

phy, in simple and easy-to-understand terms, without either complicated jargon or condescension, making this book good for both beginners and seasoned scholars.—  
*Cassie Brand, Washington University*

**Michèle Valerie Cloonan.** *The Monumental Challenge of Preservation: The Past in a Volatile World.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018. Hardcover, 280p. \$30.00 (ISBN 978-0-2620-3773-0).

Michèle Cloonan's wide-ranging study of cultural heritage preservation opens with the premise that preservation is an unavoidably complex endeavor. Collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches are needed to confront threats to heritage, whether from war and genocide, resource limitations, business interests, or apathy. Cloonan—current professor and dean emerita at the Simmons School of Library and Information Science, and a former conservator, preservation librarian, and special collections curator—takes an expansive view of monuments, including in her definition not only physical edifices but also texts, artworks, collections, natural landscapes, and intangible heritage. In doing so, she emphasizes the highly contextual nature of preservation, which has social, historical, and political valences. These influences, along with legal, technological, and financial factors, shape understandings of what constitutes preservation and what can and should be preserved in any given set of circumstances.

The unifying theme of this ambitious monograph is “monumental preservation,” a concept Cloonan uses to invoke two distinct ideas: the vast scale and complexity of the preservation enterprise, and the monumental status of what we preserve. In this loose collection of ten chapters on a range of preservation topics, she unpacks the notion of monumental preservation and illustrates it with examples from personal experience and allied preservation disciplines. Several chapters present international case studies about monuments in a variety of sociopolitical contexts (ranging from the Book of Kells and Soviet statues to Chicago architecture and Syrian cultural heritage) and the strategies used to address preservation concerns unique to each situation. The remaining chapters delve into specific issues that inform preservation theory and practice, such as human rights and cultural genocide, digital curation, and sustainability.

The work highlights important strategies for meeting the monumental challenge of preservation; in addition to a general call for collaborative and interdisciplinary thinking, Cloonan identifies cases where emergency response networks, documentation strategies, monitoring and assessment programs, and reformatting technology have been successfully deployed. She stops short, however, of offering a clear roadmap for navigating the varied and evolving landscapes of heritage preserva-

tion. Controversial or objectionable monuments—such as the Confederate monuments discussed briefly in the preface—are a significant challenge, and the book does not provide easy answers about whether or how to preserve them in ways that acknowledge past and present power dynamics and respect the reality of trauma. A compelling epilogue about Berlin, a city of troubled histories and contested monuments, demonstrates that “*how to preserve defies a single solution*” (187). In Cloonan’s view, engaging in dialogue and collaboration, both within and beyond the cultural heritage sector, to shape contextually appropriate solutions is the best way forward.

A key strength and important intervention lies in Cloonan’s argument that all types of preservation are interrelated. Linking common threads from the natural and cultural heritage preservation fields in chapter 9, “Sustainable Preservation,” she calls attention to the limits of restoration, the difficulty of defining and achieving authenticity in conservation, the destructive potential of profit motives, and the value of sustainable management. Drawing on the work of environmental historians, she points out the reciprocal influence of natural and built environments—and the indigenous connections that existed between them long before modern preservationists took notice—and she amplifies the call for dialogue and cooperation in preserving both types of monuments.

Cloonan identifies her audience as “heritage professionals, students, and scholars in all disciplines that share an interest in preservation” (xx) and stresses the importance of preservation to a wide range of fields (such as law, political science, computer science, geography, and environmental science, in addition to the expected

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disciplines). To establish this interdisciplinary framework, *The Monumental Challenge of Preservation* covers ground more commonly explored by scholars of history, memory studies, museum studies, and historic preservation, but less frequently visited by librarians and archivists. One of this book's most important contributions, therefore, might be bringing these concepts directly into conversation with theories and practices from the library profession. Because of the range of topics included, readers may not find all parts equally interesting, but the work will likely succeed in inspiring conversations about innovative, interdisciplinary approaches to preservation. The text will prove particularly valuable for scholars and practitioners looking to contextualize their work in a global network of practices and identify shared concerns across the sector.

Special collections and archives professionals will be interested in chapter 5, “Collecting as Preservation,” in which Cloonan discusses collections of books, manuscripts, and ephemera as monuments and collecting as a preservation strategy. Also germane are chapters 7 and 8, “What Are We Really Trying to Preserve: The Original or the Copy?” and “It Takes a (Virtual) Village: Some Thoughts on Digital Preservation.” While copies and reconstructions can be insurance against complete loss, Cloonan reminds us to be cautious in the claims we make about conservation, restoration, and the creation of surrogates. Collective expectations about authenticity, originality, and tangibility are not fixed, meaning that transformative approaches are often acceptable preservation strategies. However, they also necessarily involve reinterpretation and loss of context. Cloonan suggests that we accept that complete preservation of both object and context is rarely, if ever, possible, and that we abandon the assumption of indefinite preservation; we can then see our constraints and their practical implications more clearly.

Apart from the call for interdisciplinary collaboration, I found the most crucial theme of this book to be the argument that preservation is about people, not just things. Cloonan shows that preservation requires action from individuals and communities and that its successes and failures affect those people in real ways. A responsible, sustainable approach to preservation must include not only the technical aspects of collection care but also public engagement, democratized decision-making processes, respect for indigenous heritage rights, attention to the intent and wishes of creators and communities of origin, thoughtful interrogation of the cultural and political work that monuments do, and recognition of the vast array of human voices and motivations that shape our preservation agendas. Bringing these considerations into our practice and professional relationships, especially when dealing with archival silences and histories of exclusion, will lead us to build and preserve more inclusive, ethical collections.—Katherine Fisher, Georgia State University Library