

Editorial

Reinventing Anthropological Topics

Soheila Shahshahani

Abstract: In this issue of *AME* you have articles which are within established anthropological topics. What is new in them is first, new data from the field, second, new search within old data, and finally new perspective of researchers from the area. So, while kinship, law, methodology, archaeology remain the pillars of our field, they are “reinvented” through new research by scholars some of whom are from the area. Syria, Iraq, and Iran are presented, and Kordish studies relates to all countries which have a Kord population. Our journal being concerned with culture and not political borders, we include an exquisite article on emblems in Uzbekistan which proves the persistence of cultural similarities in symbols from the Middle East and Central Asia.

Keywords: aesthetics, archaeology, kinship, law, marriage, methodology

I am very pleased that once in a while our issues of *AME* become open-theme issues, allowing scholars who have not worked within a specific subfield of anthropology to send us their articles. Here we make sure that they do not fit within a close future theme issue, and include them. What you have in this collection of articles cover age-old anthropology topics, but are totally new in perspective or topic or data.

Mehmet Orhan's article is a critical study of methodology, theory, epistemology, perspective and power relations. The author, in the crucible of experience, asks seminal questions on an area that has suffered greatly, not only as human life is concerned, but also in regard to political deceptions and a lack of scientific attention paid to it. The author unravels, very calmly and logically with relevant and rich citations, layers of problems that show why the state of research in the area is as it is, and he prepares the way for future research to overcome these problems. This article should become a must on the reading list of students of



not only Kordestân, but of all the Middle East. It makes the student search for his own methodology, perspective, theories and even approach before going to the field, and makes him or her alert to tackle problems of content and formulation of questions and even behavior while in the field.

Among all subfields of anthropology, archaeological news attracts more attention because they help construct world history with its various stages through physical archaeological remains. There is also another important aspect of archaeology that has been paramount ever since the beginning of the twentieth century, and that is the use of archaeological remains to claim a geography, a past, demonstrating when a people have occupied a specific land. Jameel Haque, in his fascinating article, considers archaeology from behind the scenes, delving into how the actual digging, possessing and exporting occur in situ. We see in this article how pecuniary matters, personal reputation, greed and expertise, and institutions and administration get involved. Some objects remain in the country where they were found, but some leave, and we know that they are in museums all over the world and in museum basements or in the hands of individuals to which researchers, particularly local researchers, do not necessarily have access. This article juxtaposes the problem of science and nation building with the problem of possession of archaeological relics.

Azim Malikov shares the results of 14 years of research in his home country, Uzbekistan, on a topic that is very pertinent and complex: religion, kinship and identity. In order to find the identity of a people, geography, language, religion and kinship are studied. But when political changes occur that define identity by nation states and there is also a change in the alphabet of a language, it is difficult to determine identity. This complex situation is what Malikov tries to explore, and he does so through studying sacred lineages of Sayyids and Xojas in Samarqand. This is a very clear and concise article on a very complex subject that can be helpful for those interested in various Central Asian countries and the Turkomans of Iran. Sufi leader Makhdumi A'zam and his descendants and their endogamous marriages get particular attention in this research.

Magdalena Rodziewicz presents a succinct article on an issue that puts the dichotomy of traditional-modern once again under scrutiny. The author takes the debate to couples who live under the same roof without a formal marriage contract in Iran, to discuss the terms used to describe such unions ('white marriage' vs. 'black marriage'), to discuss views of various religious authorities (a range of views from those who call it illegal to those who consider 'the good and pure intentions' sufficient), and to see how the legal notion of 'right to privacy' can protect individuals from punishment. Legal, religious and sociological views are discussed, and the article demonstrates how creatively societies respond to social problems, in their own manner and tempo.

After five years of research in Syria, Emma Findlen LeBlanc returns for another five months in 2013 for research involving 65 interviews with politicians, lawyers, judges, tribal sheikhs, Islamic leaders, fighters and refugees. Her problem, which she poses very clearly, is the opposing views of secular persons

and those upholding *shari'a* laws and regulations. It is very good that this problem, which is felt all over the Middle East to Afghanistan and Pakistan, is shown so clearly in this article by an anthropologist. For secularists, the *shari'a* is out of place and time, and the caricature of hand cutting as punishment is evoked. On the other hand, democracy for the other group is a political structure within institutions that are distant, and can be summarised by elections and votes. Going to a court of law would not be a first choice for overcoming a problem. One would first try solving a problem through one's family, then tribe and finally *shari'a* courts; so local solutions where one had the experience of the location, knew the rules of the game, and could guess possible outcomes were more trustworthy than law courts, which are described as unpredictable, inefficient and even corrupt. The familiarity of *shari'a* and the trust in persons trying to resolve the problem for the people who have to continue to live close to each other seem a more logical choice. LeBlanc's work is theoretically supported, and her experience adds to a possible solution for building a future democracy in Syria, which is why at the beginning of her article she calls it an 'ethnography of a vision'.

It is very daring to try and unravel a preponderance of data on names, toponyms and emblems from the vast region of Central Russia and the Caucasus. This is exactly what Babak Rezvani has undertaken in inductive research. Given his vast and deep knowledge of the area and its history, he arrives at remarkable conclusions. Any part of his research could be developed to study ethnic, class, religion and gender differentiations.

Hadas Hirsch's article is a delightful text to read; it is informative and precise on preferred, permitted or prohibited colours. It shows gendered differentiations through colour in a patriarchal society. Hirsch describes how colour is a culture-dependent symbol, and rebels and tributaries, Christians and Jews at certain times were obliged to use different hues to be recognisable. She even gives the count of colours as they appear in the holy Qor'ân (white, 11 times; green, 6 times; black, 7 times; yellow, 5 times; and red, only once). The meanings of some colours are clear while others are ambivalent, and hues of others can be occasion-dependent. Besides the holy Qor'ân, she also refers to jurisprudence to give further historical examples to which an enormous amount of examples could be added. This text instigates a vast amount of work in history and geography of various Islamic countries to show cultural interpretations of texts.

This issue "Reinventing Anthropological Topics" looks at kinship, but at white marriages, it looks at archaeology, but behind museum shelves, it looks critically at methodology, it considers *shari'a* courts as a possibility for the future, it finds *raison d'être* for sacred lineages after communism and in a liberal system, it takes emblems and identity markers of the past into the future. While this issue has been a continuation of anthropological topics at large, it has been enriched by new data and new perspectives. Every open-theme issue takes a new title, as our other open-theme issues have had different central interests.