



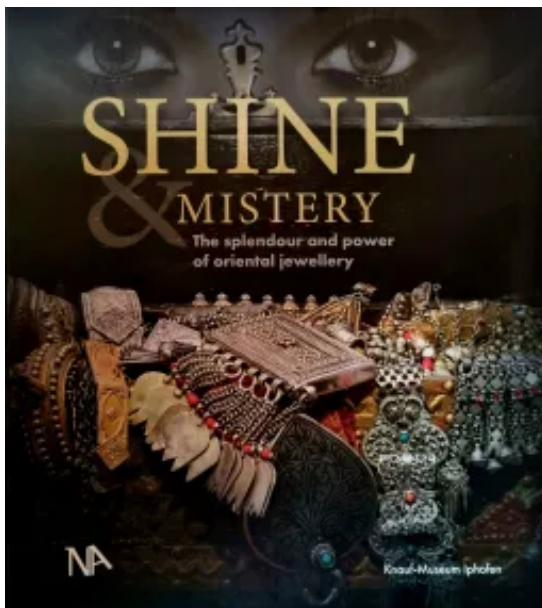
Shine & Mystery

by Sigrid van Roode

A S T U N N I N G P R I V A T E
C O L L E C T I O N

Shine & Mystery

A long-awaited book: the personal collection of Swiss collector and traveler Peter Hösli features in the exhibition *Shine & Mystery* in the Knauf Museum in Iphofen, Germany, and with the exhibition comes a wonderful catalogue on jewellery from Southwest Asia. And you're in for a treat!



Bedouin Silver | Shine and Mystery



Shine & Mystery | Levant



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First, about the title. I usually don't care much for exoticizing words such as 'mystery' in the context of jewellery from Southwest Asia, but there might be a very good reason in this case. After all, the original title of both exhibition and book are in German: *Glanz und Geheimnis*. Although the title is not explained, I immediately associated it with a previous exhibition, in Cologne, called *Pracht und Geheimnis*. This has been one of the most influential exhibitions and its accompanying publication is still one of the main reference books for dress and adornment from Palestine and Jordan. It presented the collection of dress and jewellery of Widad Kawar of Tiraz Centre. Tiraz has generously lent costume and dress to this exhibition, too, and so in my mind the dots were easily connected. [1]

Shine & Mystery starts out with a portrait of the collector, Peter Hösli. This is incredibly important: to get to know the person behind a collection. In the short biography we learn how his focus as a collector is

on unusual, upper class pieces, more modest middle class pieces as well as on repaired pieces. That last aspect is often overlooked, but it is here we learn of woman's preferences and choices over the course of her life. And that is indeed what the focal points of the collection should be, according to Peter: they should be a testament to arts and culture, provide an insight in the history of a region or country, and share not only the skill of the silversmith but also the personal stories of the people that wore these items. With these parameters, this stunning collection has been carefully built over the years.

But: those histories and personal stories is not what this book focuses on. Instead, it presents a unique and important angle that I feel should be brought to the forefront more often, and that is the history of collecting itself. In each chapter, Peter shares his own experiences buying jewellery, as well as stories and snapshots of his life traveling and living in the region. I absolutely loved this personal approach, as the aims and goals of the collector and the circumstances of collecting have a profound effect on the collection itself: what is included, what is excluded, and why? An example is the memory of an Omani headdress, which turned out to be way too expensive to purchase at that time (p. 100-101): by including his tales about 'the ones that got away', the author shows us how collecting is a constant process of not only selecting and choosing, offer and demand, but also other factors. That places the pieces in this catalogue in a context that is rarely seen, and to me absolutely enhances the value of this book even more. It is like traveling together and looking over the shoulder of the collector.

So what do we see, when we look over the shoulder of the collector? *Shine & Mystery* presents four chapters, each devoted to a region or country.

These are Saudi Arabia, the Levant, Oman and Yemen, each preceded by a personal introduction. And in these chapters, the most wonderful jewellery items are presented in bright, crisp photographs. For each item, a small fact-sheet is included with its name (and where possible its vernacular name), its origin, weight and dimensions, its age and a short description. In these descriptions is a wealth of information about the jewellery pieces and their use: we learn of Najd-headaddresses featuring in poems, an inscription against the evil eye, but also highly relevant historic facts such as changing borders. We are accustomed to borders as they are today, and only too often do inhabitants of either side of a border claim a certain jewellery style as their own: a bare fact like a border changing in 1926 (p. 21) forces us to see jewellery on a long term-scale. It's details like these that are so often left out, and I'm very happy to see them included here.

The jewellery items themselves are just breathtaking, and a testimony to the eye of the collector. I loved the coloured glass and plastic beads on a silver Omani necklace (p. 119), the fragment of a choker necklace repurposed on a headband from Jordan (p. 62), the breathtaking skills of the silversmiths creating these jewels and so much more. The clear, bright photographs really do these pieces justice and the atmospheric close-ups of details bring them to life: I could gaze over the images in this book for hours! There are a few instances where only a detail of a jewel is photographed, not the complete piece, so you need to know what you're looking at. [2]

The design of the book is carried out with great care and attention to detail. Each section is colour-coded with the colours running off the page, so you see neat blocks of colour on the lower side of the book as

well. At the end of the catalogue you'll find a useful glossary of terms and a bibliography. As this is not so much a book about jewellery history, but a personal catalogue, the bibliography is very brief: there are no references throughout the volume. The only drawback is that it contains Wikipedia-references on topics on which actual literature is abundantly available, including online sources – I must admit this choice surprised me, given the absolute quality of the collection presented.

My advice to you would be straightforward: do not hesitate and buy this book before it is out of print. This catalogue is a very relevant addition to any collector's or curator's bookshelf. It contains many rare and outstanding pieces of jewellery that you will not see elsewhere, and the personal experiences with collecting jewellery in the countries of origin themselves are incredibly important to increase our understanding of how these objects are valued and handled. A must-have publication of an incredible collection!

Shine & Mystery. The splendour and power of oriental jewellery. Edited by Markus Mergenthaler, 2023

Full colour, hardback, 191 pages, available in German and in English. Published by **Nunnerich-Asmus Verlag** and **Knauf Museum, Iphofen**.

Available with the publisher: **[click here for the English edition](#)** and **[click here for the German edition](#)**.

Follow **[Peter Hösl's amazing Instagram-account here](#)** for more jewellery beauty!

The book was received as review copy from the publisher.

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More book recommendations on personal adornment from North Africa & Southwest Asia? **Browse them all here!**

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References

[1] Volger, G. (red) 1987. *Pracht und Geheimnis. Kleidung und Schmuck aus Palastina und Jordanien*, Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Köln. The catalogue *Shine & Mystery* of this review does not include the dresses of Tiraz, they feature in the exhibition only. The fact that the exhibition is in German shimmers through in the book on occasion: the chapters Saudi-Arabia and Levant have both German and English titles, and the front cover and title pages have a spelling error in the title ‘mystery’. None of this diminishes this book in any way.

[2] Such as on page 23, 25, 66, 82

Sigrid van Roode

Sigrid van Roode is an archeologist, ethnographer and jewellery historian. She considers jewellery heritage and a historic source. She has authored several books on jewellery from North Africa and Southwest Asia, and on archaeological jewellery. Sigrid has lectured for the Society of Jewellery Historians, the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden and the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center, among many others.

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