

Loot: The Plundered Heritage.

Produced by Robert Schyberg. Color, 30 minutes. Purchase \$80 (video only), for rental inquire at Pyramid Films, Ltd., 490 East Webster, Winter Park, FL 32789 (407/644-3845).

THIS NEW PRODUCTION ON THE LOOTING of archaeological sites, fueled by the antiquities trade, deserves a wide audience. It delivers a basic message vital to the archaeological profession and the preservation of archaeological sites—that sites should be protected from unscientific excavation and that the marketing of antiquities encourages illicit digging that destroys valuable evidence about ancient peoples.

There are, of course, two sides to this issue, and both are presented in this film. Even without its revealing title, it is absolutely clear where the sympathies of the producers lie—a strong argument is presented against the trade in antiquities and private collecting. Not that the other side is not given a fair chance.

Douglas Ewing of the American Association of Dealers in Primitive and Oriental Art and Gillette Griffin of Princeton University are featured prominently, articulating their views on the selling and collecting of antiquities. Neither comes across very sympathetically. Ewing is arrogant, defensive, condescending, and evasive, never directly addressing the fundamental ethical issues.

Griffin is a bit more engaging, but in the end he is also arrogant, claiming that his personal understanding of Precolumbian objects transcends that of archaeologists.

Loot opens with dramatic scenes of ransacked sites in Central America and proceeds with a series of interviews with various specialists on both sides of the issue: archaeologists, a politician, a dealer, and a collector. At various points their commentaries are juxtaposed in such a way that it seems like a debate, although the commentators do not always address

the same question. Chief spokespeople for the "good guys" are Arlen and Diane Chase of the University of Central Florida, Craig Morris of the American Museum of Natural History, and Ignacio Duran, the Mexican Minister of Culture.

The Chases are the principal excavators of Caracol, an important Maya site in Belize. Their work at this site serves as a backdrop for much of their testimony. Unfortunately, there is a certain stridency, even shrillness, to their tone which tends to detract from their message, but they are convincing nonetheless. They are able to demonstrate graphically the devastation wrought by unauthorized and unsupervised excavation. Even more convincing, however, is Craig Morris, who, in a quiet and reasoned fashion, explains his museum's position on the acquisition of antiquities. He argues persuasively against private collecting and for a thorough system of vetting the pedigrees of all pieces purchased by museums. Ignacio Duran takes a rather extreme position against the export of any antiquities and calls for the repatriation of all pieces exported in the past.

In the end, it could be argued that each person who appears in this program expresses a view that serves his or her rather narrow self-interest, and although the archaeologists and Minister of Culture aspire to more altruistic goals, their case is not as well presented as it might have been. The cause of the dealer and collector is particularly ill-served by Messrs. Ewing and Griffin in this production, although it is probably fair to say that their views are representative of other dealers and collectors.

Despite its shortcomings, this is an important production for the issues it addresses and the variety of opinions presented. The general public needs more information on these questions and *Loot: The Plundered Heritage* is a good starting point. The film will air on PBS stations in the coming months. Check your local listings for dates. ■

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