**Cultural Artifacts**

**Merryman - *Triad of Regulatory Imperatives***

In an interesting study of contradiction, the Roman Forum lies just behind the Capitoline Museums. Inside the museum, protected from the elements, but close enough to touch, is the Capitoline Venus. Nearby is the Dying Gaul. Removed from their original context, by yards or miles, have they lost any of their impact? No. They stand ready to strike awe in the viewer. These treasures have been both bounty for individual owners and booty for conquerors. The Dying Gaul seems to have been discovered in the excavations for the Villa Ludovisi. He was acquired by Pope Clement XII for the Capitoline Collections. The Dying Gaul was requisitioned by Napoleon in 1797. He was displayed in the Louvre until 1816, when he was returned back to Rome. The stewardship, and therefore the responsibility for preservation, truth and access, was clearly established by the Capitoline Museum. The Louvre was right to return this artifact. It was being cared for with Merryman's "Triad of Regulatory Imperatives".

That can certainly not be said of artifacts in unstable political and economic climates. In the all out frenzy to obtain these artifacts, early archeologists made a collection of bad decisions and a habit of poor practice. Nevertheless, their interest in Ancient Egypt was the central motivator in creating value where there had been none. From those early beginnings grew more interest, and more value. Suddenly items discarded for centuries by modern Egyptians were deemed priceless. Artifacts taken to faraway lands were studied, reconstructed, and ultimately even decoded, revealing secrets of a language that had been lost to time. They now reside in the Louvre. There they should stay. Without the interest and ingenuity of those few early bunglers, much of what we know of Ancient Egypt would still be buried under sand. These artifacts are the responsibility of the Louvre. Should their stewardship cease to meet Merryman's criteria, they should be moved to an institution prepared to meet those standards.

Preservation, truth, and access should become the responsibility of any institution (government or academic) at the moment they acquire an artifact. First and foremost of these is preservation. It is obvious and crucial. The artwork lost in the bombing of Berlin and even the raiding of the Cairo Museum, these losses occurred not only to the institutions they were housed in. The loss is shared by all of us because we all are the true owners. This is our history. The history of man since his appearance on the planet, his growth and change, ideas and emotions, continue to drive us to look closer, think harder, to understand. Our history should be provided the stewards who will most actively protect it.

The value of context for any artifact cannot be underestimated. Neither can it be assumed to have supreme importance. We can infer many things from the geographic area in which the artifact is found. We can compare it to others found similarly. Many times we can tell who it belonged to, when it was made, how it was constructed, and what it was used for. Utmost care should be given to documenting the physical surroundings. This is the primary responsibility of the archeologist. Once complete, the safety of the artifact becomes paramount. Danger has many faces. Acid rain, erosion, faulty construction, flooding of a reservoir, or a light fingered thief can all wreak havoc on our history. If we can't protect our history we will lose it. We deserve to lose it.

The bronze statues and frescos at Herculaneum and Pompey were protected for ages by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. After their recovery, careful records and impressions were created. Artists created copies, faithful renderings of the originals. The artifacts were then moved to the Archeological Museum in Naples and their replacements installed with seamless accuracy. This seems the best practice as it benefits all involved. It prevents the need for modern repair to ancient craftsmanship and makes the artifact accessible to those seeking to find its truth. Context is preserved and the artifact is protected.