

Famously Gone: the Ancient Stones of Cyprus and the Construction of the Suez Canal

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Cypriot history can be understood as a succession of cultures that left buildings, and ruins behind. In the 19th century the island was famous for its palimpsest of architectures, but by the mid-twentieth century cut stones had noticeably disappeared, and a legend came to replace them: the stones were taken to build the Suez Canal. Using archival and photographic research, this paper explores a legend and a transaction, from the beaches of Cyprus to Port Saïd's wharves, shoreline and foundations.

Although the precise destination of these stones remains open to question, archival research sheds light on why and how Cypriot stone was used in the canal and in its attendant industries. What were the terms, and agents, of this stone trade? How did architectural export compare with legal constraints on archaeological export? What is the logic of, and what are the methods for identifying Cypriot stone? The talk is richly illustrated with antiquarian and contemporary images, including sites of poaching in Cyprus, the interior of the Suez Canal (2008), and foundations of colonial buildings (Port Saïd, 2010).

The stones are famously missing from the standpoint of contemporary tourism and post-colonial lore. Essentially, the *absence* of stone in Cyprus is important. How does absence inform accepted notions of spoliation, and of cultural heritage? Why is it spectacular that the Suez Canal could be lined with Gothic churches of Famagusta, temples of Aphrodite, Roman and Hellenistic harbors, aqueducts, public buildings and tombs? What can be inferred about human perceptions of stone, if its reuse is a subject of such speculation? The paper explores the missing Cypriot stone in relation to subsistence, identity, and a sense of belonging.

This paper elaborates on, and revises [*The Stones of the Suez Canal: A Discourse in Absence and Power in Cyprus and Egypt*](#) (Hoak-Doering, *JBNES* 2012).