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Educating the educators

*by Richard I. Ford, editor, CMA Newsletter
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How often have you visited a social anthropologist's home decorated with rare ethnographic art as a symbolic reminder of the last trip to Melanesia? When was the last time a botanist or zoologist brought an archaeological "pot" to you for identification and evaluation?

These are daily occurrences for many curators. Academic collectors present museums with special difficulties. Travels of professors in all disciplines expose them to exotic art, often ethnographic, and to illicit, though seemingly legal, vendors of antiquities throughout the world. Purchase of these objects is as reflexive as acquisition of any souvenir. No thought is given to violation of local laws, to the destruction of the archaeological record innocent purchases cause, or to the anthropological value these objects would have for scholars if such items were part of the public domain.

It is, unfortunately, a problem for which the solution is in the exclusive hands of museum curators. While public education has been a paramount obligation of museums, we have naively assumed that our professional, non-museum colleagues share a similar value system.

This is not the case. As the availability of traditional materials becomes scarcer, our task is to convince friends and professional associates to mend their ways by ceasing to participate in illegal purchases and by donating or willing their ethnographic art to museums.

Bonnie Burnham's *The Protection of Cultural Property* (1974) published by The International Council of Museums is indispensable to inform curators and their academic associates about national laws and international agreements covering archaeological and ethnographic "art." Graduate students

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history, astronomy, botany, folk life studies, geology, history, history of technology, or zoology. The program should include course work in such a discipline and the equivalent of no less than six semester hours of museum theory, practice, and history. The graduate degree may be awarded either in the academic subject or in museum studies.

Such a program ordinarily will require a period equivalent to not less than four academic terms and should include a supervised museum internship or supervised full-time work experience of not less than two months. Ideally the full-time internship or work experience will be six months or more in length. The internship or supervised work experience must be designed to benefit the student. While the student may do work valuable to the museum, this contribution should not be the touchstone of the program.

The curriculum should include instruction in the following areas:

(a) The ethics of the museum profession, public accountability, and the history, philosophy, and purposes of representative kinds of museums.

(b) The collection, care, handling, preservation, and conservation of museum objects; the management of collections including registration and cataloging.

(c) Research and the study of objects as sources of information; the use of objects to impart understanding; objects as sources of aesthetic experience.

(d) Education and interpretation.

(e) Exhibitions and experimental studies of how museum visitors learn from and respond to museum programs.

(f) Museum administration, which may include: trustee-director-staff relations; relations with governmental agencies; legal problems; fund raising, budgeting and accounting; the museum audience and community relations; personnel and labor relations; administrative planning and evaluation; physical facilities.

EDITORIAL continued

in particular should be told in advance of their departure what laws apply in the countries where they will study. Occasionally academics in other fields inquire about buying "things" abroad, and they, too, must be informed of the harm to the anthropological record their acquisitiveness may cause.

Granting agencies have a responsibility as well. Most foundations require that all objects purchased with funds they distribute be deposited in an appropriate repository. Enforcement of these provisions is difficult, however, and often ignored. These stipulations are further complicated by the fact that many objects received by ethnologists are gifts from informants or were purchased with personal funds even though nothing would have been obtained if the grant had not been awarded.

Objects already in private collections are the final area of concern. Many of these were obtained before new export laws were passed or traditional

ethnographic materials became unavailable. The solution, I believe, is to encourage academic colleagues to bequest these items to museums. Their sentimental value will not be the same for children or other heirs, and though they may accrue significant monetary value through the years, their inestimable scientific merit should be accorded highest priority.

Arrangements for museums to receive personal collections or even individual objects require more than just a legal arrangement. Since most personal collections are not cataloged or given even minimal description except by oral recall, written documentation of the objects in question deserves immediate attention.

The lax attitude many anthropologists accord these objects and their scientific significance reflects the continuing problem museum anthropologists face convincing academic colleagues of the intrinsic value of material culture for anthropological study. Our educational mission obviously does not stop with the public.