

Returning Southeast Asia's Past

**Objects, Museums,
and Restitution**



**Edited by
Louise Tythacott and
Panggah Ardiyansyah**

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FOREWORD

We welcome the present volume as a timely contribution to initiatives at the beating heart of an academia many are willing into existence today: people and places committed to free enquiry and critical thinking, and, crucially, to harnessing such intellectual practice to the preparation of students for the world of work while also shaping that world in the name of social justice. If we celebrate, still, the progress of knowledge, we do so knowing that, in its progressive quest, the university – like the museum – has historically also contributed to the simultaneous production and suppression of subaltern points of view. Even if articulated as promoting dialogues between multiple voices, such forms of representation have often muted rather than amplified the queer amongst them – those not conforming to the hegemonic models on which such dialogue is premised. Research on Object Restitution holds the promise of advancing our understanding of these difficult histories of exploitation at the heart of modern knowledge production as much as that of the long histories of the objects themselves. It also holds the promise of engendering new cultural, social and political perspectives as beholden to these histories as to contemporary negotiations of ownership – again, of things and of knowledge alike.

With respect to our own institutional microcosm of SOAS University of London, the present volume bears two torches. The first is that of SOAS's Southeast Asian Art Academic Programme (SAAAP). Funded by the Chicago Alphawood Foundation, SAAAP supports the development of Southeast Asian human resources in research, teaching, conservation and museology of Southeast Asia's ancient Hindu-Buddhist art. Recognising the wide range of established Southeast Asian expertise in these fields – from that of the Buddhist practitioner to that of the professional archaeologist, nurturing understandings of such expertise, and seeking to further these and their impact in academic and professional milieux, the programme embeds a reflective emphasis on sites and modes of knowledge production. In this context, Object Restitution emerges as a privileged topos, where contested objects comprise common ground for divergent interpretations of meaning and function. In doing so, they variously highlight claims to local, national or universal significance.

The second institutional torch borne by this volume is that of Decolonising SOAS, the university's hub for research, collaboration and information on the decolonisation of higher education institutions. This organically evolving hub takes forward the decolonising agenda at SOAS,

and provides a forum for debate, resources and toolkits on the decolonising process in the hopes of creating a broader impact on other educational institutions and the wider community. 'Decolonisation' is understood as the effort to interrogate and transform the institutional, structural and epistemological legacies of colonialism, specifically where these produce injustices within higher education and barriers to knowledge and understanding. Within SOAS, the project has been established in response to strong student interest in 'Decolonising the Curriculum'. It is part of an ongoing global decolonisation movement taking place across university campuses and public spaces from South Africa to Norway.

Cultivating research on Southeast Asian Object Restitution by cultural heritage professionals based here and there, is, then, a means of addressing one of our fundamental challenges: how can we work towards the decolonisation of a field – Southeast Asian Hindu-Buddhist Art History – while maintaining the very definition of that field born of and integral to the discursive construction of colonial power? And how can we do this at SOAS, an institution whose history cannot be disentangled from Europe's colonial past, the effects of which continue to resonate today? The task is daunting but urgent. One must acknowledge the imbrication of academic study and collecting of ancient Southeast Asian Hindu-Buddhist art in buttressing the project of empire. One must also challenge the myths of local Southeast Asian ignorance and indifference to ancient Hindu-Buddhist materials that underpinned narratives of their 'discovery' by men come from afar and armed with Science. One must track how local Southeast Asian settings have been stripped of venerated objects and physical supports to territorial organisation and collective memories well past the official temporal and geographic reach of colonial power in the region. This enables the sounding of local dimensions of conflicting claims to universal value on all sides and exposes the cynical instrumentalisation frequently at work in (re) appropriation processes. In the breadth of papers examining these issues here, we believe the present volume goes some way in assuming the complex responsibility of SAAAP's mission and in responding to the decolonising imperative of our times.

Ashley Thompson and Pamela Corey
Art & Archaeology of Southeast Asia Series Editors

Meera Sabaratnam
Chair, Decolonising SOAS Working Group

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INTRODUCTION: COLLECTING AND RETURNING SOUTHEAST ASIA'S PAST

Louise Tythacott and Panggah Ardiyansyah

INTRODUCTION

Returning Southeast Asia's Past explores the lives of artefacts which have been repatriated from the West to museums in Southeast Asia and is the first edited volume entirely devoted to object restitution to this region of the world. With contributions from museum professionals and scholars in Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia – as well as Europe, North America and Australia – the book is organised around object case studies: the removal of Khmer material by the French in the early 20th century and the restitution of Koh Ker antiquities to Cambodia in the 21st century (Abbe, and Chea, Muong and Tythacott); the repatriation of the “Mandalay Regalia” from the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) in 1964, as well as more recent returns to Myanmar (Clarke and Galloway). Other contributors focus on issues concerning the retention of ancient Ban Chiang archaeological material, and the impact of social media on contemporary acts of restitution to Thailand (Rod-ari and Phanomvan); displays and the potential repatriations of Buddhist antiquities at the Museum of Cham Sculpture in Vietnam (Nguyễn); the transfer of the Prajnaparamita statue in 1978, and more recent returns, from the Netherlands to Indonesia (Sapardan, Beurden and Ardiyansyah).

Over the past decades, there has been a range of publications which examine, broadly, the histories of looted objects and the illicit trade in antiquities, as well as the restitution of objects from Western museums.¹ Some focus on the return of material to specific parts of the world – Liu on China; Schmidt and McIntosh on Africa; Turnbull and Pickering on the Pacific; Beurden on the Netherlands; and Lafont on Cambodia.² While a number of publications document the looting of objects from Southeast Asia,³ as yet there have been no books entirely devoted to restitution to this region of the world.⁴

Hindu-Buddhist antiquities largely dominate the field of restitution to Southeast Asia – though they are not the exclusive material returned – and the essays thus add new dimensions to the study of the meanings and values attributed to these objects which have long been the privileged focus of dominant art historical study in the region in its association with collecting.⁵ Importantly, the book is innovative in terms of its representation of multiple perspectives, for it combines the viewpoints of Southeast Asian museum and heritage professionals with reflections of curators and others involved in restitution in the West.

Southeast Asian countries suffered an unprecedented loss of cultural heritage over the past 150 years, in part through colonial appropriation, looting and illicit trafficking, resulting in extensive collections of archaeological and art objects now located across the world in museums and private collections.⁶ With new configurations of political power in the region, in certain Southeast Asian countries, relations with former colonial regimes have prompted questions about the representation and ownership of cultural materials held in museums and private collections in Europe and the United States. In this volume, for example, both Nguyễn and Rod-ari query who should own Cham or Ban Chiang art respectively, while Phanomvan highlights the recent impact of social media in facilitating grassroots responses to the restitution of objects in countries such as Thailand.

The overarching narrative for the return of Southeast Asian objects to the region has been the call for restoring cultural heritage. As such, the process is politically motivated and often framed as bringing home what rightfully belongs to a given nation. Here objects and heritage are clearly embroiled in larger questions of identity, nationalism, and self-determination. While several chapters in this volume focus on the cultural, diplomatic and legal issues surrounding the repatriation process (Rod-ari, Chea, Muong and Tythacott, Clarke, Beurden, and Galloway), others demonstrate that the process of collecting and returning contributes to the construction of national identity (Abbe, Nguyễn, Ardiyansyah, Sapardan, and Phanomvan). This book argues, fundamentally, that the process of object restitution should not simply be conceptualised as “loss” on the part of the present owner, but reconceptualised as “gain” in relation to knowledge, relationships and understanding.⁷ As Curtis has asserted, more important than the actual return of objects, is the “lasting relationships with the communities to whom items were repatriated”.⁸ This can be seen, in particular, with Sapardan’s chapter, where she analyses the return of cultural property to Indonesia, and the subsequent exhibitions of repatriated material, as a means to promote international cooperation and diplomacy.

Nonetheless, it needs to be noted that repatriated material can be both used and abused by the giver and receiver. Couched in terms of cultural patrimony and guardianship, the narratives constructed around such objects can be a powerful tool for those who seek legitimacy. It is unsurprising that much attention has been given to the restitution of Hindu-Buddhist materials – often considered vital emblems of cultural and national identity in Southeast Asia – hence the utmost importance is attributed to protecting them. This backdrop sets the volume’s framework and objective, which is to highlight the complex geo-political entanglements behind these specific cultural manifestations. As such, multiple perspectives are sought in dealing with contemporary issues related to heritage formation, nation building, postcolonialism and decolonisation. As a result of the book’s emphasis on Hindu-Buddhist material, areas such as the Philippines, East Timor and Malaysia, where Hindu-Buddhist elements are not a prominent means to forge national identity and unity, have not been addressed.

In order to provide a context for the ensuing chapters, this introduction first discusses the practices of collecting Southeast Asian objects in the colonial period. It moves on to explore the looting and illicit trafficking of art and antiquities, which is still occurring well into the 21st century despite the many international laws and regulations currently in place, and it ends by providing a brief history of repatriations to the region, as well as the role of museums in articulating the changing values and meanings attributed to objects which have been returned.

COLLECTING SOUTHEAST ASIA IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Wintle has remarked on the particular position of artefacts “at the heart of empire” as “much of the colonial project was about material exploitation”⁹ – and it is not surprising, therefore, to note that colonial structures from the early 19th century onwards enabled the removal of large quantities of cultural material from Southeast Asia. A number of chapters in this volume address such histories of appropriation (Abbe, Chea, Muong and Tythacott, Clarke, Nguyễn, Ardiyansyah, Beurden, Sapardan, and Galloway). Western imperial policies had profound impacts on Southeast Asia, with the British annexing Burma as part of British India in the 19th century, as well as colonising present-day Malaysia and Singapore. The French dominated Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos from the 19th century; the Dutch controlled Java and other parts of Indonesia through trading activities conducted by the VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*/Dutch East India Company) from the beginning of the 17th century, to

be succeeded by the East Indies colonial administration from the early 19th century until the first half of the 20th century, and interrupted only by the British interregnum on Java between 1811 and 1816; Spain ruled the Philippines until 1898, while in the 18th century, Portugal colonised East Timor. Further historical research is needed to reveal the processes whereby objects entered Europe from Southeast Asia, but it is clear that by the late 19th century, the profile of collections of major museums in the “mother countries”¹⁰ had been shaped by artefacts from their respective Southeast Asian possessions.¹¹ As a result, Dutch collections today contain much Indonesian material, French museums hold a preponderance of Cambodian and Vietnamese objects, and British museums disproportionately represent Burmese and Malaysian artefacts as part of their Southeast Asian collections.

The complexity of motivations for collecting in the colonial period has been well documented in the academic literature.¹² As Gosden and Knowles observe, until 1900 collecting was largely opportunistic.¹³ Most brutal were the military campaigns, with the looting and scavenging of material by soldiers.¹⁴ There were the pursuits of anthropologists, connoisseurs, scientists, botanists, archaeologists, missionaries and colonial administrators in Southeast Asia, the mercantile interests of traders and merchants, and the souvenir collecting of wealthy travellers. It should not be forgotten, however, that the removal of material to the West was not always entirely forced.

There were periodic gifts from Southeast Asian elites to Europeans – such as those from the Embassy of Siam to Napoleon III in 1861, or King Mindon’s presentation of a gold bowl to the French Infantry Officer, Captain Moreau, in 1874.¹⁵ Earlier in 1833, King Nang Klao of Siam (r. 1824–51) started a gift exchange with the US to express bilateral agreements and friendship.¹⁶ One local ruler in Java, Adie Pattij Tjakra Diningrat, presented a Madurese kris with a cross ornament representing *Militaire Willemsorde* – signifying the hybridity of the object – to General P.F. Hoeksema de Groot in 1830s.¹⁷ Once an important symbol of the tributary system in ancient Southeast Asia, these gift-giving practices were modified – with their own peculiarities – by royal and local elites as part of a distinct strategy to promote alliance, power and modernity in the face of competing colonial interests within the region. This book, therefore, does not suggest that all Southeast Asian material collected in the colonial period was unjustly taken and should thus be returned. Nevertheless, chapters focus on processes of transfer which today are considered unethical, occurring at particularly vulnerable moments in Southeast Asian history.

The complexities of British engagements with Burma (now Myanmar) are identified by Clarke and Galloway in chapters 5 and 11. The three

Anglo-Burmese wars during the course of the 19th century (1824–26; 1852 and 1885) culminated in the annexation of Burma in 1886, and subsequent direct rule as a province of British India. As a result, a range of British travellers, administrators, missionaries and soldiers were able to live, explore, exploit, control – and collect – these colonised territories. In the early 19th century, for instance, British Navy Officer Frederick Marryat, acquired more than 170 objects during his service in the First Anglo-Burmese war. Green notes how some of these would have been bought as military loot. Two important pieces from Marryat are presently in the British Museum – a dry lacquer Buddha statue and a large footprint of the Buddha.¹⁸ Numbers of regimental museums in Britain also hold plundered material from 19th-century military conflicts – the Essex Regiment museum displays a marble Burmese Buddha, and the King's (Liverpool) Regiment possesses three Buddha statues displayed in the Museum of Liverpool with the word “looted” on their labels. Many of King Thibaw's thrones were taken by the British during the sacking of his palace in Mandalay in 1885, one of which is now exhibited in the World Museum Liverpool. The “Mandalay Regalia” too was looted in 1885, which, up until 1964, was located at the V&A before being repatriated to Burma (see Clarke, chapter 5).

As a result of the British colonisation of Burma, a new trend of upper-class tourism emerged at the end of the 19th century. By 1891, for example, Thomas Cook and Son opened an office in Rangoon, advertising the country as “charming”.¹⁹ Amongst his many examples of ethnographic and natural history objects, the wealthy tea merchant, Frederick Horniman (1835–1906) acquired souvenirs from Southeast Asia.²⁰ In 1895–96, he visited Burma, spending time in Rangoon, before travelling to Upper Burma.²¹ Horniman purchased much of his collection from dealers, in particular Felice Beato in Mandalay.²² He also obtained trophies of war – a metre high marble Buddha from a Lieutenant Colonel Peile – stolen from a temple in Upper Burma, yet described as having been “rescued” by General Sir R. Low.²³

In the first half of the 20th century, British collecting in Burma only increased. James Henry Green (1893–1975), for example, was able to amass a substantial group of Kachin textiles in his role as recruiting officer with the 85th Burma Rifles in the 1920s.²⁴ Arriving in 1918, he acquired material directly from people in the remote border areas over a 20-year period, and the resulting collections are now distributed between Brighton Museum & Art Gallery as well as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.²⁵ By the 1930s, however, Green was becoming critical of British colonial endeavours, asserting in his MA dissertation at Cambridge that Burmese peoples and cultures had in fact suffered from foreign presence in their country.²⁶

In Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, the French performed the dominant collecting role.²⁷ As noted by Abbe in chapter 2, by the early 20th century officials, administrators, sailors, artists and scientists were in the habit of picking up material during their travels.²⁸ With an influx of tourists in the 1920s, many things were stolen,²⁹ the most notorious being André Malraux's (1901–76) removal of statues from Banteay Srei in Angkor in 1923. Malraux – writer, art critic and later Minister of Information (1945–46) under De Gaulle and, subsequently, France's first Minister of Cultural Affairs (1959–69) – was arrested and the objects returned.³⁰ While a new decree for the protection of archaeological sites and artefacts came into French law in 1925,³¹ such legislation did not stem the tide of removals. Indeed, a formal system of selection was introduced soon after. Abbe (chapter 2) analyses the use and abuse of such a system in facilitating the sale of Angkorian artefacts to Europe and North America. As

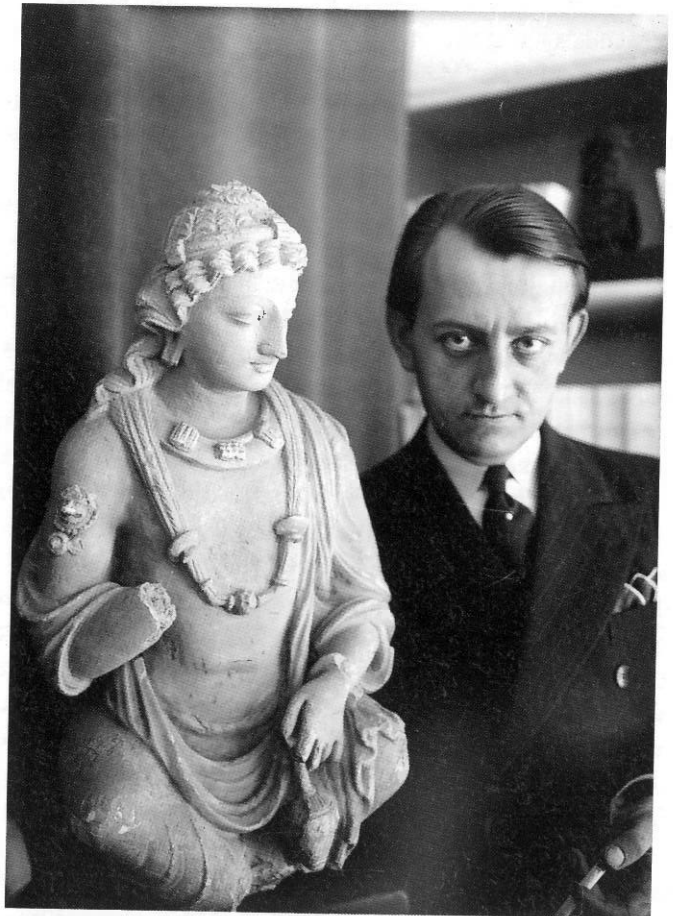


Fig. 1.1 André Malraux, with a Gandhara Buddha, circa 1933 © Albert Harlingue / Roger-Viollet.

Nagashima asserts, “Ever since a French explorer ‘discovered’ the Angkor ruins in a remote jungle, the national treasures have been the object of constant looting”.³² Nguyễn (chapter 6) relates, too, how many pieces of Cham sculpture were removed from Vietnam by the French – both scholars and colonial administrators – in the early 20th century.

Meanwhile the Dutch collected material from the many islands in Indonesia, a practice evidently present from the start of their cultural interaction. When in 1597 the first Dutch ships had just returned from the Indonesian archipelago, the librarian of Leiden University received from one of the merchants “a manuscript written in a script unknown to him”.³³ An academic interest was thus clearly present, as being able to speak a foreign language and gather knowledge of the natural world by way of collecting and studying objects was a sign of individual pride and a mark of higher social status.³⁴ Objects from faraway places, including those from insular Southeast Asia, were often termed “curiosities”. More often than not, and while objects sometimes could be celebrated on their own merit, the creation of cabinets of curiosities was intended to organise material into meaningful and insightful ways of understanding the world.³⁵ The various methods of collecting objects historically by Dutch individuals and museums are outlined by Beurden in chapter 8.

In particular, the collecting practices of Hindu-Buddhist antiquities in Indonesia that started to flourish at the beginning of the 19th century mainly focused on the island of Java, where the centre of colonial authority – the Dutch East Indies administration – was located, and whose soil had yielded many metal and stone artefacts dating from the 5th to 15th centuries. The Western collecting drive for Javanese antiquities arguably began when antiquarianism started to seep into the minds of colonial officials. In the late 18th–early 19th century, two notable antiquarian figures were influential in setting the tone for later systemised and institutionalised modes of collecting. Nicolaus Engelhard (1761–1831), a Dutch high official, had begun his service for the VOC in 1778 on Java. Notably, he served as the governor of Java’s northeast coast from 1801–08. Engelhard notoriously used his position to remove beautiful stone sculptures from temple ruins and employed them as curiosities in decorating the private garden of his residence in Semarang. The most well-known case was in 1804 when he took several statues from Singasari temple, located near Malang, East Java.³⁶ The other figure, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781–1826), was appointed Lieutenant Governor-General during the British interregnum on Java. On the one hand, the enthusiastic study by Raffles of Javanese antiquities – as part of his larger scientific investigation of the island – has been widely celebrated, especially through the appreciation of his book, *The History of Java* (1817). On the other hand, he is also responsible for the majority of



objects, originating from the Indonesian archipelago, being removed to Britain. In 1816 he successfully managed to despatch more than 30 tons of Javanese and other “curiosities and treasures” by the vessel, the *Ganges*.³⁷ Most of these were later donated to the British Museum in 1859 by his nephew, Rev. William Charles Raffles Flint.

Engelhard and Raffles had set a popular precedent for Dutch officials and Western visitors to the island around the first half of the 19th century.³⁸ A well-known instance is the displacement of the famed Prajnaparamita statue from the Singasari temple complex by D. Monnereau in 1818, a sculpture which later found its way to the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Netherlands (as discussed by Sapardan in chapter 9). The Dutch East Indies authority consequently issued a decree in 1840 to prohibit the export of antiquities from Java, except with the permission of the Governor-General, and only if sent to the Netherlands. However, while seemingly virtuous in its motivation, this decision was actually initiated by Jean Chrétien Baud (1789–1859), then Minister for the Colonies, who was concerned that the scientific survey about to be undertaken by a French archaeologist in Java would include object collecting.³⁹

While the decree failed to stop the illegal trading of antiquities by lower ranking colonial officials,⁴⁰ it was nonetheless a significant moment in the collecting practice of Javanese antiquities, and was the beginning of the systematic acquisition of objects by museums in Batavia and Leiden. The decree was subsequently complemented by another, in 1842, requiring Dutch residents to compile a list of antiquities in their possession. The Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences (*Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen*) – hereafter the Batavian Society – was authorised to selectively buy and gather the objects listed. By 1848, the museum of the Batavian Society had managed to assemble 400 Javanese artefacts.⁴¹ Later, in 1862, the government decreed that the collection should be divided between the Netherlands and its East Indies colony.⁴² The Batavian Society was authorised to select objects deemed exceptional to be kept in Batavia, while those considered duplicates could be sent to Leiden for storage and display. From the Museum of Antiquities, everything from Java – and from all regions in Indonesia – was transferred in 1903 to the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden. Beurden (chapter 8) identifies how the legal issues – including object provenance, ownership, and change of policy – influenced, and were dealt with, in the process of repatriating some of the regalia, ancient statues and ethnographic material to Indonesia in the 1970s and 2010s. Furthermore, Ardiyansyah (chapter 7) argues that part of the 1970s restitution was less about contesting object legality and more about recognising and agreeing on the sentimental values attached to things.

Fig. 1.2 Head of a Buddha in the collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, probably from Borobudur.

Thailand provides a different picture of collecting. From the 19th and well into the 20th century, collecting was pursued by Thai elites, an exercise that was, and still is, driven by what scholars term “royal antiquarianism”.⁴³ This particular mode of collecting and studying ancient objects was an instrument of the Siamese elites in their quest to be a “civilised” nation, especially at a time when Thailand was the only independent state in the region.⁴⁴ The earliest recorded activities by King Mongkut (r. 1851–68) were known through John Bowring, the British envoy of Queen Victoria to Bangkok, as he was shown the royal cabinet of curiosities.⁴⁵ Mongkut had identified, in 1833, the throne and stele of King Ramkhamhaeng from the 13th century, which he later ordered to be displayed at Wat Phra Keo, the main royal temple inside the palace.⁴⁶ His son, Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910), had similar interests in antiquarianism and archaeological study. Assisted by his half-brother, Prince Damrong, Chulalongkorn bolstered the royal collection, which he promoted as a way of educating the public.⁴⁷ Over time the practice was imported by local Bangkok collectors as a means to establish social status by framing themselves as the protectors of national heritage.⁴⁸ Between the 1950s and the 1970s, Thai elites like Princess Pantip Chumbhot and Princess Viphavadi Rangsit amassed large collections of antiquities ranging from traditional collectibles such as antique Buddha images to new types of objects, including ceramics such as those from Ban Chiang (see Rod-ari, chapter 4).⁴⁹ Inspired by these elites, hundreds of people had already begun collecting antiquities in Bangkok by the early 1970s.⁵⁰ In 2019, Thai businessman and collector, Thammarit Jira, handed over 104 objects from Ban Chiang to the Thai Fine Arts Department, claiming that it had been the intention of his family to donate the assemblage to the state government when the collection was started several decades before.⁵¹ As such, the tradition of collecting antiquities was being employed to elevate status in the social hierarchy. Of note is that in the past decades this elite endeavour has gradually shifted and been utilised by local historians and archaeologists to gain a platform for enhancing more localised cultural identity, as discussed by Phanomvan in chapter 10.

With so many antiquities consumed domestically, there was an absence of the systematic removal of cultural objects from Thailand to the West. Thus, individual foreign art connoisseurs-cum-collectors were instrumental in the development of Thai as well as other Southeast Asian art collections, in various museums around the world. Reginald Le May (1885–1972), an ex-British consul in Chiang Mai and an Honorary Member of the Siam Society, was an important figure in the development of Thai art history. Publishing *A Concise History of Buddhist Art in Siam* in 1938, he avidly collected ancient Buddhist sculpture, especially from Thailand’s northern region where many temples were erected between the

10th and 14th centuries.⁵² Objects collected during his fieldwork can now be found in the British Museum and the Horniman Museum in the UK.

Another figure categorised as a scholar-cum-collector is Alexander B. Griswold (1901–91). As a member of the US army, he was stationed in Bangkok during the Second World War, and afterwards became fascinated by the history and culture of Thailand. By 1948 he started to assemble photographs and images of the Buddha as “tools for study”. He later published various articles and books on Thai arts, and today his collection is distributed between two institutions, Cornell University in New York, and the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore.⁵³ A different approach is that of the foreign industrialists who boasted personal art collections, such as Avery Brundage (1887–1975) and Norton Simon (1907–93). Brundage developed his collection of Asian art between the 1930s and the late 1950s, when he decided to donate most of it to the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco – Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture. Concurrently, Simon amassed his vast collection of Western and Eastern art in the mid-20th century; in the late 1970s he acquired and renamed the Pasadena Museum of Modern Art the Norton Simon Museum, to which most of his art collection was transferred. The Norton Simon Museum would later repatriate a Koh Ker statue of Bhima to Cambodia, as discussed by Chea, Muong and Tythacott in chapter 3.

Meanwhile, a brief survey into the engagements among colonial scholars and regional elite figures between the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century reveals a different trajectory in terms of intra-regional movements in Southeast Asia. Horace Geoffrey Quaritch Wales (1900–81), for instance, was active in the 1930s in organising archaeological digs and investigating ancient cultures in Thailand and the Malay Peninsula. As a member of the Greater-Indian Research Committee, he started his investigation in Si Thep in west-central Thailand in 1935–36, before moving on, a year later, with his wife, Dorothy C. Quaritch Wales, to the archaeological sites of the Bujang Valley on the western coast of the Malay Peninsula. Objects collected from the excavations, including a rare Buddha figurine, ritual deposits, and miniature objects, were subsequently donated to the Raffles Museum, founded in Singapore in 1874. Today these collections can still be found in the renamed Asian Civilisations Museum.

Another example, but in a different context, is the movement of Javanese artefacts to Bangkok in the late 19th century. The second visit by Rama V of Siam (as Thailand was known before it changed its name in 1939) to the island in 1896 resulted in collecting eight cargos filled with stone objects from the sites of Borobudur, Prambanan and Singasari.⁵⁴ The items were carefully selected by the king, with consent given by the governor general of the Dutch East Indies colonial administration. Upon

arrival in Bangkok, the collection was received as “diplomatic gifts” and immediately displayed in front of the royal palace to be celebrated by the Thai public.⁵⁵ The collection was then dispersed to Wat Phra Keo compound, Bangkok National Museum and royal monasteries in Bangkok. Following a diplomatic enterprise by Dutch archaeologist, P.V. van Stein Callenfels, who met with French scholar George Coedès and Prince Damrong Rajanubhab – two of the most important figures in the study and conservation of Siamese antiquities – when visiting Bangkok in September 1926, three carved blocks from Prambanan were sent back to Java to be included in the reconstruction of a Shiva temple started in the late 1920s.⁵⁶ Interestingly, today the Bangkok National Museum has framed this particular history, as well as the existence of Javanese artefacts in the museum, as demonstrating that Thailand and Indonesia built their close relationship more than a century ago – despite the fact that Indonesia, as a nation-state, only came into being in the 1940s.⁵⁷

The Javanese antiquities presented to Rama V were not only given by the Dutch East Indies authority but also by the local ruler from Solo, Mangkunegara VI (r. 1896–1916). Four Buddha statues – supposedly originating from Plaosan temple – were handed over,⁵⁸ which in turn reveals Mangkunegara VI as a keen collector of ancient statues. Presumably inspired by his father, Mangkunegara VII (r. 1916–44) was also known in local archaeological circles as an impassioned collector of Hindu-Buddhist antiquities. Objects from his collection, such as small bronze statues, were periodically surveyed and documented by the Archaeological Service (*Oudheidkundige Dienst*) of the Dutch East Indies.⁵⁹ Interestingly, a year after his visit to the Colonial Institute, Amsterdam, in 1937, he requested a plaster copy of the Singasari Prajnaparamita, demonstrating firstly how the icon has been continuously treasured by Javanese elites and secondly how a replica might be imbued with similar qualities to the original.⁶⁰ This historical episode serves as an additional consideration in thinking about issues relating to contemporary restitution calls from Southeast Asia.

LOOTING, ACCUMULATING AND TRADING SOUTHEAST ASIA'S PAST

Looting is not a recent phenomenon in Southeast Asia, for it occurred long before the European colonisation of the region. Widely revered icons and important symbols, embroiled in power struggles between various states, for example, were often taken and re-installed in new locations. The remarkable odyssey of a unique set of Khmer bronze statues, brought from one triumphant mainland capital to the next over the course of centuries demonstrates this phenomenon. These late 12th-century bronze

statues were brought from Angkor to the Siamese capital of Ayutthaya in the 15th century, then to the Mon capital of Pegu in the 16th, to the Arakanese capital of Mrauk-U in the 17th, to finally land in the 18th century in the Burmese capital of Mandalay, where they are venerated by locals today.⁶¹ Another example is the widely worshipped Mahamuni Buddha, originally from Arakan, and re-housed in Mandalay, along with the Khmer bronzes, after Burmese King Bodawpaya (r. 1782–1819) successfully captured the kingdom in 1784.⁶² Phaya Tani, a large cannon now on display outside the Ministry of Defence in Bangkok, was taken after the Siamese army broke Patani defences in 1786.⁶³ Later colonial structures thus only served to complicate the landscape of looting – whether carried out by individuals, such as Raffles and Malraux, or as part of organised military campaigns.

When the era of Western colonisation ended with national independence for Southeast Asian countries in the 1940s and 1950s,⁶⁴ it was followed, soon after, by devastating conflicts, especially on the mainland. While evident looting in the 1950s and 1960s was associated with increased foreign travel to the region, it reached a critical level during the Vietnam War (1955–75), the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–79) and the Cambodian-Vietnamese War (1978–89).⁶⁵ Rod-ari (chapter 4) notes the appropriation of archaeological material from Ban Chiang in Thailand from the 1960s to 1970s linked to US air force bases in the country and the resulting concentration of artefacts today, specifically in Californian museums. Nguyễn (chapter 6) identifies how the ninth-century Đồng Dương Buddhist monastery was reduced to rubble during the Vietnam War and subsequently looted. In Cambodia, many pieces were taken by the Khmer Rouge from Angkor as well as further afield from other temples in the 1970s – the proceeds from the looting of antiquities being used to bolster Pol Pot's government.⁶⁶ Most devastating was the emptying, by the Khmer Rouge, of the Battambang Museums – the third most comprehensive collection in the country after the Angkor Conservation Office and the National Museum of Cambodia.⁶⁷

The smuggling and illicit trade in Khmer antiquities, however, only increased after the end of the civil war in the 1990s. Indeed, most Hindu-Buddhist antiquities were taken from Cambodia in the mid-to-late 1990s, as a result of the opening up of the region to international trade.⁶⁸ The looting and illicit smuggling of antiquities from Cambodia to Thailand reached a peak in the late 1990s and into the early 21st century.⁶⁹ This volume examines in particular thefts which occurred at Koh Ker – the tenth-century capital built by Jayavarman IV (see Chea, Muong and Tythacott, chapter 3). Once protected through its remote location, the construction of a road in the 1970s led to its opening up and the subsequent looting of artefacts.⁷⁰ Many sites were plundered elsewhere in

Cambodia.⁷¹ The most renowned case was the removal, by the military, in 1999, of a large section of wall with unique carvings, and other sections, from the important site of Banteay Chhmar, described as the “largest looting operation of Cambodian cultural property in recent history”.⁷² Hundreds of soldiers used heavy machinery for weeks to remove an almost 12-metre long section (this likely to have been privately commissioned).⁷³ Fortunately, Thai police stopped the trucks and the sculptures were later returned to Cambodia. These are now in the National Museum in Phnom Penh, though two panels are still missing.⁷⁴ By 2004, Lafont was arguing that hardly anywhere in the world had plundering reached such a scale as in Cambodia, estimating that hundreds of thousands of objects had been taken.⁷⁵ Indeed, authorities in Cambodia believe that between 1986 and 2003 over half the country’s statutory and heritage had been looted.⁷⁶

Thailand has been the main intermediary and transit country for the illegal distribution of Cambodian antiquities, with the Thai-Cambodian border being particularly porous.⁷⁷ Indeed, over half the Cambodian antiquities circulating in the global market are believed to have been relocated via Thailand.⁷⁸ Looted Khmer antiquities have been transported from Cambodia/Thailand, in particular, to the US and Europe (especially France, Belgium and Switzerland) and Japan, where market demand is greatest.⁷⁹ Some statues have been specifically ordered, others sold at auction and can be found today in public museums and private collections.⁸⁰ Cambodian artefacts have appeared in major auction houses around the world with unreliable provenance.⁸¹ According to Hauser-

Fig. 1.3 Banteay Chhmar wall, Cambodia. Photograph by Christian Luczanits, 2015.



Schäublin, Sotheby's auctioned 377 Khmer antiquities between 1988 and 2010, of which, 71 per cent had no clear historical records.⁸²

As far back as 1851, Thailand issued a regulation to prevent looting at royal temples, and though this was updated in 1934, 1943, and 1961 to include all types of archaeological and historic sites, the result has been minimal.⁸³ The illegal trading of antiquities is a lucrative business both for domestic and international markets, which has prompted digging and looting of archaeological sites.⁸⁴ In the 1960s, many ancient stone and bronze sculptures and decorative elements from temple complexes in north-eastern Thailand, such as those in Phimai and Plai Bat, were found to be missing, having been detached from the temple walls in the 1960s and 1970s (see Phanomvan, chapter 10). Ian C. Glover, a British archaeologist working extensively in the country, witnessed first-hand the looting activities conducted in U-Thong, Krabi and Khao Sam Kaeo in the 1970s and 1980s.⁸⁵ When the site of Ban Chiang was found to offer up abundant ancient pottery in the 1960s, this prompted local digging for the international market (see Rod-ari, chapter 4). A survey team from the Institute of Archaeology of the University of London and the Division of Archaeology of the Fine Arts Department of Thailand discovered that ceramics and others objects from various sites in Buriram province had already been extensively looted between 1982 and 1983.⁸⁶ The fact that ceramics from stoneware kilns of Sisatchanalai and burial sites of Tak-Omkoi had flooded Chiang Mai and Bangkok markets between 1986 and 1988 reveals a multiplication of localised looting in Thailand.⁸⁷

More importantly, local actors from various regions in Southeast Asia have played an active role in supplying illegal antiquities both for domestic and international markets. The Lower Mekong Archaeological Project found that by the early 2000s local district and provincial officials were willing participants in the local antiquities trade.⁸⁸ Cambodian farmers living near archaeological sites too have supplemented their incomes by searching for, and trading in, small objects such as ceramics, glass beads, bronze items, and other valuable artefacts.⁸⁹ Subsistence looting is not uncommon too in Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines.⁹⁰ Particularly in Myanmar, the literate younger generation is more susceptible to the promise of easy money by selling Iron Age items to local collectors and tourists, as they tend to reject the spiritual powers connected to these artefacts.⁹¹ Meanwhile, seasonal workers such as farmers and fishermen use their seasonal down time to hunt for saleable artefacts.⁹² Local buyers round up collected items and present them to antiquities dealers from the cities during their regular buying trips.⁹³

Authentic objects can be found among replicas in public markets, such as those of River City and Chattuchak Market in Bangkok, the "Russian" Market in Phnom Penh, and Jalan Surabaya in Jakarta. In some cases, such

as looted objects from Trowulan in Indonesia, ancient materials are presented as new replicas through the production of fake provenance.⁹⁴ The market may stem from the popularisation of Asian art from the early 1990s, which not only developed legitimate sales but triggered illicit trade and the illegal export of antiquities, though the market in Southeast Asian art has avoided the same international attention as the destruction and looting of archaeological sites in the Middle East.⁹⁵ Bangkok is often cited as the main gateway for antiquities from Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and Thailand, as well as China, for export overseas.⁹⁶ It is common for the Bangkok dealers to hire looters who undertake excavations and plundering, responding to market demand.⁹⁷ Singapore plays its part as an intermediary agent for Bangkok, while Hong Kong provides a space outside the region for the international market.⁹⁸ However, it should also be acknowledged that not every looted or illegally excavated object is necessarily exported to countries outside Southeast Asia. Though the percentage is still unclear, many antiquities have been consumed by national and provincial government officials, as well as wealthy families, up until today, as seen in Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia.⁹⁹ It has also been observed elsewhere that the current looting at Vườn Chuối is mainly directed to serve local Vietnamese collectors.¹⁰⁰

Lastly, a recent dimension of the antiquities trade in Southeast Asia is the development of the online market created through the opening up of internet access. Particularly for the Thai market, various kinds of small objects, such as jewellery, coins and ornaments, have been commonly offered for sale through social media platforms.¹⁰¹ Because old beads from Dawei and Tanintharyi in Myanmar are frequently sought after, these objects are posted online accompanied by book illustrations – seemingly to prove the authenticity of the items offered.¹⁰² While the objects traded may or may not be original, this new system has purportedly widened the network of local antiquities hunters and dealers in trading valuable archaeological artefacts.

RETURNING SOUTHEAST ASIA'S PAST

While much collecting during the colonial period – especially the looting as part of military campaigns – was clearly unethical by the standards of today, such activities in the 19th century and early-mid 20th century were not in fact illegal. In the wake of the plundering and havoc caused by the Second World War, the Hague Convention (1954) was the first international agreement to ban the destruction of cultural property during armed conflict.¹⁰³ The most influential treaty in times of peace, however, has been the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of

Ownership of Cultural Property which, for the first time, provided a legal basis for the recovery of looted cultural material, enabling countries which have signed the convention to request the return of stolen material. In 1995, the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects complemented the UNESCO Convention by adding a private law dimension.¹⁰⁴ These, combined, are now the most significant international agreements for the protection of cultural property and the prevention of looting and illicit trafficking of objects in peacetime.¹⁰⁵ However, these conventions are not without their problems in terms of implementation and in defining the exact criteria needed for the return of material culture, and they are not retro-active. While Cambodia was amongst the first to ratify the 1970 UNESCO convention in 1972, at the time of writing, Thailand and Indonesia have yet to sign it.¹⁰⁶

Cambodia, in particular, has been pro-active in past decades in relation to the reclamation of its cultural heritage. In 1993, the Cambodian constitution identified the need to preserve and restore archaeological and historic sites and punish looting.¹⁰⁷ The country passed a law, for example, in 1996 for the protection of its cultural assets and signed, in 2000, a Bilateral Agreement with Thailand to Combat Against Illicit Trafficking and Cross-Border Smuggling of Movable Cultural Property and to Restitute it to the Country of Origin – although, this too, is not retro-active.¹⁰⁸ The US-Cambodia Cultural Property Agreement (2003) was extended for five years in 2008, and again in 2013.¹⁰⁹ The National Museum of Cambodia, in particular, has actively collaborated with UNESCO to publish missing objects in Battambang provincial museums. Detailed inventories and collection documentation systems are clearly vital. The important book, *One hundred missing objects: Looting in Angkor* (1993), for example, led to the restitution of ten objects to Cambodia, from US, France, Switzerland and Germany.¹¹⁰ The publication, *Missing Objects from the Wat Po Veal and Battambang Provincial Museums* (2015), describing 67 lost artefacts, was also intended to trigger the restitution of artefacts. In this volume, Rod-ari outlines some of the key legislation regarding Thai material (chapter 4), while Galloway discusses the passing of the Antiquities Act in Myanmar (chapter 11).

In Indonesia, cultural heritage protection laws were initiated with the issuance of *Monumenten Ordannantie* number 19 by the Dutch East Indies government in 1931. This stated that ownership of all archaeological sites and artefacts fell into the hands of the state government and that compensation would be paid when such sites and artefacts, found on private lands, were included in the state inventory.¹¹¹ It was subsequently adopted as national law when Indonesia gained independence in the 1940s, and only updated five decades or so later with the stipulation of National Law Number 5 Year 1992 regarding Cultural

Properties. In particular, the law prohibited movement of cultural property from its original site and criminalised those involved. The 1992 law was put into effect when, in 2007, it was found that several statues from the collection of Radya Pustaka Museum, Solo, were copies while the originals had been sold to art dealers and private collectors. Following a police investigation, its former director, along with two employees, were sentenced to 18 months and 14 months in jail respectively. The law was updated once more in 2010 to include a clause for foreigners, who are permanent residents, to be able to own cultural property, though their material must remain within Indonesia.

The postcolonial period in Southeast Asia – with ASEAN developing over the course of the Cold War and the complex rise of independent nation-states as part of a defined “Southeast Asian” region – has been clearly conducive to the emergence of a region-wide consciousness of lost antiquities and the need to recall them home. While restitution is now one of the key issues facing Western museums in the 21st century, Southeast Asian politico-cultural actors and institutions have also become increasingly active in triggering, conceiving and managing calls for the repatriation of antiquities and works of art (see especially chapters by Sapardan, Beurden, Ardiyansyah, Phanomvan, and Chea, Muong and Tythacott in this volume). Indeed, this has become a core, if not the core concern of many Southeast Asian museums, ministries and heritage organisations (see Sapardan, chapter 9). What is so often conceived as a movement starting in the West is thus more complex than first imagined – and the rise of this phenomenon has led to increasing Southeast Asian activism, agency and expertise in the field of cultural heritage.

Nonetheless, it is worthy of note that object restitution is not an exclusively postcolonial phenomenon. For example, regalia from Bone and Gowa kingdoms in South Sulawesi, among them royal crowns, weapons and parasols, were returned in 1931 by museums in Leiden and, in 1937–38, by the museum of the Batavian Society upon request from the Bone and Gowa rulers.¹¹³ The first post-independence returns of material to Southeast Asia occurred in the 1960s and 1970s: two of the most renowned examples are discussed in this book – the “Mandalay Regalia” from the UK to Burma in 1964 (see Clarke, chapter 5) and the 13th-century Prajnaparamita statue from the Netherlands to Indonesia in 1978 (see Beurden and Sapardan, chapters 8 and 9). In the 1970s and 1980s, the government of Thailand succeeded in repatriating at least three objects from Western institutions and private collectors. A stone lintel, stolen from Prang Ku Suan Taeng sanctuary in 1964, was returned in 1970 by Avery Brundage, while the 12th-century reclining Vishnu lintel from Prasat Phnom Rung sanctuary which disappeared from the site in 1960 or 1961 – known as the “Narai Lintel” – was given

back by the Art Institute of Chicago in 1988.¹¹⁴ A gold votive plaque stolen from James H.W. Thompson House in 1980 reappeared in an antique shop in Europe in 1988 and, after brief negotiations, the dealer agreed to send the piece back to Thailand the following year.¹¹⁵ The Luang Poh Sila Buddha, stolen from Thung Sangiam temple in Sukhothai province in 1977, was returned to Thailand in 1996.¹¹⁶ The case of Ban Chiang is discussed in detail by Rod-ari (chapter 4) and the repatriation request for the Prakhon Chai Hoard is analysed by Phanomvan (chapter 10).

Much material has been returned to Cambodia. One of the earliest Cambodian repatriation cases was a 12th-century Khmer piece returned by France in 1993, after it was stolen from the Angkor Conservation Office.¹¹⁷ The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Sotheby's New York sent back a number of Cambodian objects in 1997.¹¹⁸ In April 2000, an American antique collector returned two items of cultural property stolen from the Angkor ruins to the Cambodian government.¹¹⁹ According to Lafont, over one hundred Khmer artefacts had been repatriated to Cambodia by 2001, representing the "biggest example of the restitution of objects of art in the world".¹²⁰ Many had been taken from the Angkor Conservation Office in Siem Reap, and were identified mainly due to the publication, *One hundred missing objects: Looting in Angkor*.¹²¹ The

Fig. 1.4 Vishnu Lintel in Prasat Phanom Rung, Thailand. Photograph by Phacharaphorn Phanomvan.



most well-known recent examples are the so-called “blood antiquities” from Koh Ker, returned to Cambodia by American institutions (see Chea, Muong and Tythacott, chapter 3). As Hauser-Schäublin argues, such successful restitutions have often been the result of specific agreements (i.e. US and Cambodia bi-lateral agreements), as well as UNESCO, Interpol and the expertise of scholars.¹²²

Indonesia saw a group of objects returned by the Netherlands in the late 1970s. The repatriation was facilitated through an agreement signed by both countries in 1975 – and the processes involved are discussed in detail by Beurden in chapter 8. Preceding this, the most famous manuscript from Java, the Nagarakertagama, was gifted by Queen Juliana of the Netherlands (1909–2004) during her state visit to Indonesia in 1973.¹²³ The manuscript entered Dutch collections through the military subjugation of Cakranegara Palace of Lombok in 1894, when it also saw a hoard of royal regalia, now known as the Lombok treasure, being collected by the Batavian Society. The regalia were also part of the objects returned to Indonesia following the 1975 agreement, discussed, too, by Beurden in this volume. The most significant repatriation was the Singasari Prajnaparamita statue, much revered today, as it is considered by many Indonesians as the most beautiful icon to have been produced by their ancestors. The collecting, repatriation, and current appropriation of this particular image is examined in depth by Sapardan in chapter 9.

Alongside the restitution of cultural material has been the growth and development of the museological landscape, with national museums, generally, being used, in conjunction with other avenues, to develop official histories of Southeast Asian states over past decades. As such, the inclusion of repatriated cultural objects into national heritage formation has tended to function as a means of strengthening the “glory of the past”. Objects, particularly those from archaeological sites and museum collections, are depositories of memories as well as reference points to project personal, local, collective and national identities. Peleggi has demonstrated how the establishment of the Bangkok National Museum was designed to document and celebrate Thailand’s magnificent art and archaeological artefacts through which an art historical lineage was drawn, a lineage which was meant to articulate a deeper sense of identity as well as the single cultural continuity of Thai peoples and cultures over time.¹²⁴ The case of Phanom Rung is apposite, for the campaign to return the lintel was less about the theft and more about its inclusion into the formation of a Thai national lineage.¹²⁵ Meanwhile McGregor has pointed out that the ethnology collection of the National Museum of Indonesia, assembled, as we have seen, during the Dutch colonial era by the Batavian Society, was restaged to present a notion of the diverse

cultural heritage of the Indonesian nation, a diversity embraced as a cornerstone of national unity.¹²⁶ Hence, from these two examples we can see that museum collections are created and presented to form a collective experience of how a nation should be.

It is worth noting that ancient monumental archaeological sites and their artefacts have frequently been afforded higher status compared to other material culture elements in nation building projects. Since these materials are mostly Hindu-Buddhist, they have provided leverage for Buddhist nations in the mainland, yet this does not hinder nationalist appropriations even for the largest Muslim majority nation in insular Southeast Asia. In looking at this phenomenon, it is useful to revisit Anderson's idea of an "archaeological push" in Southeast Asia. He argued that at the beginning of the 20th century, there was a tendency towards prioritising archaeological sites and artefacts, such as those of Borobudur, Pagan (Bagan) and Angkor.¹²⁷ While many have pointed out the need to contextualise and provide more nuance to this argument, for the sake of this discussion, it is pertinent to note that this "push" has resulted in the idea of "guardianship". Repurposed as "regalia for a secular colonial state", the preservation of monumental archaeology was in the hands of the colonial authorities, which created a clear hierarchy between the colonisers and the colonised subjects.¹²⁸ When postcolonial Southeast Asia was faced with new questions of national identity, the supposed discovery of "forgotten civilisations" provided a source of pride to the former colonies,¹²⁹ while at the same time the concept of guardianship was subverted to project the notion of self-grandeur and capability as a nation.

The drive for object repatriation, which can be regarded as another form of collecting practice, might stem from the structure through which a nation and its peoples are made to experience the material embodiment of the often notably majestic past. As such, the visual manifestation, in the form of archaeological sites and artefacts, serves as "a shared repertoire of image and objects that shape memory and identity".¹³⁰ Furthermore, individuals are encouraged to seek closer physical engagement with visual and material representations, such as architecture, monuments and the landscape, in order to experience and stimulate personal connections that respectively generate "national sentiments" and "emotional attachment" to the (national) collective memory.¹³¹ Thus, in this context, the historiography and genealogy of a nation play an important role in decisions to repatriate or not. This close entanglement between materiality, national selfhood, regional identity, cultural heritage, object patrimony and restitution is examined in more depth by Ardiyansyah in chapter 7, Sapardan in chapter 9 and Phanomvan in chapter 10.