

Annabel Jane Wharton, **Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, Theme Parks**, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006, 296 pages, \$32.50, (paperback).

Reviewed by

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In her new book, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, Theme Parks*, Annabel Jane Wharton charts a course through the commercial and spiritual traffic of Jerusalem and Jerusalem-related memorabilia. Wharton's central preoccupation is the relationship between commerce, materiality and representation, and she situates her examination of the evolution of that tripartite relationship in Jerusalem. As she traces an historical trajectory that moves from ancient relics and medieval religious orders to lithographed images, panoramas, and postmodern theme parks, Wharton argues that we might better understand the historical and political attachments to the city of Jerusalem by attending to its representations – fragmented, architectural, touristic, artistic, and virtual.

It is an innovative approach to one of the contemporary world's thornier issues: Why do so many care so much about this small piece of land, and how do they (or we) constitute our relationships to it? What are its symbolic valences and why do they pull so strongly on so many? By way of approaching this question, she offers the following: Perhaps by looking at the city's representations (carved wooden camels, bronze trivets, T-shirts, rugs, scale models) and allowing those representations to illustrate something about collective identifications, we might better understand the difficult symbolic.

The approach holds great promise for helping illuminate the symbolic and political power of this particular city. And although Wharton writes very well about its representation – her chapter on the power of 19th century lithographies and tourist accounts to shape ideas about the city is very strong -- the connections between the actual place and its material representations are too often too thin to shoulder the weight of her insightful and promising premise.

Wharton's approach is primarily metonymical – by understanding the pieces, she promises, we might better understand the whole. However, the pieces of Jerusalem she collects in this volume seem rather disconnected, and their connections to Jerusalem seem, at times, stretched too thin. For example, her first chapter focuses on church relics, and she carefully tracks the circulation of the relics in question – namely: fragments of the “true cross.” However, the connection between the power of those relics and the city of Jerusalem is hardly substantiated, and she gives no indication that those concerned with these relics see or feel in them any connection to the city of Jerusalem. Their connection to Jesus Christ and their religious power is quite obvious, but she does not substantiate their connection to the place, and their ability to evoke the city. Likewise, her chapters on the Franciscans and the Templars argue that their architectural legacies perform similar work on their visitors by evoking the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. While she scrupulously explains how these churches in France and England are architecturally analogous to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the analogy ends there and never extends to the city itself. The connection between the Temple Church in London, like the connection between a wooden

splinter and the "one true cross," can be extremely powerful in its religious evocations, but not in their ability to recall or even refer to Jerusalem as anything but a stage for a particular religious performance.