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### ITINERANT OBJECTS

#### *The Legal Lives of Levantine Artifacts*

MORAG M. KERSEL

#### OBJECTS, LIVES, ITINERARIES, AND LAW

In 1986, Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff asked us to consider the “social lives of things” – arguing that objects are not static but wander in and out of different classifications of value and use over their duration. Initially focused on notions of commodification, value, and exchange, object biographies and the ideas of artifacts with lives and agency are usefully explored and employed (see, e.g., Winner 1980; Latour 1992; Mark 1994; Riggins 1994; Weiner 1994; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Dobres and Robb 2000; Knappett and Malafouris 2008; Dannehl 2009; Knappett 2013; Burström 2014; Maeir et al. 2015; and Robb 2015). Rather than a detailed account of the object and its constituent parts, biographies are used to reveal the relationships between objects and people (Gosden and Marshall 1999), to understand the process of commodification and modes of exchange (Kopytoff 1986), and to explain societal organization and human processes (Burström 2014). A variety of methods, including archaeological excavation and analyses, archival research, and ethnography have been used to reconstruct the lives of artifacts. While the paradigm persists, there has been critique and subsequent reconsideration. Jody Joy suggests that a basic issue that prehistoric archaeologists have with object biographies is the quality of information available: “Put simply, unless the object under scrutiny has a recorded history, the evidence available is not sufficient to reconstruct a full life history, with a birth, life and death” (2009: 543). The best possible

outcome for a prehistoric artifact is analogous evidence for production and contextual evidence of death, raising yet another issue with object biography: What constitutes death in this lifespan approach to reconstructing the past life of an artifact? Cornelius Holtorf (2002) proposes that in order to create a biography it may be necessary to work in reverse from death to production. In the edited volume of Hans Peter Hahn and Hadas Weiss (2013), authors highlight the shortcomings of object biography reasoning, which places the lifespan of an object on a straight path of a beginning, middle, and end. The desire to follow a pot from the ground to the consumer may assume a linear trajectory of production, distribution, and consumption (see Kersel 2006); however, the reality is a far more convoluted, enmeshed jumble of movement – a trip, which “traces the strings of places where objects come to rest or are active, the routes through which things circulate, and the means by which they are moved (Joyce and Gillespie 2015: 3).

In reaction to the concept of an object biography, scholars have expanded the trope to include a more comprehensive approach to the life and movement of objects, augmenting or even replacing the biography with an itinerary (see the examples in Joy 2009; 2015; Hahn and Weiss 2013; Mitcham 2013; and Joyce and Gillespie [eds.] 2015). Contributions to *Things in Motion: Object Itineraries in Anthropological Practice*, edited by Rosemary Joyce and Susan Gillespie, illustrate that the intertwined webs of objects and their movements are anything but straight, as there can be periods of stasis (Knappett 2013) and/or extensive movement. Routes suggest a journey, which may be without end and involve periods of non-movement. These trips may be filled with gaps, fragmented, and never ending.

Examining the itineraries of things requires consideration of technologies for circulation; of *impediments and facilitators to movement*; of natural and cultural transformations along the way; of whether objects travel intact or incomplete, with others or alone; of the landscapes that result from the places linked through their travels; and of value of circulating objects for the production and reshaping of cultural relations that separate people, as well as for those that connect persons, places, and things across space and time. (Joyce and Gillespie 2015: 12 [emphasis added])

Laws and policies are created to facilitate and/or impede the movement of objects and as such are integral to the itinerary of a thing (Kersel 2017). As part of the bundling described by Webb Keane (2006: 201), “things always contain properties in excess of those which have been interpreted and made use of under given circumstances”; yet, rarely is law a factor in the analyses of an object’s biography and itinerary.

An examination of ceramic vessels from Early Bronze Age (3600–2000 BCE) sites along the Dead Sea Plain in Jordan resulted in the notion that these

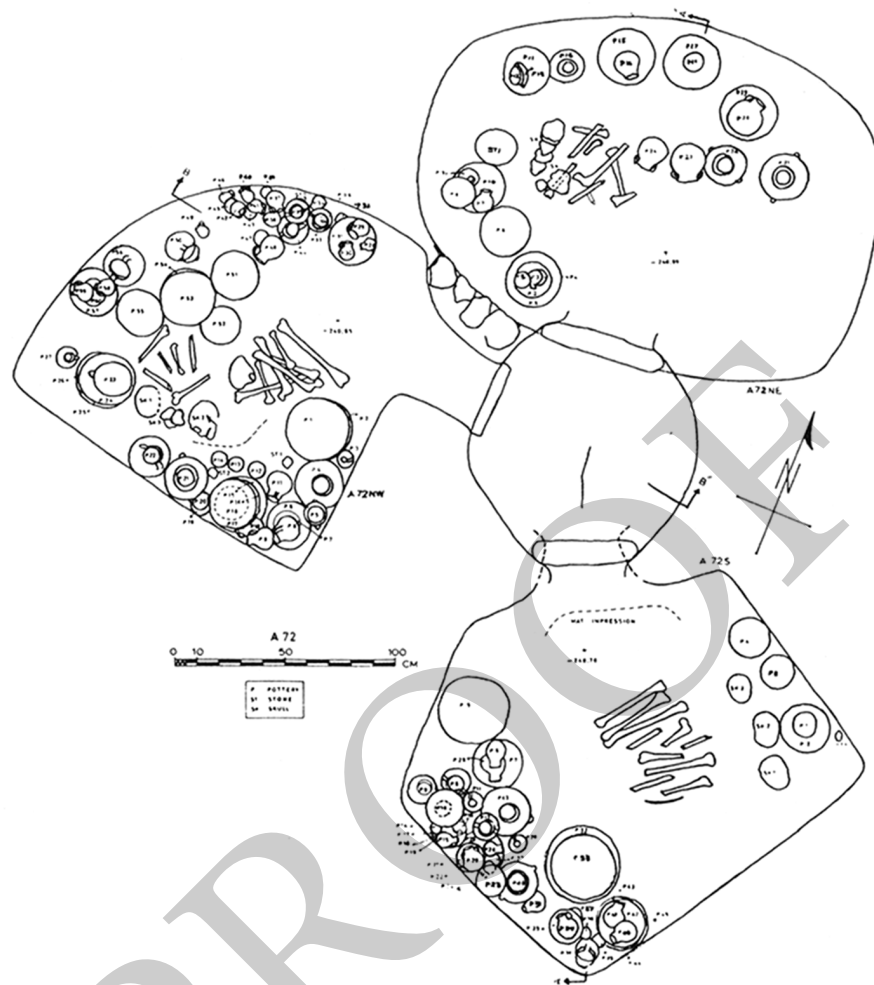
vessels have extensive itineraries that are continually impacted by law. In their initial creation, varied uses, later deposition, unearthing, changing hands, crossing borders, and eventual final resting place in a collection, law affects a single pot at each stage of movement. *Follow the Pots* (<http://followthepotsproject.org/>) is interested in the lives and itineraries of Early Bronze Age pots from the graves of Bab adh-Dhra' and Fīfa. These ceramic vessels have led lives as grave goods buried with various Early Bronze Age individuals; as excavated archaeological artifacts and the object of scientific inquiry; as looted objects, clandestinely excavated to fulfill a variety of motivations; as collected items highly prized by individuals and institutions (foreign and local); and as exhibited material on display in academic institutions, museums, and private homes. Using Joy's (2009; 2015) notion of a relational perspective to the examination of an object, the following is an ontological approach to the thing as it changes over time, takes various paths, and is affected and moved by external forces.

I want to extend Joy's (2015) thinking about objects and their lives by suggesting that the biography of an Early Bronze Age pot is comprised of its relationships with humans and law. "Objects are not just a product of society they are fundamental to it" (Thomas 1996: 141), and their morphing lives and itineraries make an examination of the lives of pots essential to our understanding of the past in the present. While the perfect path of a pot might have been to remain as a buried grave good with an ancient ancestor, by articulating the legal movement of a pot as a travel itinerary with a series of stops constituting the main stages in the life of a pot, it is possible to reconstruct how the various historic and contemporary legislative and policy efforts have shaped the life of a thing and, in turn, shaped our lives. Through the lens of law, the following will combine an examination of the biographies and the itineraries of Early Bronze Age pots from the Dead Sea Plain, Jordan.

#### THE LEGAL ITINERARY OF AN EARLY BRONZE AGE POT FROM TOMB GROUP A 72NW

##### *Legal Itinerary Segment 1 – Pots are Placed with People in Shaft Tomb A 72NW*

During the Early Bronze Age (EB) IA (3600–3200 BCE) at the site of Bab adh-Dhra' (see Fig. 9.1) along the Dead Sea Plain in Jordan, hundreds of individuals were buried in single and multi-chambered shaft tombs. In Shaft Tomb A 72NW (Fig. 32.1), the skulls and long bones (secondary burial remains) of at least three individuals were buried in one of three chambers of an irregularly rounded shaft tomb (Schaub and Rast 1989: 132). Unusual in construction, the tomb had one rounded and two angular walls with squared corners (see Fig. 32.1). The thick stone slab blocking the tomb was not quite large enough



32.1. Plan of Bab adh-Dhra' Shaft Tomb A 72 (from Schaub and Rast 1989: fig. 76). (Courtesy of the Expedition to the Dead Sea Plain Project.)

to seal the entrance, necessitating the use of pebbled plaster to fill in the cracks. The burial consisted of a central disarticulated bone pile in the center of the tomb on a reed mat (traces of a mat impression were evident). A minimum number of three people (complete skulls of two adults and a third fragmentary skull of a child) were buried with the typical mortuary toolkit of the Early Bronze Age (EB) IA: two basalt bowls, some carnelian beads, two limestone mace-heads, and sixty-three ceramic vessels. The majority of vessels were made of fine ware with thin walls and a reddish-orange slip, some burnished. Ceramic shapes included with the dead were wide deep bowls, small deep bowls, large ledge-handled jars, medium-sized loop-handled jars and loop-handled juglets (Fig. 32.2). Meredith Chesson has proposed that a few of the forms have close parallels in the Jericho Proto-Urban A tombs, but similar



32.2. A typical Early Bronze Age tomb group from Bab adh-Dhra' in the Royal Ontario Museum collection (reg. no. A 12). (Photo by M. M. Kersel, (with permission from the Royal Ontario Museum.)

groups, especially with the distinctive ware and decoration, are not yet known outside of the Bab adh-Dhra' area (1999; 2015).

Excavations by Paul Lapp in 1965 and 1966 and subsequent analyses by Chesson, R. Thomas Schaub, and Walter Rast suggest that there is little evidence for a permanent, full-scale domestic occupation of Bab adh-Dhra' during the EB IA. Data recorded by Lapp and further interpreted by Chesson, Rast, and Schaub support a seasonal or temporary campsite explanation for the archaeological remains in the eastern area of the Cemetery A (<http://expeditiondeadseaplain.org/>). This lack of permanent EB IA habitation evidence led to the conclusion that during EB IA the utilization pattern of the region was temporary. Periodic returns by pastoral groups to rebury their dead in an established burial ground seem likely (Chesson 1999; 2015; Schaub and Rast 1989). The occasional articulated burials recovered during the years of excavation at Bab adh-Dhra' can best be explained as associated with deaths that occurred during these visits or may belong to the end of this period when permanent occupation began (Chesson 1999; 2015). Despite the lack of written records, it is clear from the archaeological record that over the span of centuries at Bab adh-Dhra' people buried the dead in a particular manner with a particular mortuary toolkit (Baker 2012; Kersel and Chesson 2013). The purpose of these associated goods is unknown – perhaps they were intended for use in an afterlife? These lacunae in our understanding of the function of such artifacts reinforce Joy's (2009) assertion regarding problems encountered

by prehistorians when reconstructing the biographies of objects. Clearly, during the Early Bronze Age, people brought their dead and the associated grave goods to the cemeteries at Bab adh-Dhra', an-Naqa, and Fifa (see Fig. 9.1). Presumably, these people did not envision that the burial vessels might be disinterred and redistributed but expected them to remain in Shaft Tomb A 72NW. What is not clear is whether they were following directives proscribed by traditional law on where and how to bury the dead during this period.

*Legal Itinerary Segment 2 – Scenario A: The Pots are Discovered in the 1920s*

The mortuary goods buried with the dead in Shaft Tomb A 72NW remained undisturbed until the early 1920s, when William F. Albright and Alexis Mallon report the first incidents of looting at Bab adh-Dhra' (Albright 1924; Mallon 1924). During a survey of the southern Ghors carried out as part of a search for the biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, "Père Mallon discovered some cairns which the Arabs had opened, disclosing pottery of the Early Bronze Age" (Albright 1924: 6; Mallon 1924). While surveying, Albright and Mallon came into contact with these Early Bronze Age pots lying on the surface of the site, unearthed during looting. Their work was authorized under the legal permission of the British Mandate agent in charge of archaeology in Transjordan during this period. Between 1921 and 1946 (the latter is the date of the establishment of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan), Transjordan was closely tied to the British Mandate government and its laws (Corbett 2015). "Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Riza Tewfik Bey, former professor of Philosophy in the University of Constantinople and for a time Minister of Education in the Turkish Government, now Director of Antiquities in Transjordan, everything went smoothly and we were treated with courtesy and consideration by all the officials with whom we came into contact" writes Albright (1924: 3) in his account of the trip to the southern Ghors. British Mandate ordinances and rules are based directly on a succession of earlier Ottoman laws (1869, 1874, 1884 [see Shaw 2003; Kersel 2008; Özel 2010; Çelik 2011; 2016; and Eldem 2011]). This sequence of Ottoman legislative efforts was in response to increasing foreign archaeological interest in the area, the excavation of some high-profile sites and monuments, and the looting of archaeological material from the empire. Thus, it emphasized heavily the regulation of the movement of artifacts and monuments.

Prior to 1869, all governance of cultural heritage in the Ottoman Empire was based on Islamic law and local jurisprudence. The 1869 Turkish Bylaw on Antiquities (*Asar-ı Atika Nizam-namesi*) provided the first formalized "procedural and legal structure to regulate search, extraction, possession, and preservation of antiquities" (Eldem 2011: 314). The bylaw consisted of seven articles,

which established a series of requirements related to archaeology, artifacts, monuments, museums, and sites. Appearing first in the official Ottoman gazette (*Takvim-i Vekayi*) on February 13, 1869, and then in the foreign-language press the following month, the bylaw stated:

1. The new regulation requires that henceforth application for permission to excavate in any part of the empire shall be made to the Department of Public Instruction (under whose charge the Museum is to be placed); and
2. Prohibits the exportation to foreign countries of any antiquities (ancient coins excepted) found in the course of such excavations, though they may be sold to private individuals resident in the empire, or purchased by the state.
3. Objects found on private property shall belong to the owner of the soil.
4. The right to remove antiquities is limited to such as are below the surface of the ground.
5. Those who disturb or damage memorials on the surface will be proceeded against.
6. Permission officially applied for by a foreign power can only be granted by special imperial written edict.
7. The last article provides for archaeological explorations at the expense of the state by persons competent to undertake such works, and those who are possessed of information calculated to promote the object in view are invited to communicate with the minister of public instruction. (*Levant Times and Shipping Gazette*, March 22, 1869, English summary of the 1869 Turkish Bylaw on Antiquities [Eldem 2011: 314])

Subsequent laws (1874, 1884, 1906) governing archaeology in the Ottoman Empire were based on this initial bylaw but added provisions. Edhem Eldem (2011: 282) suggests that the earlier 1869 bylaw may seem inconsequential in the development of cultural heritage legislation and policy, but it laid the groundwork for greater ministerial/museum oversight of cultural material and the future formation of a national ownership provision (Donkow 2004; Kersel 2010; Özel 2010; Eldem 2011). Using the 1869 bylaw as a springboard, the Ottoman authorities in Constantinople issued a series of laws, *Reglement sur les antiquities*, in 1874 [1874 law] that sought to regulate further the movement of artifacts, clearly articulating the principle of *partage* – the division of archaeological finds between the foreign excavators, the state, and the landowner. If, during the nineteenth century, an object was scientifically excavated from one of the Early Bronze Age sites along the Dead Sea, the pot could now be housed in Boston, Chicago, London, Melbourne, or Toronto as part of a *partage* arrangement. Or it could have been deemed “not needed for the national repository” and released to the thriving legal market in antiquities throughout the Ottoman Empire.

In the waning days of empire, the Ottoman government adopted a new law related to archaeology and antiquities. The 1906 decree took the national ownership provision further by declaring that all antiquities found in or on public or *private* lands were the property of the state and could not be taken out of country. As a result, “all newly discovered antiquities became state property by operation of law, *ipso jure*, at the time of discovery and no further act of acquisition was needed by the Ottoman government” (Özel 2010: 179). Personally held antiquities found prior to 1906 were grandfathered under the law and remained private property, sometimes making their way into the legal antiquities markets (see Kersel 2008; Çelik 2011; and Eldem 2011).

With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the region comprising modern Israel, Jordan, and Palestine was ceded to the British after World War I, and the League of Nations passed The Palestine Mandate of the League of Nations in June 1922. The British Mandate period, often referred to as the “Golden Age of Archaeology,” saw the establishment of an efficient, centralized colonial government and the improvement of transportation and communications throughout the region, as it became one of the most active centers of excavation and archaeological research in the world (see Silberman 1998; Bernhardsson 2005; Goode 2007; and Corbett 2015). The changes in oversight meant that the area Albright and Mallon surveyed in 1924 was under the jurisdiction of the British Mandate government. In their initial days of statehood, most postcolonial entities did not alter the basic institutional arrangements of colonial law and administration, which in this context resulted in British Mandate laws and ordinances retaining many of the characteristics of the earlier Ottoman laws and bylaws (Chatterjee 1993). In one of its first actions, the British Mandate government circulated an antiquities proclamation and then the 1920 Antiquities Ordinance, noting the importance of cultural heritage in the region and regulating archaeological excavations and surveys.

Under the conditions of their survey permit, based on the 1920 ordinance, it was legal for Albright and Mallon to pick up material from the ground in their survey area. As part of the itinerary of a pot from Shaft Tomb A 72NW, one of the vessels lying on the surface due to looting may have been collected by Mallon and Albright and now may reside in a permanent collection in Jerusalem, the United States, or France. However, if the pot was not picked up as part of the 1924 survey, it may have passed through numerous hands over the years, which could include local acquisition by a looter for sale to a middleman, collector, foreigner, or museum.

In the 1920s, traveling from person-to-person or institution-to-institution, the Early Bronze Age vessel may have been subject to the 1929 Antiquities Ordinance of the newly established Department of Antiquities. Under this ordinance, the selling and buying of antiquities in Transjordan and Palestine

was well articulated. The 1930 Antiquities Rules outlined formal procedures for excavation, survey, interpretation, the licensed trade in antiquities, and institutional acquisition of artifacts from this region. Jordanian families who had been in the antiquities business for decades were now required to apply and pay for a license to sell antiquities. This ordinance preserved many of the structural features, as well substantive policies, of the earlier Ottoman legislative efforts (Kersel 2015a; Taha 2010), creating a sense of legal continuity related to the management of cultural heritage.

*Legal Itinerary Segment 3 – Scenario B: Paul Lapp Excavations in 1965 and 1967*

In an alternate scenario, the mortuary goods buried with the Early Bronze Age ancestors remained undisturbed on the reed mat in Shaft Tomb A 72NW in Cemetery A. In response to a 1964 report asserting that the major source for the recent influx of Early Bronze Age vessels for sale in the antiquities shops in Jerusalem was the cemetery at Bab adh-Dhra', Paul Lapp (1966) mounted a rescue excavation at the site. In the late 1950s, Lapp, an archaeologist and director of the Jerusalem School of the American Schools of Oriental Research (now, the W. F. Albright Institute for Archaeological Research), noted a trickle, a stream, and then, by the mid-1960s, a flood of Early Bronze Age pots in the Jerusalem antiquities market (Lapp 1968; Saller 1964–1965). The unique pots were identified as coming from one of the Dead Sea Plain sites in the modern state of Jordan. During the 1965 campaign, Lapp excavated the northwest chamber of Shaft Tomb A 72, recovering one basalt bowl, two limestone mace-heads, a few carnelian beads, and sixty-three pots. He registered one of the buff-colored craters (Fig. 32.3) as no. 91431, noting that it had four rounded knobs and some decoration.

In 1946, British Mandate rule was nearing its end and the independent Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was recognized. The first formal law enacted by the Jordanian state regarding antiquities was in 1953, which maintained many of the basic principles of the precursor Ottoman laws and British Mandate ordinances. The Antiquities Order No. 1 of 1953 [1953 law] laid the conditions for a sale in antiquities, as well as a permitting process for the excavation of sites and detailed a system of *partage* (Kersel 2015b). Under the 1953 law (part II), the Jordanian government could issue an excavation license to an applicant, and the pots recovered from these Early Bronze Age sites could be transferred out of Jordan as part of a division of excavated materials (*partage*). *Partage* artifacts remaining in Jordan that were not required for the national collection could be sold on the legal antiquities market in Amman. An excavated pot from Bab adh-Dhra' could be in an educational study collection, a museum, a private collection, a licensed antiquities shop (duplicate material could be sold by a licensed agent of the state on the legal antiquities market), or



32.3. Early Bronze Age vessel (Schaub and Rast 1989: fig. 85:1, reg. no. 91431 = OIM A35331) at The Oriental Institute from Bab adh-Dhra' Tomb Group A 72NW. (Photo by M. M. Kersel, with permission from the Oriental Institute.)

in a storeroom, awaiting study, analysis, and eventual publication. The excavated pots from Shaft Tomb A 72NW were placed in storage in Amman.

In 1970, Lapp died in a swimming accident off the coast of Cyprus, leaving the pots from Shaft Tomb A 72NW in limbo. Nancy Lapp, Paul's widow, was faced with thousands of vessels in storage after inheriting his legacy collections. In an archival letter from David McCreery (an archaeologist based in Amman) to Edward Campbell (ASOR representative), McCreery outlined an assessment of the stored pots in Amman. McCreery suggested the collection inventory was inadequate, that some of the pots were "missing," and the artifacts were at risk (David McCreery to Edward Campbell, Nancy Lapp, and R. Thomas Schaub, September 2, 1977, Nancy Lapp correspondence). Further correspondence between N. Lapp and the staff from the Jordanian Department of Antiquities indicated that storage space in Amman was at a premium, and tomb groups like Tomb Group A 72NW needed a "new home" (Nancy Lapp to Adnan Hadidi of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, September 23, 1977, Nancy Lapp correspondence).

In response to the precarious storage situation of the Early Bronze Age pots, the Jordanian Department of Antiquities and ASOR (the Paul Lapp excavation sponsors) came up with an usual stage in the itinerary of the pots from Shaft Tomb A 72NW. In a December 1977 letter to The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago, N. Lapp offered, on behalf of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities and ASOR, to sell Bab adh-Dhra' tomb group

A 72NW for the purposes of display and education (Nancy Lapp to The Oriental Institute, December 26, 1977, Nancy Lapp correspondence). Even though Jordanian Temporary Law N.12 of 1976 on Antiquities banned the trade in antiquities, the government could permit the transfer/sale of such material. This legal movement of pots satisfied a demand for teaching materials, freed up valuable storage space, and allowed the pots to increase interest in Jordanian archaeology, thus encouraging cooperative archaeological efforts between the United States and Jordan. The objects were to act as ambassadors on behalf of Jordan (Adnan Hadidi, the director of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, to Nancy Lapp, August 15, 1977, Nancy Lapp correspondence). In the spring of 1978, The Oriental Institute acquired Tomb Group A 72NW, paying \$6 USD per pot.

The pot traveled from the storage facility in Amman to the collection of The Oriental Institute. As of 2018, the pot (see Fig. 32.3) from Shaft Tomb A 72NW remains a part of The Oriental Institute collection. After acquiring it in 1978, it was assigned Oriental Institute accession number OIM A35331, which corresponds to fig. 85:1 registration no. 91431 in the 1989 publication of the Lapp excavations at Bab adh-Dhra' by Schaub and Rast. Between April 3 and May 13, 2017, the pot (OIM A35331) was part of an exhibit about the ancient and modern movement of Early Bronze Age pots at the Neubauer Collegium at The University of Chicago. While an unconventional stage in the life of a thing, the controlled distribution of tomb groups permitted the Jordanians to decide how and where their cultural heritage was displayed and accessed in the public domain allowing for greater contact with the material culture of the Early Bronze Age of Jordan.

*Legal Itinerary Segment 5 – Scenario C: A Pot from Shaft Tomb  
A 72NW Sold in the Market Place in Jordan*

Between 1965 and 1974, a Bab adh-Dhra' pot – one of a 1,000 excavated by P. Lapp – might not be considered necessary for the national repository, perhaps considered redundant (Bisheh 2001), and could legitimately make its way onto the legal antiquities markets in Amman. Demand, by both locals and tourists was vigorous, but 1974 saw a tightening of restrictions for the movement of archaeological materials with Jordan's ratification of the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property 1970 (also referred to as the 1970 UNESCO Convention). In ratifying this convention, Jordan agreed to abide by the principles outlined in the document and to aid other countries in preventing the illegal movement of archaeological objects. At the same time, other member states agreed to protect against the illegal importation of Jordanian material across their borders. While the 1970 UNESCO Convention is not a law, it is a

customary form of agreement between member states to protect against the illegal export/import of artifacts. Pots looted from the Early Bronze Age sites and illegally exported were now subject to seizure at the borders of the countries that had also implemented provisions of the 1970 UNESCO Convention.

The Temporary Law No. 12 of 1976 on Antiquities [1976 law] and the later Jordanian *Antiquities Law No. 21* of 1988 (amended in 2004) along with the Regulations for Archaeological Projects in Jordan of 2015 make excavating without the permission of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities illegal. Any undiscovered artifacts below ground belong to the state (the people of Jordan). Additionally, the 1976 law banned the legal trade of antiquities in Jordan, but the Early Bronze Age sites were (and are) still being looted and pots were (and are) still leaving the country illegally. Many of the looted items are for sale in the legally sanctioned Israeli antiquities market. In examining the biographies and itineraries of these objects, it is clear that they have legal and illegal stages, which constitute elements of their life stories. What kind of trip does a pot take to get from the ground in Jordan to the consumer in Israel?

*Legal Itinerary Segment 6 – Scenario D: A Pot Illegally Excavated from Shaft Tomb A 72NW Sold on the Antiquities Market in Israel*

In an different set of circumstances for Shaft Tomb A 72NW instead of a systematic excavation by Paul Lapp, a looter made his way to Bab adh-Dhra' in the spring of 2014, armed with the standard tools (Fig. 32.4) – a long metal prod, a shovel, a flashlight, and a bucket. Using the metal prod, he poked holes in the surface until it hit a stone with a thud – a limestone slab indicating a burial chamber. Taking up a shovel, the looter dug down into the shaft until he came upon a chamber entrance. After pushing aside the long bones and skulls and leaving the undesirable mace-heads and carnelian beads, he recovered sixty-three pots and two basalt bowls. The removal of the pots without an excavation permit from the Jordanian Department of Antiquities is illegal. Under these conditions the items are not destined for academic study, but instead the itinerary of this pot may be dangerous, nonlinear, and precarious. Ethnographic interviews with looters reveal that while their motivations for looting are varied (boredom, employment, looking for gold), the end result is often the same – “big black cars from Amman and/or Kerak come to the sites and buy the pots for \$4–7 USD” (Looters 3 and 15).<sup>1</sup>

Once in Amman, the pots may end up in private Jordanian collections, or they may be transferred to the legal market in Israel, traveling by back pack, in shipping containers, diplomatic vehicles and pouches, United Nations aid trucks, or by plane across an international border (see Kersel 2006). Illegally excavated artifacts often travel in the same well-established networks as arms, drugs, and humans (Efrat 2012). Global statistics on border inspections indicate



32.4. Looters' tools at the Early Bronze Age site of Fifa. (Photo by M. M. Kersel.)

that approximately less than 10 percent of all material is stopped and checked, allowing for the movement of illegal material (Naím 2005). In a recent border interdiction at the King Hussein Bridge between Jordan and Israel, a car from the Norwegian Embassy was stopped and searched, based on an anonymous tip (Ben Zion 2016). During the incident, “[c]ustoms officials found 10 kilograms of ancient coins, statuettes, beads and other artifacts stowed in cardboard containers inside the car’s paneling” (Ben Zion 2016). This search and seizure confirmed over ten years of ethnographic research on the movement of archaeological materials in diplomatic vehicles.

In Israel, the looted pots are assigned a registry number through a complex laundering process and can be legally sold and exported outside of the country (Kersel 2006). In 1948, like Jordan, the newly formed state of Israel adopted the existing British Mandate antiquities ordinances and rules regarding the care and handling of cultural heritage. It was some thirty years later that a new antiquities law was passed in order to protect archaeological monuments, sites, and objects. While Jordan rid themselves of the colonial influence of a state-sanctioned trade in antiquities in favor of laws curtailing the movement of objects outside of the new borders, Israel’s Antiquities Law 5738 (1978) included a provision and guidelines for a legally licensed trade in antiquities (see Kersel 2008; 2010). Under the 1978 law, it is illegal to excavate any archaeological site without the permission of the relevant government agency, the IAA, established under Antiquities Authority Law 5749 (1989). Unfortunately, the 1978 law created a nonsensical situation where the illegal



32.5. Buff-colored Early Bronze Age pots. (Photo by M. M. Kersel.)

excavation of antiquities is prohibited by law; however, the same law permits the legal sale of antiquities, even though some antiquities originate from illegal excavations in Jordan, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and elsewhere.

Under the 1978 law, it is legal to sell, buy, and export artifacts in IAA-authorized shops. In order to comply with the licensing requirements, the dealer (Israelis and Palestinians) is required to submit an inventory of each item in their holdings, which should be comprised of pre-1978 dealer inventories, museum deaccessions, or inherited collections, which are grandfathered as eligible for sale. Until recently, the registry was typically a handwritten ledger or an Excel spreadsheet with vague descriptions of items like “buff colored pot” (Fig. 32.5), accompanied by an often hastily taken, blurry image. A tourist visiting a licensed shop (most of which are in the Old City) is mainly concerned with questions of authenticity: Is the pot real? Is it from the Dead Sea Plain in Jordan? Buyers assume that because they are making a purchase in a state-licensed shop they are required to do nothing further as part of the transaction. Unclear in the process is the need for an export license to take the artifact outside of the country. Due to a poorly worded aspect of the 1978 law, the onus is on the tourist to ask the dealer for the export permit, which lists the items and their registry numbers. In order to receive an export license for a particular object, the dealer contacts the IAA with the registry number of each item being sold, and the IAA issues a license. If the tourist does not ask for the export license, and the dealer does not offer, the artifact leaves the shop, and there is no record of the sale. If there is no request for an export license and no

record of the sale, the original registry number can be reused for a similar “buff-colored pot” allowing recently looted material to be laundered and to enter the closed system in Israel. In order to close this gap in the 1978 law, the IAA instituted additional licensing guidelines in 2016, which required all licensed dealers to document their entire inventories online. Under this new rule, licensed antiquities dealers have to allocate every single artifact an identification number and associated picture, which will be stored in an electronic database with the IAA. Requiring an image to be attached to individual registry numbers should make it more difficult to launder newly excavated pieces with ambiguous descriptions and fuzzy images.

Back to our object itinerary, the Early Bronze Age pot from Bab adh-Dhra‘, illegally excavated in 2014, traveled from the Dead Sea Plain to the window of a licensed shop in Israel via a big black car, was issued a “used” registry number, and given a label indicating that it is from the age of the patriarchs and matriarchs (Fig. 32.6) and available for purchase. The itinerary of the pot does not end in the storefront. On a steamy August afternoon in 2014, an Australian tourist (Tourist 67) decides they have to have a pot from the “city of sin” (recall earlier that Bab adh-Dhra‘ has been tentatively identified as biblical Sodom [Albright 1924: 6; Mallon 1924]). For \$120 USD, the visitor buys the pot, asks for and receives an IAA export license with a distinct registry number, and then travels back to Melbourne. He is disappointed at both the airports in Israel and Australia that he is not asked to produce the export license allowing him to take the pot out of



32.6. Early Bronze Age pot from the “age of the patriarchs and matriarchs” in a Jerusalem shop window. (Photo by M. M. Kersel.)

the country. The pot now sits on the bookshelf in the home office of the tourist where he looks at it often, reminding him of a “very hot day in the Old City of Jerusalem” (Tourist 67).

*Legal Itinerary Segment 7 – Object Death and the Journey’s End?*

In his consideration of the lives of things, John Robb (2015: 167) attempts to refocus the discussion by asking “what social task are they [things] intended to accomplish, and what characteristics (material and otherwise) enable them to do it?” This chapter expands Robb’s thinking by demonstrating the impact that law has in determining the duties of things and in facilitating the carrying out of those duties. An 1874 Ottoman law allowed for unearthed objects to travel beyond the extent of empire in order to fill the coffers of museums. A 1976 Jordanian law encouraged objects to act as ambassadors on behalf of the kingdom by facilitating their transfer to educational institutions across the globe. A loophole in a 1978 Israeli law meant that a stage in the itinerary of an Early Bronze Age pot could be as a looted item legitimately presented for sale in a licensed shop with a reused registry number and available for purchase and export by individuals and institutions alike. A single pot can and does travel far and wide, movement that is facilitated, enhanced, or, at times, impeded by law.

An examination of the object biographies and itineraries of Early Bronze Age pots from Jordan allows for the simultaneous consideration of many life-stages or travel segments over a span of millennia. This enables what Joy (2015) refers to as a thicker analysis, turning the life of a thing into a rich narrative rather than a clinical listing of attributes. There is a durability and persistence of objects (Joy 2015) that allows them to move in and out of spaces, imbuing them with particular meanings and functions. Objects lay dormant, disappear, are reused, change contexts – their lives are filled with holes; for many, there is no direct progression from beginning, to middle, to end. While we may be able to argue for greater conformity at creation by the last stage in the life of a thing, there exists the greatest variation (Dannehl 2009). In its final resting place, a single Early Bronze Age pot can be a grave good, an excavated artifact, a looted object, a museum exhibit, an object of study, or a tourism memento. When they reach their final resting places on bookshelves, in museum vitrines, in shaft tombs next to ancient ancestors, is the journey at an end? There is still room for debate on the notion of itinerant objects and their relationships to durability, stasis, continuity, agency, and law.

NOTE

- 1 Interviews were conducted after receiving Institutional Review Approval from the Ethics Review Boards at the University of Cambridge (2002–6), the University of

Toronto (2007–9), Brown University (2009–10), and DePaul University (2010–present). Interviewees agreed to participate on the condition of anonymity and were each assigned aliases (i.e., Looter 7, Dealer 19, Tourist 95). Any direct citations are in quotes and attributed to that alias.

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