

Hunting Souvenir Buildings In the Middle East

By Pat Smith, Brooklyn, NY

My friend Ann and I toured Syria and Jordan recently to look at archaeological sites and visit the fabled rosy red city of Petra.

We started in Damascus where we visited, among other sites, the 14th century Azem Palace. Just as our group was leaving the Palace, I spotted a souvenir building in a showcase. It was a bas relief of Aleppo, but there was not time to buy it.

Knowing we would return later to Damascus, I determined, as any good collector would, to return to the Palace for it. When we did return, our Syrian guide wrote directions in Arabic for the cab driver, and marked up my map to get us through the souk and the twisting streets to the Palace.

In the gift shop we looked closely at the bronze skyline of Aleppo, glued against a shiny black standing plastic base. Below the skyline, under the citadel, were a red heart and the word "Aleppo." Someone loves Aleppo!! Did I? We collapsed in gales of laughter. Really tacky. It weighed a ton—well, five pounds, anyway. But it was only \$8.00. And after dragging Ann through the souk (which she hates), I could not NOT buy it.

Going back through the noisy, crowded souk, we came out on a main thoroughfare, where we were beset by young men insisting that we get in "my brother's taxi." The fares were triple and quadruple what we had paid to get there. To escape the men, we walked down the avenue and started hailing cabs (we are not New Yorkers for nothing) and finally found one with a meter.

The Aleppo souvenir safari ended 10 days later in the Amman, Jordan airport at midnight as we started home. The souvenir, wrapped in my pajamas,

was packed in the "book bag," in which we take books, abandoning them as we read them. Coming home, we fill the bag with purchases, usually my buildings.

The Jordanian officials insisted that many of us open our small luggage, looking, they told me, for "scissors." They particularly went after Ann, making her go through the security passage twice, then dumping out her backpack, and finally forcing her to unlock the book bag. As the official was unpacking it, he dropped the Aleppo souvenir. It broke, knocking the bas relief off the plastic back.

The only other metal souvenir buildings I saw were in Baelbeck on a day trip into Lebanon. They were the six columns of the Temple of Jupiter, which have stood since the Romans, and a three-dimensional Temple of Bacchus at the same site. Also I found a couple of magnets of the ruins, one with the six columns plus six dancing Lebanese in front of them. No need for your comments. No replicas of mosques at all.

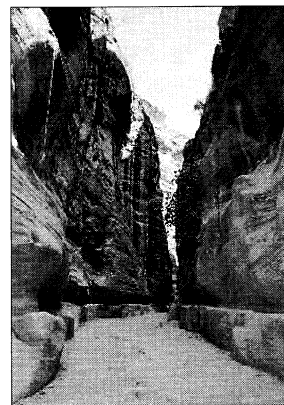
Petra, Jordan, the city hidden in the rocks, is only now becoming a popular tourist destination with its enormous classical-front tombs carved into the walls of the cliffs. Its trademark has become the tomb called the Treasury, which I found in a variety of materials, mainly composition and terra cotta, and one lovely one in silver mounted on a rather inexpensive framed background. There were also carved wood and metal key rings.

After I returned, I learned that Joe Kopitz here in Brooklyn has a metal replica of a temple at the Roman ruins in Jarash, Jordan. We visited it, but found no replicas. Joe bought his a few blocks from here on Atlantic Avenue, the developing Arab commercial

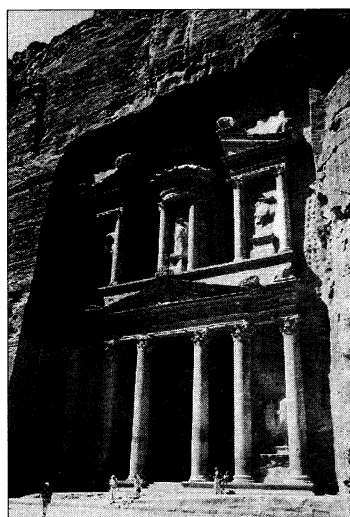
center in Brooklyn.

The Mideast has a long way to go to catch up to Europe in terms of souvenir buildings, but I foresightedly stocked up in Amsterdam on the way over—wonderful pewter houses and towers.

By the way, we saw endless Eiffel Towers, all over Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. They sit on the tops of houses, serving as television antennas—mostly 12 or 15 feet tall. And we lunched one day in Syria at a restaurant called the Eiffel Tower, complete with a 20-foot replica out front, no doubt a remnant of the pre World War II French mandate. Regrettably, no French food at this late date.



Petra



The Treasury in Jordan.

In Memoriam

Bill Kniesel, twin brother of former SBCS president Bob Kneisel, died suddenly of meningitis on March 5, 2001 in Los Angeles. Bill had a great appreciation for souvenir buildings and found many of them for Bob in his weekly forays to Los Angeles area swap meets.

At the 1998 SBCS convention in Los Angeles, Bill drew a map of the next day's swap meets and gave the attendees a copy. Many of the souvenir buildings Bill found over the years were made available to SBCS members through the lists that Bob sent out.

Surviving Bill is his father Paul and his twin brother Bob. Bill's assiduous collecting efforts, bright smile, and quick wit will be genuinely missed by his family and by souvenir building collectors.