

Jane C. Milosch and Nick Pearce, eds. *Collecting and Provenance: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Provenance Research Initiative, 2019. Paperback. \$75.00. (ISBN: 9781538127568).

Jane Milosch and Nick Pearce's standalone 2019 *Collecting and Provenance: A Multidisciplinary Approach* packs a lot into a relatively compact package while leaving plenty of room for additional work and encouraging the growth of provenance as an interdisciplinary field of study. The compilation takes the form of twenty-eight chapters spread over four parts, best read with time allotted for contemplation between the parts. Bookended by methodologies and ethical questions, this is a dense but approachable interdisciplinary work with broad appeal.

The introductory material sets the stage well, establishing the need for this book with such a scope as “provenance,” broadly defined across the fields. In his foreword, Richard Kurin indicates that this is “the broadest, most wide-ranging volume on the topic produced to date” and that “authors deal with virtually every category of collectible” (x). Lynn Nicholas’s preface adds that “the essays not only attempt to define provenance, but also to demonstrate its daunting complexities, how its uses have changed over time, and how the very changes of those times have, themselves, led to a continuing evolution of this science; for provenance research is, indeed, a science” (xi). The first two chapters prove the concept, convincing me within minutes that the editors’ call for a journal, for recurring conferences, for societies—whatever it takes—is indeed necessary. To a librarian/archivist who works extensively with an art museum right next door, it has been obvious for years that there needs to be more collaboration between the fields, stepping up the GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums) ties and linking our discovery systems to a significantly greater degree than we already have. Provenance as its own field could only benefit from this enhanced discourse.

Part 1, “Provenance: Past and Future Challenges,” is likely to have the broadest appeal for the most readers. It makes clear that despite the promises of linked data, open access, etc., we still struggle to share data within our own fields and also have no authoritative way to link together interdisciplinary provenance information. Disciplines continue to develop standards and schemas separately, often in closed systems, and often without conversation. This is where a larger institution like the Smithsonian should have an advantage, linking materials from a collector of both (for example) paintings and artists’ books. But there is evidence even reading across the book chapters from authors at institutions including the Smithsonian that the various fields represented in the book, all working with provenance, are not interacting in ways that would advantage us greatly. For example, Christel H. Force’s chapter “Intellectual Property and Ownership History” points out that “the

provenancer is mute and invisible to a fault" (29), which aligns with points made in Christian Huemer's first chapter "The Provenance of Provenances." But looking to libraries, we see some catalogers signing their records, with allowances in library metadata schemas for this possibility in ways standardized across the field. Granted, the cataloger is usually not doing full and complete research on each book they catalog. However, there is sometimes a name assigned to the researcher's work absent in comparable museum records. Any explicit differences between approaches to library versus museum provenance work go largely unaddressed in the book, with contributing authors approaching their work through their own lenses, reflecting the overall lack of collaboration between the fields.

This first part rapidly accomplished its goal of convincing this reader that challenges in provenance as a shared field exist; I only wish there had been more answers presented, or evidence of more substantial collaborations. David Newbury and Louise Lippincott's "Provenance in 2050" in particular presents an extremely strong argument for why museums should partner with libraries. While the museum field has long-established codes for ethical provenance research and documentation that often predate that of libraries, libraries typically have more publicly transparent documentation, an assertion backed by Joshua Gorman's later chapter "Forgotten Language of the Ledger" (336).

Part 1 would have benefited from a different arrangement of the chapters, as more specific case studies were interspersed with broader theoretical essays that did an excellent job of contextualizing some of them after the fact. However, the range of subjects in part 1, as in the rest of the book, was exceptionally diverse, and skipping between chapters in order of interest does not subtract from the whole. Hearing from different authors within the same institution who still brought vastly different perspectives was helpful; though it may have been helpful to bring in some authors from smaller, less well-known institutions, which still have plenty of provenance questions to address and projects to discuss despite the lack of a long history or a massive scale.

In parts 2 and 3, "Objects in Motion" and "Museum and Collection Formation: Provenancing Art and Nature," a broad span of chapters address interesting, largely individual cases of provenance study. An array of essays featuring collectors, problematic histories, and the nature of global trade span such diverse topics as medieval bury chests, the violin trade, books looted by the Nazis, the exploration of older records tracking items held by the National Museum of the American Indian, collaborations with Aboriginal communities, and more. Chapter 20, "One Object, Three Histories: Provenancing the Dromedary" by Louise Lippincott stood out for proposing a trifecta of provenances for a taxidermy group featuring two

lions and a human riding a dromedary camel at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History: “artistic (from object maker to owners), scientific (specimen’s date and place of birth, death, and/or collection), and cultural (the successive cultural milieus in which it has been displayed and interpreted” (297). This is an especially helpful system to conceptualize provenance studies in, and one which is reflected if not named in other chapters throughout the book. Lippincott goes on to probe especially the cultural provenance of the work in question in an introspective essay that proved to be one of the highlights of the middle two parts in my own analysis. The effect on the meaning of a work by the owner, as wrought by the 1899 owners who strategically added a gun to the piece, is imminently clear in a way that it can never be in so many of the cases described in the book.

Although part 4, “Provenance and Collecting Policies: Practical, Legal, and Ethical Challenges,” delves into challenges featured throughout the rest of the book, ethical considerations in particular are both a complex and necessary subject in provenance studies, in this case very well-treated by the featured chapters. The first chapter in the section addresses international ethical standards in the museum field, which from personal experience are largely standards shared with the archival and special collections fields. Additional knotty issues are covered throughout the rest of this part of the book, from explorations of individual item histories and antiquities trafficking to the effect of international law. The chapters again alternate between specific case studies and more theoretical concepts in a somewhat disorienting way that nonetheless effectively engages the reader. The final chapter, “Before, During, and After: Documenting Museum Collections in Times of Crisis and Disaster,” outlines and briefly examines standards for documenting provenance before an item moves, such as the Object ID standard. While helpful for learning basic protocol, this chapter focuses more on outlining rather than interrogating; more of the latter, perhaps including suggestions for implementation or example documentation, would have been helpful.

Overall, *Collecting and Provenance* is an excellent purchase for anyone in the GLAM field hoping to learn more about approaches to provenance study—from archival curators to museum registrars, librarians to docents. It may be especially useful for teaching librarians, curators, archivists, et al. who are instructing others in their approach to primary sources, and who may find helpful the numerous examples of case studies in provenance research and investigation. I hope that as researchers and professionals advance the interdisciplinary field of provenance, this will prove a foundational work that suggests structure for an approach not yet wholeheartedly adopted by any of the individual fields in question. As implied early in the chapters, linked data and shared vocabularies hold great promise if well applied; but it will take much greater and more systematic collaboration on the part of the authors and the readers to make that happen. — Margaret Gamm, University of Iowa Libraries