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In the House of the Serpent Handler: A Story of Faith and Fleeting Fame in the Age of Social Media

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recipe supplied. Bistro by the Sea in Morehead City showcases chargrilled blackened cape shark fillet over pineapple salsa recipe furnished. Decorative colorful attention-grabbing pictures of the delicious succulent fish and shellfish eats grace the splendid cookbook.

Debbie Moose has a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. Ms. Moose wrote *Buttermilk: A Savor the South Cookbook*, *Southern Holidays: A Savor the South Cookbook*, *Fan Fare: A Playbook of Great Recipes for Tailgating or Watching the Game at Home*, and *Potato Salad: 65 Recipes from Classic to Cool*. Debbie Moose composes for the *News & Observer* of Raleigh, NC and *West Virginia South*. The recommended audience is anyone seeking data on North Carolina fish and shellfish and anyone wanting to try luscious and tasty fish and shellfish recipes. The marvelous astounding fine cookbook is ideal for academic and public libraries.

Melinda F. Matthews
University of Louisiana at Monroe Library

In the House of the Serpent Handler: A Story of Faith and Fleeting Fame in the Age of Social Media. Julia C. Duin, Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2017. ISBN 978-1-6219-0375-8 (paper/PDF). \$24.95



Julia C. Duin grabbed my attention to her new book “In the House of the Serpent Handler: A Story of Faith and Fleeting Fame in the Age of Social Media”. With serpent handling being a practice I had only heard mention in an anthropology class years ago and with the news media carrying stories of the effects of social media for good or ill in our society, I wondered how social media and serpent handling met in her mind and in her research.

What I learned was a great deal about serpent handling as a religious practice. Additionally I observed the ways in which Julia reached out to members of Facebook to collect data and to analyze what members practiced, said and recorded in their Facebook posts. It was quite interesting to observe how the use of Facebook broadened the membership of the practicing congregations and gave voice

to some persons who might have never written or spoken to an audience as wide as a single response contained in their posts.

Kudos to Julia for the book cover that sets a tone of the fear and bravery of those who participated and witnessed serpent handling ceremonies. Also the 50+ black and white illustrations give meaning to the reality of the ritual, the physical buildings and the faces of the men, women and children who were the practitioners of the faith.

I highly recommend Appendix One and Appendix Two: Research Methods, and Where to Find Serpent Handling Churches. As a reader you will be able to follow her research methods to learn how she prepared her research and successfully used social media (Facebook) to frame her study and gather her data. You will also want to get in your car, find a fellow researcher to accompany you, and visit some of the Serpent Handling Churches.

This book is recommended for public, academic and theological libraries. My congratulations to Julia Duin and the University of Tennessee Press.

QUESTION: Is snake handling in the Bible? My pastor told me God promised to protect Christians from such animals.

ANSWER: The modern version of snake (serpent) handling began as a religious ritual in the Appalachia region of the U.S. by George Hensley. He introduced the practice, based on a literal interpretation of Mark 16:17 - 18, to a Holiness movement church around 1910. Hensley became a credentialed minister of the church in 1915. After seven years of service, he left the denomination that credentialed him to form the first Pentecostal church to require ALL its members to be able to handle a snake as proof of their conversion.

Those who practice snake handling as a religious ritual believe Mark 16:18 should be interpreted literally. They view the verse as a promise from Jesus that serpents will not harm them (especially during the worship of God) because they are Christians. One of the main problems with this Biblical understanding is that the tragic history of using a poisonous snake as part of the worship of almighty God CONTRADICTS the validity of their interpretation.

Many believers have DIED while handling these venomous reptiles in a church meeting or service. George Hensley, the "father" of this practice, died from a poisonous snakebite in 1955. In 1998, an 'evangelist' who used serpents during services died from a timber rattlesnake bite. His wife had died from a bite three years earlier. In 2012, a pastor in the Pentecostal movement passed away after receiving a bite from a snake while leading an outdoor service.

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