

DePaul University

From the Selected Works of Morag M. Kersel

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A Little Piece of the Holy Land

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/morag_kersel/24/

and using them, in thinking through the power relations the tools are meant to short-circuit, in taking seriously the material as well as social dimensions of environmental problems, and in supporting grassroots efforts to create a civic-minded environmental health science.

Please send A&E news and reports to Amelia Moore at a.moore@miami.edu.

Archeology Division

E CHRISTIAN WELLS, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

A Little Piece of the Holy Land

By Morag M Kersel (DePaul U)

For over ten years, I have been exploring whether we can establish causality between the demand for archaeological artifacts in Israel's legal market and the looting of archaeological sites in the region. To approach this question and to explore tourists' desires for archaeological artifacts, I have spent time in the Old City of Jerusalem (where most of the licensed antiquities shops are located) talking to the various actors in the trade. As a result of these interactions, I have become increasingly focused on tourists, their acquisitions, and their motivations.

Demand for a memento of a visit to the Holy Land (Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Territories) has endured for millennia—from early religious pilgrims to those of today. Under the terms of the Israel Antiquities Law of 1978, it is legal to obtain an artifact from a licensed dealer with an export license issued by the Israel Antiquities Authority. When purchasing an object, the tourist selects an artifact, a meaningful symbol that may act as a signifier of a site, an era, a person, triumph over the fear of the unknown, prowess in the marketplace, or an evocative symbol of a journey to a distant land. Collecting decontextualizes and recontextualizes the materials and imbues them with new meaning for the tourist. Display of the souvenir commemorating their visit to the Holy Land within their own home is often a crucial component of the action of buying an artifact. Visitors, family and friends can share the experience vicariously through the purchased item, which conveys the essence of the lived experience—a tangible connection to the recent past, which provides a link to the distant past. Taking home a piece of the Holy Land reaffirms and materializes the spiritual connection to a place.

Artifacts from the Holy Land are unique because of a holy essence associated with the purchase. In one instance, a tourist wanted to buy something for his girlfriend that was from the "year zero." When the dealer asked if he meant "in the time of Jesus," the answer was an emphatic yes. Both were devout Christians, and he wanted a symbolic reminder for both of them that concurrently would remind him of his "life changing visit to the Holy Land." The tourist went on to recount the archaeological sites he visited while in Israel (Megiddo, Tel Dan, Bethsaida, the New Testament sites around the Sea of Galilee) and how he walked in the footsteps of Jesus. When the dealer asked if the tourist wanted an artifact from a particular site, he replied "No, the Holy Land is good enough for me."

For many tourists, archaeological material confirms an unbroken continuity, a past that cannot be separated from the present and one that conveys a powerful link to the future. The generalized "Holy Land" suffices as an identifier, obviating the need for a specific archaeological site. Tourists that I spoke with considered the "Holy Land" an adequate descriptor. They are generally indifferent as to whether or not the dealer is in violation of the 1978 Antiquities Law or that the artifact may have been looted recently or transported illegally from the Palestinian Territories to Israel.

Devotion to biblical artifacts has led to a discouraging predicament where illegally excavated material is entering the legal antiquities market. Dealers use suspicious business practices to reuse inventory register numbers in order to introduce new material into the old market. The success of this ruse is predicated on the tourists' lack of interest in specific archaeological find spots (provenience). Tourists are often satisfied with generalisms, such as "in the time of Jesus" and "from the Holy Land" rather than specific dates and exact excavation locations. Most tourists interviewed as part of this research seemed unaware of the relationship between the artifact they were purchasing and the archaeological site (whether looted recently or not) from where it originated. In antiquities shops throughout the Holy Land, tourists experience the past through direct engagement with material culture, often one devoid of its archaeological context, but nonetheless meaningful to purchasers. Unfortunately, it is this detachment with the findspot that results in the ongoing looting of the region in order to meet demand for artifacts from the Holy Land.

To learn more about the Archeology Division, visit our website at www.aaanet.org/sections/ad/index.html. Send news, notices, and comments to: E Christian Wells, ecwells@usf.edu.

Association for Africanist Anthropology

JENNIFER E COFFMAN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Time to Nominate for AFAA Awards

As the academic year rapidly comes to a close for many of us, please do not forget about nominating colleagues, students, or yourself for one of AFAA's writing awards. The AFAA awards honor excellent work and bring that work to the attention of wider audiences. The deadlines are indeed approaching quickly, as noted below.



Elliott P Skinner
(1924–2007).
Photo courtesy AFAA

The Elliott P Skinner Book Award committee seeks submissions of books that best further both the global community of Africanist scholars and the wider interests of the African continent, as exemplified in the work of Elliott P Skinner. Contributions from all subfields of anthropology are welcome, with special consideration given to works drawing upon extensive research in the field or those advancing new

methodologies for fieldwork in Africa. Inquiries should be sent to Betty Harris (bharris@ou.edu) by May 15, 2012. If you have published a book or been particularly impressed by one published in 2009, 2010 or 2011, please be sure to nominate it.

The annual Bennetta Jules-Rosette Graduate Student Essay Award honors an outstanding graduate student essay in Africanist anthropology. Contributions from all subfields of anthropology are welcome. Special emphasis seeks to highlight emerging perspectives with promise to develop as a major contribution to the fields of Africanist anthropology, African studies, or African diaspora studies. Submissions should be sent to Bennetta Jules-Rosette (bjulesro@ucsd.edu) by June 15, 2012.

The annual Nancy "Penny" Schwartz Undergraduate Paper Award celebrates the excellence in undergraduate research in Africanist anthropology. Submissions should be sent to JR Osborn (w.h.osborn@gmail.com) by June 15, 2012.

To learn more about AFAA and to find more details about the annual awards, please visit our website at www.aaanet.org/sections/afaa.

Please send photos and column ideas to Jennifer Coffman, James Madison University, coffmaje@jmu.edu.

Association of Black Anthropologists

KAREN G WILLIAMS, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Understanding Food Acquisition under Cuba's Changing Food System

By Hanna Garth (UCLA)

Given that there is virtually no malnutrition in Cuba and people seem to regularly enjoy heaping plates of rice and beans, why did my research participants often say, "there is no food"? Why do Cubans describe the national



food ration, in place now for 50 years, as inadequate and using the food system as a "struggle" even though the monthly food ration provides approximately two weeks' worth of basic food staples at virtually no cost to them? After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba entered a period of economic hardship starting in the 1990s. During my recent fieldwork I found that, in post-Soviet Cuba, services that were once guaranteed by the socialist state had dissolved and have now become the responsibility of individuals. Household members are now forced to do increasing amounts of work to fulfill these services themselves, and they must spend more money (that they must generate in innovative ways as unemployment rates rise) in order to achieve what many perceive to be a lower quality of life. As the number of subsidized foods available decreased, the full-priced foods available have not increased, but the prices have risen with demand. This has fostered a flourishing black market. With the spread of global capitalism, similar shifts are happening all over the world, but in Cuba there are few non-state-based intermediaries. Whereas in neoliberal capitalist settings the state has weakened as corporations have gained increasing power,