

BOOK REVIEWS

Corrado Pedeli and Stefano Pulga, translated by Erik Risser; *Conservation Practices on Archaeological Sites: Principles and Mechanisms*. Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2014; 168 pages, paperback, \$50; Getty Publications, 1200 Getty Center Dr. Suite, 500, Los Angeles, CA 90049; ISBN: 978-1-60606-158-9

As an archaeological objects conservator, I often look for practical guides to field conservation that can be taken on site for use not only by conservators in the field but also by the archaeologists with whom we work. Straightforward, comprehensive guides to archaeological conservation that help to bridge the gap between archaeology and conservation practice, and that provide basic knowledge useful to both specialists, are still lacking and are a much needed resource in the field. Joining archaeological conservation field guides such as Sease's *A Conservation Manual for the Field Archaeologist* and Watkinson's *First Aid for Finds* is the book *Conservation Practices on Archaeological Excavations: Principles and Methods* written by conservators Corrado Pedeli and Stefano Pulga, and translated from the Italian by conservator Erik Risser.

The goals of the publication are to provide tools for both archaeologists and conservators working on excavations and to promote collaboration between the two disciplines. Providing resources that strengthen collaboration is essential given that the two specialties can sometimes be at odds with each other because of differing methodologies or goals in their approaches to archaeological research and preservation. Throughout the book, the authors express the need for collaboration. They stress that archaeologists should have a basic understanding of conservation and that, in turn, conservators who study and preserve archaeological cultural heritage should have a similar understanding of archaeology. Through the various topics covered and the way the information is presented, the authors have provided a user-friendly and practical guide, offering theoretical and methodological approaches, coupled with hands-on information. The book goes beyond the Sease and Watkinson publications mentioned above as well as many others focused on field conservation, to cover practices for both structures and objects, two areas that are often dealt with separately in the conservation literature. In my own experience, I have found that many archaeological field projects do not have different conservators for portable objects and architectural features; instead the available conservator is asked to cover all aspects of the preservation of the site, in both the short term and beyond. This book provides the basics to understand the

theoretical approaches to all general aspects of site conservation. It also helps to outline any initial stabilization or immediate preservation needs that should take place until an appropriate specialist can be brought on site.

There is sometimes a concern within our profession that comprehensive guides such as this provide too much information and may encourage non-conservators to undertake treatments or preservation steps that could be detrimental to an individual object and/or endanger the preservation of archaeological objects and in-situ features. The authors anticipated this concern, and throughout the book they emphasize that the information provided is a general guide, and stress the importance of involving conservation professionals throughout all stages of an archaeological field project. In chapters where more detailed practical information is offered, the authors reiterate their point of needing a conservator to undertake the work. They describe at what point basic stabilization and general knowledge is not sufficient, and when a specialist should be brought in.

The book does an excellent job of tackling the broad topic of conservation on excavations and provides general information from the start of an excavation through to the long-term storage and protection of artifacts and structures. The first three chapters focus on aspects of excavation, the burial environment, and preservation of different materials. Chapter 1 describes the role of conservation and conservators on excavations and frankly notes conflicts or complications that can arise – and indeed have arisen in the past – due to differing philosophies or approaches between archaeologists and conservators. The need for conservation planning from the outset of a project and the need for the involvement of conservators in the process from that starting point is stressed. The importance of well-defined objectives for both excavation and conservation is pointed out as essential to ensure the long-term preservation of sites and the portable finds uncovered there.

This first chapter also provides an overview of what conservation is and how to plan for it, something that will be useful for archaeologists to know and incorporate into project preparation. Explanation of the burial

environments that could be encountered and their effects on different materials (and the likelihood of their preservation) described in subsequent chapters is also useful information for those directly involved in the excavation of cultural material. A discussion of soil types and how the process of unearthing artifacts (described as *messa in luce*) can influence preservation is discussed. The authors emphasize the importance of understanding the diagenetic processes that these materials can undergo in situ and how these inform condition issues and the levels of deterioration observed.

Chapters 4-5 describe methods for the excavation of both moveable (objects) and immovable (structures) items and the various types of materials that can be uncovered. A description of what condition cultural material may be in upon excavation, and the measures to undertake immediately after excavation, to stabilize the object and prevent further deterioration are offered. This chapter provides a great deal of useful information in Tables to organize and present a large amount of information. However some improvements could be made in the layout of the Tables, making them larger and wider so they are easier to read; this would be particularly useful when the book is used on site in the field.

Chapters 6-10 cover the immediate protection and stabilization of excavated material, and those features and objects still in situ but exposed. This section includes: overviews of temporary shelters, with the pros and cons of different materials and types provided; methods and materials used for the stabilization and lifting of structures and portable finds, including block lifting as well as detachment of decorative architectural elements; prevention of biological attack, including a flow chart to help with deciding approaches and treatments; and consolidation of unstable materials. A novel, and extremely important, addition to this section of the book is the consolidation and stabilization of stratigraphy, something in which not all archaeological conservators are trained, but may be asked to deal with, because of the stratigraphy's significance to archaeological research. Approaches and considerations are described, and the importance of minimal intervention is stressed. Problems that arise because of different soil types and moisture levels within the stratigraphic layers and the impact this can have on any intervention is also described.

More detailed discussions are provided for consolidants applied to structures, as opposed to those for portable finds (these are described by classes of materials). A general trend that predominates in the book is an emphasis on providing more detailed and hands-on information about the conservation of non-portable material. This could be due to the nature of the two specializations and the wider range of material types

and condition issues encountered with small finds, and/or the establishment of fewer standardized treatment approaches to portable cultural heritage as opposed to structures. The authors discuss some types of organic consolidants and two types of resins: acrylic and vinyl resins and emulsions. However, a more thorough discussion of the pros and cons, ageing properties and issues regarding additional classes of commonly used resins is lacking. The focus of the chapter is principally consolidation, but due to the fact that many of the same materials are used both as consolidants and adhesives (organic materials used for joining fragmentary objects are not covered in the book), this could have been an opportunity to inform non-conservators as to why certain organic resins are preferred over other more commonly available materials. This may be an area where the conservator and archaeologist needs to turn to other resources for more detailed information about specific resins, such as Chapter 3 of Sease's publication or the *Adhesives and Consolidants Wall Chart* created by the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections http://www.spnhc.org/media/assets/leaflet2_chart.pdf.

The final chapters in the book deal with materials after excavation, such as their cleaning, packing and storage (short and long term), documentation and registration, and finally long-term preservation and protection of structures and finds. Chapter 11 is the only other chapter in the book that describes methods for actively treating objects and unearthened features but only covers initial cleaning focused on the removal of soil. The majority of the chapter discusses the process of washing finds, a very common practice on excavations, and the inherent dangers posed to artifacts in that process including the types of archaeological information that can be lost during the washing process. This is another area where the authors stress careful consideration of any intervention and focus on very preliminary basic cleaning. They do not delve further into other aspects of conservation treatment for portable finds. This is in line with their assertion that any further intervention requires the expertise of a conservator and helps to re-emphasize the focus of the book as a source that addresses first-aid treatment only and the most basic field conservation techniques.

The other chapters provide very detailed information on appropriate materials for packing archaeological artifacts. This allows anyone using the book to determine the most suitable materials for storing artifacts after excavation. Creating micro-climates and packing damp and wet objects are also included. These chapters provide very important information useful to archaeologists or other project members overseeing packing on site. Although these storage methods are meant to be temporary, in practice they can become permanent (or

at least long term) and therefore should be carried out using appropriate materials.

The subsequent chapters on registration, labeling, and documentation offer good descriptions of the types of information that should be recorded (including archaeological context as well as conservation interventions) and recommend some appropriate materials for labeling. There is also a short chapter on examples of on-site temporary storage systems. Missing from Chapter 11 is information on how to label individual artifacts rather than groups of objects. Since it is common practice for artifacts to be individually labeled, with numbers directly written on the artifacts, this seems to be a missed opportunity to inform non-conservators about appropriate methods and materials for marking artifacts (such as those described in Buck and Gilmore's *The New Museum Registration Methods* and several other available labeling resources). More information on the subject could help reduce the widespread procedure on excavations of writing directly on objects with ink or using other methods that permanently alter artifacts.

The final chapter describes long-term conservation measures for site presentation. Concepts such as reburial, shelters, and protection of masonry walls are included. Several factors that need to be considered when choosing protective shelters or enclosures, such as the impact of visitors to the site and the interpretation of the site for them, are provided. Several appendices follow this chapter with useful information on aggregates and binders, on the preparation of consolidants, and on how to use silica gel to create

microclimates. Appendix 8 is extremely valuable because it provides a checklist of equipment and materials needed for first aid treatment of structures and objects on site. This information is organized by chapter and cross-referenced to the text so that the reader can access more information on how the materials and equipment are used as necessary. This appendix is a good resource to complement other field conservation checklists such as the *Fieldwork Checklist* created by the American Institute for Conservation's Object Specialty Group and Archaeological Discussion Group.

Overall the authors do a thorough job of covering a wide range of topics and issues one could encounter on an excavation where both portable finds and structures require preservation. They stress the importance of collaboration in planning the excavation and that conservation processes be carried out thoroughly. The book is certainly a valuable resource that could be brought into the field for use by conservators and archaeologists alike. It provides a good general introduction to archaeological conservation, and will be particularly useful to archaeology and conservation students learning about archaeological field methods and conservation on excavations. An electronic version of this publication would be an added bonus, making the book more portable for site work and easily accessible to a broader audience.

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Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Lisbeth, and Jack Soutanian, with contributions by Richard Y. Tayar. *Italian Medieval Sculpture in The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Cloisters*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010. 368 pages, 328 illustrations, hardcover, \$75. Available from The Metropolitan Museum of Art Store (www.store.metmuseum.org). 9780300148985.

Spanning the 9th to the 15th centuries, this amply illustrated volume offers information and insight on over fifty sculptural artworks in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Italian Medieval collection. Not since 1913 has the museum published a catalog covering these holdings, which even then surveyed but a fraction. That lacuna, along with advances over the last century in materials analysis, and increased collaboration between curator and conservator, well-warrant this new presentation. As museum director Thomas Campbell notes in his Foreword, today, "much more can become visible" about these works, making the question "Why am I seeing what I am seeing?" a rich and seemingly endless endeavor.

Such clear acknowledgment of the unique contribution of the conservator's eye to understanding

objects heralds a major change since the early 20th century, in what we demand from our looking, and, relatedly, in how museum catalogs are written: here, each entry features an art historical description of the object—touching on provenance, function, context, and significant stylistic comparisons—followed by a technical section on "Material and Condition." Divided into Pre-Romanesque, Romanesque, Gothic, and two brief sections for objects "In Medieval Style" and Reproductions, this subset of The Metropolitan Museum's collection comprises mostly stone with little trace of polychromy, several exquisite polychrome wood sculptures, and notably, a rare polychrome textile relief.

The contributions of the art historian and conservator run parallel more often than they intertwine, and