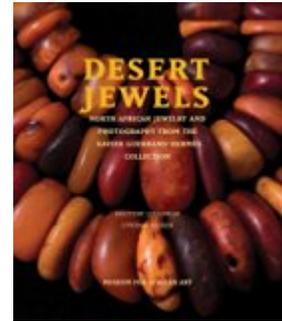


Krystine Loughran, Cynthia Becker. *Desert Jewels: North African Jewelry and Photography from the Xavier Guerrand-Hermès Collection*. New York: Museum for African Art, 2009. Illustrations. 95 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-945802-52-5.

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Published on H-AfrArts (July, 2009)

Commissioned by Jean M. Borgatti



Ornament and Imagery from the Maghreb

Desert Jewels accompanies a traveling exhibition of the same name organized by the Museum for African Art in New York City. The exhibition brings together approximately eighty pieces of jewelry and thirty photographs from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century North Africa, all part of the personal collection of Xavier Guerrand-Hermès. The accompanying catalogue highlights a selection of jewelry from the exhibition in forty-three striking color plates, and includes twenty-four historical photographs. The collections are complemented by informative essays by Kristyne Loughran and Cynthia Becker as well as brief descriptions of jewelry types and catalogue information for each piece or photograph. The volume provides a nice overview of turn-of-the-twentieth-century North African jewelry and photography, and includes some interesting insights about ornament and everyday life as well as colonial-era imagery of North Africa.

The book opens with a foreword by Elsie McCabe Thompson, president of the Museum for African Art, providing some information about the collector and his collection, which was formed over a number of years while Guerrand-Hermès lived in Morocco. Unfortunately for those interested in the process of collection itself, this is the only mention of the collector; little information is given about why he might have chosen particular objects, where and how they were acquired, what his relationship was to other collectors, and so on. Although this does not detract from the scholarly interest of the rest of the

volume, such issues are commonly seen as relevant to a collection's presentation, and it would have been particularly interesting in this case to have more information of this nature in relation to the historic photographs.

The first full essay in the volume, "Jewels in the Dust" by Loughran, provides an interesting overview of the social, historical, and technical aspects of North African jewelry. As most of the pieces in the collection are from Amazigh (Berber) regions, Loughran focuses on the historical development of Amazigh jewelry styles, common techniques, and the idea of a North African aesthetic. Interestingly, Loughran does not strictly separate rural and urban styles, as is often the case in writing on North African arts, arguing instead that the portability of jewelry has resulted in a "cosmopolitan approach to creativity" (p. 9). Although the historical account provides some valuable information on the development of styles and techniques, Loughran does not always question sources as thoroughly as she could have, seeming, for example, to take Orientalist paintings as reliable ethnographic evidence. In addition, throughout the essay, there could have been a tighter connection between the aesthetic and technical aspects discussed and the objects featured in the catalogue.

The other essay, "Photographic Encounters on the North African Stage" by Becker, gives some historical and social background to the photographs assembled in the Guerrand-Hermès collection. These are images from

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and include staged studio portraits, photographs of urban and rural life, and photos of tourists in North Africa. Becker provides an informative account of the development of photography in North Africa, with details about specific photographers and studios. She also tackles sensitively the issue of the colonial gaze, while arguing that these photographs can still provide insights into particular historical moments and elements of daily life, like dress and ornament. The essay is accompanied by twenty-four photographs from the collection, which will be of interest in and of themselves as historical documents, bearing in mind the issues Becker raises about the European interest in an exotic "Orient."

Along with these two essays, the bulk of the catalogue is devoted, rightly, to full-color plates of jewelry from the collection. Most of the images are full-page photographs that convey the beauty and complexity of these pieces and are able to do justice to the variety of

materials and techniques used. Brief descriptions of such different jewelry types as head ornaments, earrings, and necklaces, and of particular pieces provide further information on the social uses of jewelry and decorative elements found in particular regions. Many of the pieces are from Amazigh (Berber) regions, though there are many examples of urban creations as well. For anyone with an interest in North African jewelry the volume is worth perusing solely for the variety of pieces presented; although many will be familiar types, a number of the pieces are less common, including those inscribed in Hebrew or the strikingly unique necklaces from both rural and urban areas.

Taken as a whole, *Desert Jewels* is a valuable contribution to the literature on North African art. The color plates and informative essays provide the reader with a good introduction to North African jewelry and photography, and the volume is particularly welcome given the lack of material published in English on the subject.

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Citation: Lisa Bernasek. Review of Loughran, Krystine; Becker, Cynthia, *Desert Jewels: North African Jewelry and Photography from the Xavier Guerrand-Hermès Collection*. H-AfrArts, H-Net Reviews. July, 2009.

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