

# Asian Culinary Magic, Visual Journeys, and Afghan *Buzkashi*

FROM  
BANGKOK  
TO *BUZKASHI*

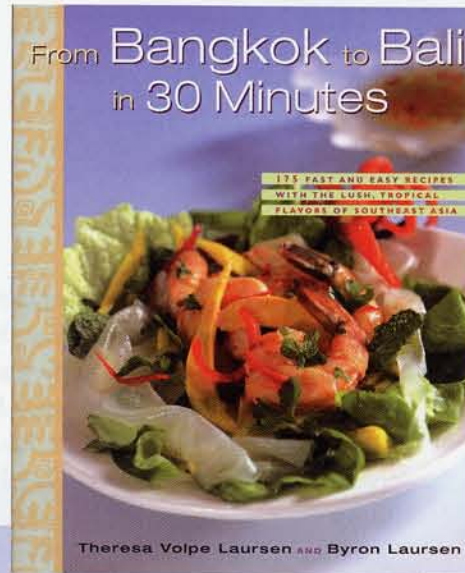
FOR THOSE WHO ENJOY the delicate combinations of herbs and spices that are hallmarks of Asian cuisine or for those interested in expanding their cooking repertoire, this is a cookbook worth adding to your collection. In *From Bangkok to Bali in 30 Minutes*, authors Theresa Volpe Laursen and Byron Laursen have successfully adapted the essentials of Asian cooking to the harried lifestyle of many Americans.

Popular dishes such as Tom Kha Kai (Thai Chicken and Coconut

Soup), Night Market Noodles, Malay Chili Shrimp, and Spicy Stir-Fried Cashews are among the 175 easy-to-follow recipes, which fall within the 30-minute parameter of the title. A chapter on the Asian pantry serves as a comprehensive introduction to ingredients required in Asian cooking; while sections on sauces, pastes, and condiments provide recipes for the accoutrements used in all successful Asian meals.

Although purists may be surprised by a few adaptations to traditional Asian cuisine (such as Chicken and Fennel with Thai Green Curry and Basil), others will delight in the authors' fresh and innovative approach to cooking. Desserts are a case in point; the authors have combined subtle flavors reminiscent of Asia with comfort food in their Jasmine Rice Pudding with Coconut Cream and Saigon Cinnamon, and their recipe for Baked Apples provides a satisfying Asian accent to another American standard.

*Judy C. Voelker is a research assistant for the Thai Archaeometallurgy Project (TAP) in MASCA. She has participated on archaeological excavations in Thailand since 1993 and lived in a Thai village from 1997 to 1999 while conducting ethnoarchaeological research.*



**BOOK TITLE**

*From Bangkok to Bali in 30 Minutes*, by Theresa Volpe Laursen and Byron Laursen (Boston: The Harvard Common Press, 2003), 304 pp., cloth (\$29.95), ISBN 1558322345, paper (\$14.95), ISBN 1558322353.

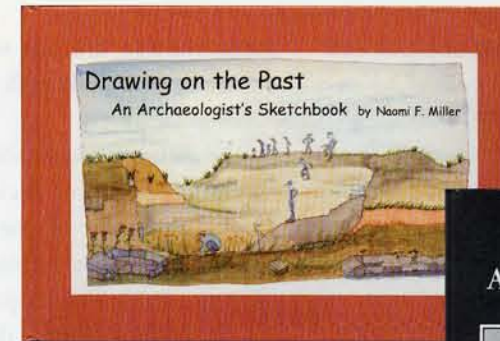
Reviewed by Judy C. Voelker

FRENCH POET, ESSAYIST, AND CRITIC, Paul Valery, who devoted his life to crafting meaning through words, has said, "to see is to forget the name of the thing one sees." Why then do anthropologists of all subfields, trained as we are to observe, exchange our most cherished currency — ideas — primarily through the written word? Academic convention has required words because, by their very nature as arbitrary symbols infused with culturally specific meaning, words provide us with a vehicle for testing shared meaning. When we see, words disappear, opening new ways of knowing; but these are highly individualistic and personal.

Two recent publications of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, Naomi Miller's *Drawing on the Past: An Archaeologist's Sketchbook*, and Alessandro Pezzati's *Adventures in Photography: Expeditions of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology*, bring the reader/viewer into worlds unknowable through the traditional medium of language.

Miller's book is a delightful, colorful, slender, volume that fits perfectly into the hands for an intimate read, much the way

the original Beatrix Potter stories fit into the hands of a small child. This book is a hybrid between an illustrated journal and a coffee table art book. The book is organized to follow the journeys Miller has taken into the field as an archaeologist over the past thirty or so years, primarily in the Western Asian nations of Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Turkmenistan. Lyrical watercolors, pencil, and ink drawings dominate every page, accompanied by a free, light, narrative.



While the artwork is the main focus of this book, the art is presented in a slightly more academic format than would typically be found in a true art book. Dimensions and media of the original works are not given. Though interspersed throughout, black and white images are labeled as figures, and color art as plates. Some images are heavily captioned, while other times miniature sketches decorate the page without a specific label.

At times, the pages feel a bit like the Barnes Foundation walls, where monumental works are displayed as though they were postage stamps. The overall cluttered effect is generally pleasing, yet some individual paintings are so luscious they would get to speak more if given their own pages. Nevertheless, the artwork and carefree text convey many aspects about archaeological fieldwork that make this book useful for individuals interested in the experiences of fieldwork. Miller's images speak to the dusty, hot breezes of Western Asia, the humor and pleasure of a healthy archaeological expedition, and to the inherent oddity of archaeology whereby people from one culture arrive in jeans and tee shirts to preserve the treasures of another place and time. *Drawing on the Past* would make a perfect gift for a young person entering the field who will find meaning in both taking and documenting the journey between the covers.

*Adventures in Photography* bears a more playful title but inside presents a more traditional text, followed by 64 luminous black and white photographs expertly selected from the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology archives by Alessandro Pezzati, the Museum's archivist. The images reflect the full geographic range of the Museum's expeditions conducted between the late 19th century and the early 1970s. One can only hope that Museum-sponsored expeditions still include this quality of photographic documentation. Perhaps these images will be presented in a sequel.

Though the photographs are the jewels of this book, they are accompanied by a straightforward text describing the specific expeditions, and also by a world map indicating exact locations of field sites. In addition, informative captions, including place,

**Adventures in Photography**



Expeditions of  
the University of Pennsylvania Museum  
of Archaeology and Anthropology

ALESSANDRO PEZZATI

**BOOK TITLES**

*Drawing on the Past: An Archaeologist's Sketchbook*, by Naomi Miller (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 2002), 85 pp., 64 color plates, 15 figures, cloth, \$19.95, ISBN 1-931707-27-8.

*Adventures in Photography: Expeditions of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology*, by Alessandro Pezzati (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 2002), 96 pp., 1 map, 64 illustrations, cloth, \$29.95, ISBN 1-931707-41-3.

Reviewed by Dana Walrath

subject, and photographer, as well as an excellent index, comprehensive list of plates, and suggested readings, will satisfy scholars with an eye for detail. Many another well-researched book, however, is not such a pleasure to experience. Each black and white image is given its own page. Each page turn involves experiencing two new images that flow gently from the preceding page but also sensitively coexist. Pezzati's attention to features such as the density of the image, landscape versus portrait orientation, and scale, allow diverse subjects to provide one another with unspoken meaning. For example, in plates 26 and 27 the receding corridor in the Meydum Pyramid of Egypt is paired with a lone beggar sitting with his bowl and stick.

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Each of the photographs in this book is a work of art, as well as a vehicle for anthropological information. Because *Adventures in Photography* contains no text analyzing the cultural meaning embedded in these rich images, it will be up to visual anthropologists to show how these images can be “understood as artifacts of culture.” In the meantime, artists and academics alike can forget names while we drink in these images.

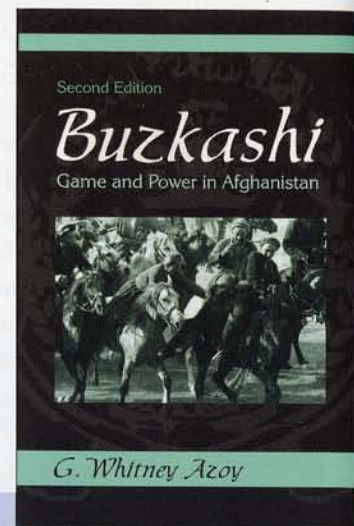
*Dana Walrath is an anthropologist, artist, and writer. She is an assistant professor in the Department of Medicine at the University of Vermont in Burlington, Vermont.*

THOUGH CALLED “GOAT PULL,” *buzkashi* is now played with the carcass of a calf, the object being for the horserider to take the carcass free and clear of the general melee, to demonstrate control, all ostensibly for fun. The riders can range from a few dozen to hundreds, the amount of each purse determining the number and quality of the riders. As a junior Foreign Service officer in the early 1970s, the author became interested in *buzkashi* and how the organization and carrying out of a multi-day tournament is expressive of the way socio-political power is perceived and demonstrated in Afghanistan. After his doctoral fieldwork in northern Afghanistan, he returned regularly to Afghanistan and is now working in Kabul.

*Buzkashi* is so uncontrollable, that for a powerful man to successfully organize a multi-day tournament and see it through without matters disintegrating into chaos is a sure sign that he can order events and is worthy of a following. Azoy says much about the topsy-turvy world of Afghan politics. Equally fascinating is his analysis of the way, in 1953, the then-royal regime began to stage a government-sponsored *buzkashi* in the capital, a controlled demonstration of the metaphorically

uncontrollable, and the way subsequent regimes dealt with the traditional game.

The author is a keen observer and makes adroit use of socio-political theory in service of the material, though all theory applied comes from pre-1972. The chapters added for the second edition discuss the



### BOOK TITLE

*Buzkashi: Game and Power in Afghanistan* (Second Edition), by G. Whitney Azoy, (Waveland Press, 2003), 160 pp., 18 photographs, paper, \$12.95, ISBN 1-57766-238-5.

Reviewed by Birch Miles

shift of power from the old-line landed khans to the new men who came to the fore through the 1980s and 90s.

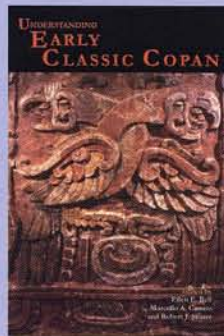
Chapter 4 could use some verb tense changes to bring the material of the first edition in line with the time frame of the second. In chapter 5 especially, Dr. Azoy's fluid prose approaches great beauty and evokes great sadness as he recollects a world torn apart and changed forever. Not only is he a keen observer in answering the question “What is it that is going on here?” he is also a fine storyteller.

*Birch Miles worked with Afghan refugees along the Afghan-Pakistani border in 1986-87, before and after which he taught Islamic Studies and Persian Literature at the University of Pennsylvania.*

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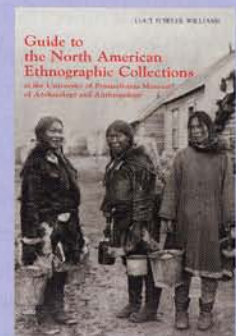
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