

A Letter from the Editor of the Museum Reviews

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I am honored to serve as the new Museum Review Editor for the *AJA*. The museum reviews began as a formal feature of the *AJA* in 2005 but were dormant from 2013 until the spring of 2017. It is a pleasure to participate in their revival. Museum exhibitions and new installations are of central importance to archaeologists. They are both works of scholarship and one of the most powerful ways our field communicates its findings with the wider public. They deserve close and careful examination by specialists.

This is an exciting and challenging time for museums. Directors and curators are working to make their collections accessible to broad audiences while maintaining academic rigor. They strive to negotiate conflicting demands for connectivity and contemplation, to address issues of identity and representation, and to meet difficult financial challenges without compromising their missions. At their best, today's museums foster exploration, curiosity, empathy, and intellectual inquiry among diverse publics. Archaeological collections and exhibitions have benefitted from this more inclusive approach. Inventive displays, renovated spaces, new technologies, imaginative storytelling, and institutional loans and collaborations have expanded audiences for archaeological collections. At the same time, there are challenges. Collections of antiquities can raise powerful questions about the acquisition and ownership of cultural property, the history of collecting, and the politics of display. Such innovations and challenges make this an especially compelling time for the *AJA* to cast a critical eye on new installations and exhibitions.

My vision for the museum reviews is that they will cover a broad range of museums and exhibitions that offer important interpretations of ancient cultures and their material remains. I also intend for the museum reviews to be a space for discussion about the public face of archaeology. To that end, I welcome reviews of noteworthy exhibitions that show how archaeological knowledge is produced, that highlight the results of recent archaeological research, that speak to ethical concerns faced by archaeologists and museum professionals, and that engage visitors in innovative ways. I also encourage reviews of important exhibitions that focus on the history of archaeological excavations and collections or the preservation and conservation of archaeological materials. Along with reviews of exhibitions in prominent museums, I welcome reviews of significant new site museums and of notable exhibitions in university and smaller museums. My aim is to draw attention to influential new work as well as emerging trends.

Museum reviews will cover worldwide exhibitions that fit within the journal's purview as defined by the Governing Board of the AIA, embracing "the art and archaeology of ancient Europe and the Mediterranean world, including the Near East and Egypt, from prehistoric to Late Antique times." Reviews of exhibitions that address the reception of ancient European and

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Mediterranean art and archaeology (such as Elizabeth S. Greene and Justin Leidwanger's review in this issue of Damien Hirst's recent work [www.ajaonline.org/online-museum-review/3581]) will also be considered. Reviews should offer a balanced and thought-provoking evaluation of an exhibition's strengths and weaknesses. They should also address the implications of an exhibition for scholars, museums, and public audiences. Comments are encouraged on the value of the catalogue as a permanent record of an exhibition and a work of scholarship. Further guidelines for reviews can be found in the Author Guide on AJA Online (www.ajaonline.org/submissions/museum-reviews).

Museum Reviews follow the AJA's policy on the publication of recently acquired antiquities (AJA 121 [2017] 2; 109 [2005] 135–36). At a strict minimum, reviews of exhibitions or collections need to acknowledge any objects in those exhibitions or collections acquired since 1973 that do not have a legitimate provenance and that have not received a proper initial presentation. In such cases, reviews should call attention to “how much information and value is lost when an object is illegally removed from its archaeological context” (AJA 109 [2005] 136). The policy is a simple one, but it requires vigilance on the part of reviewers. Here I write from personal experience. In my (very favorable) April 2017 review of the Museo Arqueológico Nacional de España in Madrid (AJA 121 [2017] 333–41), I failed to document the dispute over some of the vases in the Várez Fisa Collection, which have been tied to the antiquities dealers Giacomo Medici and Gianfranco Becchina.¹ I am currently investigating the status of the vases and will document it in an addendum to the review in a future issue of the AJA. For my purposes here, however, this example is a powerful reminder (and a painful one for the incoming Museum Review Editor) of the necessity of very close attention to collecting histories.

The plan is to publish quarterly reviews on AJA Online (www.ajaonline.org/museumreviews). Synthetic review articles that cover broader topics or trends across multiple institutions or exhibitions will appear in the print fascicles of the journal. A new feature is an

online list of current and upcoming museum exhibitions. I welcome input from readers for additions to this list. While the Museum Review Editor typically invites reviews, I also welcome inquiries from potential reviewers as well as ideas and suggestions from readers for reviews or reviewers.

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This is a particularly ripe moment for the AJA to critically review museum exhibitions, and I look forward to the discussions that will follow.

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¹D. McGill, “Madrid: Indifference is Not an Option,” *Looting Matters*, 13 July 2010, <http://lootingmatters.blogspot.com/2010/07/madrid-indifference-is-not-option.html>; F. Isman, “Looted from Italy and Now in a Major Spanish Museum?” *Art Newspaper* 19 (July/August 2010) 4; F. Isman, “Antichità: I tesori che l'Italia non rivendica,” *Il Messaggero*, 21 April 2012, 23.