Environment'.

The overview of the book in the preface gives the justification for the selections chosen. These are:

[1] ... historical writings that form the basis of contemporary thinking and practices ... [2] ... readings from a variety of fields that are primarily concerned with the preservation of cultural heritage ... [3] ... new areas of interest, such as sustainability ... [4] ... publications that might not be accessible to most readers ...

(Cloonan, 2015, *xvii*)

A "preservation timeline" is provided which is, as all timelines are, linear and chronological (and, thereby, with an implied 'origin' and 'evolution' trajectory). Chapter 1 follows this linear chronology with selection and commentary by Cloonan from sources such as the Old Testament (to demonstrate the antiquity of the concept of "keeping documents for future use" (Cloonan, 2015, *xxiv*); Cloonan could have gone even further back in time by referring to the Mesopotamian clay tablets for record-keeping dating to c.3000 BC – although they are referred to in Paul Conway's paper in chapter 7); Marcus Vitruvius Pollio's *Ten Books on Architecture*, c. 15BC; to the latest reference in this chapter dating to 1877, The Society for the Protection of Ancient Building's manifesto.

The coverage of the book is vast, although not so much in terms of time-span (the majority – seventy-seven – of the works referred to date to the 20th or 21st centuries) as in subject matter or specific foci. Thus, we have the impossible attempt at an overview of 'key works' related to preservation or conservation of, in effect, all material culture objects. Such a selection is also, naturally, a personal (even with an advisory panel) choice, and, therefore, not only subjective but also a (con)temporary reflection of what are deemed to be key texts in the field. I would question how papers on digital preservation and sustainability (such as those in chapter 7 and the last paper in chapter 11) can already be key texts. The current trends in both areas will have shifted and will continue to shift as both are susceptible to rapid technological and political change, and the value placed on preserving anything (everything?) for posterity.

Having said this, the book does include papers on key aspects that are important to understandings of preservation and heritage including cultural memory (Assmann, 1995), heritage as identity (Pearce, 2000), ethics and values (selected Charters and Declarations), and an attempt at multi-cultural perspectives (chapter 10). My feeling is, however, that whilst a large number of the chosen papers refer to useful and important practical preservation methodologies (and changing attitudes towards these), the discussion of what cultural heritage might be perceived as (and how this perception has been constructed) should have been given greater significance within the volume. Surely it underpins the whole point of producing such a work? I feel there is a bias inherent in the volume that largely reflects a Western understanding of heritage. If a culturally-valued object is so created by its use within the culture that produced it, what, exactly, is being 'preserved' when objects are taken out of their social context and placed in artificial repositories (museums, libraries, or appropriated as visitor attractions)? As Peleggi states

conservation [can no] longer be premised upon seemingly universal – though in fact Western – ideas of aesthetic and historic value, but must reflect in the first place the cultural values and religious beliefs of the community for whom heritage is preserved.

(Peleggi, in Daly and Winter, 2012, 55)

This is why cultural memory lies at the core of why preservation matters – and which is not addressed enough in this volume.

Material culture objects are impermanent; they are destined to decay. They are not (usually) created with a view to perpetual life. Aboriginal rock art is revisited and repainted, and recreated, as part of aboriginal cultural and spiritual activity that gives it meaning (see Mowaljarlai 1988). So, as Foyle (2015) asks in his article about the recent destruction of ancient Assyrian monuments, "is it time to rethink our ideas about preserving the world's heritage?" Western notions of preservation can be criticised for their over-emphasis on the relationship between authenticity and provenance. Foyle gives the example of Japanese ancient pagodas

that have been rebuilt perhaps 10 [sic] times, but which inherit their original ethos and form, which represent the soul of the object above its materiality.

(Foyle, 2015)

Foyle does not elucidate how the "original ethos" is discernible, but the concept of the "soul of the object" being more important than its materiality is interesting. Iconoclasm and biblioclasm are themselves culturally-created events, they are part of the palimpsest reflecting the impermanence of objects. Perhaps, then, what is really significant is the intangible, that which cannot be preserved or transferred except through cultural means? Do we (humans) need 'authentic' objects to embody cultural memory, and how might attitudes towards this differ between cultures?

However, cultural memory is only one aspect of why preservation might or might not be important. The potential yielding of insight into previous ways of being in, or seeing, the world (surely an important part of what 'heritage' seeks to

recapture?) is another aspect. Erne (referring to literature and, specifically, the bibliographic makeup of Shakespeare's playbooks) states "[literature's] materializations are not simple containers within which the texts' meanings are disseminated but the conditions of the meanings they participate in shaping" (Erne, 2013, 115). Thus, the materiality of an object contains multi-level cultural information or meanings, as well as creating these meanings by being that object. The object provides the clues, not always discernible and subject to shifts in interpretation and new 'evidence' or theoretical approaches. Without preservation (of some kind) the clues disappear altogether.

Does Cloonan's book contribute to understandings of how (Western) preservation has been and is viewed? The answer is 'Yes' but, in summary, I suspect this volume will be primarily useful to students as an easy source for the papers included along with Cloonan's own introduction to each chapter's foci. It may also act as a reference book for practitioners (therefore achieving what it set out to do). However, whilst recognising the expertise that has gone into the selection of the content for the production of this book, my feeling is that Cloonan has produced something that, ultimately, is too eclectic and amorphous, and should, perhaps, have been produced in a different form itself.

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