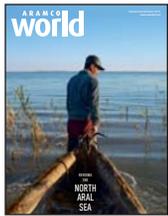


ARAMCO world

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REVIVING
THE
**NORTH
ARAL
SEA**



Into the slowly rising waters of the North Aral Sea, a fisherman wades out along a marshy shore that from the 1980s until a few years ago was a dusty desert's edge. This smaller, now separate part of what was once the world's fourth-largest inland sea has increased its water volume by half in a decade. Photo by Carolyn Drake.

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Back Cover



Ibn Hazm's epic in poetry and prose may have influenced European troubadours; the Beatles, Elvis and scores of today's pop singers all knew what he was writing about, even if none of them ever read *The Ring of the Dove*. Art by Belén Esturla.

We distribute *AramcoWorld* to increase cross-cultural understanding by broadening knowledge of the histories, cultures and geography of the Arab and Muslim worlds and their global connections. In print, *AramcoWorld* is distributed six times a year, without charge, to a limited number of interested readers; online, it is archived and indexed from 1960 to the present.

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Reviving the North Aral Sea

Written by Larry Luxner

Photographs by Carolyn Drake

A decade after Kazakhstan completed a dam, fish are returning to the northern reaches of the inland sea that became a global icon of environmental collapse.



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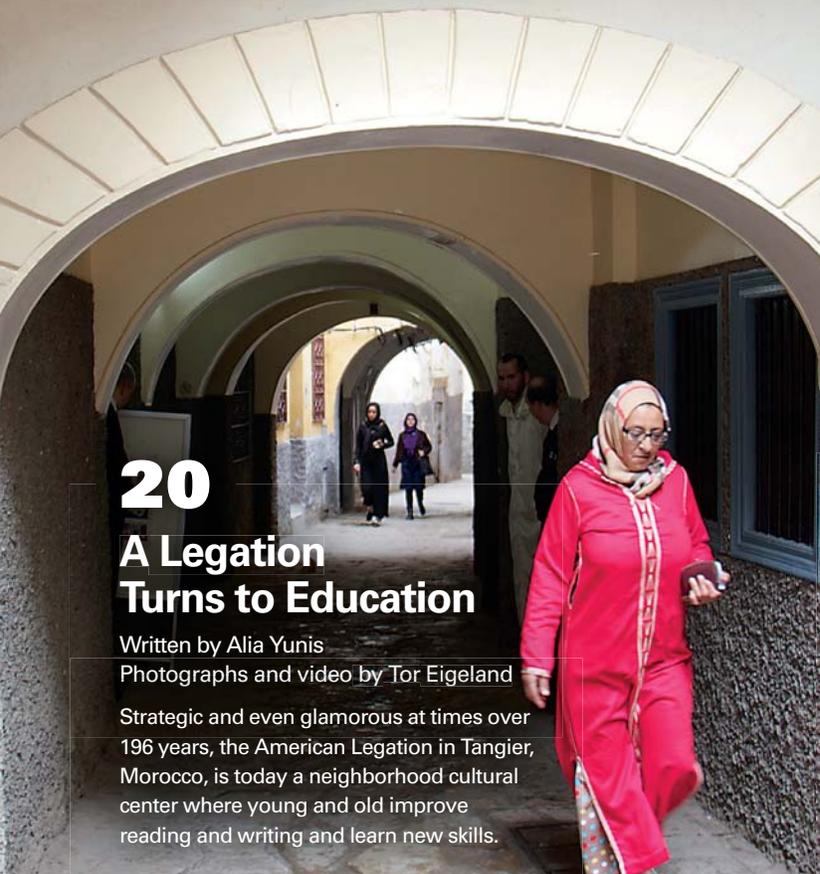
Fashioning a Dialogue

Written by Piney Kesting

Photographs and video by David H. Wells

Born in a refugee camp in Kenya, 19-year-old Somali-American designer Sahro Hassan has won awards as well as acclaim in her hometown of Lewiston, Maine, for "modest fashion" that can appeal to Muslim and non-Muslim women alike.

المفوضية الأمريكية سابقا
المتحف
TANGIER AMERICAN LEGATION
MUSEUM

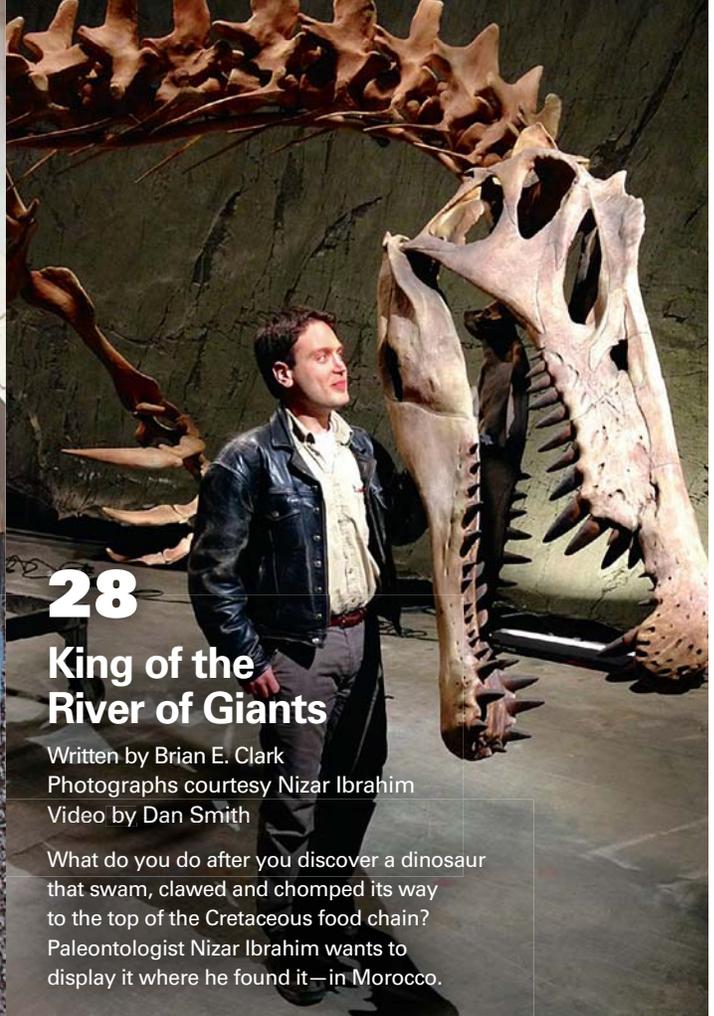


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A Legation Turns to Education

Written by Alia Yunis
Photographs and video by Tor Eigeland

Strategic and even glamorous at times over 196 years, the American Legation in Tangier, Morocco, is today a neighborhood cultural center where young and old improve reading and writing and learn new skills.



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King of the River of Giants

Written by Brian E. Clark
Photographs courtesy Nizar Ibrahim
Video by Dan Smith

What do you do after you discover a dinosaur that swam, clawed and chomped its way to the top of the Cretaceous food chain? Paleontologist Nizar Ibrahim wants to display it where he found it—in Morocco.



32 Now Playing: Jordan Credit: Nadine Toukan

Written by Matthew Teller
Photographs by George Azar

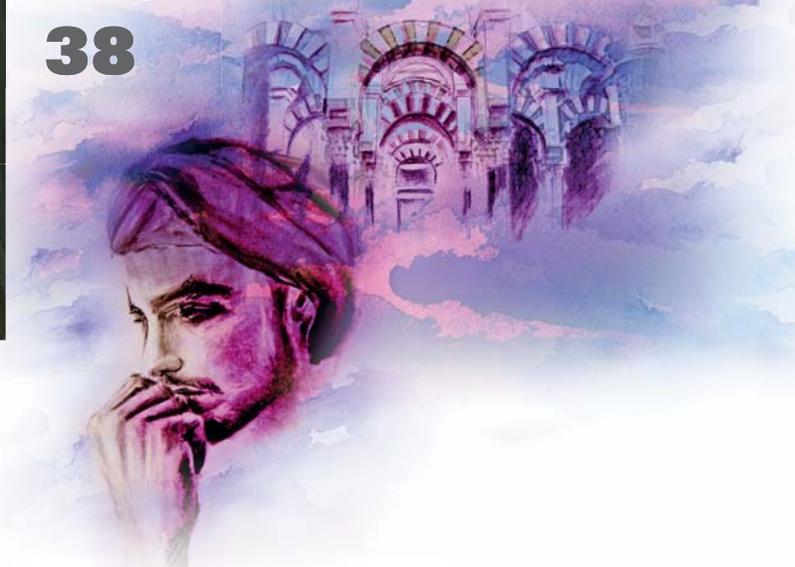
A decade ago, Nadine Toukan led Jordan's Royal Film Commission and founded a workshop that launched a generation of Arab and especially Jordanian filmmakers. Often credited on screen as a producer, she likes to think of herself as "a connector."

Travelers of Al-Andalus, Part v: Ibn Hazm's Journeys of Exile and Love

Written by Louis Werner | Art by Belén Esturla

Survivor of 11th-century politics that drove him from three homes, Ibn Hazm wrote prolifically on many analytical subjects, but he is remembered most of all for his bittersweet classic, *Tawq al-Hamama*, or *The Ring of the Dove*.

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REVIVING THE NORTH ARAL SEA



WRITTEN BY
LARRY LUXNER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
CAROLYN DRAKE



The municipal museum in the now-dusty former fishing port of Aral displays a surprising work of art: a mural that honors local fishermen who in 1921 helped save Russia from starvation by sending to Moscow 14 boxcars loaded with fish. Near it is a photocopy of Vladimir I. Lenin's typewritten letter of thanks to those fishermen, and near that is a bronze bust of Aral's own hero of that effort, Tölegen Medetbayev.

Surprising, because those 14 boxcars of carp, sturgeon, bream and other freshwater fish came from the same part of the Aral Sea that from the 1980s until relatively recently had become too salty for anything to survive.

Surprising also because, having heard for years much about the demise of the Aral Sea, it was heartening to learn that in the North Aral Sea—which



Working from dusk until dawn, fishermen from around the town of Aral in Kazakhstan haul in a catch from the North Aral Sea, where the water level has risen and salinity has decreased—in stark contrast to the larger South Aral Sea, which has gone nearly dry. On shore, a night's fishing might bring 100,000 *tenge* (us \$533), an economic lifeline in a struggling region where fishermen have been heroes before: They appear in Aral's museum in a mural, above, commemorating the valiant dispatch of 14 boxcars of fish a day after a desperate telegram arrived from Vladimir I. Lenin in 1921 requesting famine aid for Moscow.

INSET: LARRY LUXNER (DETAIL)



is only some 10 percent of the inland seabed once a bit larger than Sri Lanka or the state of West Virginia—a reversal of decline is under way: The North Aral Sea is, slowly, coming back to life.

The closest that commercial airlines fly to Aral is Kyzylorda, an eponymous provincial capital of about 190,000 people, about 90 minutes flight time south of Kazakhstan's capital, Astana. Taking that flight late in the afternoon, my translator Dinara Kassymova and I arrived just in time to board an overnight train to Aral. We shared a compartment with a young woman who introduced herself as Aynura, on her way home with her two infant sons, Islam and Muhammad. The win-

Flowing into the North Aral Sea from headwaters in mountains more than 2,000 kilometers to the southeast, the Syr Darya River, opposite lower, is lined here on both banks by irrigated crops. Opposite: In the 1960s, the Soviet Union's hunger for cotton—sometimes called “white gold”—inspired the building of 30,000 kilometers of irrigation canals along both the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers that diverted replenishment of the Aral Sea, which began to evaporate. This cotton field in Kazakhstan is shared by three families. Lower: Arid steppe stretches for hours outside a dusty window along the rails from Kyzylorda to Aral.



dows were too caked with dirt to see much.

As the Soviet-built train chugged and belched northwest along the steppe, I realized that most of the pas-

sengers who weren't sleeping had gathered outside our compartment—one of the last ones in the last car—to smoke unfiltered cigarettes while gazing at the night through an open door. In search of fresher air, I wandered the other way, past a cook nonchalantly frying onions in the dining car's tiny kitchen and an elderly man sitting facing his wife, peeling potatoes for their evening meal.

In the dining car, decorated with plastic red roses at each table, a waitress with gold teeth named Shireen served meat and vegetables. Before joining the railway, she said, she had taught journalism in her native Uzbekistan. Of all the passengers, the only ones who didn't appear to be locals were a young television reporter and his cameraman assigned to cover a three a.m. rocket launch at the Baikonur cosmodrome, which lies between Kyzylorda and Aral.

After eight hours, around daybreak, we pulled into Aral, now a gaunt little town that once thrived on fishing. A local representative met us at the station, and together we walked the few blocks to Aral's modest city hall.

“When the sea started to dry up, of course everybody was pessimistic, and people started moving away to other districts,” said Tanirbergen Seytghanovich Darmenov, the town's deputy *akim* (mayor). “This was a very big problem for Kazakhstan.”

Kristopher White, an associate professor of economics at KIMEP University in Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest city, agreed. He's an expert on the Aral Sea, called *Aral Teñizi* in Kazakh and *Aralskoye Morye* in Russian.

“Certainly, this is an environmental disaster. We're talking about [what was once] the world's fourth-largest inland body of water,” said White. Since 1960, he explained, when the commercial fishing catch exceeded 43,000 tons, the Aral Sea has lost as much as 88 percent of its surface area and 92 percent of its volume. In 1996 only 547 tons of fish were caught, much of it contaminated with pesticides. Meanwhile, salinity had jumped from 10 parts per thousand (ppt) in 1960—essentially fresh water—to 92 ppt in 2004—some three times the salinity of most oceans.

This, he said, destroyed fish habitats and, with the recession of the sea, “there was also what we call desiccation, or encroaching deserts. An entire desert landscape has replaced much of where the sea was.” This has been a humanitarian



Once-abundant freshwater fish, commemorated at left by a statue in Aral, were reduced to a vestige of their former numbers by both the decrease of habitat and the rising salinity caused by the lack of replenishment from the Syr Darya and Amu Darya. Stranded as waters retreated and abandoned by their owners, fishing fleets such as this one at Zhalanash, above, now only hint at the former shoreline.

disaster, too, he added, in which the sea's disappearance brought unemployment, poverty and emigration.

Darmenov, 58, didn't hesitate to place blame squarely on the USSR, whose agricultural scientists and civil engineers transformed semi-arid steppe into fields of cotton and wheat through irrigation that required building some 30,000 kilometers of canals, 45 dams and more than 80 reservoirs.



“The Soviet engineers didn’t think about the consequences. They knew the lake would dry up someday, but they didn’t care. There was no democracy; everybody was scared to talk,” Darmenov said. “Some scientists warned this would happen, but nobody listened to them. In 1985 people finally began talking, but by then it was too late.”

By 2000—nine years after the Soviet

Union’s collapse—the once-mighty lake had separated into two unequal parts: the North Aral Sea in Kazakhstan, and the much larger South Aral Sea mostly in Uzbekistan. Today all that’s left of the South Aral Sea is a narrow, crescent-shaped sliver of water along the western shore, and experts predict it, too, will disappear because it has no link to the Amu Darya river that once fed it.



1957



The level of the Aral Sea in the late 1950s is customarily used as the reference to see how much water has been lost.

1982



In the early 1980s, the accelerating drop of the sea level is evident. Salinity is rising; fisheries are shrinking.

2000



The Aral Sea splits into North and South. Not only has it lost most of its water, but fishing is also nearly gone. The Kok-Aral Dam begins to allow waters in the North Aral Sea to rise.

2015



Despite expansion of the North Aral Sea, only some eight percent of the water volume of the late 1950s remains.



Along the shore of the North Aral Sea, a wedding gives an occasion for a dance in the village of Tastubek, where fish catches are rising with sea levels.

In October 2014, the US National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA) released images of the Aral Sea taken by its Terra satellite. These were among the first to show the South Aral Sea's entire eastern basin as bone-dry—a dramatic difference from a similar image taken in August 2000. “This is the first time the eastern basin has completely dried in modern times,” said geographer and Aral Sea expert Philip Micklin of Western Michigan University. “And it is likely the first time it has completely dried in 600 years, since the medieval desiccation associated with diversion of Amu Darya to the Caspian Sea.”

Aral, population just above 30,000, is the largest town on the northeast shore of the North Aral Sea, and some 73,000 people remain living in the surrounding region. Here, explained Darmenov, the Kazakh government and World Bank must work together with the Syr Darya river to save the sea. The river is the sea's sole source of replenishment, and its fate

is still largely determined by cyclical rainfall patterns, as well as snowmelt from the distant Tien Shan Mountains.

“This is not about money, or about what man can do. Everything depends on nature,” said Darmenov. The akim's office is decorated with a gold-framed portrait of 75-year-old President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has led Kazakhstan since 1989, two years before it declared independence from the Soviet Union. “We

Kazakh translator Dinara Kassymova poses in Aral with two boys. In 2014, British rock band Pink Floyd hired local boys for “Louder than Words,” a music video that looked at Aral through the eyes of youth.



are very grateful that our president hasn't forgotten about this problem, and that he's trying his best to revive the sea."

The sea's decline is chronicled in stark detail at Aral's municipal museum on Tokey Esetov Street, right off the main drag, Abulkhair Khan Street. Established in 1988, the museum collects an entry fee of 200 *tenge* (about \$1.10) from each of the 15,000 people who visit annually.

Here, stored in three glass display cases, are animal teeth, shells, glass shards and ceramic fragments—all found on the dry seabed after the lake began drying up in the 1970s. There's also an 1849 map of an obviously much larger Aral Sea, credited to Commander A. Butakoff of the Imperial Russian Navy, as well as a painting made in 2003 that shows, a bit nostalgically, what Aral's port looked like in the 1960s.

Remote the museum may be, but its guestbook is full of comments from Dutch, French, Spanish and American visitors. Yet to the museum's director, Madi Zhasekenov, the museum is not just for tourists.

"We want to show our generation how life used to be here," Zhasekenov said as he locked up his collection of artifacts to go out for his lunch break.

The 53-year-old walked across the street to a park where



As the largest of the towns along the North Aral Sea, Aral was also a light manufacturing hub based on sheep-grazing: A historical marker notes that in 1976 the city exported 5,000 metric tons of wool, 340 furs, 3,000 sheepskins, 1,500 pairs of woolen gloves and 1,200 pairs of woolen trousers.

as a teenager in the 1970s, he said, he would hang out with his friends. The concrete benches where they'd gaze out on the shore of the Aral Sea are still there, but these days there is no sea to be seen. Instead, children frolic on a rusted merry-go-round. The feeling of nostalgia and loss was palpable.

"My children don't want to live in Aralsk," Zhasekenov said quietly, using the common Russian name for the town, "but I grew up on the shores. I don't want to leave. This is my home, and I believe the sea will come back."

He then invited me to lunch at his wooden shack across the street from the aging Hotel Aral. To my surprise, the museum curator opened the door to a storage room, sat down and started to play a rickety old piano. Not one of its 88 keys was in tune. Then he took out a rusty German trumpet lacking a mouthpiece and pretended to play.

It's easy to understand why Zhasekenov misses the old days. In 1976, according to a historical marker at the once-thriving port, Aral

"We want to show our generation how life used to be here," said Madi Zhasekenov, director of Aral's museum.



shipped 5,000 metric tons of wool, 340 furs, 3,000 sheepskins, 1,500 pairs of woolen gloves and 1,200 pairs of woolen trousers. Now, the tourists who stop by here can climb aboard the *Lev Berg*, a fishing boat painted bright blue, and look out over the desertified lakebed. Two rusting cranes that have not been used since the early 1980s hulk above the otherwise flat horizon.

But the waters that by the early 2000s had retreated 100 kilometers from Aral are now only 20 kilometers away, and they are coming closer.

“We inherited the problem of the Aral Sea from the Soviet Union, but as soon as we became independent, we adopted special programs,” said Zhanbolat Ussenov, director of the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs and former spokesman at Kazakhstan’s Foreign Ministry.

“We of course understood that we wouldn’t be able to save the sea on our own— from neither a financial nor an expertise point of view—so we created an International Save the Aral fund,” Ussenov explained. “We invited the World Bank and individual countries to help us with this environmental catastrophe. And I’m happy to say that today the Aral Sea is slowly returning to its original boundaries.”

The dream of saving the entire Aral Sea— both North and South—is unrealistic, said experts who know the region. But everyone seemed to agree that the first phase of the project Ussenov alluded to—officially known as the Syr Darya Control and Northern Aral Sea Project, or SYNAS-1—has been a success so far.

Ahmed Shawky M. Abdel-Ghany, a senior water-resources specialist with the European and Central Asian region of the World Bank’s Water Global Practice, has managed the project from his Washington office since late 2010. He said SYNAS-1 cost \$83 million, and it included a subproject for restoration of the North Aral Sea.

“We’re not talking about the whole Aral Sea, just the northern part that fully lies in Kazakhstan,” said the Egyptian civil engineer, who’s worked in 20 countries during his 12-year career with the World Bank.

He said that one crucial element of SYNAS-1, construction in 2005 of the 13-kilometer-long Kok-Aral Dam, increased the volume of water in the North Aral Sea by around 50 percent in three years.

Both North and South Aral Seas have shallow coastlines. At Aral, retreating waters stranded the formerly seaside town 100 kilometers inland; however, in the past decade, the waters have been returning. They now lie about 20 kilometers from Aral—and they are coming closer.





Kazakh and international water management initiatives have helped the North Aral Sea increase its volume by an estimated 50 percent over the past decade. This year fishermen are catching some 22 species here, and catch numbers are rising.

“The northern Aral Sea was initially [in 2005] 38 meters above sea level. Now it could reach around 42 meters,” said the engineer. “As a consequence, salinity in the NAS has been reduced by around half, but all these numbers are subject to the hydrological variables that change every year.”

Proof of success so far, he said, lies not only in the decreasing distance from the town of Aral to the shore, but also in the area’s fisheries, which have doubled or tripled output in recent years. “The government and donors hope that with the SYNAS-1 follow-up phases, the northern Aral Sea gets closer,” he said.

But even 20 kilometers seems like an eternity when the only way to cover it is via four-wheel-drive over a dirt road that vanishes into nowhere just past the edge of town.

That simple journey required nearly two hours, taking us past the dried-up village of Mergensai as well as scattered, hulking ruins of fishing trawlers that sat abandoned in the scorching sun, covered with graffiti.

At one time this ship graveyard was a major attraction luring so-called “dark tourism”: Photos of camels roaming the desert with these vessels in the background are on display in the Aral museum, and they have appeared in travel maga-

zines to publicize the plight of the Aral Sea. The camels are still there, though in recent years most of the vessels have been cut up into scrap that has been sold to China.

While visitors who actually make it to the seashore aren’t likely to find a hubbub of fishing activity, there’s certainly more going on here than in the recent past.

One hardy soul is Marat Karebayev, who sets out on his wooden blue dinghy around seven every morning and usually doesn’t return until five p.m. He’s been fishing for five years, and he said he earns 10,000 to 20,000 *tenge* (about \$55 to \$110) each day. From that, he has to deduct the cost of gasoline (about 800 *tenge* for 10 liters) as well as the fishing net (60,000 *tenge*), which must be replaced once a year.

“The sea is now much closer than it was 10 or 15 years ago,” said the 31-year-old Karebayev, dressed in navy blue overalls, a black sweater and a checkered beret. “I catch more fish now, and the prices are higher.”

Some 22 varieties of fish are now commercially exploited from the North Aral Sea, and the catch is coming in around 6,000 metric tons per year, said deputy mayor Darmenov. He added that could rise to 30,000 tons annually if World Bank-funded projects now in place bear fruit.



Oltinay, left, watches television while her son reads the paper at home in Aral. She remembers her late husband's job at Aral's fish-processing plant, which has recently started up again. "In 2000 there was huge unemployment, but things have gotten better," said Adilbek Aymbetov, director of the plant. This allows young men such as these fishermen in Tastubek, lower, to stay for weeks at a time near the sea, fish at night and relax in between over *shay* (hot tea) and *kleb* (Russian for bread).



His optimism is shared by Adilbek Aymbetov, director of the Aral fish-processing facility on the edge of town. The plant has been operating for nearly five years. About 25 people work there, packing carp, northern pike and other fish for both local consumption and export to the 28-member European Union.

"In 2000 there was huge unemployment, but things have gotten better," said Aymbetov. In 2013, he said, he processed 300 tons of fish and exported about 100 tons, up from production of 215 tons and exports of 97 tons the year before.

In 2011 the World Bank's Abdel-Ghany visited Kazakhstan to finish the SYNAS-1 evaluation report and plan for the second phase: SYNAS-2. This seven-year, \$126-million effort is funded by \$107 million from the World Bank itself, with Kazakhstan putting up the rest.

"The government is really eager to start as soon as possible," Abdel-Ghany said, noting that SYNAS-2 includes rehabilitating delta lakes, developing fish hatcheries, upgrading flood dikes and straightening river meanderings to improve water flow.

Abdel-Ghany foresaw a third phase, too. "That's when you'll really see this whole lower part of the Syr Darya basin area developed," he said. "Then, and only then, could we say that this is one of the biggest environmental projects in the world."

Sagit Ibatullin, former chairman of the executive committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), recently told Kazakh media that the five-nation organization's plan for bringing back the entire Aral Sea—both South and North—if fully implemented, would cost as much as \$12 billion.

The Kazakh official, appointed by President Nazarbayev, headed IFAS from October 2008 to August 2013.

KIMEP University's White pointed out that while most of the IFAS plan would have to focus on the far-more-beleaguered South Aral Sea, Kazakhstan's efforts to revive the northern portion of the sea "has been hailed as a success from an environmental standpoint, and I think rightfully so. The northern Aral Sea has come back a little bit—nowhere near the scale of what it was prior to 1960—but without question it has been stabilized and is now returning."



Spanning what may be the most strategic 13 kilometers of North Aral Sea coastline, the Kok-Aral Dam, finished in 2005, regulates the water released from the North Aral Sea and its tributary Syr Darya river—raising hopes as well as water levels.

The fisheries, engineers and bankers got a boost last year from an unexpected corner: British rock band Pink Floyd, which since its birth in 1965 has decried alienation, commercialism and environmental degradation. Its 2014 music video “Louder Than Words” featured inhabitants of Aral and nearby villages filmed against a backdrop of deserts and abandoned ships. At last count it had been viewed nearly 7 million times.

Aubrey Powell, Pink Floyd’s creative director, recently told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Uzbek service that although the surreal specter of ships stranded in the desert appealed as a setting for a video on environmental disaster, “it’s not so much about the disaster—that’s been written about endlessly—but more about what it means to the younger generation.”

Nobody knows how many fans Pink Floyd has in Aral. But KIMEP University’s White did say that during his most recent visit to the region, he and his environmental team saw new houses being built; inside homes, he saw new televisions and refrigerators.

“We went around the entire northern Aral Sea and talked to folks in very remote villages, some of which have only recent-

ly gotten electricity,” said the professor. “There’s a generally positive outlook for the future, which I don’t think has been the case around the Aral Sea for a long time.”

Aral native Yerken Nazarov, 31, appears to share that newly positive outlook. His grandmother was a fishmonger who lived to celebrate her 100th birthday.

“What needs to happen to bring the sea back?” I asked Nazarov on my last afternoon in town. He thought for a second and replied: “We need to hope.”



Larry Luxner (larry@luxner.com) is news editor of *The Washington Diplomat* and a longtime contributor to *AramcoWorld* and other publications. Based out of Istanbul, photographer **Carolyn Drake** (www.carolyn-drake.com) worked extensively in Central Asia between 2007 and 2013. She now resides in the



United States, where she has begun a new photo project.



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Fashioning a Dialogue

Written by
PINEY KESTING

Photographs and video by
DAVID H. WELLS

For a promotional video shoot in Lewiston, Maine, designs by 19-year-old Sahro Hassan are modeled by Cristal Martin, Heather Pollock, Maryam Abdirahman, Reyni Bernabel and Kenzi Langley. Opposite: Hassan keeps focus during the shoot.

When Sahro Hassan stepped into the halls of Lewiston Regional Technical Center in Maine as a freshman in 2010, she was already designing her future along with trendy clothes for young Muslim women.



Right: Hassan learned to sew at the Tree Street Youth after-school program, and as a freshman at Mount Ida College in Newton, Massachusetts, she honed skills in apparel construction under Jeanne McDavitt. Far right: Wearing Hassan's designs, models prep for the runway. "I decided to create fashions appropriate to my culture and to my beliefs," Hassan says, "but also unique and sophisticated, so that both Muslim and non-Muslim women would want to wear it."



"The fashion industry in the us doesn't do justice to modest women, especially when it comes to young females like me, and that frustrated me," explains Hassan. "I decided to create fashions appropriate to my culture and to my beliefs, but also unique and sophisticated, so that both Muslim and non-Muslim women would want to wear it."

"I love being able to express so much with just a piece of garment," says Hassan, who at age 19 already has three fashion shows and both local and state awards to her name. One of her goals, she emphasizes, is to use her fashions to create cross-cultural conversation. "The more people come to this country as immigrants," she explains, "the more we need to share and embrace each other's cultures. We need to understand each other's stories. I want to do that through fashion."

Hassan's own story began before she was born, when her family emigrated in the early 1990s from Somalia.

"I remember my mother telling me that she and my father walked for days and days before they ended up in Kenya," she recalls. Desperate to leave famine and civil war behind, the Hassans spent several years at a refugee camp named Dadaab, some 100 kilometers across the border, where Sahro was born. After relocating to the Kakuma camp in northeastern Kenya, the family was accepted for refugee resettlement in Indianapolis, Indiana, when Sahro was 10. After four months there, Somali friends in Lewiston suggested the Hassans join them in Maine.

"I feel humbled because of the experience I had at such a young age,"

says Hassan. "Looking back, no one would choose to grow up in hardship, but I believe that if I can overcome my past, I can overcome anything."

There was indeed much to overcome. When Hassan, her parents and seven younger siblings arrived in Lewiston in 2007, none of them spoke English. Her father needed work. Despite the obstacles, Sahro Hassan flourished.

"Sahro always stood out," says Barbara Benjamin-McManus, Hassan's middle-school teacher and mentor. "I remember that when she first came to school, most of the other Muslim girls wore long skirts with pants underneath. But she wore vibrant colors and was always dressed a little bit different, and she was never self-conscious."

She adds that Hassan often expressed her desire to become a fashion designer. "I think she's going to make it because she's breaking a mold, and she is driven to excel. She is the first Muslim girl I know who's gone into fashion design, and I told her to hold onto that dream!"

Hassan learned to sew at Tree Street Youth, an after-school and summer program for at-risk youth



At home in Lewiston, Sahro Hassan stands at top left with her mother and siblings around her. Of the family's journey from Somalia to Kenya to Maine, Hassan says, "No one would choose to grow up in hardship, but I believe that if I can overcome my past, I can overcome anything."



in downtown Lewiston. With its support, which included a donated sewing machine and fabric, she held her first fashion show in 2013, and Somali friends modeled her designs. Last year she graduated from Lewiston High School with honors, and she calls herself an “Islamista”—her own moniker as a Muslim “fashionista.”

Hassan laughs when she recalls how unprepared she was for her fashion launch. “I had no clue what I was doing, so I just threw stuff together,” she says. “Some of the garments were even hard to walk in since I was still teaching myself how to sew.”

Fatuma Ali, her 18-year-old cousin and one of her models, recalls her own disbelief when Hassan told her she wanted to be a fashion designer. “I never really thought she was going to do it because in our culture we don’t do fashion or anything

outside of the box. She was the first girl in our community to do something different.” Hassan has tried to find a good cultural mix, adds Ali. “We still keep our hijabs on, but she’s changing the designs. I think that’s really cool.”

“We need to understand each other’s stories. I want to do that through fashion.”

—Sahro Hassan

With each show, Hassan’s sewing and production skills have improved. In 2013 and 2014, she held two at an outdoor plaza during the city’s summer Artwalk festivals.

Lewiston residents filled the seats at her last show, Benjamin-McManus recalls. “Most of the spectators were white. Afterwards they came up to Sahro and wished her well. They were so supportive

it blew me away,” she says. Among those who were impressed was Lewiston photographer Jim Walker, who offered to photograph her fashions and created her first professional portfolio—for free.



Hassan prepares to lead her models to the stage. Her middle-school teacher, Barbara Benjamin-McManus, remembers Hassan as a statement-maker who “always dressed a little bit different.” Opposite, lower: The self-proclaimed “Islamamista” coaches before a show.

“The mere fact that Sahro Hassan is a known name in Lewiston demonstrates the impact she has on both the Somali and local community,” says Julia Sleeper, founder and director of Tree Street Youth. “I think she sees herself as someone working toward unifying populations by helping people to understand cultural differences using something she’s passionate about.

“She knows that what she is doing goes beyond making fashions and dresses for some of her friends and customers. It’s a much greater statement that affects the young Muslim women of her community as well as the community at large.

“Sahro is an amazing success story,” Sleeper adds, “and an important peer role model for our other students at Tree Street.” Both Sleeper and her colleague Kim Sullivan continue to mentor Hassan as she pursues fashion design at Mount Ida College in Newton, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston.

Sullivan maintains that Hassan’s ability to bridge cultures stems in part from her parents’ steadfast backing. “They are incredible,” she comments. “They have always been supportive of Sahro in what she wants to do, even when it has not always seemed culturally appropriate to them.”

Hassan admits that her parents were at first confused. “My

mother even told me that in our culture we have people who sew or tailor clothes—but not designers,” she explains. “My parents didn’t understand what a designer does, or how it could become a career.”

Hassan’s desire to launch her own business got a boost during her junior year at Lewiston when she joined the Youth Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA) program sponsored by the Androscoggin County Chamber of Commerce. Chip Morrison, then

president of the chamber and director of YEA, interviewed Hassan when she applied. He wondered how this soft-spoken, small young woman was going to be able to promote her business idea. “But she had this incredible drive. You could feel it even though she didn’t articulate it very well in the beginning,” says Morrison, who observed her

transformation over the 30-week after-school program.

In the end, she wowed the local investors, and they gave her the grant she needed to launch her business under the name Fashionuji. “Sahro is magnetic,” exclaims Morrison. “This young woman will not be denied. She is driven to succeed, and I would never be surprised if she later founded a Fortune 500 company. I have that much confidence in her.”

In 2013 Hassan received first prize in Maine’s “Future Business Leaders of America” competition.

LEWISTON, MAINE: AN ACCIDENTAL MELTING POT

Take an economically struggling Maine mill town of 36,600 and add to it nearly 5,000 Somalis seeking haven in a new country. On the surface, it hardly looks like a formula for success.

When the first substantial numbers of Somalis began arriving in 2001 in Lewiston, they were not welcomed with open arms. Unemployment was high, and locals feared that new arrivals would overburden social services and increase competition for the few jobs left after the closure of once-thriving textile mills.

Despite Lewiston's economic slump, it was one of the us cities that Somali refugees found attractive—through websites and word of mouth: good schools, affordable housing and, most important of all, a safe place to raise a family. Many brought a strong sense

of community and entrepreneurship; they enrolled their children in the local public schools, signed up for English courses and found—or created—jobs.

Today, per-capita income in Lewiston is rising. The crime rate has dropped. The center of town, once called “The Combat Zone,” has new, family-owned grocery stores offering halal meats (prepared following the Islamic method of slaughter), and there are storefront mosques in between new organic-food cafés as well as other more conventional businesses.

“Challenges still exist,” comments Julia Sleeper, founder of Lewiston's Tree Street Youth program. “Acculturation is messy.” But relations, she says, continue to improve. This, she says, is “testimony to the strength of both communities.”



Along Lisbon Street in Lewiston, signs and flags reflect a new internationalism.

Today, it's hard to find anyone in Lewiston who hasn't heard of “Fashion Girl,” as Hassan is affectionately known. Young Muslim women inspired by her designs are sporting brighter colors and trendier patterns, and some local stores showcase her fashions. She has a growing fan club among non-Muslim girls in town.

Morrison's confidence was well founded. As a result of the YEA, in 2013 Hassan received first prize in Maine's “Future Business Leaders of America” competition. Later that same

year, she represented Maine in the national Future Business Leaders of America competition. In 2014 she won the “Girls Rock Award” for entrepreneurship from Hardy Girls, Healthy Women, a Maine-based nonprofit organization. That's quite a list of accomplishments for a young woman who didn't speak a word of English when she arrived in Lewiston eight years ago, let alone a word of fashion lingo.

The conversation, it appears, is just beginning. 🌐



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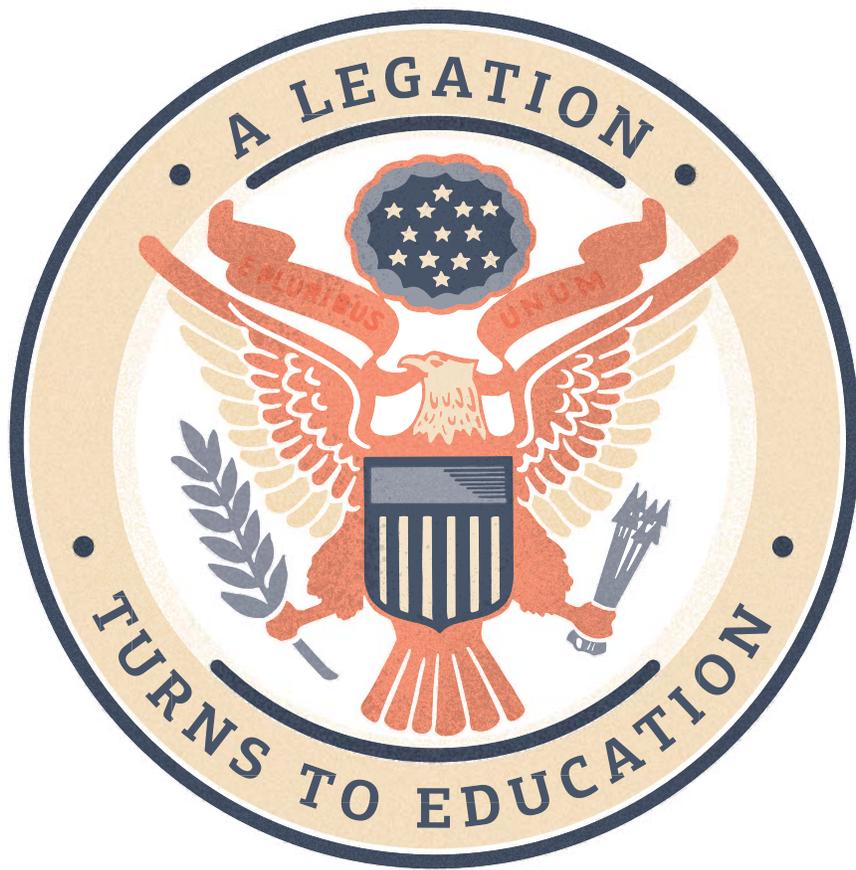


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Fashioning a Dialogue video:



WRITTEN BY
ALIA YUNIS

PHOTOGRAPHS & VIDEO BY
TOR EIGELAND

“Life is very short and the world is there to see and one should know as much about it as possible. One belongs to the whole world, not just one part of it.”

—PAUL BOWLES

Eighty-six-year-old Aicha El Kharz has lived in Tangier’s *madinah* for most of her life. Her surprisingly youthful eyes peer over reading glasses as she tells you that she used to work in the neighborhood as a cleaning woman. She did so without being the least aware of the political and social significance of a certain building on the Rue d’Amerique, a building she now walks to twice a week with the aid of her cane.

That Mark Twain, Paul Bowles, Malcolm Forbes and many other American diplomats, artists and businessmen preceded her in walking the halls and rooms of this building means little to El Kharz. Nor does it matter to her that this is the only US National Historic Landmark building outside America. The Tangier American Legation, as the building was long known, is where El Kharz and hundreds of other women in the *madinah* (the walled

Moroccan students on a field trip relax on the terrace of the Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies, or TALIM. A gift to the US in 1821 from Sultan Mulay Suleiman, the “embassy without an ambassador”—the American Legation, Tangier—became a gathering place for diplomats, business leaders and writers. In the late 1990s, it refocused its mission on education. Right: Winding up from the narrow Rue d’Amerique in Tangier’s *madinah* (old walled city), residents climb the stairs to TALIM’s arched doorway. Far right: The Legation’s terrace looks out on the strategic harbor that connects Morocco to both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.

and fortified heart of the city since the 14th century) are learning to read. “I want to be able to read the Qur’an,” El Kharz says, catching her breath as she works on basic Arabic sentences amid a class of 25 women with dreams of where literacy can take them.

Today the building is called the Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies, or TALIM, an acronym that doubles as the Arabic word for “education.” The name change reflects its own







Learning new skills and sharing generations of knowledge, more than 150 women of the madinah take classes at TALIM for personal enrichment and job opportunities. Above, center: Aicha El Kharz, 80, reads Arabic with teacher Fatima Ben Guerch. In June, the TALIM Woman's Program, founded in 1994, awarded 59 certificates for the completion of courses in cooking, Arabic literacy and sewing, below.

change from the diplomatic and business center for expatriates it once was to its role since the late 1990s as a community center.

"It's a package when you talk about TALIM," says Yhtimad Bouziane, the associate director. "It's not just a library, just a research center or just a museum or a literacy center. It's all together. We can't divide it. It's an ensemble, and everything is important. I can't imagine this place without the women, without the library, without the art. I had never heard about the Legation until I started working here, and I have lived here most of my life. But today, most people know about us."

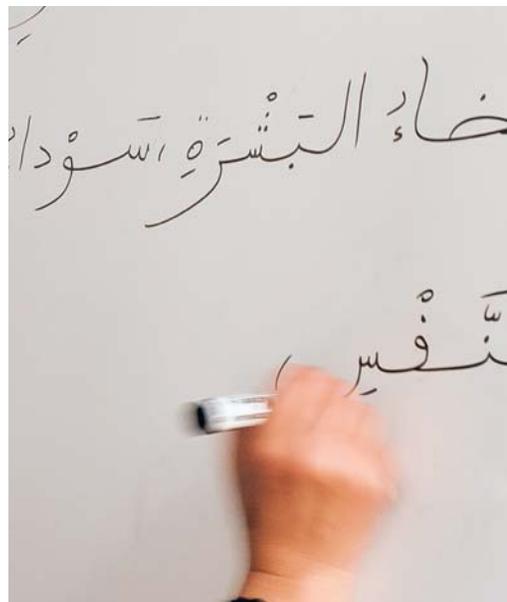
As she talks, she has to strain her voice to make herself heard above a din of hammering and drilling on the roof. Most of the staff of seven—which includes three maintenance workers—shrug off the noise, as renovations are nearly con-

stant. The building's upkeep is paid for by the US government, which owns the property, although TALIM's various projects, as well as its staff salaries, are funded through non-governmental grants and donations.

TALIM director John Davison also speaks above the racket as he discusses with an interior designer visiting from the UK a new wall color for one of the gallery rooms. The designer decides a door has to be removed to give a better view of an intricately carved grandfather clock in the corner; the maintenance crew has it off and stored away within an hour.

TALIM is evidence that a building is rarely just a building. It's also an ever-changing, evolving keeper of the stories of the people who built it, lived and worked in it, and still protect it—and of the stories of the city in which it resides. The original structure,

TOP, CENTER: ALIA YUNIS





which is more than 200 years old, is now attached to two other buildings. This makes TALIM a bricolage of unexpected wings, unpredictable stairways and hidden doorways, all festooned with paintings of the Americans and Europeans who lived in this diplomatic and trade hub at the gateway between the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean.

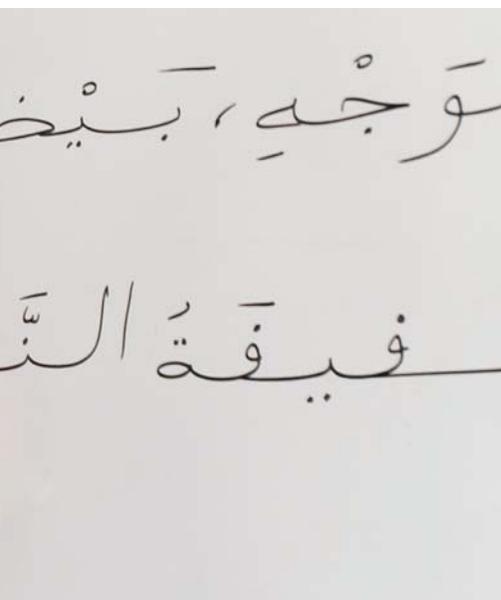
TALIM's many appendages, added and altered over the years, are matched by the diverse roles they play. On one spring day, several tourists from Spain (a 20-minute boat ride away) stroll in the art gallery while Moroccan high-school students on a field trip flirt on the garden terrace and an American graduate student researching Middle Eastern hip-hop naps in her guest apartment. Meanwhile, two Moroccan university students troll through 400 years' of books on the Maghrib in one of five hard-to-find library rooms as 20 local

women joke with each other in the kitchen, where they are learning to make *taj*, a local marzipan biscuit not quite Middle Eastern, not quite European.

Due to the eclectic architecture, these groups are largely unaware of each others' presence. Nor is this a place one comes upon by accident: Taxi drivers are often confused when told to stop at the madinah's Bab d'Amerique ("American Gate"), as this is a residential area, set apart from the tourist cafés, carpet sellers and snake charmers by several alleyways that admit little sunlight.

TALIM's neighbors are all Moroccan families. Some have been there ever since the original building was given to America by Morocco in 1821, and some of the members of those families study at TALIM. The two security guards at the entrance, with no one to talk with most of the day, look forward to school and

"We started talking to the women [of the madinah]. They are the pillars of the family, but we found out most of them had not gone to school. They couldn't help their children with their studies."



work letting out, as that's when residents young and old stop to chat on their way home.

The madinah's 173,000 residents today form a working-class urban core surrounded by nearly 1 million more Tangerois who live beyond the walls that define the old city. The madinah was the city that largely stood in 1777, when the seas were battlefields of trade and European colonial expansion, and when Morocco's Sultan Mohammed III recognized the US as an independent nation, making Morocco the first country officially to do so. That relationship was formally recognized in 1786 by the Moroccan-American Treaty of Friendship signed by the sultan and Thomas Jefferson, among others. It remains the US's longest-standing treaty.

According to Italian historian Carlo Giuseppe Guglielmo Botta, author of *The History of the War of Independence of the United States*, Sultan Mohammed III's initiative was a response to American appeals, delivered through France, beseeching his help in protecting US merchant ships from pirates on the Barbary Coast. Seeing future business opportunities in backing the newly declared US while he reestablished Morocco's strength after years of infighting, the sultan agreed. Nearly half a century later, in 1821, Sultan Mulay Suleiman furthered the relationship by giving the building to the US in recognition of the 1786 treaty.

The word "legation" is "a 19th-century word that is best explained as an embassy without an ambassador," says Davison, a retired diplomat who first encountered the Legation in the early 1970s when it served as a Peace Corps language-training center. "A legation did all the same things as a consulate, but it had a higher-ranking representative," he explains, noting that the name stuck even after 1956, when its status as a diplomatic mission officially ended. "Now it's just the name of the building. You'll hear terms in the madinah about such and such being the former French or German legation. It's almost like a Tangier word because historically that's what everything was called."

With so much of the world's trade going through the Strait of Gibraltar in the 1800s, the need for US and European legations in Tangier expanded, but when Mark Twain visited the American consul and his family in the 1860s, he was struck by how quiet



Set on a donkey and posed in front of the Legation is Alice Dodge, daughter of Henry Percival Dodge, who served as US envoy from 1909 to 1910. One of hundreds of images from the early to mid-20th century now in TALIM's archives, it offers a glimpse back to a more formal, socially stratified era.



Popular with tourists visiting TALIM is the room of photographs showing Legation literati, named the Paul Bowles Wing after the author and musicologist who spent decades in Tangier and donated some 72 hours of traditional Moroccan music that he recorded in the 1950s.

life was. Indeed, in *Innocents Abroad*, published in 1869, he wryly noted that the high point of the consul's day, in a city with no other Americans, was the arrival of the mail. By the 1920s, however, European orientalist writings and art had sparked a romanticizing of Tangier among American writers and artists as a "new Paris," full of foreigners and the gateway to North Africa.

"The first half of the 20th century was probably the most important period for the Legation, when Morocco was divided into French and Spanish protectorates," Davison explains. "But the other European powers were determined that Tangier's port not come under the protection of just one country, and they had US support for that." He adds that the Cap Spartel Lighthouse, located just west of Tangier and which recently celebrated its 150th anniversary, was deemed to be so strategically important that in 1867 it was under the commission of the US and several European countries. "In fact," he adds, "there are people who say the lighthouse situation was the precursor to the League of Nations."

After World War I, Tangier became an open international zone where its residents were not subject to the trading laws of their native countries.

But it wasn't all about business. The classic film *Casablanca*, with its focus on refugees from war-torn Europe, could more



for toy soldiers near Tangier. Today, two of Forbes's toy-soldier dioramas are popular with visitors to TALIM. Other donors, often the heirs of former diplomats in Tangier, gave photographs that date mostly from the early to mid-20th century; many are still in cardboard boxes awaiting digitization.

Looking through the photos, viewers see Western men in formal suits and Western women in long lacy dresses, often with Moroccan servants taking care of their carriage horses just outside the Legation. At least in the idealized world of images, it was a good life for expatriates, who by then made up some half of Tangier's total population.

Then came Moroccan independence in 1956. Tangier's free-trade status ended and, for many of the expatriates, the appeal of the city waned. By the 1980s, only about five percent of Tangier's

residents were non-Moroccan. One who has stayed is artist Elena Prentice. Her grandfather was the consul general at the Legation, her uncle was an OSS officer there, and she served as TALIM's director in 1989 and 1990. She left for a few years, but in 2002 she returned permanently to Tangier.

She recalls that in the past there had been little mixing between the people of the madinah and the foreign communities, and that during her stint as director she worked on integrating the building into the community. She founded a newspaper, *Khbar Bladna* (*News of Our Land*), to publish stories in the local dialect after realizing that much of the neighborhood couldn't read classical

The cultural center's museum covers a history of envoys and emissaries back to the 1786 Moroccan-American Treaty of Friendship—the first international treaty signed by a us still in the throes of war for independence from Great Britain.

appropriately have been called *Tangier*, as the city remained neutral during World War II. "There were 65 Americans working in the Legation, most of whom were military," says Davison. "The special offices of the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] operated out of here. Tangier was a very strategic city for Americans. It was the city of transit for refugees. If people could get their money here, they could work around the world."

After the war, writers the likes of Truman Capote, Gore Vidal and William Burroughs continued to come, and at the Legation they had documents notarized and random clerical matters handled. One of the most popular draws in TALIM is the Paul Bowles Wing, which pays homage to these writers. Bowles himself donated 72 hours of traditional and nearly extinct Moroccan music he recorded in the 1950s, and TALIM is in the process of digitizing the archive.

Bowles's music is one of the many discoveries to be made at the library, which also holds nearly 8,000 books, the oldest dating to the 15th century. Most are in English and French, but there are some Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic titles. The library is for research, not open to the public, and it draws mainly Moroccan and American graduate students.

"The books are all donations," says Bouziane. "Joseph Verner Reed, who was an ambassador during the Reagan era, loved Morocco so much that he gave us nearly 4,000 books."

Perusing the library rooms, packed ceiling-high with books, visitors find translations of the travels of Tangier's native son Ibn Battuta, volumes on history and politics in the region, orientalist novels set in Morocco, *Fodor's Travel Guides* from the 1960s and '70s, as well as more modern books such as Paula Wolfert's *Couscous and Other Good Food from Morocco*—the last inscribed by the author to Malcolm Forbes, publisher of *Forbes* magazine and former owner of an estate and museum



Arabic. This was, inadvertently, the first step toward today's literacy programs—and the notion that the Legation has a wider future purpose, one focused on its neighborhood.

Today the energy of the Legation comes from the students of the madinah. In 1998 a group of civic-minded Moroccans got together and formed the volunteer organization Fondation Tanger Al Madinah, or FATM. “We realized no one was taking care of the madinah,” says Adil Alaoui, FATM’s president. A university professor with doctorates in physics and civil engineering, he has fond memories of visiting his grandmother in the old city when it was still the main shopping area.

“No one was protecting it as a heritage site, cleaning it up,” Alaoui says. “We tried to get the community interested, but we realized that there were more pressing problems than protecting heritage. Most people in the madinah live on low incomes, and to them there was only one major problem: how at the end of the month a man could pay all of the bills. We started talking to the women. They are the pillars of the family, but we found out most of them had not gone to school. They couldn’t help their children with their studies.

“They needed to read—even to read recipes to work,” he adds, for the most common form of employment for women is in the food-and-beverage industries of the vital tourist trade.

At the time, the Rue d’Amerique was considered one of the roughest parts of the madinah, with high crime and prevalent drug abuse. FATM representatives talked to their TALIM counterparts, who agreed that it would host the classes. They started out with one volunteer teacher and four students.



Left: TALIM director John Davison, at right, reviews paint colors for another renovation in the building that has been expanded and remodeled numerous times since 1821. Davison explains that a “legation” ranked higher than a consulate but lower than an embassy. “Now, it’s just the name of the building,” he says. Above: Women gather in an embroidery class.

“In the beginning it was really hard, to be honest,” Alaoui says. “The men were reticent, but we would have discussions with them over coffee and tea to get them to believe in the idea. We explained that it was better for the children to have an educated mother. Also, the lessons were at an American center, and that caused some discontent, with the political situation in Iraq and Palestine. We had to explain to them the difference between politics and culture, and that it wasn’t a political center.”

The hard work paid off. “One day, there was a knock at the door, and I found an old man standing there, and he asked if this is the place where they teach reading and writing,” Arabic teacher Fatima Ben Guerch recalls with a smile. “I said, ‘I’m sorry, but it’s only for women.’ He said, ‘Yes, I brought my wife.’ And she stayed with us for two years until she got too sick to come anymore.”

Today there are 150 students at TALIM, up from 99 in 2005 when Ben Guerch joined as a full-time teacher. She teaches all three levels of the language classes, lecturing and then working one-on-one with the students. “It takes a lot of patience,” she says. “Sometimes I have to try three or four times to get a student to understand, but then when she is leaving, she’ll say, ‘Forgive me,’ and I’ll forget how tired I am.”

The classes also include lessons about the Qur’an, basic math and Moroccan history and civics from free government textbooks.

All the staff brags about one star alumna, Fatima Gharbouï, 65, who was one of the first students. She has become a recognized artist for her paintings of the neighborhood and rural life of her childhood.

“When she started writing, she was also doing some doodling in her books,” Bouziane recalls. “I brought her some paints. She didn’t believe in herself, but she made several paintings at the request of Adil. I suggested we do an exhibition, but everyone was very reluctant at first because it would be expensive.”

Still, TALIM staged an exhibition, and it proved popular. People talked to Gharbouï and bought her work, but no one knew if it was her story or her artwork that intrigued them. “So we

did a second exhibition, and she sold a painting for 500 dirhams [\$50],” says Bouziane. “Then her work started to be shown in galleries in London and Marrakech and Tangier, and started selling for 5,000 and 6,000 dirhams, and she got electricity at home as a result of that. Before, she had been painting by candlelight.

“At first she didn’t want to sell her work. She said they were for her. But then she started to understand. And now she has bought a little piece of land. She still comes every day because for her it is still a club, and she comes and does some embroidery.”

Indeed, the classes feel like a neighborhood sorority. “The women have helped us bolster civic pride in the neighborhood,” Alaoui says.

Some of Gharboui’s art hangs in TALIM’s art museum, which opened in 1976. Mohammed Jadid, who has been curating and collecting for 15 years, estimates that 600 to 900 pieces have been donated. They include many portraits of the wealthy expatriates who once lived here, as well as paintings those expatriates themselves made depicting the region. Gharboui’s works are the first by a contemporary resident of the madinah.

For Gharboui, El Kharz and most of the older women, the desire to read the Qur’an is the main reason they say they want to study at TALIM. Younger women are more inclined to see it as a doorway to employment.

The Legation’s circular, eagle-embazoned crest appears above an archway along one of the madinah’s narrow streets that surround—and, here, runs underneath—TALIM.



The youngest student today is 22, and many are in their 30s, 40s and 50s. Once a student has passed through three levels of Arabic, she may take embroidery, cooking and foreign-language classes that vary with the expatriate women who volunteer to teach them. The embroidery classes and cooking classes, which began 15 and five years ago, respectively, function almost as a reward for the younger students—and as job training, too.

“They can’t take these classes until they finish the literacy classes,” says Rahma Bounhani, a teacher who learned cooking and sewing from her mother and at trade school. “We want them to be able to get jobs in tourism or perhaps in the catering cooperative we started.” She focuses mainly on sweet-and-savory pastries, which the students proudly share with staff and guests.

The goal of workforce preparation became particularly important in 2008 when the global economic crisis hit Tangier and many factory jobs disappeared. Today Tangier is undergoing a manufacturing boom, with international companies such as Renault and Toyota setting up plants as the Moroccan government invests in making the city a major trade hub again. The work includes building the new Tanger-Med Port, which will double to 8 million the number of containers the harbor can handle. Tangier remains a city that draws tourists looking for snake charmers and other whiffs of exotica, but it is looking at a future that depends more on acumen than charm.

“We still need to do a lot of work here,” says Alaoui. “There is a whole generation that needs to grow up with hope—male and female. We are trying what we can.”

Americans who have invested time here agree.

“The Legation was a chance for me to practice citizen diplomacy, adding to the work of decades by dedicated volunteers to preserve the building and to add to the rich cultural life of Morocco’s most international city,” says Gerald Lotfus, a retired diplomat who was TALIM’s director from 2010 to 2014. “The Legation is a living reminder of America’s long engagement with the Arab and Muslim worlds, and as it grows more active with the community, it underscores the symbolic importance of this irreplaceable institution.”

“It’s remarkable,” Prentice reflects. “The Tangier welcome of others is exquisite. We have been so welcomed here. I don’t know if the reverse would be the case—if there were such a Moroccan building in the us, would it would be so warmly welcomed for so many years, and be a source of so much community pride?”



Alia Yunis (www.aliayunis.com) is a writer and filmmaker based in Abu Dhabi. She is the author of the critically acclaimed novel *The Night Counter* (Random House, 2010). Norwegian-born **Tor Eigeland** (www.toreigeland.com) has traveled all his life as a freelance writer and photographer, and he has contributed for decades to *AramcoWorld* as well as to many other publications.



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Video visit to TALIM:

KING of the RIVER of GIANTS

Written by BRIAN E. CLARK
Photographs courtesy NIZAR IBRAHIM
© Video by DAN SMITH



When he was a child in Germany, most of the dinosaur books that University of Chicago paleontologist Nizar Ibrahim read didn't mention *Spinosaurus aegyptiacus*, which means "spiny lizard from Egypt." Even now, few do.

But then the youth found a tome that introduced a story that hooked him for life: Between 1910 and 1914, Bavarian aristocrat Ernst Freiherr [Baron] Stromer von Reichenbach and fossil collector Richard Markgraf trekked through the eastern Sahara in Egypt, where among their finds were a few fossilized bones that appeared to belong to a previously unknown predator—one even larger than *Tyrannosaurus rex*. It was their exploits, Ibrahim says, that focused him on Africa. Now, thanks to Ibrahim's digging in southeastern Morocco, *Spinosaurus* is poised to make its way into dino-lit, for kids and scholars alike.

"I was perhaps six or seven at the time, and I still have all those books," says the 32-year-old Berlin native whose bright blue eyes tip off his mixed German and Moroccan heritage.

When he learned later that the bones Stromer had discovered in Egypt were destroyed during a World War II British bombing raid on Munich, and that unraveling the *Spinosaurus* puzzle was

widely considered "the ultimate prize in dinosaur paleontology," he became passionate in his pursuit of the predator. (Stromer's finds—spines, a lower jaw, tail bones and other bits—had been insufficient to extrapolate a fully reliable skeleton.)

Ibrahim sated his curiosity at last several years ago amid the approximately 250-kilometer-long, fossil-rich Kem Kem escarpment, which lies on the Morocco-Algeria border in what was once a river system. It was there that he and his team uncovered more fossilized bones of a *Spinosaurus*, along with those of enormous flying reptiles such as *Alanqa saharica* and huge prehistoric fishes. The whole region, he says, was a largely unknown, 95-million-year-old Cretaceous ecosystem, a "lost world of African dinosaurs, a place far more bizarre than any other ecosystem we know about." Fame in natural history circles came quickly, and last year The National Geographic Society dubbed Ibrahim "the dinosaur detective" and named him among its Emerging Explorers.

“Africa just happens to be, I think, the final frontier in paleontology,” he says. “Today it’s an ocean of sand with temperatures that can reach 52 degrees Celsius [125°F], but 100 million years ago, it was a huge river system teeming with giant fish and even bigger predators like *Spinosaurus*.”

Ibrahim says he plans to keep exploring. “I believe there are many more treasures out there to be found. Will we discover even bigger predatory dinosaurs? I don’t know, but we’ve only found a small percentage of the dinosaurs that once lived.”

The size of the carnivorous *Spinosaurus* tends to attract the most attention: At around 15 meters from nose to tail, it’s about the size of a school bus. That’s 20 percent longer than a *T. rex*—and taller, if it reared up. But Ibrahim says it’s the semi-aquatic adaptation of *Spinosaurus* that most fascinates him and other paleontologists.

“It’s like no other dinosaur,” he explains. “If you look at its anatomy, it has ‘partially aquatic lifestyle’ written all over it. Its significance is that it shows that dinosaurs were far more diverse and adaptable than previously thought. *Spinosaurus* was highly specialized and indicates that dinosaurs could cross the line from land to semi-aquatic. That probably didn’t happen often, but we know it happened at least once.”

Ibrahim says *Spinosaurus* had slender, crocodile-like jaws more than 1.5 meters long with conical teeth that made them ideal for grabbing slippery fish. It also had a big, sail-like structure on its back supported by spines that were each taller than a human.

“That sail was like a peacock’s tail, sort of a display structure that may have been brightly colored and, we think, communicated important information to other

Right: Ibrahim, at left, and an assistant rest at a dig site on “The River of Giants.” Lower: These linked parts of a fossilized spine of a *Spinosaurus* were recovered nearby.



Paleontologist Nizar Ibrahim, far left, leads a team exploring the Kem Kem escarpment on the once-swampy edge of the Sahara Desert in southeastern Morocco, a region Ibrahim dubs “The River of Giants” for its treasures of fossilized bones of large dinosaurs. Largest among them, and adapted to both water and land, was *Spinosaurus aegyptiacus*, shown opposite in an artist’s rendering,

creatures. It might have said, ‘Look how big I am!’ ‘Stay out of my territory!’ or ‘I’m interested in mating!’ That same sail, however, probably made

it pretty awkward on land. It was also rather front-heavy.”

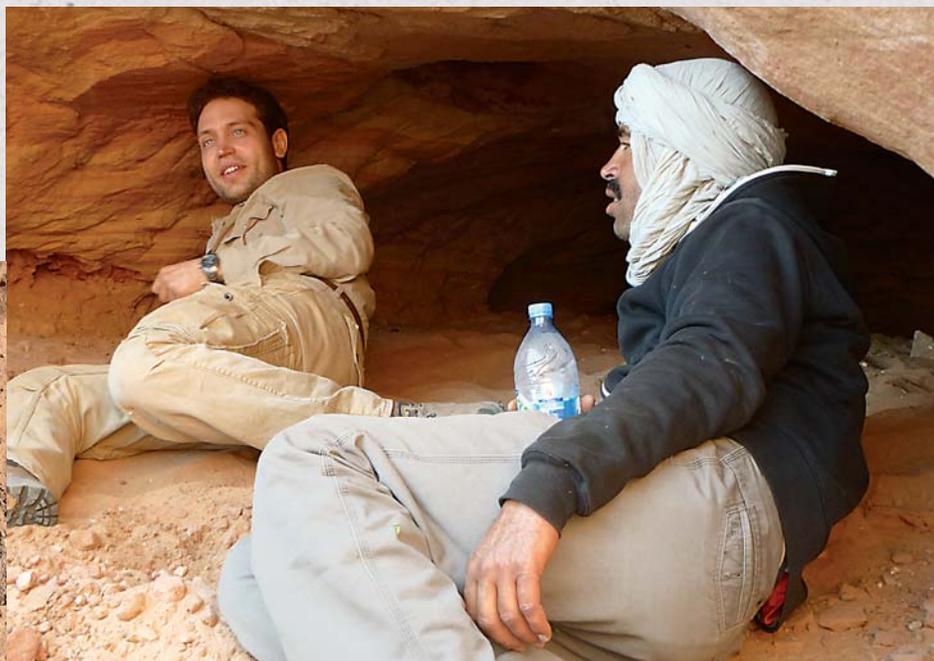
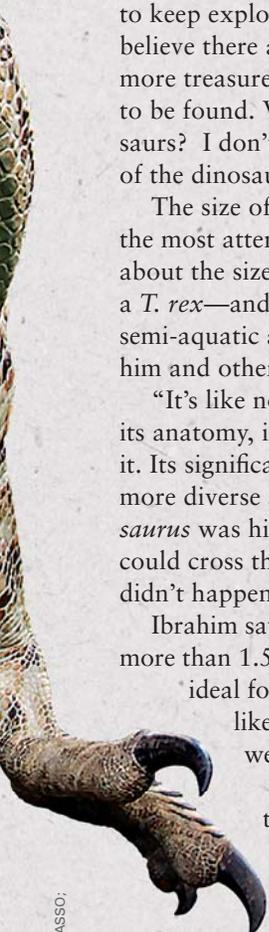
Though Ibrahim’s search for the *Spinosaurus* began with childhood musings and models that led him to graduate school and research in Europe and North America as well as many trips to Morocco and the broader Sahara, his first real lead came in 2008 in Morocco. That was when he purchased some blade-shaped bones from a fossil hunter that he later thought might belong to a *Spinosaurus*.

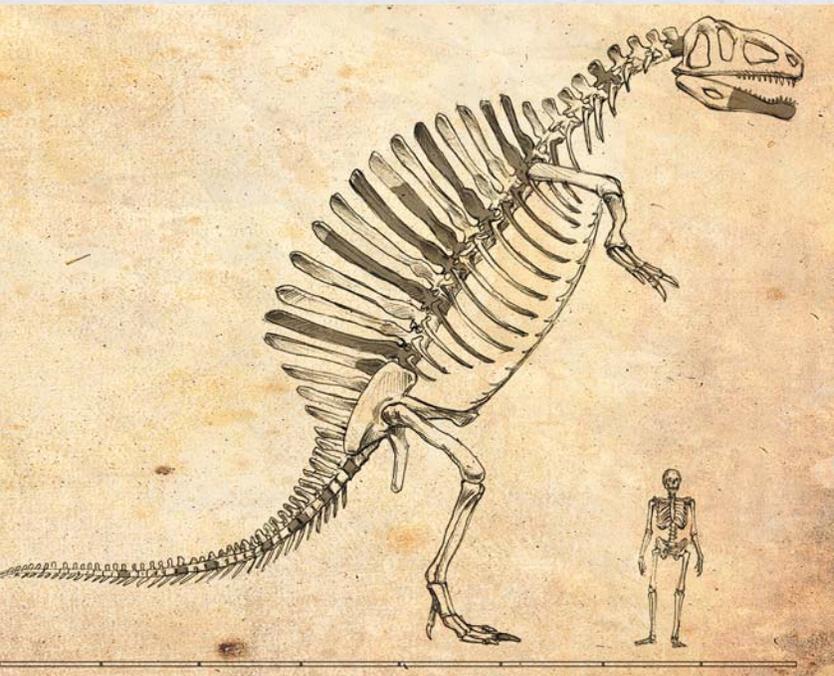
Italian colleagues later told him of fossils in Milan’s natural history museum. Ibrahim traveled to Italy to inspect the bones, which he learned had recently been acquired from an unidentified Moroccan fossil trader.

When he compared his bones with the ones in Milan, he found that they matched. He wondered if they had come from the same reptile.

That was the beginning of the detective work. Ibrahim now had to locate the unnamed Moroccan fossil hunter from whom he’d bought his specimens in order to find the bones’ original location. All he remembered was that the man had a mustache.

“In southeastern Morocco, that’s not very helpful,” he





Left: German paleontologist Ernst Freiherr [Baron] Stromer von Reichenbach posed with this fossil bone, attributed to a *Bahariasaurus*, after his expedition to Egypt in the early 1900s—when he also discovered the first fossilized remains of *Spinosaurus*. Far left: In this sketch styled after Stromer's skeletal reconstruction, *Spinosaurus* towers over a human.

says ruefully. “And the country has maybe 50,000 fossil hunters, so I knew my chances were slim.”

But back to Morocco he went, visiting village after village along the Sahara in search of the mystery man. In the oasis town of Erfoud, he was about to give up his quest when he saw a man walk by that he thought he recognized. He had a moustache.

“I was sitting in a café, quite ready to throw in the towel,” he remembers. “But I saw him out of the corner of my eye and ran after him.”

The pair talked, but the fossil digger balked at revealing the location of his find until Ibrahim convinced him of the discovery’s importance to Morocco. Then the man, who asked to remain anonymous, led the young paleontologist to a site not far from Erfoud. It yielded enough additional bones that with the help of technology and Stromer’s sketches, scientists at last built a skeleton of a *Spinosaurus*.

Excavations continue, and today the displays they built are part of a traveling exhibition called “*Spinosaurus*: Lost Giant of the Cretaceous” that is now in Milan. The fossils Ibrahim discovered are back in Morocco as part of a research collection at Hassan II University in Casablanca.

If Ibrahim has his way, his *Spinosaurus* bones will one day become part of Morocco’s first natural-history museum. But first, he says, he needs to raise more interest in dinosaurs and paleontology in Morocco, the wider Maghrib and Middle East. He’s already working on educational programs to do just that.

“If you look at the worldwide success of movies like *Jurassic Park* [released in 1993] and the new *Jurassic World*, there is something universal about the appeal of dinosaurs,” he says. “In North America, Europe, Japan and Australia, everyone seems to love dinosaurs.”

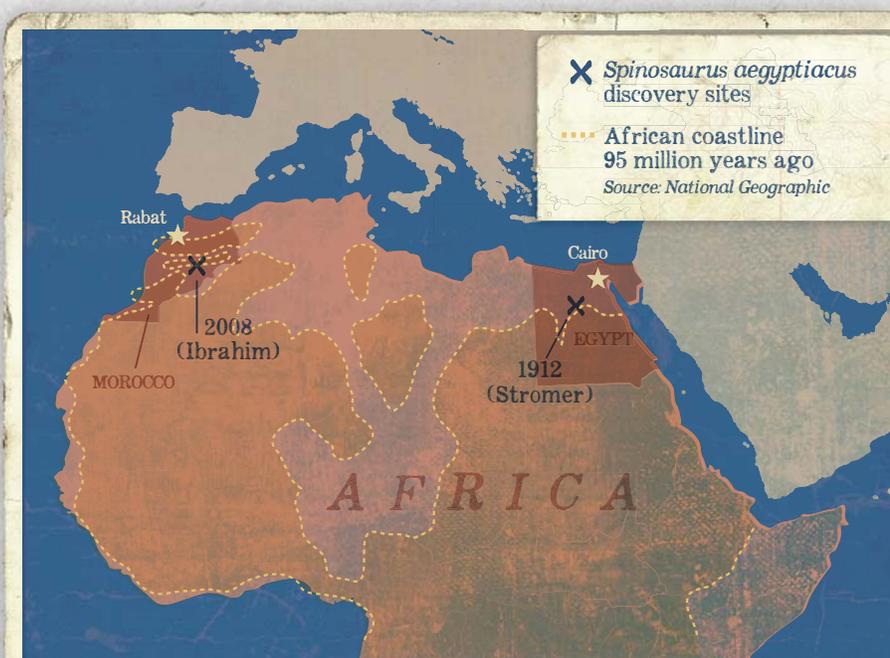
Not so in North Africa and the Middle East, he

says. “People in Morocco are not aware that their country has yielded all these incredible fossils, and that Morocco has one of the most complete records of life on our planet. But when you tell kids there about dinosaurs and paleontology, they get excited and want to know a lot more. To me that’s very encouraging.

“There is no big national museum of natural history. So I’m trying to help change that with the discovery of flying reptiles like *Alanqa*, dinosaurs like *Spinosaurus* and the ecosystem I call ‘The River of Giants.’”

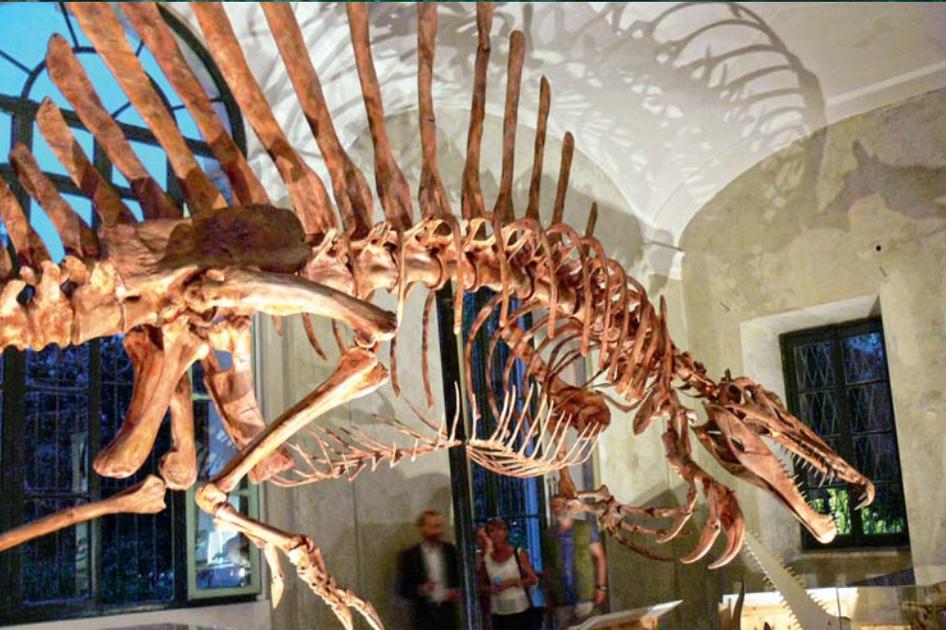
A national museum of natural history “just has to happen,” he says firmly. “Most of the fantastic Moroccan fossils that have been discovered are on display in European and American museums ... not Morocco, and that’s absurd. I want people, especially young Moroccans, to know about this incredible story that is written in the rocks of their country.”

Stromer, who in addition to being an explorer and a prolific writer was a professor at the Ludwig Maximilian University in





Left: A swimmer the size of a school bus armed with teeth and claws, *Spinosaurus* could weigh six to seven tons. Equally at home on land or in water, it was a predator without equal. Lower: This life-size model of the dinosaur skeleton features in the traveling exhibition “*Spinosaurus: Lost Giant of the Cretaceous*,” now showing at the Palazzo Dugnani in Milan.



nosaurus and a *T. rex*? But he replies patiently, knowing people are curious about such a match-up.

“They lived millions of years apart and on different continents,” he explains. “So this is pure speculation. In addition, predators typically try to avoid serious injury, not like what you’d see in a *Godzilla* movie, because in the real world, injuries can make predators very vulnerable and unable to catch prey.”

The *T. rex*, Ibrahim says, was all about its huge, crushing jaws. *Spinosaurus* has strong arms and slashing claws in addition to crocodile-like jaws. “They are both very powerful and large predators,” he says. “If one of them lands a big bite or causes a major injury in some other way, it’s probably game over, but the battle would probably still drag on for quite a bit longer. My hunch would be that *T. rex* has an edge on land. But in the water, *Spinosaurus* reigns supreme.”

Then Ibrahim turns back to real science. “While some people seem to enjoy fight scenes between predatory dinosaurs in computer games and movies,” he says, “for me the most awe-inspiring and magical thing to watch would be to see these animals do what they are doing best, in their natural environment.

“In the case of *Spinosaurus*, that would be watching one of these animals emerge from the water with a freshly caught fish in its jaws, slowly wading toward the edge of the river, the majestic sail glistening in the evening sun. Now that would be a sight.” 🌐



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Munich, would probably agree.

If Ibrahim could meet his admitted role model, he says the first thing he would tell Stromer is that his theories about the first *Spinosaurus* fossils in Egypt were correct.

“I’d say, ‘You got it right,’” he notes. “I’d tell Stromer that *Spinosaurus* really was bizarre—the largest predatory dinosaur we’ve discovered, even longer than *T. rex*. I think he’d be happy to know that we found a new skeleton and a lot of other incredible things in Morocco.”

Then, he adds, “I’d love to share with him all the discoveries my team made in Morocco and tell him, ‘Yes, that strange world of Saharan dinosaurs you found in Egypt stretched all the way to Morocco.’”

Ibrahim shakes his head a bit when asked a pop-culture question: How would he handicap a battle between a *Spino-*



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NOW PLAYING
JORDAN
CREDIT: NADINE TOUKAN



Until 2008, Jordan had produced only one truly home-grown feature film.

It was Egypt that blazed the trail for Arab cinema, followed by Morocco, Algeria and several other countries. Cairo's film industry in the 1940s, '50s and '60s was prolific, and many productions from that time are recognized as classics. But those decades of dominance, in which Egyptian visual culture was ubiquitous across the Arab world, helped suppress the development of film production elsewhere.

Jordan's first movie, *Siraa fi Jarash (Struggle in Jarash)*, was released in 1957. Independently financed by a group of friends, one of whom, Wasif Alsheikh, was also the director, it has been described as part gangster flick, part tourist documentary. Scenes of rather wooden dialogue come interspersed, unusually for a drama, with location shoots showcasing Jordan's natural and historical attractions.

But the breakthrough wasn't sustained. For more than half a century, foreign directors shot in Jordan, most notably David Lean (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962) and Steven Spielberg (*Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*,



Written by **MATTHEW TELLER**

Photographs by **GEORGE AZAR**



A makeshift film screen blows in the desert wind in Jordan's Wadi Rum, long a cinematic setting for international films (notably *Lawrence of Arabia*), where this spring Jordanian filmmakers and local Bedouin actors gathered to view one of Jordan's newest films, director Naji Abu Nowar's *Theeb*—another film influenced by pioneer filmmaker and cinema-workshop developer Nadine Toukan, above right. "Nadine is the reason I'm sitting here today," said Abu Nowar.

1989). A handful of Arab films during that time had Jordanian connections, but there was scant institutional support for aspiring Jordanian filmmakers. That is, until a serendipitous chain of events about a decade ago brought Nadine Toukan back to her hometown, Jordan's capital, Amman.

In one of the bright salad-and-smoothies cafés popular in Amman's upscale neighborhoods, the soft-spoken, 40-something Toukan pauses for thought before answering my question about her career.

"I like to see myself as a creator, a connector of dots," she says.

Credited as producer or executive producer on many of the movies that have flowed out of Jordan in the last 10 years, Toukan began her career in advertising. She changed direction in the 1990s to help establish Jordan's first dot-com success, a news and entertainment portal for the early web called Arabia Online. But even after

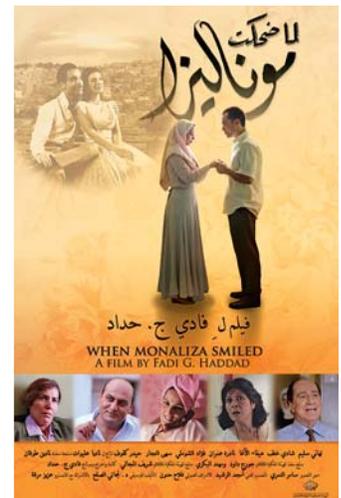
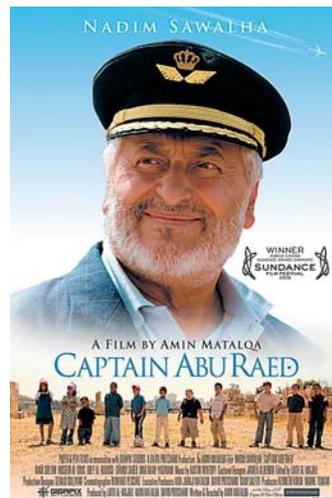
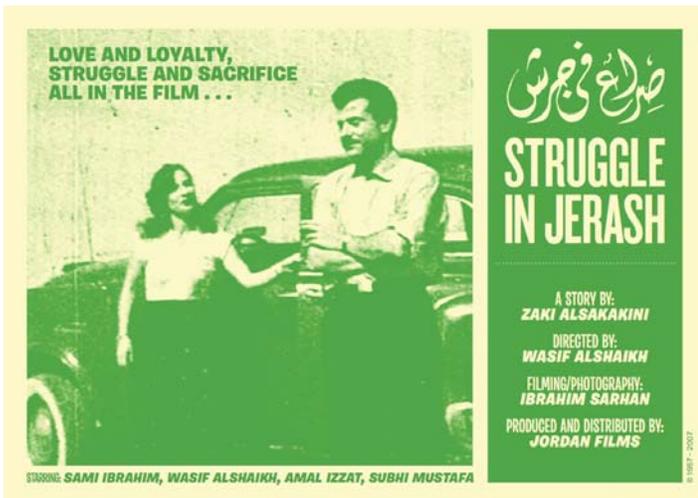
relocating to cutting-edge Dubai during the dot-com boom of 2000 and 2001, she knew that her heart lay elsewhere.

"I realized I wanted to roll up my sleeves and [work] instead of observing and commenting. That's how I think of myself—as a contributor to the creation of possibilities. I wanted reach," she says.

Back in Amman, creating content for the web dovetailed neatly into creating content for the screen. Toukan discussed making a documentary about the tribes of Petra with noted Jordanian anthropologist Rami Sajdi. They developed a proposal, only to meet a wall of skepticism from television and film-production companies.

"Everybody said: 'Oh, who cares? You'll never get it made.' That, for me, was fascinating," Toukan says.

Some might have capitulated. Others more confrontational might have raised a fight. But this playful, quietly steely



Forty-eight years after it premiered, Jordan's first feature film, *Struggle in Jerash*, stood almost alone when Nadine Toukan founded the Sundance Middle East screenwriters lab in 2005 and launched the new Royal Film Commission's program to develop local filmmaking talent. Three years later, Amin Matalqa released the critically acclaimed *Captain Abu Raed*; Fadi Haddad's *When Monaliza Smiled* came in 2012.

character began searching for another way. Her restlessness coincided with planning by the Jordanian government to create the Royal Film Commission (RFC), partly to entice foreign productions to the country, but also to foster the development of a homegrown cinema industry. Toukan was invited to head the RFC's program to identify and develop local talent.

She knew she would be starting from scratch. One of her first initiatives was to forge links with the Sundance Institute, a US nonprofit founded by Robert Redford to nurture filmmaking talent.

In 2005 Toukan helped bring Sundance's screenwriting lab—at which mentors and filmmakers are corralled together in a retreat to refine ideas—to Jordan.

"I was in England when my sister told me about the Royal Film Commission, and that a colleague of hers, Nadine Toukan, was [involved,]" Jordanian director Naji Abu Nowar recalls when we meet on the breezy balcony of a film-production company in Amman.

"I wanted to make Arabic films, but I just didn't think going back to Jordan was an option. There was no idea of a film industry there. I talked to Nadine, and she said I should apply to the Sundance Middle East screenwriters' lab. It completely changed my life. Working with these writers gave me a new idea of what it was to be a screenwriter. Nadine is the reason I'm sitting here today."

The lab became an annual event, and this year it celebrates its 10th anniversary in Jordan. Abu Nowar can pinpoint a number of leading filmmakers who have benefited from its influence, including first-year participants Cherien Dabis, Sameh Zoabi and Najwa Najjar. "They all went through" the lab, he says.

"*Wadja* [the first Saudi feature directed by a woman,

Haifaa Al Mansour] went through that lab. You name any Arab film that won awards, it's gone through that lab. That's a mark of the quality of the work—and that's from Nadine."

As the RFC began to draw international directors to Jordan, including Brian de Palma (*Redacted*), Nick Broomfield (*Battle for Haditha*) and Kathryn Bigelow (*The Hurt Locker*), it also launched a cooperative effort with the University of Southern California in Los Angeles to establish the Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts, or RSICA, which offered the only master's-degree program in film in the Middle East.

Toukan, though, was feeling the constraints of working in a public-sector institution. She left the RFC to face head-on the wall of skepticism inhibiting support for local filmmaking.

She met a California-based Jordanian filmmaker, Amin Matalqa, who showed her a script he was developing with a friend, Laith Majali. To Toukan, it looked promising. She began pitching to potential business backers in

Jordan and gathering support from the scriptwriters' contacts in Los Angeles.

The result was *Captain Abu Raed*, released in 2008 to critical acclaim. Directed by Matalqa, it's a moving story about an elderly man working as a janitor in the Amman airport whose life becomes entangled with those of local children. As well as winning several international awards, *Captain Abu Raed* marked Jordan's emergence as a contemporary filmmaking nation.

"Why did it take so long?" asks Toukan. "Permission," she says with a smile.

"There's a mindset that waits for permission to create," she explains, adding that self-censorship inhibits an individual's license to author a narrative by raising questions like: "Is my voice interesting enough? Is it worthy enough?"

“You name any Arab film that won awards, it's gone through [the Sundance Middle East screenwriters'] lab.”

—NAJI ABU NOWAR

Right: On the set of *The Rendezvous*, Jordanian-born director Amin Matalqa works with actors (from left) Stana Ketic, Raza Jaffrey and Meg Cionni. Lower: Cionni on the camera's screen during a scene; at lower right, Matalqa reacts to the take.

Am I good enough?"

"That's a phenomenon across the arts, I think. We didn't wait for anyone's permission."

And this time, it wasn't a one-off. With institutional recognition and, perhaps more importantly, growing informal support networks, other Jordanian filmmakers followed *Captain Abu Raed's* lead. Notable among them were Mahmoud Al Massad, whose gritty urban documentary *Recycle* (2008) garnered international attention, and Mohammed Al Hushki, who made *Transit Cities* (2009) about a woman who returns to Amman after 17 years abroad to find her family and the city changed. *Transit Cities* took home two prizes at the Dubai International Film Festival. Toukan's goal of creating a viable, skilled, experienced Jordanian film community was coming closer—aided by a film fund administered by the RFC that was extending vital support to local writers and directors, as well as backing by individuals such as the late Ali Maher, an RFC commissioner and advocate of the creative arts.



teaches film at the American University in Dubai.

Toukan "was always there day to day, to give feedback and supervise in casting, locations," he adds. "But she wasn't trying to act the boss. She would say, 'This is Fadi's project; we're helping him do his film.' I always remember that."

"*Monaliza* stirred a lot of discussion in Jordan," says Omar Razzaz, until recently head of the board of trustees at the King Abdullah II Fund for Development (KAFFD), a Jordanian nongovernmental organization devoted to civic empowerment. The film dealt with "several taboos to do with foreign workers, class, identity [and gender] issues," he says. "It brought a lot to the surface."

Razzaz notes that establishing a Jordanian film industry doesn't just have a cultural impact. "From a strictly economic perspective, the value-added of the cinema industry is huge, because you have so many linkages to it—music, design, fashion, tourism, culture. You can market a whole country through what you produce [on screen]," he says.

Jordan's royal family has long had an intimate connection with screen entertainment. King Abdullah's parents met on the set of *Lawrence of Arabia*, and the



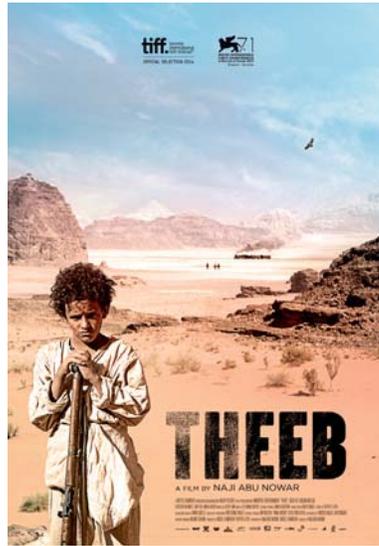
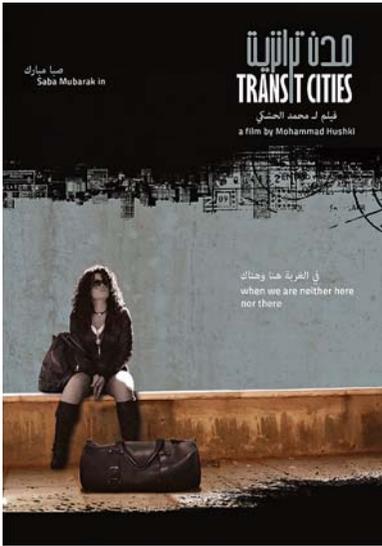
Fadi Haddad explains how he approached Toukan in 2010, at his graduation from RSICA, with an idea he'd developed with fellow student Nadia Eliewat.

The pair had expected to wait "five or six years" for the chance to move it to the screen, but "Nadine read the script and [asked to] be executive producer," Haddad recalls. "She has this vibe that [means], 'We'll make it happen.'"

This time, the result was *When Monaliza Smiled*, a romantic comedy about an unlikely relationship between a dour Jordanian office worker and a cheery Egyptian teaboy. Shot in Amman and released in 2012, it was a hit across the region.

"I don't think [the film] would have happened without Nadine," says Haddad, *Monaliza's* director, who now





Mohammed Al Hushki's *Transit Cities* (2009), left, took two prizes at the Dubai International Film Festival. Naji Abu Nowar's *Theeb* (Wolf), released last year, was notable for its collaboration with local Bedouin actors, silhouetted, right, during a screening at Wadi Rum.

king himself even had a nonspeaking role in one episode of the television series *Star Trek: Voyager*.

But Toukan, nurturing intense drive beneath her mild, cheerful exterior, is impatient with a filmmaking model that depends on royal or state patronage. For her next project, she broke that mold by successfully pitching for funding from a range of local, private-sector business sources. The KAFD also became a key financial backer for *Theeb* (2014), directed by Toukan mentee Abu Nowar.

This latest Jordanian hit—whose Arabic title means “Wolf”—follows an English army officer through the deserts of northern Arabia during World War I, as seen through the eyes of a Bedouin boy caught up in events beyond his control. *Theeb* is an intimate, acutely well-observed drama of relationships, described by Hollywood’s *Variety* magazine as “a classic adventure film of the best kind, and one that’s rarely seen these days... A Bedouin western shot in the Jordanian desert with real Bedouins.”

“Nadine is someone who has earned her stripes,” says Razzaz, calling her “very driven, very creative” and very dependable. “That’s comforting, to know you’re talking to a

person that [isn’t] going to drop this next year.

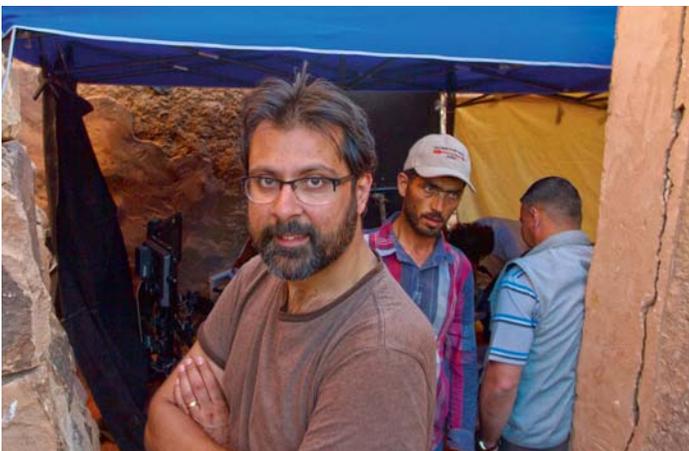
“KAFD has always distinguished between financial return and social return,” Razzaz says, noting that the success of a film can be measured in more ways than box-office take. “We quickly saw how [*Theeb*] was changing mindsets in [rural communities] about the possibility you could be an actor and not just a bus driver or security guard.”

This social return can also be seen on the film set. In 2006 crews filming in Jordan were less than one-third Jordanian. By 2014 two films—*Rosewater*, directed by American talk-show host Jon Stewart, and *Kajaki*, directed by Britain’s Paul Katis—had been shot in Jordan with 70-80 percent Jordanian crews. From set construction to costume design, film is expanding the nation’s skills base.

Bassel Ghandour got his break on *Captain Abu Raed*, where he was Toukan’s production assistant. He then secured a position on *The Hurt Locker* and parlayed that experience into co-writing *Theeb*. Now he runs his own production company in Amman.

“To help nurture a system that had people who really knew

Left: Ossama Bawardi produced *Salt of This Sea* in 2008 and *When I Saw You* in 2012. Right, Naji Abu Nowar at the Wadi Rum screening of *Theeb*.





Above: Bedouin actors greet each other at the screening of *Theeb* while Toukan, lower, greets viewers.

nothing—all they had was ambition to work in film—that really takes vision,” he says of Toukan.

There have been, and remain, obstacles: RSICA has folded, and no Jordanian movie has yet turned a profit. But *Theeb* is well on the way to that breakthrough, having capitalized on its festival successes to secure 2015 general releases in the UK and the US, cinema’s two biggest and most important markets.

The wider benefits excite many.

“I absolutely see a return in intangible ways,” says Saad Mouasher, vice-chairman of Jordan Ahli Bank. One of *Theeb*’s financial backers, he voices full-throated support for Toukan’s work in the industry.

“When you’re producing a movie, you’re investing in local capabilities. Movies are a way for us, in the Arab world, to reclaim our heritage,” he says. “I would invest again. Until the industry matures, issues such as supporting the arts, freedom of expression and creating our own narratives take precedence over [financial] return. It’s priceless, culturally. Nadine is one of the catalysts for positive change in Jordan.”

Between sips of tea in our bustling café, I ask Toukan if she is trying to change her country. After a pause, she nods and says, “Yes, I am. We are. It’s a pleasure to do that. It’s one of the reasons I get up excited in the morning—the adventure of it.”

“You can see the stepping stones” on the way to success, she says. “That gives me great inspiration and motivation. A film movement will shift Jordan culturally and politically—the experience of going to a cinema with a bunch of strangers, laughing together, crying together, being wooed together, is extremely important for how a culture gets to be comfortable with itself.”

She remains committed to breaking molds and opening more creative pathways for Jordan—and Jordanians.

“My duty is to make good entertainment—and I love venturing

into the unknown,” she says. “If the film industry in Jordan were established, I don’t know if I’d be this excited. It’s massive, unlimited opportunity. That’s really exciting for me. Less rules!”



Journalist and broadcaster **Matthew Teller** (mailto:matthewteller.com) is based in the UK. He writes on the Middle East for international media and makes documentaries for BBC radio. Follow him on Twitter @matthewteller and at his blog www.QuiteAlone.com. Photojournalist and filmmaker

George Azar (george_azar@me.com) is co-author of *Palestine: A Guide* (Interlink, 2005), author of *Palestine: A Photographic Journey* (University of California, 1991) and director of the film *Gaza Fixer* (2007). He lives in Jordan.



Link:

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View trailers for *Captain Abu Raed*, *When Monaliza Smiled* and *Theeb*:

TRAVELERS of AL-ANDALUS

part V



Ibn Hazm's Journeys of Exile and Love

Written by LOUIS WERNER Art by BELÉN ESTURLA

Some travel more with their feet and others travel more in their hearts. The names of some are known in foreign lands because they themselves have gone there, while others become famous abroad because their works precede them. Some reputations are forceful, and some are gentle. But those people whose legacies journey farthest often are those who write not of conflict, but of love.

For Abu Muhammad Ali ibn Hazm, topics of the heart examined from all possible vantage points—from moral philosophy to social psychology, from the most ethereal matters of the spirit to the most practical ones of the body, and, in religious terms, from the sacred to the profane—engraved his stamp on both Arabic and Western literary traditions far from his own life and times in 11th-century Al-Andalus.

His most important book is *Tawq al-Hamama* (*The Ring of the Dove*). It is the one Arabic

work most cited alongside the Western canon on like subject matter—the Greek philosopher Plato, the Roman poet Ovid, troubadours in medieval France who strummed their lyrics on the lute (descended

from the Arab *'ud*) and also, one might argue, the Beatles in “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” Elvis Presley in “Don’t Be Cruel (To a Heart That’s True)” and singers of countless similar boy-wants-girl pop confections.

Historians recognize that Al-Andalus served as a bridge to Europe of the literary form known as the *muwashshah*, or the rhymed strophic poetry with a refrain. The word came from the Arabic root meaning cummerbund, as if each stanza is “belted” by the repeating verse. They were often set to the musical accompaniment of lute, tambourine and hand drum—the ideal instruments for a minstrel trailing his royal sovereign or the ladies of the court. But from where came love as the subject of a song?

For this, medieval Europe looked to the Arabic translators in Al-Andalus as well as the Arab East, and to the Christian court in Toledo, where Arabic was still widely spoken. All helped transmit back to Western languages what the Arabs had previously translated from Latin and Greek. While most of these texts were scientific and analytical, there was also a keen interest in what might be called the philosophy of life—and they returned to Europe those ideas that classical writers had expounded about the nature of the human heart.

As Plato has Phaedrus say in his eponymous dialogue, “My tale, Socrates, is one of your sort, for love was the theme that occupied us—but love after a fashion.” Their conversation continues on the subjects of soulful, mad and divine love. Or as Ovid put it in the opening lines of his *Art of Love*, written with the same pedagogical purpose: “If there be anyone among you who is ignorant of the art of loving, let him read



this poem and, having read it and acquired the knowledge it contains, let him address himself to Cupid.”

As a similar guide to the heart from an Arab perspective, Ibn Hazm praised the supremacy of requited love and rejected the remote and unattainable love often depicted by pre-Islamic poets, that of a woman whose only traces are found, for instance, in the dead ashes of her abandoned campfire. When the sixth-century poet Imru al-Qays wrote, “Oh my friends / Let us stop and weep over the remembrance of my beloved / Here was her abode on the edge of the sandy desert,” Ibn Hazm responded, “Spare me those tales of the Bedouin ... their ways are not our ways ... it is not my habit to wear out anyone’s riding beast but my own.”

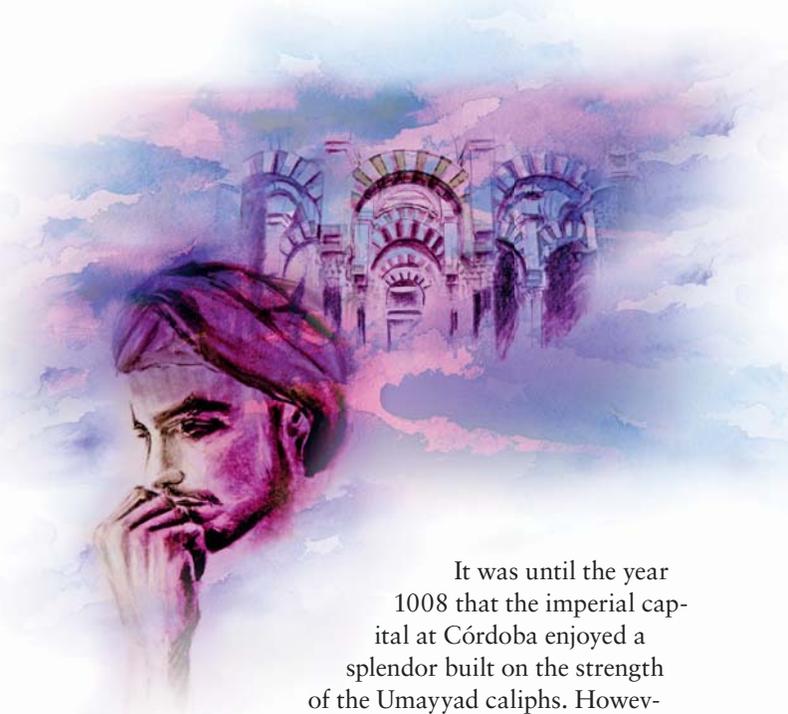
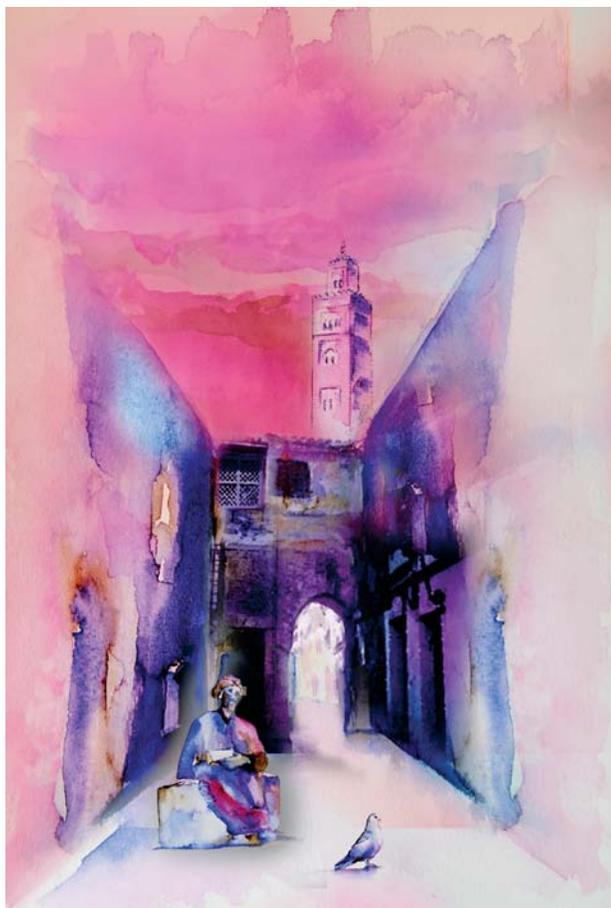
Indeed he explicitly rejected the imagery of the desert, and in *The Ring of the Dove’s* introductory poem, he directly addressed his beloved:

*The passions most men boast them of
Are like a desert’s noontide haze:
I love thee with a constant love
Unwithering through all my days.*

Ibn Hazm was born in Córdoba in the year 994 to the Bani Hazm, a large, Arabized family of Hispanic origin. His grandfather had long ago abandoned the family farm near Huelva in order to improve his fortune by serving in the Umayyad court, then at the apex of its magnificence in Córdoba. Ibn Hazm’s father, Ahmad, was a man of letters who was also skilled in navigating the political affairs of Caliph Hisham II, and he attained the office of vizier.

The caliph awarded Ahmad with privileges of luxury and wealth, and he allowed the family to move closer to the court in the noble city of Madinat al-Zahra, on the outskirts of Córdoba. There, Ibn Hazm spent his childhood in the *haram* among the women, where he observed and learned from them in silence. This experience helped him develop a sensitive understanding of the feminine perspective on life that was to become so important in all his literary and philosophical works.

As a boy, Ibn Hazm was said to have been especially impressionable, clever but prone to melancholy, educated in the high tradition that included Greek sciences and readings of classical Arab authors. In those years he shared company with a group of intellectuals who belonged to the aristocracy, among whom he would later seek protection from political persecution, and with whom he would ceaselessly squabble over arcane matters literary and theological.



It was until the year 1008 that the imperial capital at Córdoba enjoyed a splendor built on the strength of the Umayyad caliphs. However, after dynastic upheavals and family conspiracies, the political situation turned turbulent. Revolts and internal struggles brought on a long series of betrayals, murders, dismissals and rebellions, sudden enthronements followed by usurpations and exiles. All marked a decline that resulted in the abolition of the caliphate in 1031. In all this, Ibn Hazm’s father was dismissed from his post, his privileges began to vanish, and he fell from favor. Chaos reached its peak in May 1013. Ibn Hazm was about 20 by then. Córdoba fell into the hands of an invading Berber army from North Africa. The city was plundered, its streets littered with corpses, its gardens and palaces reduced to ashes. The Bani Hazm home was demolished, its extended family members dispersed and chased from town, and the young Ibn Hazm, now sunk into more than a typical adolescent depression, went into self-imposed exile to Almería.

Almería, it turned out, was no safe haven, and there he was arrested and sent into involuntary exile, first in the hamlet of Aznalcázar near Seville, then in Játiva, Valencia—which happened to be the center of papermaking in Al-Andalus, which may have nudged him to first pick up the pen. Later he was to return to his family’s ancestral farm near Huelva, and there he died at age 70 in 1064.

Although the open wound in Ibn Hazm’s temperament never healed, it did give him the impulse in the year 1022 to write about—of all things!—love, a much more

refined and multifaceted emotion than the rancor he must have felt. *The Ring of the Dove*, an exquisitely composed and maturely imagined treatise on the act of loving and being loved, was composed by a 28-year-old who by all accounts had not yet tasted any of that.

What he wrote in following years—if his son Abu Rafi can be believed—comprised more than 80,000 pages in some 400 works on topics such as theology, law and religious polemic (subjects far in spirit from where he first began), and it was all torched on the order of Abbad II Al-Mu'tadid, the petty ruler of the kingdom of Seville that took shape following the breakup of the Caliphate. Ibn Hazm's defiant answer to this was, "Even though you might burn paper, you will not burn what is written upon it, since that remains in my heart and in my mind."

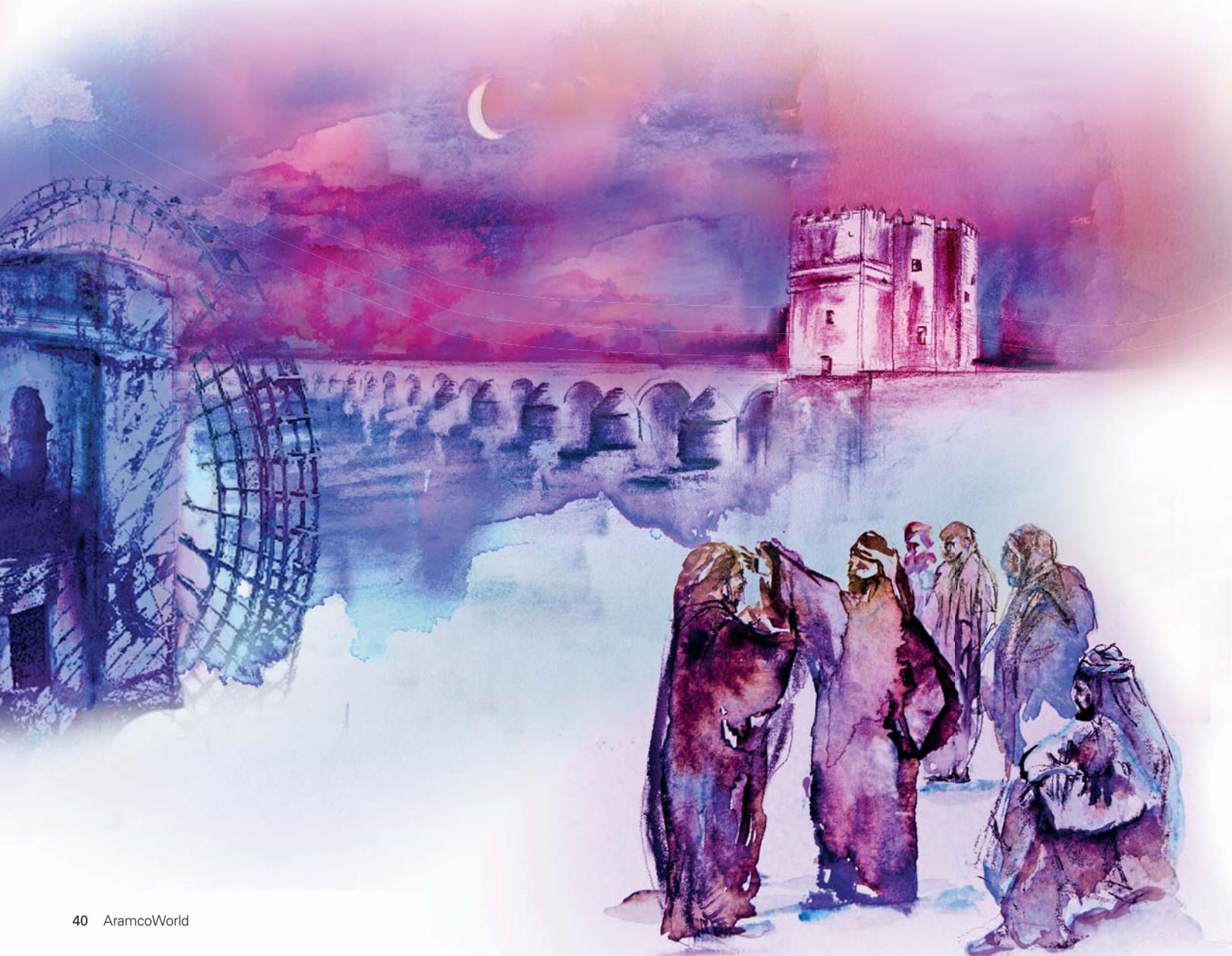
Literary scholars Ramón Menéndez-Pidal, María Rosa Menocal and others believe that Arabic literature has been until recently an underestimated source for much of medieval European *belles-lettres*. Attraction, temperance, forbearance: such subjects can be found in the philosophical tracts of Ibn Rushd (Averroës), who lived in Córdoba a century after Ibn Hazm. In following centuries, it is not known when or if the West ever became enlightened by the Tunisian Shihab al-Din

al-Tifashi's manual *Delight of Hearts About What Will Never Be Found in Books*, or from the Arab East by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's *Meadow of Lovers and Diversion of the Infatuated* and Ibn al-Jawzi's *Condemnation of Desire*.

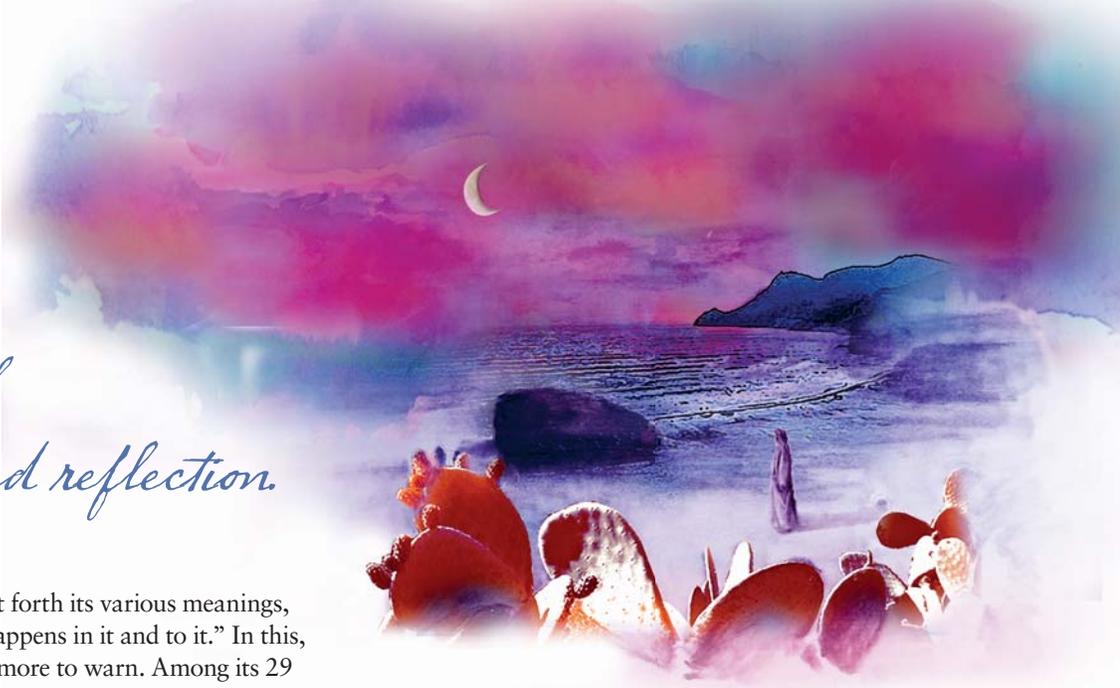
Ibn Hazm's work stands above because of its fine balance of rumination and reflection interspersed with his poems and personal history. Some of his most engaging anecdotes are based on his own experience, and they begin with such lines as, "Once when I was seated in Almería," or "I knew a young man who," or "Writing this has put me in mind of a certain day when," or, as an example of his wide range of informants, "A woman in whom I have confidence once told me."

According to *The Ring's* English translator A.J. Arberry, it shows "a perfect blend of sacred learning and profane delectation." He goes on to say, "Ibn Hazm is surprisingly free of pedantry; it is doubtful whether any other Arab writer so well qualified as he would have resisted the temptation to enumerate all that earlier scholars had said on the derivation of the Arabic word for passion."

Ibn Hazm's dedicatory preface, addressed to an unnamed friend but probably his fellow poet Ibn Shuhayd, lays it out: "You charged me—may God exalt you!—to compose for you an essay



*Ibn Hazm's
work stands
out for its
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ruminating and reflection.*



describing Love, wherein I should set forth its various meanings, its causes and accidents, and what happens in it and to it.” In this, his purpose was less to instruct and more to warn. Among its 29 chapter headings, one can read: “Of the Slanderer,” “Of Wasting Away,” “Of Betrayal,” “Of the Vileness of Sinning” and “Of the Reproacher”—all showing just how cautionary was his tale.

Yet there were also joyful accounts of the times when love goes not wrong but right. “I never saw any amorous couple,” he wrote in the chapter “Of Contentment,” “who did not exchange locks of hair, perfumed with ambergris and sprinkled with rosewater, done up at the roots with mastica or clarified white wax, and wrapped about in ribbons of embroidered cloth, silk or the like, to serve as a souvenir when they are separated.”

The Ring's many poems, which were heavily excised in the one remaining manuscript that was copied three centuries after its original composition and now resides at the University of Leiden, are written as commentary on the life lessons taught in its more discursive prose sections. Arberry has put them into rhyming quatrains that seem to jump off the page as love lyrics wanting to be sung. This one comes from the chapter “Of Allusion by Words,” about how deeply speech can sting the heart:

*Harsh words of bitter blame
And false complaining came
From one most cruel, who
Was judge, and plaintiff too!
She laid her nameless charge
Before the world at large,
But none knew her intent
Save him, whose hurt she meant.*

It is almost as if the troubadour Marcabru, who lived in Gascogne in southwestern France in the following century and sang most famously about the alleged perfidies of women, had first read *The Ring of the Dove*.

*By the fountain of the orchard,
where the grass is green, near the shore ...
I found, alone, without companion,
she who doesn't want my happiness.*

Paul McCartney had not yet been disappointed in love (as Ibn Hazm predicted he inevitably would be) when he sang, “Oh

please, say to me / You'll let me be your man / And please, say to me / You'll let me hold your hand.” But the Andalusian could have also warned that stony silence, even more than harsh words, can pierce the heart of a true but unrequited lover, as Elvis Presley learned to his own sorrow:

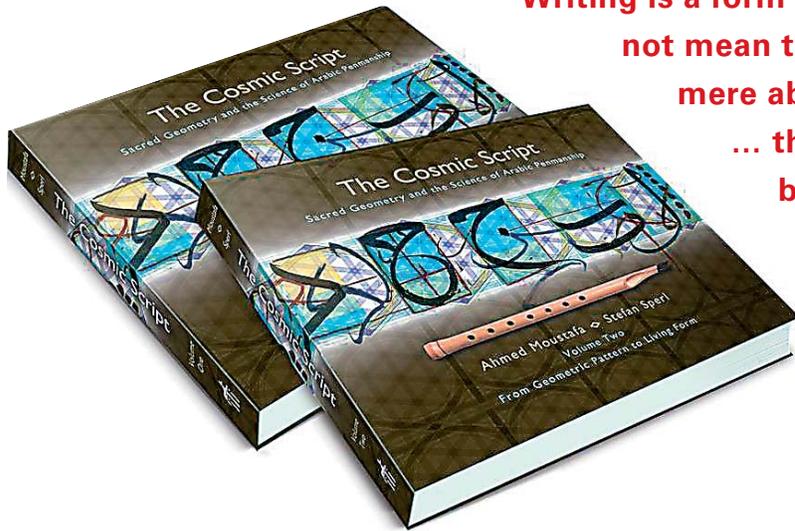
*You know I can be found,
sitting home all alone,
If you can't come around,
at least please telephone.
Don't be cruel to a heart that's true.*

To return from the recording studio back to the 11th century, Ibn Hazm counseled firmly that neither boy nor girl “come around” to their beloved, and *The Ring* is suffused with advice for continence and separation. Even as he quoted a *hadith* (saying) of the Prophet Muhammad, “Let your souls relax from time to time, otherwise they are apt to rust in the same way that metal rusts,” he also stated a higher purpose: “I have planned the matter thus so that the conclusion of our exposition and the end of our discussion may be an exhortation to obedience to Almighty God, and a recommendation to do good and to eschew evil; which last commandment is indeed a duty imposed upon all believers.”

But whether good and evil can so easily be discerned between lovers, that is the eternal question Ibn Hazm left hanging. And it remains so, in varying and inverse proportions of the two, in almost every love song ever since written. ☹

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“Travelers of Al-Andalus” is a six-part series selected and adapted from the original 41-part series “El Viajero Histórico,” an idea and production by Ana Carreño Leyva in *El Legado Andalusi: Una Nueva Sociedad Mediterránea*, the magazine of the Andalusian public foundation El Legado Andalusi, based in Granada, Spain, from 1990 through 2010. The basis of this article appeared in issue number 19, titled “Ibn Hazm de Córdoba,” by Magdalena Lasala. (www.legadoandalusi.com)



“Writing is a form of geometry, but this does not mean that the letter shapes are mere abstract signs. On the contrary ... the letters are likened to blossoms, jewels, precious stones, ornate garments or smiling teeth, and a page of beautiful writing appears like a garden of fruits and flowers.”

Readers of *AramcoWorld* who want to range more widely or delve more deeply than a bimonthly magazine can do will find interesting material, most of it recently published, in this list. Without endorsing the views of any of the authors, the editors encourage varied and omnivorous reading as a path to greater understanding. The books listed here are available online, in libraries, from bookstores—we urge our readers to patronize independent bookstores—or from their respective publishers; International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) are given to facilitate ordering. Please do not order books from *AramcoWorld*. The full-text electronic archive of “Suggestions for Reading” from 1993 to the present can be found at www.aramcoworld.com.

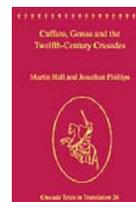
The Cosmic Script: Sacred Geometry and the Science of Arabic Penmanship. Ahmed Moustafa and Stefan Sperl. 2014, Inner Traditions, 978-1-62055-396-1, \$150 hb.

The fruit of the collaboration between scribe Ahmed Moustafa and a scholar Stefan Sperl, this double volume is an ambitious investigation of a 10th-century text that proved seminal in the evolution of Arabic calligraphy. Attributed to Ibn Muqla, calligrapher and vizier of the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, it set forth principles and underlying theories for “Proportioned Script,” which gave rise to six scripts that by the 12th century had relegated the more angular Kufic to niche uses. For students and lovers of calligraphy, *The Cosmic Script* is an important treatise, following in the tradition of analyses and commentaries on ancient texts. The book’s comprehensive approach also makes it valuable to readers with a more general interest in Islamic art and history. Its core argument is that, in Proportioned Script, letters are both symbols that carry meaning and forms that embody mathematical and spiritual truths. Dualities run throughout the work: Beauty is both physically attractive and ethically good; and the book itself is theoretical and practical, exploring how mathematical and religious abstractions dictate the physical formation of letters. Volume I presents the basics of the Arabic alphabet, followed by discussion of the rich intellectual context in which Proportioned Script was codified. It then analyzes the text in light of, for example, Euclidean geometry and neo-Platonic philosophy, as well as Islamic theological and mystical texts that assigned meaning to writing both as process and product. Bolstering their argument with logic and myriad graphs and illustrations, the authors focus ever more tightly on specific rules that dictate the proportion of each letter. Volume II essentially applies the arguments to each of the letters of the alphabet. The reader’s journey can prove at times intense and, for those not inclined mathematically, daunting. Nevertheless, the takeaways are numerous, not the least of which is a deeper understanding of the dimensionality of Arabic calligraphy and, more generally, the multiple meanings of beauty. —LEE LAWRENCE



Arabs and the Art of Storytelling: A Strange Familiarity. Abdelfattah Kilito. Mbarek Sryfi and Eric Sellin, trans; Roger Allen, foreword. 2014, Syracuse UP, 978-0-81563-371-6, \$29.95 hb.

Moroccan novelist and literary critic Abdelfattah Kilito brings a fresh perspective to several traditional Arabian stories in this slim volume, which is translated from the French. This is a scholarly work with footnotes aplenty, but Kilito is a friendly guide. He examines venerable tales with humor and wit, in a lively and engaging voice. The sensational response to the first European translation of *A Thousand and One Nights* in the early 1700s led bemused Arabs—some two centuries later—to take a fresh look at their own stories, he writes. He reconnects readers with classic stories, including *A Thousand and One Nights* and *Kalila and Dimna*, and with tales that are less well known to Westerners. *The Book of Misers* by al-Jahiz, from Basra, reflects the “strange familiarity” of the subtitle: The satire presents misers as complex creatures; not always repulsive, they are sometimes “people who are setting things right.” This and other reversals of stereotypes make Kilito’s book a literary adventure. —JEAN GRANT

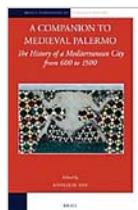


Caffaro, Genoa and the Twelfth-Century Crusades. Martin Hall and Jonathan Phillips, eds. 2013, Ashgate, 978-1-40942-860-2, £70.00/\$119.95 hb.

In 1100, 20-year-old Caffaro di Rustico began chronicling the affairs of his politically and commercially powerful Republic of Genoa “so that [its] victories . . . might be known to men in the future for all time thereafter.” His *Annales ianuenses* (*Genoese Annals*) remains medieval Europe’s earliest-known secular civic history. Declared the republic’s official record in 1152, the *Annals* were perpetuated by various successors until 1294. This first comprehensive English translation breathes

life into the world of the medieval Genoese merchant class (much as the Gineza documents did Cairo's medieval Jewish merchants) and offers compelling accounts of the Crusades, in which Caffaro took part. Useful to scholars, students or the avid reader of medieval history, this welcome translation, as its editors observe, provides "a unique, Mediterranean window on this complex and multi-faceted subject, as well as revealing ... [Caffaro's] remarkable career and the history of his beloved home city."

—TOM VERDE



A Companion to Medieval Palermo: The History of a Mediterranean City from 600 to 1500.

Annliese Nef, ed. 2013, Brill, 978-9-00422-392-9, €167/\$216 hb.

Of all the lights in the Islamic Middle Ages, those of Palermo shone among the brightest.

Cosmopolitan and commercial, culturally rich and ethno-religiously diverse, the capital of the Kingdom of Sicily stood at the crossroads of the medieval Mediterranean world. Under powerful Norman kings, Palermo thrived for centuries as a beacon of tolerance and intellectual exchange among enlightened European rulers, Greek-speaking Byzantine Christians and Arab Muslim settlers. This collection of essays, from a variety of historians (many with close connections to the city), examines Palermo's literary, artistic, architectural and political significance. At its apogee under Roger II (1095-1154), as essayist Mirella Cassarino of Sicily's University of Catania observes, the city exemplified the monarch's ambition to promote "the Eastern inheritance, Arab and Byzantine, and to combine it with the European tradition." Though assembled with the scholar in mind, this comprehensive essay collection will also appeal to the serious reader of medieval Islamic history.

—TOM VERDE



Competitive Archaeology in Jordan: Narrating Identity from the Ottomans to the Hashemites.

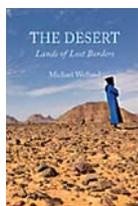
Elena D. Corbett. 2014, University of Texas Press, 978-0-29276-080-6, \$55 hb.

The author follows a scholarly path to show how Jordan has interpreted its antiquities

to provide the cultural background that today defines the kingdom as a nation. The story begins in the mid-19th century, when institutions in both Europe and the Middle East began to focus attention on major archeological discoveries in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Palestine. Initially a source of intellectual inquiry, these sites took on a different role after World War I, as newly emerging states turned to them to assert the distinctive cultural heritage of each. Nowhere was this more true than in Jordan, which, with little in the way of natural resources or a cohesive history, relied on postage stamps, currency and, above all, its desert heritage to convey an image of continuity by combining images of such antique sites as Jerash and Petra with portraits of the ruling Hashemite family. Supplemented with copious notes and a generous bibliography, *Competitive Archaeology in Jordan* provides an in-depth survey of the myriad and

often subtle ways archeology is used to establish a national identity.

—ROBERT E. GRUTZ

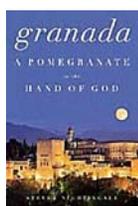


The Desert: Lands of Lost Borders. Michael Welland. 2015, Reaktion Books, 978-1-78023-360-4, \$40 hb.

This rich comparative study of the world's deserts is both historical and scientific, touching upon cultural analysis and literary descriptions by

author-explorers. Welland concentrates on the Sahara, the Mojave, the Gobi, Australia's Great Sandy and the Empty Quarter, or Rub' al-Khali, approaching his material in a pleasantly idiosyncratic manner. His chapter headings—"Wet and Dry," "Hot and Cold," "Body and Soul," "Feast or Famine"—underscore the dichotomies that arid regions always seem to hold in surprise. A professional geologist, he is at his best on scientific matters. He explains, for instance, why high dunes and perennial lakes, such as Libya's Ubari and the Gobi's Badain Jaran, are often found side by side, and how to measure a sand grain's aeolian saltation (wind-driven jumping), which is the mechanism for dune formation. Welland's previous book, *Sand: The Never-Ending Story* (2010), saw things as a microcosm. *The Desert* is his macrocosm.

—LOUIS WERNER



Granada: A Pomegranate in the Hand of God. Steven Nightingale. 2015, Counterpoint Press, 978-1-61902-460-1, \$28 hb.

Steven Nightingale offers the reader two charming books in one: first, a Peter Mayle *A Year in Provence* story of restoring, and moving his family into, an

old house in Granada's ancient Albayzín quarter, a steep hillside neighborhood of enclosed garden homes within view of the Alhambra palace that overlooks the city; and second, a *tour d'horizon* of Al-Andalus's time of *convivencia*, the intellectually rich period under various kings and *amirs* when Islam, Christianity and Judaism met on nearly even ground, resulting in a great flourishing of the arts and sciences. The melody of those two themes is neatly captured in the title, for Granada is the Spanish word for pomegranate. The themes work best when they come together in the same moment, as for instance when the author walks through the winding streets with his young daughter on her way to school, overhearing a flamenco guitar being strummed in a doorway, sniffing the scent of strong coffee from an old café, and bantering with his *albañiles*, an Arabic-derived Spanish word for construction workers—experiences that as likely could have taken place a thousand years ago under the Moors as today.

—LOUIS WERNER

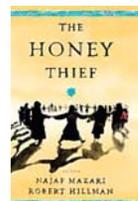


Grand Hotels of Egypt in the Golden Age of Travel. Andrew Humphreys. 2012, AUC Press, 978-9-77416-496-5, \$34.95 hb.

For many travelers to Egypt, a stay in a grand hotel is as essential to their experience as a visit to

the Pyramids of Giza. Andrew Humphreys brings back to life a vanished era of tourism through a wealth of historic photographs and travel memorabilia, the journals and letters of intrepid sightseers, and the reminiscences of the glitterati who wintered on the Nile. Tour packages arranged by Thomas Cook & Sons ballooned from 500 hardy souls in 1873 to 11,000 "Cookites" by the winter of 1889-1890. Upper-echelon hotels catered to moneyed Europeans and Americans, offering a "gilded refuge" of ballrooms and billiards, dragomen and high tea. Humphreys devotes chapters to the grand dames with names as evocative as those of the pharaohs: Mena House, Winter Palace, Cataract, Savoy, Cecil and, perhaps most famous of all, Shepheard's. The glamorous age came to an end with the 1952 revolution, when Shepheard's was burned to the ground. The ensuing decades saw neglect, repurposing, demolition and, for the survivors, ungainly additions, but recent renovations have returned a few to their former glory. *Grand Hotels of Egypt* is a diverting excursion, as pleasurable as a cold drink on a palm-shaded veranda overlooking the Nile.

—KYLE PAKKA

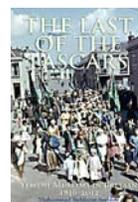


The Honey Thief. Najaf Mazari and Robert Hillman. 2013, Viking, 978-0-67002-648-7, \$26.95 hb.

Afghans honor an age-old tradition of storytelling through which they pass hard-earned experience and wisdom to successive generations. As a nation,

they cherish tales of loyalty to God, tribe and family. They tell contrasting tales of beauty and evil, shame, forgiveness, devotion and fear, and of life's mysteries, hopes and dreams. When Najaf Mazari immigrated to Australia, he sought both to remember the culture and traditions of his homeland and to sow some of its timeless stories in the hearts and minds of Western readers. His Australian friend, writer Robert Hillman, helped with the flow of his English. The result: gripping tales of British and Russian occupiers, of sometimes-ruthless tribal rulers, and of treachery, revenge, taxation, starvation, jealousy and greed. But there are also memories of the land's towering mountains, cities, deserts and fertile valleys, of its never-ending striving for freedom and the loving nature of a generous, honorable people. A charming final aspect of Mazari's fast-paced book is that it includes some tales of teas and spices, and a selection of tasty Afghan recipes.

—WILLIAM TRACY



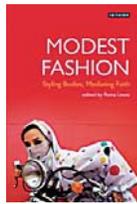
The Last of the Lascars: Yemeni Muslims in Britain 1836-2012.

Mohammad Siddique Seddon. 2014, Kube Publishing, 978-1-84774-035-9, \$29.95 pb.

"Lascar" is the key word in the title of this history of Yemeni immigration to England. This movement started well before the post-World War II influx of South Asian immigrants that is the more visible and politically problematic

case of the intermingling of East and West in the UK, and it offers insights into issues of cultural assimilation. Lascar is derived from the Arabic word *al-askari*, meaning “military,” and the term was used to describe the native merchant seamen of the British East India Company. It was not a term Yemeni sailors—many of whom manned the coaling ships used to refuel the fleet at the port of Aden, and who began settling in Britain in the 19th century—used themselves. But they accepted this appellation in port towns like South Shields and Cardiff, and thus began their successful journey of assimilation on terms set by others. An *AramcoWorld* photo-essay on the boarding houses of Yemeni

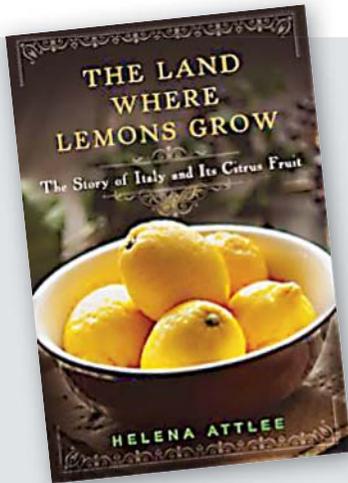
seamen in England (Nov/Dec 2009), with its video link on the magazine’s website, nicely complements this tale. —LOUIS WERNER



Modest Fashion: Styling Bodies, Mediating Faith. Reina Lewis, ed. 2013. I.B. Tauris, 978-1-78076-383-5, \$28 pb.

Scholars, anthropologists, fashion designers and bloggers from across the Muslim, Christian and Jewish faiths are engaged in a lively dialogue about transformative contemporary ideas of dress. This discussion is reflected in *Modest Fashion*, where 12

contributors argue that today’s global fashion industry has failed to accommodate a growing segment of the population seeking appropriate attire without foregoing personal style. They show how young entrepreneurs are meeting those needs by developing their own styles and using the Internet to promote their brands. For example, the e-retail webpage Rabia Z., by an Emirati-Afghani designer who studied fashion in the US and lives in Dubai, affirms her ideology of fashion “where modesty is always in style” and highlights the *hijab* and *abayah* as modern, upscale and fashionable. Writes editor Reina Lewis, Artscom Centenary Professor of Cultural Studies, University of the Arts



The Land Where the Lemons Grow: The Story of Italy and Its Citrus Fruit.

Helena Attlee. 2014, Countryman Press, 978-1-58157-290-2, \$23.95 hb. When the medieval Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal visited Sicily in 972 CE, he was not very impressed with life in Palermo. He was, however, taken with the beauty of its surrounding gardens, where dew-kissed lemons hung from the trees “like the pale faces of lovers/Who have spent the night crying,” as the medieval Sicilian-Arabic poet Abd ar-Rahman described them. Brought to Sicily by the Arabs in the 10th century, lemons and sour oranges hold a special place in Italy’s culinary, cultural, agricultural and historical identities. Gardening historian Helena Attlee weaves together all these strands in her charming history-travelogue dedicated to Italy’s love affair with its citrus fruits. Incidental recipes for citrus-infused dishes, such as *tagliolini alle scorzette di arancia e limone* (tagliolini with orange and lemon zest) and *insalata de cedro* (citron salad) add to this languorous narrative about one of the Mediterranean’s major contributions to cuisine.



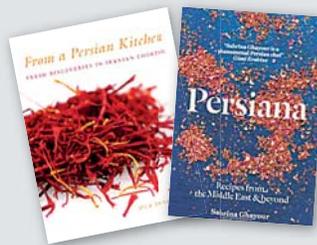
Authentic Egyptian Cooking: From the Table of Abou El Sid. Nehal Leheta. 2013, AUC Press, 978-9-77416-621-1, \$29.95 hb.

There are at least two dining establishments that no visitor to Cairo should overlook. The first is any traditional *koshari* joint in town—the Cairene equivalent of the American diner—serving up the Egyptian national dish of lentils, rice and pasta, topped with tangy tomato sauce and fried onions. The other is Abou el-Sid, a fairytale restaurant named for a fictional character, albeit inspired by authentic Egyptian cuisine. Winner of multiple international awards, many of the classic dishes served at this legendary restaurant—*ful* (stewed fava beans), *fettah* (rice casserole), *molokhia* (an herb-infused sauce of coriander and mallow)—are now available to the home cook, thanks to Nehal Leheta’s beautifully designed book. While dining in Abou el-Sid’s ornate, Arabesque establishment is not easily replicated, a meal constructed from the pages of this elegant and practical title literally offers a taste of the experience.

MEASURES OF GOOD TASTES

Reviewed by **TOM VERDE**

“In citrus farms in Sicily and southern Italy ... an orange is never peeled in the field. There’s a ritual to observe.... [The farmer] holds the fruit in the palm of his hand, stem side up. Then he makes a horizontal cut to divide it neatly in half. The juice of the fresh orange is lavish, uncontrollable, and scent explodes into the air.”



From a Persian Kitchen: Fresh Discoveries in Iranian Cooking. Jila Dana-Haeri.

2014, I. B. Tauris, 978-1-78076-801-4, \$29 hb.

Persiana: Recipes from the Middle East & Beyond. Sabrina Ghayour. 2014, Interlink,

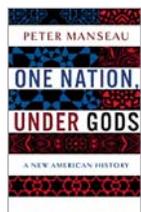
978-1-56656-995-8, \$35 hb.

Persian cuisine could never truly be described as “simple.” Any country whose method of preparing its signature crusty-bottomed rice dish (*tahdig*) requires the

care and precision of a watchmaker is bound to be intimidating to the home cook attempting to do justice to dishes once served to sultans. Yet these two titles help bring Persian cuisine within the reach of just such an adventurous soul. Dana-Haeri’s recipes are the more traditional. She dedicates chapters to classical dishes such as *aash* (soups), *khoreh* (stews and casseroles), *khorek* (roasted and grilled meats, chicken, fish and vegetables) and *polow* (rice) in all its bejeweled varieties (infused with emerald-green pistachios, golden saffron, ruby-red currants and the like). Throughout, she aims “to demonstrate the diversity of the cuisine by juxtaposing sweet-and-sour with spicy and aromatic dishes” —hallmarks of traditional Persian cooking. Though some recipes may be a bit challenging, this is a good, accessible introduction to Persian cuisine. Ghayour’s work is a hipper, more modern take on the genre. Dubbed a “rising star” of Middle Eastern cooking, she uses Persian cuisine as her base camp from which to explore the region’s vast culinary landscape. Turkish cuisine inspires a good many of the recipes, from the city of Adana’s famed *köfte* kebabs, to *piyaz*, a delicious, simple salad of white beans and red onions, with a tahini dressing. Touches of harissa and preserved lemon add North African nuances to Ghayour’s roasted *poussins*, while the addition of sumac, nigella seeds, cumin and coriander transform an Italian classic into “Eastern-style” *fofaccia*. Ghayour draws heavily on her Persian roots for many of the book’s classically inspired dishes, such as lamb stewed with prunes, honey and cinnamon (with the added Western twist of butternut squash) or *sabzi polow* (Persian herb rice), a standard at Persian New Year’s celebrations. This is an eclectic regional journey with an innovative culinary Sherpa as your guide.

London, “[T]he significance of the accelerated, commercialized and cross-faith fashion activity witnessed in the early decades of the twenty-first century is likely to be more lasting than any wardrobe ensemble.”

—SUZANNE BADER

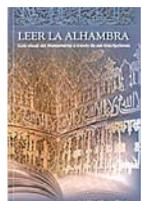


One Nation Under Gods, A New American History. Peter Manseau. 2015, Little Brown and Company, 978-0-31610-003-8, \$28 hb.

Peter Manseau argues that the view that the United States was founded as a Christian nation is a comfortable

myth that ignores fact. He offers abundant counterpoint in this page-turning book, highlighting the many belief systems in an evolving America and noting that “church-goers in 1776 [numbered] ... less than a fifth of the population.” He introduces little-known weavers of the national tapestry, telling stories of diversity, conflict and adaptation. His characters include Estebanico, a Moroccan who explored the Southwest in the 16th century after surviving the wreck of a Spanish expedition, and the slave Omar bin Said, a scholar who adopted Christian tenets but continued to practice Islam—and whose autobiography was published in English in 1848. Manseau discusses laws against “Mohammedan” worship, beginning in the 1600s, but concludes, “It was perhaps the very stubbornness of Islam among its adherents that led to its broader impact on American culture.” He also points to leaders like Thomas Jefferson, who in 1815 sold his personal library—including his Qur’an—to the Library of Congress, underscoring the breadth of America’s religious heritage.

—NAJWA MARGARET SAAD



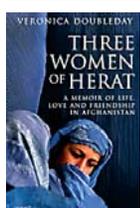
Reading the Alhambra: A Visual Guide to the Alhambra through Its Inscriptions. José Miguel Puerta Vilchez. Jon Trout, trans. 2011, Edilux Press, 978-8-49585-630-2, \$23 pb.

This is an essential guidebook for any serious visitor to the Alhambra. It contains

all the Arabic inscriptions—filling 350 pages!—on every wall, with transcriptions, transliterations, translations, location maps and, most importantly, highlighted close-up photographs. This not only allows one to train the eye on lettering obscured by the dense profusion of *ataurique*, or arabesque, background decoration, but also to appreciate the often involuted, mirrored, knotted and calligrammic (shaped in the form of its subject matter) calligraphy. The words themselves are in stucco, stone, paint, peeled tile and wood. Many of the inscriptions are repeat lines of the motto of the Nasrid dynasty (1232-1492), whose kings built the Alhambra: *Laa Ghalib ila Allah* (“There is No Victor Other than God”) runs like a leitmotif atop the palace’s walls and door lintels. An accomplished Arabist, Puerta Vilchez offers translations of everything—panegyrics, Qur’anic verses, the 99 names of

God, cartouched epithets and single words. With this book in hand, the Alhambra suddenly presents itself like a text, even to a visitor who cannot read Arabic.

—LOUIS WERNER



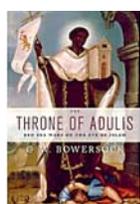
Three Women of Herat: A Memoir of Love, Life and Friendship in Afghanistan.

Veronica Doubleday. 2012, Tauris Parke, 978-1-84511-026-0, £9.99/\$22 pb.

In 1974, Veronica Doubleday accompanied her husband, ethnomusicologist John

Baily, to Herat. The first year, she lived as a classificatory man, mixing freely with the opposite sex and studying with a local artist—hence her charming, detailed scenes of Afghan life in the Herati miniature tradition. She became increasingly intrigued by the lives of the women, whom she rarely met, and decided to explore their world, in part to help her husband. Her story, first published in 1988, is told through friendships with three musical informants. Doubleday performs with a women’s music group at weddings and other occasions, experiencing one of the very few ways an Afghan woman could earn a living. The friendships were warm and affectionate, in spite of cultural strains, and her postscript from Peshawar, Pakistan, where she traveled in the hope of hearing news of her vanished friends in the refugee camps after the 1979 Russian invasion, is a poignant reminder of the human cost of war. Readers may also be interested in the recordings: *Songs from Kabul*, John Baily; and *Music of Afghanistan: Professional Musicians in the City of Herat 1973-77*, John Baily and John Blacking.

—CAROLINE STONE



The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam.

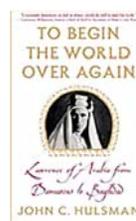
G.W. Bowersock. 2013, Oxford UP, 978-0-19973-932-5, \$24.95 hb.

The history of ancient Southwest Arabia is known largely through its inscriptions, not all of which

are found in Arabia. The author highlights a remarkable Greek inscription in Ethiopia in relating the tale of the bitter conflicts in the southern Red Sea region that preceded the rise of Islam. Carved into a marble throne at the Ethiopian port of Adulis and recorded there by a sixth-century Christian merchant, it tells of an invasion of southern Arabia about 250 by an Ethiopian king based in Axum. The Axumite Ethiopians left Arabia in about 270, but retained an interest in the peninsula. In 525 the now-Christianized Ethiopians returned. Their excuse was a massacre of Christians in Najran by forces led by Yusuf, king of Himyar and a recent convert to Judaism. The victorious Ethiopian king returned to Axum, but another Ethiopian leader, Abraha, moved into the western and central Peninsula. His military adventure failed, and southern Arabia fell under the domination of the Persians. Less than a century later, the Persian Empire itself fell, and was soon succeeded by Islam.

The author draws on a wealth of archeological evidence to prove his points and add color to a rarely told tale.

—ROBERT W. LEBLING

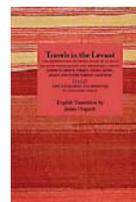


To Begin the World Over Again, Lawrence of Arabia from Damascus to Baghdad.

John C. Hulsman. 2009, Palgrave Macmillan, 978-0-230-61724-1, \$27 hb.

John C. Hulsman looks at T.E. Lawrence from a fresh perspective—that of

statesman-strategist—and finds him both prescient and unable to follow his own advice, with aftershocks reverberating to this day. Readers familiar with Lawrence’s role in furthering the revolt of the Hejazi forces led by Feisal ibn Hussein against the Ottomans in World War I may not know of Lawrence’s “Twenty-Seven Articles.” Drafted after Feisal’s capture of Aqaba in 1917, they—plus the promise of an Arab state—helped pave the way to the capture of Damascus in 1918. Those articles, argues Hulsman, offered “nothing less than a new way for Western nation-builders to look at the rest of the world.” They called for a Greater Syria built on a “bottom-up” understanding of the local situation. Instead, the imperial victors—France and Britain—imposed borders, institutions and rulers. The result was often chaos. In a sad coda to the treaty-making at Versailles, Lawrence engineered a throne for Feisal—in Iraq, about which the *amir* knew little—from which his grandson was overthrown. That was precisely because the king was seated by outsiders rather than enthroned by those he ruled. —ARTHUR CLARK



Travels in the Levant: The Observations of Pierre Belon of Le Mans on Many Singularities and Memorable Things Found in Greece, Turkey, Judaea, Egypt, Arabia and Other Foreign Countries (1553).

James Hogarth, trans. 2012, Hardinge Simpole, 978-1-84382-196-0, £35/\$60 pb.

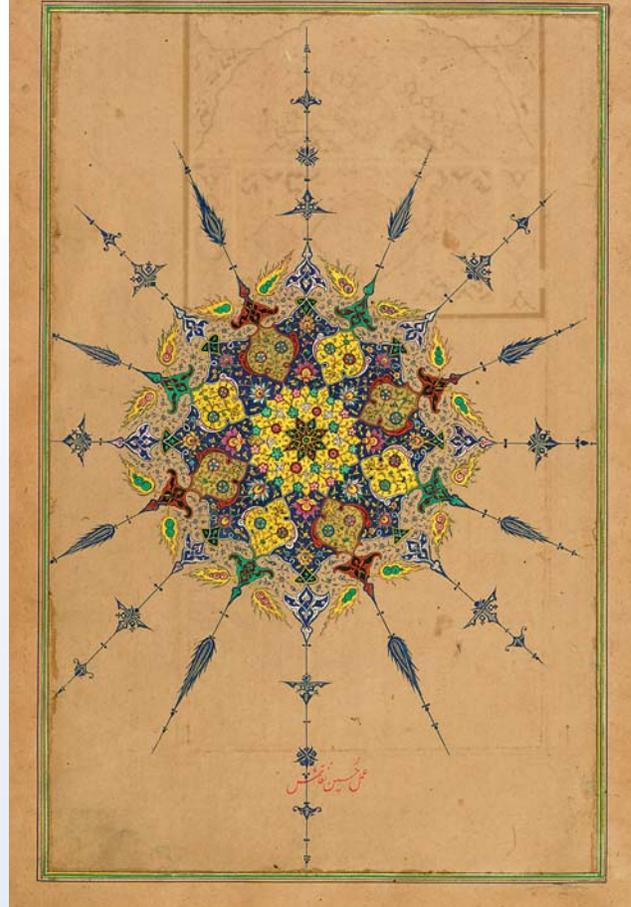
Pierre Belon’s *Travels* is one of the earliest works on the Levant written from a scientific point of view. Belon was a naturalist, but he was interested in numerous other aspects of the Ottoman domains. Along with plants and animals, gardens and archeological sites were of special interest to him. His travels in the Levant from 1546-1549 were undertaken to obtain accurate information about countries still little known in Western Europe at a period when King Francis I of France was eager to build economic and political ties with the Ottoman Empire. It is a great pleasure to have an excellent translation of such an important text in modern English. (The previous one dated to around 1600.) The introduction and the notes are clear and helpful. The book is divided into short sections, which makes it easy and pleasant to read. The numerous black-and-white illustrations from the original, scattered through the text, add greatly to its charm.

—CAROLINE STONE

Pearls on a String:

Art and Biography in the Islamic World presents the arts of Islamic cultures from the points of view of authors and artists from historical Muslim societies. The exhibition focuses on specific people and relationships among cultural tastemakers threaded together “as pearls on a string,” a Persian metaphor for human connectedness, especially among painters, calligraphers, poets and their patrons. It highlights the exceptional art of the Islamic manuscript and underscores the book’s unique ability to relate narratives about individuals. Through a series of vignettes, the visitor is introduced to the art inextricably linked to the men and women who shaped the Islamic past and contribute to its future. Walters Art Museum, **Baltimore**, November 8 through January 31.

Signed by ‘amal-i Husayn Naqqash, this illuminated frontispiece in opaque watercolor, ink and gold opened the second poem of “Shirin va Kusrav,” a khamsah by Amir Khusraw.



Current **September**

The Hidden Qualities of Quantities shows three new projects by Dana Awartani, intertwined by explorations of ritual as gestures within which geometric and organic forms sit at the center of a set of performed sequences acted out on paper and canvas. Awartani works with coding and geometric forms that include pre-Islamic talismanic designs and systems. Athr Gallery, **Jiddah**, through September 15.

Cleopatra and the Queens of Egypt shows how mothers, wives and daughters not only supported reigning pharaohs, but also played significant roles in politics and religion. Their magnificence is conveyed through masterpieces of ancient Egypt from a number of renowned museums around the world. **Tokyo** National Museum, through September 23; The National Museum of Art, **Osaka**, Japan, October 10 through December 27.

Time of Others. How does the word “other” divide us? How does the way a person looks at another person shape that individual’s image of him or her? Inspired by such questions, this exhibition presents works by 20 primarily younger artists from the Asia-Pacific region, including Saleh Husein (Indonesia) and Basir Mahmood (Pakistan). The National Museum of Art, **Osaka**, Japan, through September 23.

Art from Elsewhere explores different realities of profound global change. It brings together some of the most important artists around the world. The show features works in a variety of media that examine questions of trade and exchange, urban and international migration, frontiers and failed utopias. Artworks address issues including life in conflict zones, oppressive government regimes, and the advent of capitalism and post-colonial experiences. **Middlesborough** Institute of Modern Art, **uk**, through September 27. Harris Museum, **Preston**, **uk**, October 10 through November 30.

Zaha Hadid at the State Hermitage presents the first retrospective of the first woman to become a main figure of contemporary world architecture. It features 300 models, drawings, photographs, sculptures and design objects, from experimental designs of the 1980s to Hadid’s first iconic projects and more recent works, including the Guangzhou

Opera House in China and Heydar Aliyev Centre in Baku. The exhibition is organized as part of the architectural program “Hermitage 20/21,” aimed at collecting, studying and exhibiting works of the 20th and 21st centuries. The State Hermitage Museum, **St. Petersburg**, through September 27.

Traces of the Future is based on artworks combining social observations with involvement in issues that constitute the major challenges of tomorrow’s society. The exhibition celebrates Moroccan contemporary art with visionary overtones, setting a reference system for the works and the public, which share the same socio-cultural, political and critical background. The artists represented tackle familiar themes, navigating between imaginary worlds and everyday realities. How they deal with challenges to physical and mental barriers, including stories of migration experiences, unveils many of the contradictions of our time. As such, the expression “traces of the future” is a figure of speech or an effect by which contradictory terms are used in conjunction. The **Marrakech** Museum for Photography and Visual Arts, through September 30.

Current **October**

ReOrient Festival 2015 turns San Francisco into a center for innovative, spirited, thought-provoking theater from and about the Middle East. With short plays by playwrights from Iraq, Iran, Egypt, England and the us, ReOrient offers a unique opportunity to explore this region and its theater, stories and artists. Z Below, **San Francisco**, through October 4.

Ten: The Exhibition, the Arab American National Museum’s celebration of its 10th anniversary, presents the work of 10 exemplary Arab American artists. Their diverse range of works explores concepts of representation, identity and migration. Many of these challenges are universal among immigrants, but contain aspects unique to the Arab American community. The exhibition is guest-curated by art historian, writer and gallery art director Maymanah Farhat. Arab American National Museum, **Dearborn, Michigan**, through October 4.

Oussama Diab: What Happened Here shows the work of the Palestinian-Syrian artist. Alongside his latest paintings, the exhibition depicts everyday experiences of individuals caught amid political conflict through selected drawings, mixed-media collages and preparatory sketches that demonstrate how his new series has progressed with recurring symbols and a cohesive narrative. In recent years Diab has developed a neo-cubist style as part of a broader theoretical project that explores the esthetic potential and relevance of historical precedents. Diab depicts the increasingly fragmentary state of global society as political conflicts, forced migration and displacement tear apart communities. Domestic scenes and individual portraits chronicle ordinary life against the backdrop of catastrophic events with the interactions of a couple as the focus of the series. Although Diab’s characters are depicted with elegant ornamental patterns that allude to dimension and motion, his paintings possess a palpable melancholy, as the intimacy of love is tainted by the shadows of war. Ayyam Gallery, **Beirut**, through October 5.

First Look: *Collecting Contemporary at The Asian* is an exhibition of contemporary highlights from the museum's collection, including painting, drawing, photography, baskets, ceramics and video—infusing traditional themes, media and cultural history with the urgency of present-day ideas. It features artists from Asia and the U.S. Yako Hodo abstracts the traditional art of basket weaving, while Yang Yongliang's "The Night of Perpetual Day" and Xu Bing's "The Character of Characters" push Chinese ink painting into new media. Their stunning videos appear beside early innovators of Chinese ink, connecting fresh ideas to their formal roots. *First Look* also features Bay Area favorites like Hung Liu and Zheng Chongbin and several exciting debuts, including Ahmed Mater's "Illumination *Waqf*" (2013)—a diptych print in the form of an Islamic manuscript with decorated borders. Asian Art Museum, **San Francisco**, through October 11.

A Thirst for Riches: *Carpets from the East in Paintings from the West* points to the history of trade between Europe and Muslim civilizations while exploring how beautiful objects acquire new meanings as they are exchanged. Drawing from the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and supplemented by loans from other institutions, the exhibition pairs mid-17th-century Dutch paintings featuring Eastern carpets with actual carpets produced in the East during the same period. Did these carpets symbolize wealth and worldliness, or did they signify vanity and excess? This exhibition is a powerful reminder of the cultural impact of trade. Aga Khan Museum, **Toronto**, through October 18.

Aatifi—News from Afghanistan: *Painting, Works on Paper, and Video.* Mysterious shapes and lines—this was how Aatifi first perceived letters as a child. Since then, the artist has worked closely with Islamic calligraphy, engaging with the form and essence of Arabic characters. Aatifi learned the most important styles of the classical art of calligraphy in Kandahar, Afghanistan, his birthplace. As a student of calligraphy, he began to modify the characters. Over the years, he has refined and reduced elements of Islamic calligraphy, developing a unique visual language that is both independent of text and universally understandable. Responding to scriptural traditions, he synthesizes elements of classical style and the rich quality of light and color found in the Middle East with modern art. He selects characters purely for their esthetic and compositional aspects, and then fragments, rotates and layers the lines and shapes to convey power and dynamism, depth and space. Pergamonmuseum, **Berlin**, through October 18.

El Hadji Sy: *Painting, Performance, Politics.* In 1985 the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt commissioned artist and curator El Hadji Sy (b. 1954 in Dakar, Senegal) to assemble a group of works of contemporary art from his homeland to initiate a long-term relationship between the two cities. Thirty years later, the museum presents a retrospective of Sy's career as a painter and cultural activist. The exhibition combines Sy's installations and paintings—sometimes executed with his bare feet or produced on such unusual surfaces as

industrial rice sacking or synthetic kite silk—with his selection of ethnographic objects and artworks by colleagues from Senegal. It includes loans from international private collections and works from the museum's own collections. As a founder of the collective Laboratoire AGIT'ART and curator of numerous artist-led workshops and studio spaces in Dakar, Sy in his interdisciplinary practice continues to break new ground. Weltkulturen Museum, **Frankfurt**, through October 18.

An Egyptian Puzzle: *Restoring the Coffin Lid of But-har-chonsu.* More than 120 years after it was discovered in a rock-cut tomb in the Theban necropolis in Upper Egypt, the lid of the outer sarcophagus of the priestess But-har-chonsu from around 1000 BCE forms the center of a small exhibition organized by the Near-Eastern and Ancient Egyptian Collection of the **Kunsthistorisches Museum**. In collaboration with the Institute of Conservation-Restoration at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, the coffin lid was comprehensively restored in 2011-2014. Wrongly reassembled pieces were identified, removed and correctly assembled, and a large number of previously "homeless" fragments were identified and incorporated. The exhibition documents this fascinating procedure and offers insights into the painstaking work of the conservators. **Vienna**, through October 26.

Occident and Crescent Moon: *The Ottoman Orient in Renaissance Art* looks at depictions of the Ottomans in Renaissance art c. 1540-1600. The exhibition explores permanent collections to discover the many ways in which Western Renaissance artists responded to subject matter, motifs and stylistic influences from the Ottoman Empire, and the different evaluations of this great power as expressed in these artworks. A selection of around 40 paintings, medals, *objets d'art* and suits of armor reflect relations and exchanges between Central and Eastern Europe and the Islamic Orient, which were marked both by drawn-out wars and the West's infatuation with all things oriental. **Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna**, through October 26.

Current November
Woven Luxuries: *Indian, Persian and Turkish Textiles from the Indictor Collection.* Used for furnishings—as carpets, spreads, bolsters, hangings, clothing—and exchanged as diplomatic gifts, silk velvets have been preeminent luxury textiles in many parts of the Islamic world and Europe, especially from the 15th century onward. The 11 textiles in this exhibition, selected from a private New York collection, provide a glimpse into the richness and diversity of Iranian, Indian and Turkish silk velvets. Spanning three distinct cultural areas with their own design sensibilities and tastes, this group of textiles showcases different techniques of velvet production and suggests their varied uses. Of special note are the two 17th-century carpets from India and Iran, each measuring nearly 1.83 by 1.22 meters and retaining not only their design elements but also their vibrant colors. These, along with nine other substantial textile fragments, show the cultural exchange between the Mughal, Safavid and Ottoman empires, and their shifting

political, religious and economic ties. Asian Art Museum, **San Francisco**, through November 1.

From the Figurative to the Abstract: *Modern Art from the Arab World* features works on paper recently acquired by the British Museum by eight artists from different countries of the Middle East and North Africa who have studied abroad, absorbing different traditions in their work. The analysis of the figure is central to a number of the artists, with abstraction another powerful thread running through the works on display. The British Museum, **London**, through November 8.

The Union of Fire and Water presents a historical and cultural superimposition of Baku and Venice through the eyes of artists Almagul Menlibayeva and Rashad Alakbarov. It brings together site-specific video, sculpture and installation works to explore the interrelation between the two cities. The exhibition is based in the Palazzo Barbaro, the former residence of Giuseppino Barbaro, a Venetian ambassador who traveled to and wrote extensively on Azerbaijani cities in the late 1400s. Commissioned by YARAT and curated by Suad Garayeva, the exhibition is open at The 56th International Art Exhibition, **Venice Biennale**, through November 22.

Current December
The Royal Hunt: *Courtly Pursuits in Indian Art.* Expressions of imperial authority are universally embodied in royal imagery of the hunt, in which rulers pursuing prey serve as metaphors for power and martial prowess. The theme is celebrated throughout the history of Indian painting and became ubiquitous in later Rajput paintings of the late 19th century. The exhibition features works from the Department of Asian Art, with loans from the Department of Islamic Art, the Department of Arms and Armor, and New York collections. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through December 13.

In the City, an absorbing exhibition of graphic design and sound art, provides a rare glimpse into four Arab cities. The show, a first of its kind in London, showcases a series of commissioned and preexisting works from an eclectic lineup of established and emerging Arab designers, illustrators, and video and sound artists. It transports the audience through four enigmatic, often overlooked Arab cities—Alexandria, Algiers, Baghdad and Nablus—by recapturing and reimagining elements of them. The collection explores each city's panorama through its streets, landmarks, people, signage and sounds; individual rooms contain elements borrowed from the city it represents, forming a variety of installations that entice interaction between the audience and the work. P21 Gallery, **London**, through December 15.

Current January
Arts of the Islamic World. The arts of the Islamic world flourished in a vast area extending from Morocco and Spain to the islands of Southeast Asia. Distinct in their cultural, artistic, ethnic and linguistic identities, the peoples of this region shared one predominant faith: Islam. The works on display represent the three principal media for artistic expression in the Muslim world:

architecture (religious and secular), the arts of the book (calligraphy, illustration, illumination and bookbinding) and the arts of the object (ceramics, metalwork, glass, woodwork, textiles and ivory) and date from the ninth to 17th centuries. On view are brass bowls and candlesticks, folios from the Qur'an, earthenware and ceramics, and paintings representing the traditions of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and other parts of North Africa, Turkey, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. Freer Gallery of Art, **Washington, D.C.**, through January 3.

Les fables de Kalila et Dimna originated as a collection of tales composed in India around the fourth century CE for the education of princes. By giving voices to animals, the author was able to speak freely and teach principles of good governance and moral standing. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, through January 3.

Pattern, Color, Light: *Architectural Ornament in the Near East (500–1000)* features examples of architectural ornament from Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Turkey that were found at sites ranging in date from approximately 500 to 1000. Few buildings from this period survive fully intact, but the pieces of walls, ceilings and floors that remain shed light on the ingenious ways that artisans created sumptuous interiors and stately façades. Far from being mere embellishment, the decorative programs to which these pieces belonged created memorable experiences for viewers, conveying the power of a patron or the depth of a religious concept. These enduring esthetic concepts are explored further through the lens of the exhibition's three themes: pattern, color and light. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through January 3.

Silk Road Luxuries from China. Long before Marco Polo sparked European interest in Asia, the Silk Road connected Mediterranean ports in the West to centers of production and trade in China and beyond. For more than 2,000 years, this vast network of caravan trails has linked oasis settlements across the Central Asian desert, and many of those ancient overland routes are still in use today. The Silk Road enabled the long-distance exchange of luxury goods—colorful silks, silver and gold objects, delicate glass and even the legendary peaches of Samarkand—as well as the sharing of ideas, customs and religious beliefs. The impact of foreign imports on the arts of China reached exceptional heights during the Tang dynasty (618–907), when craftsmen explored new materials, forms and decorative patterns introduced from the West. The flourishing young empire expanded into Central Asia, and its capital Chang'an (modern Xi'an) became the largest city in the world. Its cosmopolitan society sought fresh ideas and expensive goods from afar. Traders and artisans from the ancient kingdom of Sogdiana, located in southern Uzbekistan and western Tajikistan, were especially active in this exchange, and their ancient Iranian language was the primary basis of trade for centuries. Communities of Sogdian traders extended from Anatolia to India and Sri Lanka and on to East Asia. Freer Gallery of Art, **Washington, D.C.**, through January 3.

Home Ground:

Contemporary Art from the Barjeel Art Foundation. This exhibition from the Sharjah, UAE-based foundation runs the gamut from photography to installation, sculpture to painting, and more. Twelve Arab artists examine how private life is shaped by current political events. Their works are united by an awareness of struggles: the struggles to cross geopolitical borders, the struggle to forge an identity in an ever-shifting world and the inherent struggle of being an artist. Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, through January 3.



"Nation Estate – Olive Tree," Larissa Sansours. 2012. Photograph.

Ragmala: *Musical Moods and Amorous Moments* is an assembly of Indian miniature paintings presenting images of tenderness, seemingly depicting episodes in various couples' love relationships. But the paintings also show moments of despair and melancholy, with each artwork representing a specific mood, as defined by Indian musical theory that originates from a complex system of esthetic experience. Two historical Indian musical instruments, a tube zither (*rudra vina*) and a long-necked lute (*tanpura*) from the collection of the Ethnologisches Museum are also on display and further illustrate the connection between music and painting. Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin, through January 6.

2050: *A Brief History of the Future* uses more than 70 contemporary works, from paintings and sculptures to photos, videos, installations and digital art, to question the future up to 2050. The exhibition addresses major societal themes such as over-consumption, global conflicts, scarcity of natural resources, social and economic inequality and the mutation of the human being. However, these complex topics are challenged by positive and constructive visions, sometimes even humor. Belgian and international artists such as Sugimoto, Boetti, Kingelez, Warhol, LaChapelle, Gursky, Op de Beeck, Yongliang, Turk and Alys invite viewers to rethink the future based on a subjective reading of the past and translated by artistic creations from previous millennia. This exhibition and a complementary exhibition at the Louvre, Paris (September 24 through January 4) are

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inspired by Jacques Attali's book *A Brief History of the Future*. The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, through January 24.

Arts of Islamic Lands: *Selections from the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait.* This newly expanded installation more than triples the display to some 250 works that present an impressive and comprehensive spectrum of Islamic art. Objects from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, India, the Iberian Peninsula and Central Asia from the eighth to the 18th centuries demonstrate the development of techniques, craftsmanship and esthetics in Islamic visual culture. Among the highlights are a 16th-century Ottoman prayer carpet; a glass mosque lamp from 14th-century Cairo; an extraordinary earthenware bowl from ninth-century Iraq that transcends its humble function; early gold jewelry from Afghanistan and Syria; and opulent Mughal jewelry crafted in the refined *kundan* technique, including a brilliant bird pendant fabricated in late 16th-century India from gold, rubies, emeralds, diamonds and rock crystals. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, through January 30.

O'siris, mystères engloutis d'Égypte reveals 250 objects from seven years of underwater excavation by archeologist Franck Goddio, supplemented by 40 works from museums in Cairo and Alexandria, some of which are on display for the first time outside of Egypt. These objects, their discovery and historical significance revive one of the greatest myths of Egyptian civilization, "The Mysteries of Osiris," the son of Earth and Sky who was killed by his brother, dismembered and thrown into the Nile. Included in the exhibit are the remains of the ceremony of Osiris Mysteries, celebrated in the cities of Canopus and Thonis-Heracleion. Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, through January 31.

Shoes: *Pleasure and Pain* looks at the extremes of footwear from around the globe, presenting around 200 pairs of shoes ranging from a sandal decorated in pure gold leaf originating from ancient Egypt to the most elaborate designs by contemporary makers. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, through January 31.

Current **March and later**
Egyptian Magic is a fascinating journey into the world of magic in ancient Egypt. Learn how, in a secret world where the gods and the dead

are intrinsically linked to mankind, magic can influence destinies. The exhibition presents pieces from the largest collections in the world. Produced in collaboration with Stichting Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, with the contribution of the Louvre Museum. Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City, through March 3.

Perspectives: *Lara Baladi.* Egyptian-Lebanese artist Lara Baladi experiments with photography, investigating its history and role in shaping perceptions of the Middle East—particularly Egypt, where she is based. Using a digital loom, the artist transformed a collage of her images into a large tapestry—*Oum el Dounia* (Mother of the World)—reflecting her interest in the proliferation of images of Egypt and how technology and interactivity affect the creation, dissemination and preservation of visual narratives. Related programming for the exhibition focuses on *Vox Populi, Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age*, an archive of images, videos and texts documenting the 2011 events in Tahrir Square. Planned events include talks with the artist and curator and panel discussions held in conjunction with the Middle East Institute. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C., through June 5.

Spinosaurus: *Lost Giant of the Cretaceous.* As recently as 10 years ago, scientists believed the *Tyrannosaurus Rex* was the largest predatory dinosaur. That is, until they met the *Spinosaurus*. Measuring 15 meters, this giant carnivore was two meters longer than the biggest *T. rex* ever discovered. Discovered several years ago along the Moroccan-Algerian border, the *Spinosaurus* roamed the earth 95 million years ago and had long crocodile-like jaws and a distinctive sail on its back. The exhibition at **Palazzo Dugnani** allows visitors a close encounter with this massive creature and the chance to learn some fascinating facts about its discovery and the world in which it lived. Milan, through October 1, 2016.

Gold and the Gods: *Jewels of Ancient Nubia* draws upon the world-class collection of jewelry from ancient Nubia (located in what is now Sudan), accumulated by the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), that constitutes the most comprehensive collection outside Khartoum. *Gold and the Gods* focuses on excavated ornaments from an early

20th-century expedition by MFA and Harvard University. Dating from 1700 BCE to 300 CE, they include both uniquely Nubian works and foreign imports prized for their materials, craftsmanship, symbolism and rarity. MFA, Boston, through May 14, 2017.

Egypt's Sunken Secrets displays 293 artifacts from different Egyptian museums: 18 from the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square, 22 from the Graeco-Roman Museum, 31 from the Alexandria National Museum, 15 from the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Museum and 207 from the Sunken Monuments Department. Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, through January; Martin-Gropius-Bau exhibition hall, Berlin through August 2016; London, November 15, 2016, through March 2017.

Coming **September**
Light Show explores the experiential and phenomenal aspects of light by bringing together sculptures and installations that use light to shape space in different ways. The exhibition showcases artworks created from the 1960s to the present, including immersive environments, freestanding light sculptures and projections. From atmospheric installations to intangible sculptures that one may move around—and even through—visitors can experience light in all its spatial and sensory forms. Individual artworks explore different aspects of light, such as color, duration, intensity and projection, as well as perceptual phenomena. They also use light to address architecture, science and film using a variety of lighting technologies. Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE, September 19.

Coming **October**
The Fabric of India. The highlight of the India Festival at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), this will be the first major exhibition to explore the dynamic and multifaceted world of handmade textiles from India. It will include a spectacular 18th-century tent belonging to Tipu Sultan, a stunning range of historic costume, highly prized textiles made for international trade and cutting-edge fashion by celebrated Indian designers. Showcasing the best of the V&A's world-renowned collection together with masterpieces from international partners, the exhibition will feature more than 200 objects ranging from the third to the 21st centuries. Objects on display for the first

time will be shown alongside renowned masterworks and the latest in Indian contemporary design. The skills and variety in this rich tradition will surprise and inform even those with prior knowledge of the subject. **V&A, London**, October 3 through January 10.

Europalia Arts Festival: *Turkey*. Turkey is the invited country for the 25th edition of the *Europalia Arts Festival*, which will feature a rich and extensive program of events, including two major exhibitions hosted by the Palais des Beaux-Arts (BOZAR) in Brussels: *Anatolia: Home of Eternity* and *Imagine Istanbul*, explore the various transformations of this constantly evolving capital city. Various locations, **Brussels**, October 6 through January 31.

Khalil Gibran. Lebanese-American artist Gibran Khalil Gibran is one of the most influential figures of the modern age; his philosophical ideas were mainly delivered through his essays and poems both in Arabic and English. His most internationally known and celebrated work, *The Prophet*, a set of poetic essays originally published in English, expresses some of these ideas. Born in 1883 in Bsharri, Lebanon, he immigrated with his family to the US at age 12. Settling in Boston, he was first exposed to the rich world of art—theaters, opera houses and art galleries—all of which influenced his artistic talent. He died in 1931, leaving a treasure of paintings and literary works. The exhibition showcases around 50 works and manuscripts of different media, including watercolor, oils and charcoal on paper and canvas. **Sharjah Art Museum, UAE**, October 7 through December 7.

Old Patterns, New Order: *Socialist Realism in Central Asia*. Under Soviet rule, artists across Central Asia created images that embraced modernity and idealized the past. This exhibition examines the socialist-realist art movement in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and other areas of Central Asia, pairing 20th-century paintings with examples of the traditional textiles they depict. The show is organized in partnership with George Washington University's Central Asian program. The George Washington University Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, opening October 10.

Orientalist Glass Art: *Masterpieces from the Museum of J&L Lobmeyr, Vienna* features nearly 90 items of glass art made over some 200 years by Austria's foremost glass manufacturers. Part of the private collection of the Lobmeyr family, a number of the artifacts on display have not been shown since the 19th century. Included are pieces inspired by the Islamic art traditions of Mamluk Egypt and Syria, Nasrid Spain, Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India, culminating in the presentation of a chandelier designed for the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah. **Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization, UAE**, October 20 through January 16.

Islamic Motifs is a collection of 60 photos of Islamic geometric and floral decoration by Emirati photographers Marwan Al Ali and Yusif Harmoudi. The exhibition includes photos of Islamic motifs inspired by many of the mosques and the interior elements of other Islamic architecture found in the UAE, such as the interior esthetic design,

calligraphic script and Islamic motifs used to decorate the doors, halls and walls. **Sharjah Calligraphy Museum, UAE**, October 11 through November 30.

Nour Festival of Arts shines a light on the best in contemporary Middle Eastern and North African arts and culture each October and November in venues across the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) in London, organized by the Council's Arts and Culture Service. From its origins as a pioneering arts education program based at Leighton House Museum, *Nour* has grown into a 32-partner and 20-venue strong cultural festival. Each year, *Nour* introduces thought-provoking work that challenges stereotypes of this region of the world and its peoples, through cultural expression. **RBKC, London**, October 22 through November 8.

Coming November
Première Biennale des photographes du monde arabe. The European House of Photography and the Institut du Monde Arabe launch a new artistic project, presenting a series of exhibitions in various locations along a pedestrian route between both places. Spread over 700 square meters, the exhibit showcases the works of 30 photographic artists from the Arab world, along with Western artists who have focused on a region or issue within this vast territory. The richness and diversity of points of views of these artists are on display, derived from a documentary tradition that goes beyond immediate reporting. Institut Du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, November 10 through January 17.

Lasting Impressions: *George Bahgory*. Bahgory was born in 1932 in

Bahgory, Egypt. A painter, sculptor, novelist, children's books writer and actor, he is most famous for his political satire, which people looked forward to seeing in *Al Ahram* newspaper.

Known for reflecting popular Egyptian sentiments, as in his many beautiful portrayals of the legendary Egyptian singer Um Kulthoum, Bahgory is shown to be more than just the "Grandfather of Caricature" in the sixth edition of *Lasting Impressions*, which showcases more than 90 works, some dating back to the 1950s when he was a student. **Sharjah Art Museum, UAE**, November 11 through December 31.

Hrozný and Hittite: *The First Hundred Years* is a conference honoring the centennial of Bedřich Hrozný's epochal identification of Hittite as an Indo-European language. It brings together specialists in cuneiform philology and Anatolian and Indo-European comparative linguistics, as well as Ancient Near Eastern history, archeology and religion, to survey the latest scholarship in the field and evaluate the prospects for Hittology in its second century. Charles University, **Prague**, November 12 through November 14.

The Egyptian Surrealists in Global Perspective focuses on the history and the evolution of the Egyptian Surrealist group and their relationship with their Western and international counterparts. It documents one of the most interesting chapters of modernism in the late 1930s up to the early 1960s and highlights the multifaceted aspects of modernity and its global interconnectedness in the 20th century. The conference is followed by a traveling exhibition, *When Arts*

Become Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938-1965), to be inaugurated at the Sharjah Art Foundation in 2017 in Sharjah, UAE. American University of **Cairo**, November 26-28.

Coming December
Senses of Time: *Video and Film-Based Works of Africa* features five African artists exploring how time is experienced—and produced—by the body. Bodies climb, dance and dissolve in six works of art. Characters repeat, resist or reverse any expectation that time must move relentlessly forward. *Senses of Time* invites viewers to contemplate tensions between ritual and technological time, personal and political time through pacing, sequencing, looping, layering and mirroring. The exhibition features Yinka Shonibare's cinematic "Un Ballo in Maschera," in which European ballroom dancers in sumptuous African print-cloth gowns dramatize the absurdities of political violence as history repeats itself. The film selections explore choreographies of memory and forgetting in the haunted ruins of post-colonial deindustrialization, demonstrate the slipperiness and fragility of time and identity and draw visitors into a captivating kaleidoscopic space where past, present and future converge. **Los Angeles County Museum of Art**, December 20 through January 2, 2017.

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