

Chapter 10

The “Other” Meaning of Value in Archaeology: The Uncomfortable Topics of Money, Looting, and Artifacts of Questionable Origin

Richard M. Pettigrew and Sanchita Balachandran

The Topic Please discuss situations in which you have had to deal with things that the field of archaeology and overall study of the past would really prefer not to exist: for Rick, this is the topic of treasure hunting and the video about Odyssey Marine Exploration’s finds that he posted on *The Archaeology Channel*; for Sanchita, this is the study of issues of treating the sword that she described in her article in *Archaeology Magazine*, plus any other similar situations that you have both encountered. We would like you to frame your discussions in terms of the topic of artifacts and money: in other words, in addition to their “priceless” value in representing the past, archaeological artifacts also have monetary value. How have you encountered this aspect of archaeology and the study of the past in your work (i.e., your given situations above), what dilemmas has it presented to you, how did you decide what to do, and can you see any solutions?

The Case of the Odyssey Video: Richard M. Pettigrew

Many would like to arrange for archaeology, ideally a purely scientific and academic discipline and process, to be divorced from issues of financial advantage and personal gain. Perhaps surprisingly, as our experience demonstrates convincingly, single-minded efforts to keep archaeology free from such subverting influences can lead to contradictions, quandaries and abiding conflicts. Even the freedoms of public education media expression and student project choices can be threatened by

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self-chosen watchdogs of archaeological ethics. One wonders, then, if it might not be better to recognize and accommodate the inevitable place of monetary value in the process of investigating the human past.

My organization, Archaeological Legacy Institute (ALI), produces *The Archaeology Channel* (TAC) (<http://www.archaeologychannel.org>), one of the world's most popular archaeology-related Web sites with traffic of eight million page views in 2008 and the top-listed Web site for a Google search on "archaeology video." Since we launched it as a streaming-media Web site in July 2000, TAC has grown dramatically in its online visibility, its professional stature and the volume of its video and audio content. We have worked hard to nurture and promote TAC and its growth as part of our public mission to tell the human story through Internet media.

One measure of our success in our effort to develop TAC is the degree of reaction and feedback we receive when we put up a new video or audio program. With few exceptions, the feedback we get is positive and encouraging. In our history, the most notable exception to this norm is the reaction we experienced in March 2008 and subsequent months when we posted a video that featured the curation facility of Odyssey Marine Exploration, a for-profit company that specializes in the location, documentation and recovery of deep-water shipwreck sites. The controversy hinges on ethical issues surrounding Odyssey's practice of selling artifacts with high monetary value. Such a practice often is seen as a violation of fundamental principles, but the controversy here highlights the different values simultaneously attributed to highly marketable archaeological artifacts and questions about how such artifacts should be treated and disposed.

My own archaeological career began in 1971 as an anthropology graduate student at the University of Oregon, where I earned my MA and Ph.D. degrees and where I was on the staff as a Research Associate from 1976 to 1986. During that time and in subsequent years as a private-sector archaeologist, I made numerous and, I hope, significant contributions to Oregon archaeology while absorbing and professing a fairly purist attitude against the marketing of artifacts. At the same time, until recently I probably did not fully recognize the potential conflicts of interest that can arise from making a living on doing archaeology. Eventually, my growing dissatisfaction with the endless pursuit of CRM contracts and the production of often cutting-edge research reports that few would read induced me to found an organization (ALI) devoted to widely sharing the insights, perspectives and knowledge we archaeologists accumulate. My passion became telling the human story to our fellow human beings through TAC using advanced digital media technology. When we launched TAC, I did not fully realize that I had added the processes and ethics of online journalism to my archaeological repertoire. But experience can be a harsh and unrelenting teacher.

The case in point is the video, *Anthropology Field Notes 6: Shipwrecks – with Odyssey Marine Exploration* (<http://www.archaeologychannel.org/content/video/anthfldnotes6.html>). This is the last of a series of video interview programs produced and submitted to us by Central Washington University and created by Faith Haney, at that time a graduate student at Central specializing in nautical archaeology. In her planning for this last video of the series, Faith sent letters to all the top nautical archaeology departments in the country requesting an interview, but the only group to respond to her

with an invitation was Odyssey Marine Exploration (OME) of Tampa, Florida. She had some grant money dedicated to the video series and spent the last of it going to Tampa to interview the Odyssey laboratory curator, Ellen Gerth. We had agreed to Webcast her video series, with the understanding that each submission was subject to our review, but we were not aware of her Odyssey interview until she sent us the video.

When she submitted her video to us, we saw that this was a potentially controversial subject, as many marine archaeologists do not consider Odyssey a reputable archaeological organization, as they are known to offer certain artifacts for sale. We do not go out of our way to raise the hackles of colleagues, but at the same time, we felt an obligation to follow through with our agreement with Central to Webcast their video series. We agreed to post it on TAC only after Faith agreed to make some edits in the video to highlight the fact that Odyssey was controversial and only if we could also post a disclaimer and create a message board inviting comments about the video. We felt that the video would create an opportunity to air the issue of for-profit marine salvage companies and promote a dialogue among professionals and the public that in the end would be a valuable contribution. The resulting communications and dialogue certainly realized that expectation and showed that Odyssey and issues surrounding monetary value in archaeology indeed are highly sensitive in our profession. We did not expect to, nor did we, reach a resolution on the subject, as we saw our role as a vehicle for discussion. The ramifications of the topic go far beyond what one can cover in a single article, but it will be useful here to offer a sample of the viewpoints expressed to show how honestly held opinions can differ.

We strengthened our disclaimer after the video went up and after representatives of the Register of Professional Archaeologists (RPA) requested this change. The currently posted disclaimer reads as follows:

Many professional archaeologists categorically and ethically object to the sale of artifacts collected from archaeological sites, whether on land or under the sea, in any circumstances. Other professional archaeologists argue that the sale of artifacts should be allowed in some circumstances, such as the sale of marketable commodities recovered under controlled circumstances in large and redundant quantities from deep-water shipwrecks, as claimed by Odyssey Marine Exploration. Our presentation of this program does not constitute an endorsement of Odyssey Marine Exploration, its practices or projects by Archaeological Legacy Institute. We are aware of the controversy surrounding shipwreck explorations by for-profit enterprises and we hope that this program will encourage meaningful and productive discourse on the subject. We welcome your thoughtful feedback to shipwreck@archaeologychannel.org.

We were prepared for differences of opinion about Odyssey, but surprised by the tenor of some of the responses. As we had invited comments for our online message board, we expected some negative responses through that mechanism. However, the quickest negative feedback and the least diplomatic comments came via personal e-mail to us rather than comments submitted for the video’s message board. Without identifying the authors, I will summarize some notable examples.

One correspondent expressed deep disappointment in our “portrayal of commercial treasure hunters as archaeologists,” arguing that giving such exposure to a company like Odyssey was, in effect, “directly contributing to the exploitation of underwater cultural resources, ultimately leading to their destruction and dispersal.” This person then went on to allege that “the activities you support” in presenting this

video “are in direct contradiction to the ethical principles of the SAA, SHA, and AIA (principles your web page suggests are followed by ALI), the spirit and intent of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage and the ICOMOS Charter on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage, and the Register of Professional Archaeologists Code of Conduct.”

Another used terse irony to make a point: “Advocating the commercial salvage of shipwreck archaeological sites is a questionable long term strategy. Will you also be doing the commercial sale of artifacts from public land sites?”

One e-mailer resorted to stereotypic and prejudicial name-calling: “... sometimes it takes a while for true colors to show, even for liberal whiney academics looking for compromise.” A frequently heard theme expressed compliments for what we had contributed alongside surprise and dismay at our alleged connection with looters. As an example, one respondent complimented us on our programming while finding “... it hard to believe that *The Archaeology Channel* is promoting a treasuring hunting company such as Odyssey Marine Exploration.” This person’s understanding of Odyssey’s activities, which appears to be incorrect and is at odds with our research into their actual practices, was that “... they only recover and conserve those artifacts that they can sell, while destroying the site and context of the more mundane and frankly, the more interesting organic materials that are on the sites...”

Another expression of this sentiment is the following: “by featuring this video on your otherwise commendable Web site, it appears to the public that plundering shipwrecks for artifacts to sell is the same as the legitimate archaeology projects featured in other videos ... I must say that I am struggling to understand how a person in your position and with your obvious passion for archaeology can condone this.”

Some of those objecting in direct e-mails refused to submit comments for all to read on the message board, apparently out of a desire to deny Odyssey a debating platform. Some objectors did submit comments to the message board, but the earliest and most frequent comments came from those who applauded us for opening up the subject on TAC. Here are some examples:

I want to applaud you for running Faith Haney’s *Anthropology Field Notes 6* featuring Odyssey Marine Exploration. I’ve interacted with Odyssey and one of its founders, Greg Stemm, for many years – most recently as a member of an executive group of archaeologists set up jointly by Odyssey and the British Ministry of Defense to provide advisory oversight of work on the shipwreck thought to be the Sussex. I’ve found Greg to be a very original thinker, and I think Odyssey holds out considerable hope for the future of commercial-based deep-water archaeology...

As for the possibility of doing good archaeology, I can only say that Odyssey’s fieldwork, as I’ve seen it demonstrated and described in research designs and project plans, seems to me to be superior to virtually anything I’ve seen even on dry land. Very tight control is maintained of provenience, and a unique system for both excavation and documentation makes it possible to produce a far more complete record of an Odyssey excavation than is characteristic of archaeological projects. I’d be surprised if the system worked perfectly all the time; there are doubtless lapses and mistakes, but it’s a rare field project anywhere that doesn’t experience lapses and mistakes (Tom King, 3/7/08)

There can be no denying that the company exists to make money for its shareholders and salaries for its employees, both recognized by the IRS as profits, and differing not at all from the taxable income of professional archaeologists. In short, in one way or another, we are all in it for the money...

Your condemnation [referring to one of the opposing comments] of the sale of shipwreck artifacts is, I suggest, as philosophically founded as are respect for motherhood and the flag. To reject either would be a sin so heinous as to be indescribable. I assure you that I agree. But I do not agree that the retention of every last potsherd or peso is in anyone’s best interest...

No museum needs nor wants a ton of conglomerated silver coins or, for that matter, a thousand 1860s wine bottles. Providing a sufficient number are retained to represent all discernable variations, the remainder have no further informational value...

There is, I am afraid, a good deal of hypocrisy inherent in the “holier than thou” approach to the entire field of underwater archaeology – not the least of it in determining who shall do it and who may not, and what shall be done with the recovered artifacts. The *Titanic* exhibits and the recovery processes that preceded them are classic examples of the morally improper exploitation of the past. Nevertheless, salvage from its debris field was featured by the National Geographic Society and its exhibits were shown at the National Maritime Museum in London and in the Mariners’ Museum at Newport News, Virginia. To my knowledge, nobody complained that Dr. Ballard lacked the appropriate archaeological credentials or claimed that the recovered objects had archaeological value (IH, 11/30/08)

The curator for *Odyssey*, Ellen Gerth, who was the interviewee in the video, submitted a defense of *Odyssey* for the message board, as follows:

Odyssey’s professional mission differs significantly from treasure salvage operations whose sole aim is the recovery of commercially valuable items from sunken wrecks, typically without regard to archaeological standards and procedures. In its commitment to recover, preserve, and document underwater cultural heritage for future generations, *Odyssey* adheres to the same rigorous archaeological standards applied to terrestrial and shallow water sites. However, a significant difference is the cost and the requirement for specialized equipment essential for conducting deep-water archaeology. Those archaeologists who have taken the opportunity to observe our work in the deep ocean have made a point of recognizing that our archaeological protocols are not only on par with the “academic” archaeologists, but in many cases far surpass them ... While it is true that *Odyssey Marine Exploration* offers select **duplicate artifacts** for purchase by collectors, these artifacts are thoroughly conserved, studied and documented before sale ... *Odyssey* has a collection policy that provides for keeping any artifact that is unique, or available in limited numbers, in our study collection in perpetuity. These pieces are available for study, display and educational purposes. Fortunately, the profits derived from the sale of duplicate articles funds the ongoing care and maintenance of this collection, so the public is not forced to fund the maintenance of the collection (Ellen Gerth, 3/14/08)

The fallout from our webcast of this video extended beyond comments submitted by individuals and even beyond verbal argument. We received letters of objection signed by representatives of most of the leading professional organizations worldwide, clearly organized by several energetic individuals in key positions. These letters all argued that the sale of artifacts under any circumstances constituted the commercialization of archaeology and therefore was unethical. While this is the official position of many and possibly all of the major professional organizations, it clearly is not agreed to by many of their members, who believe that exceptions can be made to the “do not sell” proscription. We ourselves did not take an official position on the matter, maintaining steadfastly that our role was to air the opposing views.

In the end, this episode has been a valuable learning experience and one that was a necessary step in our development as an archaeological media organization.

It caused us to take a close look at our own principles and protocols and to develop a position statement on the matter, as follows:

At ALI, we are very much in accord with calls to promote responsible Stewardship of archaeological resources. This has been a fundamental aim of ours since we were founded in 1999 and we have worked since 2000 to develop TAC into a medium ideally suited to convey this message. Consistent with that effort, we are very keen to create and deliver informative content about the values and ethics of archaeology.

As developers of a media outlet, our obligations include some that go beyond what archaeologists normally have faced. In our activities we are compelled to adhere to a set of ethical principles much akin to those of broadcast journalism. In order to maintain credibility as well as to ensure fairness to those who may use our service, we have to be careful to separate our own opinions from those expressed by specific programs that we broadcast. Because inevitably we will at times be subject to pressure from interest groups of one kind or another, and to demonstrate clearly to all that we are not susceptible to this kind of pressure, we must resist calls to avoid or modify or remove specific programs.

Let me suggest that those who still have concerns about our showing Anthropology Field Notes 6 first watch the video and then read the postings on the message board there. You will see cogent and sincere arguments on both sides of the Odyssey issue.

It's not easy to be on the receiving end of pointed criticisms and objections about our content and we don't go out of our way to create controversy. However, such controversy is an inevitable (but hopefully just occasional) part of media broadcasting. We ask for you all to understand. Thank you.

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Whatever one believes about the appropriateness and ethics of Odyssey and its marine archaeology program, we as a profession must come to grips with the realities of doing archaeology in a commercial world. The market value of artifacts matters not simply to museums, art dealers and customs agents, but more broadly to our profession at every level. ALI did not seek out this apparently taboo subject: it came to us. As the Odyssey dispute demonstrates, those who believe that the ethical debate on this subject is over are simply deluding themselves. Issues of profit and money will not go away or be resolved while we ignore what is really happening to archaeological sites and collections. In the construction of a realistic, effective and consensus position on archaeological values, which is yet to be achieved, a relevant, contemporary archaeology must openly and honestly consider alternative views on the appropriate disposition of marketable artifacts.

Archaeology, Conservation and the “Cost” of Archaeological Artifacts: Sanchita Balachandran

Archaeologists and conservators of archaeological material both acknowledge that artifacts can hold many values, and that these values are mutable and constantly re-interpreted by different stakeholders (Clavir 2002; Lynott and Wylie 2000a; Munos-Vinas 2004; Sloggett 2009). We are comfortable assigning particular values to these artifacts, such as, “artistic, historical, scientific, religious, or social [significance]

... [that] is an invaluable and irreplaceable legacy that must be preserved for future generations” (AIC 1994a). But where are these values ultimately carried and preserved—on the physical object or in the documentation and interpretation of the original context in which the object was found? On site, archaeologists and conservators often clash over this question of what is more important to preserve, the actual archaeological artifact, or the information it embodies. This conflict grows more acute when archaeological material, through the licit and illicit art market, emerges far from the context of the archaeological site and enters a museum or private collection. Now as commercialized objects, these artifacts have gained a monetary value according to physical qualities such as historical rarity or aesthetic appearance, but have lost much of the contextual information which archaeologists hold most dear. Are all of these de-contextualized objects then no longer worthy of preservation? In particular, are artifacts with no provenance entirely meaningless from an archaeological perspective, and should conservators therefore leave them to deteriorate? How should a conservator ethically preserve archaeological artifacts?

The fundamental question of what is worth preserving – the object or the information it carries – animates the complex relationship between archaeologists, museums and private collectors, and conservators. In this paper, I discuss the uneasy position of the archaeological conservator who works with both archaeologists and collectors of archaeological material; how can a conservator ethically preserve both the physical artifact *and* the knowledge it represents when they have been unnaturally separated by archaeologists, collectors, and the art market? Does the valuing of information and provenance over the physical artifact discourage its preservation? Furthermore, are there ways in which assigning a monetary value to an artifact actually encourages its preservation?

I trained as an art conservator at the Conservation Center at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. I focused on the conservation of archaeological material early on, and completed internships at the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Harvard Art Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, among others. I also pursued field projects that led me to Cambodia, Egypt, Italy, and Tunisia, as well as sites in the U.S. For six years, I worked as a freelance conservator, running archaeological conservation projects in Egypt in addition to working for museums and universities in North America. I recently joined the Johns Hopkins University as the Curator/Conservator of the Archaeological Museum. In this role, I conserve, manage and research a sizeable archaeological collection and teach conservation-related courses to undergraduate students. My path to this current position has broadened my view of conservation; it is not simply a field dedicated to the protection and study of individual artifacts, but rather a means of understanding the values and resonances of these artifacts within an historic, artistic, and social framework.

I was an undergraduate the first time I held an artwork – a nineteenth-century American painting – and it was also the first time I was aware of the commercial value of such objects. As I lifted the solid frame and cradled it gingerly in my arms, a fellow intern in the university gallery shouted, “don’t drop it, that’s three million

dollars!” The painting seemed to grow heavier and more fragile in that one instant, and I remember the relief of placing it against the gallery wall. My early concern about the monetary value of artifacts became less burdensome throughout graduate school; this was partly from gaining confidence working with unique artifacts, but also because the “cost” of art work was rarely discussed or even consciously avoided during my conservation training. I also grew to recognize the “preciousness” of archaeological artifacts as they emerged from the ground during an excavation. Conserving an artifact that had remained hidden for thousands of years and could be linked to a specific place or time, or even a specific individual in the case of grave goods, was a powerful and personal responsibility. These objects, while still in their original context, were priceless, both for the information and personal links they embodied, but also because they were not commercialized by the art market.

A conservator’s responsibilities are multilayered. On the most basic level, conservators study, document and treat artifacts, collections and sites in order to preserve them. This may involve slowing the degradation of an object through physical or chemical interventions; revealing evidence of its manufacture or use through careful examination or cleaning; and making artifacts robust enough for access and use by scholars, descendant communities and the general public. Conservators are also charged with maintaining the intangible integrity of objects, i.e., ensuring that our interventions do not compromise or remove cultural, religious or other associative aspects that give meaning to them. For example, disfiguring accretions such as drips of libations or other offerings may be left in place as evidence of religious use. As another example, artifacts that were intentionally broken for ritual purposes may only be virtually but not physically re-assembled. However, conservators are expected to remain unaware of the commercial value of the materials they preserve because of the concern that they “may be influenced by the prestige imparted by association with cultural property that is rare, famous or of high monetary value ... [as] this may affect the interpretation of data, judgment of condition, etc” (AIC 1994b). Thus, our professional ethics demand that we consider each object for every value it holds except monetary value for fear of compromising our level of care. Ironically, the only condition under which conservators are asked to discard every value *except* monetary value is when an object is an unprovenanced antiquity; in such cases, the historical, artistic, cultural, and intangible qualities are considered unworthy of conserving precisely because of the way that the objects have entered into a collection. But are conservators acting ethically if they intentionally allow archaeological material to deteriorate?

Preserving the De-contextualized Object

Several recent publications sketch the complex social and economic networks that make the removal and transfer of archaeological objects from their “source countries” to art collecting nations possible (Brodie and Renfrew 2005; Chippindale 2001;

Chippindale and Gill 2000; Mackenzie 2005; Szopa 2004). “Local diggers,” often destitute individuals in the source country seeking to supplement their regular income, unearth artifacts illicitly for sale to middlemen. The middlemen then pass this material on to local or international dealers who smuggle it to an intermediary nation where laws against illicit antiquities trafficking are less stringent. After establishing a reasonable “provenance” in these countries, the objects are “legally” sold to other nations. The commercial value of the artifacts increases exponentially from what is offered to the local digger by the middleman, to what the international dealer demands for the same object in a New York City gallery. This process and the price of certain types of artifacts have changed somewhat with the advent of online retailers who can sell antiquities relatively anonymously and with less risk through the Internet.

Many conservators encounter archaeological objects within a museum, where they have presumably been vetted for their provenance and then legally acquired.¹ Private collectors of archaeological artifacts generally work with freelance conservators, who, without the resources of a museum institution, are placed in the awkward position of having to decide whether they should request information about their clients’ legal title to these objects. Some conservators purposely do not ask for this documentation because of fears of jeopardizing a business relationship, while others are simply unaware of the current laws affecting the purchase of archaeological objects. In these cases, how much due diligence is required of a conservator before conserving a deteriorating artifact? Is it the conservator’s ethical responsibility to preserve the object, or preserve the idea that unprovenanced objects are archaeologically worthless and should not be legitimized through conservation treatment?

In 2007, I wrote in *Archaeology Magazine* of an agonizing decision to conserve an unprovenanced rusting Roman steel sword that was shattering into fragments (Balachandran 2007). My client, an amateur historian with a genuine concern for the long-term preservation of his collection, told me that he purchased his artifacts on Web sites such as Ebay. He felt strongly that he had rescued this sword and other such fragments from an uncertain future in their source countries. He emphasized that he was caring for his collection in a way that would be unsustainable on an archaeological site or even a museum. These are familiar arguments to anyone working with archaeological objects, but applying these questions to a specific object – such as the Roman sword – made them sound more reasonable and even justifiable. For my client, the purchase of ancient objects from Web sites made them accessible in a way that would have been otherwise impossible given his moderate economic

¹I have had several conversations with conservators who found that the objects they were asked to consider for acquisition or which were already part of the collection raised serious questions about provenance or indicated that they were recently looted. However, it was often beyond the conservators’ authority to suggest that these materials be de-accessioned or otherwise removed from the museum.

resources. Furthermore, he was willing to pay more than the cost of the original artifacts to have them preserved according to museum standards. To him, the sword had a value beyond its price tag; it was a personal link to history and to a particular (if anonymous) Roman soldier who had died somewhere in the ancient world.

Archaeologists and conservators are united in condemning the commercialization of archaeological objects, and advocate avoiding unprovenanced objects for fear of legitimizing them by examining or publishing them, or improving their physical condition (Brodie 2006; Brodie and Tubb 2001; Jaeschke 1996; Sease 1997; Tubb 1995; Sease and Tubb 1996; Tubb 1997). They have also argued that these fragments are devoid of any “scientific” value as they tell us nothing about the broader cultural context from which they came (Brodie 2006; Brodie and Tubb 2001). But conservators are trained specifically to identify and document the kinds of minute traces that individual objects, even when wrenched from their original contexts, can retain. In the case of the Roman sword, I could distinguish an impression of wood that was once pressed against steel during burial and remained visible in the rust. On the hilt, criss-cross striations were preserved the corrosion, providing evidence of the textile grip that was wrapped around it in antiquity. Why should this information be lost when a simple conservation treatment could preserve it for future generations?

After consulting my colleagues and reading extensively in the archaeological and conservation literatures, I went against the prevailing ethics to conserve the sword. But I resolved to no longer work on unprovenanced objects, primarily because of the risk of damaging my professional reputation. Through a series of e-mail exchanges with my client, I also convinced him to stop collecting unprovenanced artifacts and steered him toward volunteering on a scientific archaeological excavation. Despite this ethical victory, I remained unconvinced by the hollow-sounding arguments given by archaeologists and conservators condemning unprovenanced artifacts. Having worked on excavations, I recognize that objects from known contexts tell us more than these isolated fragments can, but de-contextualized objects also carry invaluable information. Bauer (2008) suggests that there will always be an illicit trade in antiquities even if international legislative controls in art trafficking are tightened and the collecting public is won over by the ethical arguments of archaeologists. Given this reality, it behooves both archaeologists and conservators to communicate more clearly with collectors and find alternate ways of collaborating with them to preserve the limited archaeological record.

Preserving the Context at the Cost of the Object

If, according to archaeologists, unprovenanced antiquities are “valueless” because they are wrenched from their original context, then the archaeological site is where objects are “worth” the most in terms of their historical, cultural, and scientific value. Therefore, archaeological sites and the artifacts buried in them should be protected and conserved as completely and ethically as possible. In reality, the

priority of an excavation is to find and document information about a site, rather than physically preserving all the material that is uncovered. Thus, resources are allocated for discovering information rather than keeping the artifacts that provide this data, and all but the more spectacular or rare finds are seen as somewhat unimportant once they have given up their desired contextual information. Ironically, these same artifacts – which archaeologists minimally prioritize with the archaeological context – become symbols of precious archaeological value when they are commercialized and traded through the art market. How can archaeologists legitimately condemn the circulation and preservation of artifacts by private collectors when they routinely discard similar materials as part of their professional practice? Would archaeologists change their excavation practices if they were more aware of the monetary value of uncovered artifacts?

There remains a deep rift between archaeologists and conservators within the context of an archaeological site, in part because of this double-standard regarding the value of finds. Conservation has yet to be fully integrated into the workings of most archaeological excavations because the emphasis is primarily on finding and documenting rather than keeping archaeological material. This means that material, once excavated, may not survive because there is little interest in conserving it for long-term study or use. Conservation is assumed to be luxury that most excavations cannot afford, rather than an essential means of understanding and analyzing the materials uncovered in the course of the dig season. Conservators’ decision-making skills and expertise may also be considered to be simple recipe-like techniques that can be easily taught to and applied by excavators to any variety of materials. Thus, important archaeological material that would survive excavation with conservation treatment may be physically damaged or lost by well-meaning but ill-prepared individuals who are not trained to preserve them. Many archaeologists also suggest that the artifacts they find are not beautiful enough to warrant a trained conservator on staff; therefore, the belief is that conservators primarily improve the aesthetic qualities of an artifact for a museum display, rather than stabilize it for purposes of scientific study. Such assumptions put both the artifacts and the information they can provide at risk, and ultimately limit the scope of an archaeological excavation.

The moment of discovery of an archaeological object is often the most vulnerable moment in that object’s “life.” In my experience working in the field, all materials, from robust stone to fragile textiles, begin to deteriorate rapidly once they are exposed to unstable ambient conditions. Therefore, there is a critically short period of time within which to stabilize and lift finds before they are irreparably damaged. During the 2002 field season at the University of Pennsylvania-Yale-Institute of Fine Arts Expedition to Abydos, Egypt, a group of 25 ivory bracelets discovered in an ancient child burial began to crack and split into hundreds of fragments within hours of being uncovered. It was only because I could temporarily stabilize them in situ that five of them could later be reconstructed for study and publication. This is but one example of the direct benefits of having a conservator on an excavation’s field staff. While not all excavations may require a field conservator, this decision should be made in consultation with a conservation professional *before* an excavation season begins, and provisions should always be made to bring in a conservator

immediately if circumstances require it. Furthermore, archaeologists must work in collaboration with conservators to draft long-term preservation plans for their sites so as to ensure that the material they excavate and the architecture they expose is protected for future excavations.

Conservators and archaeologists often clash on site over the question of what is more important to preserve: the object or the contextual information, respectively. But should not an ethical archaeological and conservation practice aim to preserve both equally (Lipe 2000; Lynott and Wylie 2000b)? Objects provide crucial information that even the most exhaustive descriptions, drawings and photographs cannot. An intact artifact may tell us about specific manufacturing techniques, the use of particular materials or pigments, or even preserve uniquely human traces such as fingerprints or DNA. Site practices must change to ensure that this original source material is not sacrificed for the sake of documentation. The development of increasingly sophisticated survey and photographic equipment means that information can be captured precisely in a matter of minutes. New conservation materials such as cyclododecane offer quick and entirely reversible ways to stabilize and lift fragile finds, also within minutes (Balachandran 2010). Given these tools, there is no justification for damaging or losing archaeological evidence. While there will always be competing priorities for preservation on site, the decision to simply document an artifact rather than conserve it should be an agonizing choice, not a routine one. If such measures are not implemented, it is disingenuous for our fields to condemn collectors and museums who wish to preserve unprovenanced objects when we ourselves are unwilling or incapable of doing so on site.

Conclusion

As per our ethical codes, conservators are bound to preserve both the physical artifact and the tangible and intangible values it carries. Thus, can conservators help reconcile the collector's fetishization of the physical object and the archaeologist's fetishization of the knowledge gained from that object? Conservators are uniquely placed to advocate for both the importance of archaeological context – as I did with my private client – and the actual artifact, as in the case of the ivory bracelets on excavation. Any rapprochement between collectors and archaeologists would require an acknowledgment that their entrenched positions on the preservation of only the object or only the information it contains, respectively, are in fact resulting in the destruction of the archaeological record. Archaeologists must also change their site practices in keeping with the high ethical principles they preach to collectors. This means recognizing that the physical preservation of the artifacts they uncover is an essential and routine archaeological responsibility, and one that requires planning, staffing, and resources. Furthermore, such care demands that excavations proceed much more slowly and uncover only as much material as they can preserve so as to fully discharge their ethical responsibilities.

Final Thoughts on Value, Money, Looting, and Artifacts of Questionable Origin: Richard M. Pettigrew

The papers by Ms. Balachandran and myself both pertain to concerns about the “commercialization” of archaeology. In both cases, an archaeologist and a conservator who consider themselves ethical took actions and positions considered unethical and improper by some of our colleagues. For Sanchita, the issue was her performance of professional services on behalf of a private collector and an object that had been removed from its original context. For us at ALI, the issue was our public presentation of a video that featured the curation lab of Odyssey Marine, a company that makes much of its income from selling redundant objects of high monetary value, such as artifacts made of gold and silver.

In both cases, we see an apparent clash between different kinds of value: monetary value and information value. Many archaeologists tend to regard their enterprise as a purely intellectual activity, independent of and on a higher plane than financial and commercial pursuits. To many, association with money debases and biases the search for knowledge. While I, too, believe that the search for truth should not be guided or colored by financial motives, I must point out the obvious: financial concerns always have played and always will play a key role in the conduct of archaeology. Most archaeology in the U.S., for example, is the work of for-profit companies and their paid employees, who endlessly seek out well-funded projects that are the source of their livelihood. Even university researchers follow the laws of economics, moving in directions encouraged and allowed by financial opportunities presented by grants and their departmental salaries. Might it not be time now to acknowledge the role of money in our work and find ways to come to terms with it? Would not such acknowledgment encourage the public to see archaeology as relevant – meaning here as part of a widespread and familiar socioeconomic system – instead of rarified and distant?

However, I am not convinced that this distinction of values is the sole focus of the dispute. Instead, it seems the debate has much to do with alternative strategies to accomplish what are widely agreed goals. Archaeologists generally agree that preservation of archaeological sites and their potential to yield information about past human activities is a critically important aim. This goal matches the high value that archaeologists place on information as opposed to market value. In this context, artifacts are considered to be important for their data potential, regardless of the price they might bring on the open market. A corollary goal, generally shared also by archaeologists, is to discourage and if possible prevent the damage that can be done to the information potential of archaeological sites by those who are motivated by greed to loot them for marketable artifacts.

With this in mind, consider the question: How do we achieve these goals? Those who hold that it is unethical to have any professional contact with private collectors or for-profit salvage companies believe (I think) that such contact encourages looting and destruction of archaeological sites (whether terrestrial or beneath the sea). Is this true? Conversely, is it true that professional refusal to work with all collectors

and salvage companies actually protects archaeological sites or collections? What evidence do we have for this? Is it not possible that a lack of engagement with such people and companies actually works against our preservation goals and separates archaeology from the mainstream of society? Beyond that, if artifacts are important to us purely as sources of information, then what is the proper disposition of multiple copies of identical objects (such as gold coins in the hundreds) that have extremely high value on the open market? And how do we protect marine archaeological sites containing such loot from salvagers using increasingly available and effective technology? And as queried by Sanchita, should archaeologists not simultaneously give proper deference, both in and out of the field, to the information value of an artifact and its values as a physical object?

I believe these questions need to be debated within the professional community and explored empirically to find out what policies might be the most effective. A pragmatic and nondogmatic approach to heritage protection and our role in the wider society seems likely to yield better results both for the preservation of the archaeological record and the public perception of archaeological relevance.

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