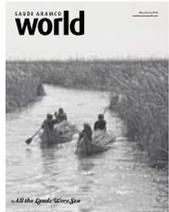


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*All the Lands Were Sea*



Their canoes laden with the reeds on which their material culture is based, Ma'dan men paddle along a waterway in Iraq's marshes in 1967. Marsh Arab homes are built of bundled reeds and roofed with plaited ones. Photograph by Tor Eigeland.

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**Back Cover**



An anonymous, fanciful illustration for a souvenir leaflet shows Cedar 3, launched by the Lebanese Rocket Society in 1963, over Beirut. It actually flew over the Mediterranean, but it did lift Lebanese national pride to a new high. Photo by Sheldon Chad / Manoug Manougian Collection.

Saudi Aramco, the oil company born as an international enterprise just eighty years ago, distributes *Saudi Aramco World* to increase cross-cultural understanding. The magazine's goal is to broaden knowledge of the cultures, history and geography of the Arab and Muslim worlds and their connections with the West. *Saudi Aramco World* is distributed without charge, upon request, to a limited number of interested readers.



## From Rubble to Revival: Haitian Art's Arab Connection

Written by  
Nancy Beth Jackson  
Photographed by  
Maggie Steber

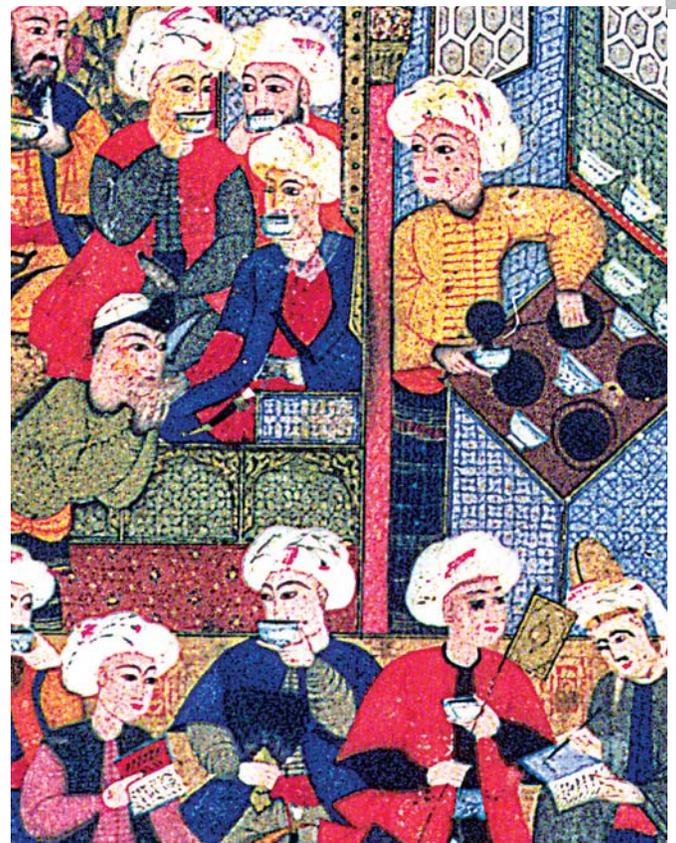
Sons of Arab immigrants to Haiti, Georges Nader and Issa El Saieh brought a generation of Haitian artists to world attention. But in 35 seconds on January 12, 2010, their lifetime's work turned to rubble, along with the rest of the nation, in the calamity of an earthquake. Now finally, the country and the art collection are recovering.

## firstsocialnetwork@coffeehouses.mideast

### 10

Written by  
Caroline Stone

Coffee, which needs to be skillfully roasted and ground before brewing, gave rise from the earliest times to public coffee houses, which provided something unique from Yemen to Europe and the New World: A place where men of diverse classes and trades could gather for conversation. The result was a social-networking revolution.



## All the Lands Were Sea

Photographed and Written by Tor Eigeland

In late 1967, photographer Tor Eigeland traveled for more than a month, mostly by canoe, among the countless villages of southern Iraq's vast marshes. Now, 45 years later, writer Anthony Sattin calls his photographs a "rare and ethnographic record of a lost world. They bring us back to a time and place where people lived in harmony with their environment and respected the balance the natural world needs to thrive."

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## European Ceramics for the East 34

Written by Willem Floor and Jaap Otte  
Photographs courtesy of the Montague Collection

A question to a Moroccan shopkeeper led Joel Montague on a four-decade, three-continent collector's journey, the fruit of which is now an extensive collection of the ceramics produced in Europe for sale in Muslim lands. The patterns, iconography and calligraphy in Arabic and other languages—and the production techniques—illuminate a little-known chapter in ceramic crafts and early modern East-West trade.

ترجمان المكنوز  
INTERPRETER  
of TREASURES

## 40 Part 3: Food and Drink

Written by Tim Mackintosh-Smith

In this third of six articles sampling the treasure-house of Arabic literature, accounts of what we eat and drink are as varied as the lands where Arabic is spoken and written, from the delicious and exemplary to the merely curious—and, occasionally, the repellent.



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## The Forgotten Apogee of Lebanese Rocketry

Written and Photographed by Sheldon Chad

When a first-year instructor invited his students to form a "rocket society" at Haigazian College in Beirut, one of the world's most successful amateur space programs took off, and with it, the pride of the country.



44 Classroom Guide  
Written by Julie Weiss

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Posing in the new Galerie Nader are family members Joseanne and Georges, Sr.; behind them stand John, Marie Salame and her husband, Georges, Jr. The new art gallery, which survived the 2010 quake, boasts two floors of art, much of it by Haitian masters.

**I**n the 1960's, Nader walked away from his mercantile success to take a chance on a very different kind of merchandise: Haitian art, already a popular souvenir for the tourists who arrived on cruise ships three times a week. He opened one small shop downtown, and then another, and he rewarded taxi drivers for bringing clients to his door. By 1992, when he built his three-story mansion on the hill—it also housed his Galerie Nader and the Nader Musée d'Art—he had become one of the nation's best-known dealers and collectors. "On top of the town, top in the arts" read the sign outside the 35-room structure in the hilly neighborhood of Croix des Prez. His personal collection of 12,000 Haitian works of art, including pieces by naïf masters Hippolyte, Obin and Benoit, was considered the largest in the nation and perhaps anywhere.

Nader (pronounced nay-daire) was not the first to realize the potential value of Haitian art. Credit for that is generally given to

Dewitt Clinton Peters, an American who opened the Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince in 1944 as a school and gallery. But it was Arab-Haitian art merchants, primarily Nader and the late Issa El Saieh, whose half-brother Élias Noustas owned La Belle Créole, who made the international market. "First it was the Centre d'Art. Then came the Arabs," says Axelle Liautaud, a Centre d'Art board member and Haitian art historian.

Kent Shankle, executive director of the Waterloo Center for the Arts in Iowa, which—thanks in part to Arab-Haitian art merchants—has the largest collection of Haitian art in the United States, remembers being overwhelmed when he visited the Nader

Right: Only ruins remain of the Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, destroyed by the 2010 earthquake. Far right: Axelle Liautaud oversees the return and cataloguing of the art that has been restored and repaired by experts from the Smithsonian Institution, who set up a workshop at the center's ruins.





# FROM RUBBLE TO REVIVAL: Haitian Art's Arab Connection

✧ WRITTEN BY NANCY BETH JACKSON ✧ PHOTOGRAPHED BY MAGGIE STEBER ✧

From his expansive terrace high above Port-au-Prince, Georges S. Nader's home boasted panoramic views of the harbor and the bustling Bord-de-Mer business district, where this son of struggling Lebanese immigrants had worked his way up from stock boy to general manager of La Belle Créole, Haiti's first and most luxurious department store. Founded by Palestinians who arrived in the late 19th century, La Belle Créole symbolized the commercial prowess of Arab-Haitians, who had not always been welcome in the country.



museum some years ago. “The storeroom had racks and racks and racks of paintings by the great masters. Not just a few pieces, but whole racks. The place was a real treasure, chock full of all these great paintings that they were basically just safeguarding, and that very few people had ever seen.”

But on the afternoon of January 12, 2010, Georges Nader’s world literally crumbled in 35 seconds. At 4:53, a 7.0 earthquake shook the city, its epicenter only 25 kilometers (16 mi) west of the capital. The human tragedy was indescribable, but the earthquake also struck at the heart of Haitian culture. The tectonic shift destroyed the gallery-museum. Irreplaceable Haitian art, estimated to be worth anywhere from \$30 million to \$100 million, was buried in the rubble.

Arabs are Haiti’s only ethnic minority, originating mostly in Bethlehem and mountain villages in northern Lebanon near Tripoli

The first thought was to rescue the people inside. Neighbors rushed to pull Nader and his wife, Marie, both then 78 years old, from the only two rooms still standing. His leg was injured; she later suffered a

heart attack. Despite his protests, they were evacuated to Miami by way of the Dominican Republic, leaving his sons Georges Jr. and John to see if anything could be salvaged. First reports were grim.

*The Wall Street Journal* headlined, “Art Trove Is Among Nation’s Losses.” Only a handful of canvases from the museum and about 3000 canvases

**Emmanuel El Saieh, son of the late Issa El Saieh, orchestra director and founder of Galerie Issa in Port-au-Prince, displays a painting by the famous Haitian artist Philomé Obin, showing the painter himself on the left and Issa—his patron—on the right. The family arrived in Haiti from Bethlehem, via New York, in the early 20th century.**





Left: A maid straightens a painting in the Galerie Issa, which was not harmed in the earthquake. A unique talent-spotter, Issa discovered and hired a large number of the great Haitian naïfs: Jacques Enguérand Gourgue, André Pierre, André Normil, Jacques Chéry, Seymour Bottex, Alexandre Grégoire and dozens of others. Above: Wrapped and organized, paintings restored by the Smithsonian for the Centre d'Art collection are still stored at the ruined Centre, awaiting display and storage elsewhere.



stored in a satellite gallery in the Pétionville suburb remained. “I’ve lost my life’s work,” Nader said at the time, for so it seemed.

Because Arab immigrants have long dominated Haitian commerce, it should not be surprising that Arab-Haitians have been among the most influential art dealers in Haiti: What is surprising is that they are in the country at all. The “Syrians,” as the Haitians called all Arabs regardless of origin, have long been the business backbone in a nation that has never encouraged immigration. Indeed, Arabs are Haiti’s only ethnic minority, originating mostly in Bethlehem and mountain villages in northern Lebanon near Tripoli.

The first “Syrians” arrived in the late 19th century, each individual coming almost always by chance. Fleeing political and economic turmoil in the Ottoman Empire, they were often content to board any ship headed to “America.” Sometimes they arrived in the Eldorado of their dreams, but many found themselves debarking, largely unwelcomed, in Latin American nations. Those arriving directly or indirectly in Haiti were at first received with sympathy and not a little fascination, as former farmers from the Middle East took to the countryside to peddle the wares they carried on their backs or on overloaded donkeys.

“They were considered like indigents or traveling acrobats,” writes Joseph Bernard, Jr., in his 2010 *Histoire des colonies arabe et juive d’Haïti*. Some peddlers were accompanied by bears or monkeys that danced to cymbals and flutes, he adds.

Soon the exotic newcomers were opening small shops and introducing the concept of credit to Haiti. Fascination turned to hostility as enterprising “indigents” began to dominate retailing and enter the import-export business, dealing mostly with the us. As early as 1894, a law was enacted in Haiti barring Arabs from the country, but they continued to come and to stay, ignoring threats of fines, imprisonment and expulsion. “Quite a tenacious group of people,” observes Mario L. Delatour, a Haitian filmmaker who documented the challenges the immigrants faced in the 2005 film *Un Certain Bord de Mer (An Unwelcomed Lot)*. Around 1903, as many as 15,000 “Syrians” were living in Haiti, but only a handful had been able to obtain Haitian citizenship, according to Bernard.

Not all came as farmers-turned-peddlers. Some arrived to explore business opportunities. Issa El Saieh’s maternal grandfather and uncle,



who had immigrated to New York from Bethlehem, arrived in Port-au-Prince in the late 1880's, looking for the iron framework of an exposition building, which had gone missing in transit to South America. When they found it, rather than return it, they offered to sell it to Haitian President Lysius Salomon and create a market surrounded by shops.

Family lore has it that Salomon became incensed at the thought of foreigners in commerce. "You will control the economy and control my country," he supposedly said, and threatened jail. The businessmen's us citizenship saved them. In the end, the structure was erected as Marché Salomon, and the uncle—Antoine Talamas—moved to Haiti and

**Amid the street and market paintings that line a block in Pétionville, painter Louis Saurel, 37, says many of his paintings have musical themes.**



became a millionaire. His niece, Issa's mother, arrived as a teenager at the turn of the 20th century

Invoking the protection of a powerful neighbor nation was one way Arabs in Haiti survived repeated anti-"Syrian" campaigns, but by 1911, *The New York Times* estimated that only about 500 remained in Haiti, with 114 merchants paying the equivalent of \$150 a year for a business license. At least a dozen claimed us citizenship. "Syrian merchants in Haiti do most of the importing for the island, taking over the business, particularly in provisions and dry goods," *The Times* reported. The Haitian government had again ordered Arab traders to depart. Mobs were attacking shops and assaulting shopkeepers. Brooklyn Syrians appealed to Washington "for protection of their countrymen."

As World War I neared, the plight of the Arabs in Haiti took on new significance for the US government. Officials feared Haitian elites with strong commercial ties to Germany might bar shipping from New York dry goods jobbers and Chicago meatpackers to Haiti. In July 1915, President Woodrow Wilson dispatched 330 Marines to protect the interests of us corporations. The Arab-Haitians would fare well in the 19-year occupation that followed, but anti-Arab measures resurfaced when the Marines left. Only after François Duvalier seized control in 1957 did doors begin opening for Arab-Haitians, although many joined the Haitian diaspora.

**Georges Nader, Jr., sifts through a stack of some of the hundreds of damaged paintings rescued from the earthquake and now in the attic of the Galerie Nader awaiting restoration and repair. That process may well take a decade or more to complete.**



Small paintings of scenes of everyday life in rural Haiti, by Henry Bottex, hang in a grid at Galerie Issa.

Unlike Arab immigrants in other parts of Latin America, Arab-Haitians did not form cultural organizations or become part of the local political fabric. They remained a class apart, generally marrying within their group, and they maintained their own networks through family and village ties. Georges and Marie Nader are the children of Lebanese immigrants who sailed to Haiti on the same ship in 1920. Issa El Saieh's twice-widowed mother, related to the Handal clan said to be descended from German Crusaders, sent Issa's elder half-brother Élias Noustras to Jamaica when he was 12 to be schooled in business by relatives.

Élias learned his lessons well. By 1941, he was applying for a 20-year trademark on the word *voodoo*, which he planned to use in marketing handbags, sandals, perfumes and beauty products. He and his mother soon opened La Belle Créole, an elegant department store downtown, which took up a whole block near the port and introduced the soda fountain, Rolex watches and Hermès scarves to Haiti. Haiti was entering what is called its Belle Époque period, an explosion of culture that had gone dormant under the US occupation. In a time when Port-au-Prince rivaled Havana as a tropical destination, Élias supplied Canadian ships, operated hotel shops and opened a restaurant called Le Pêchoir clinging to Boutellier Mountain, a kilometer (3300') above the city.

Élias Noustras mentored both Georges Nader and his half-brother

Nader and El Saieh's  
 "personal and business support  
 ... allowed them to create  
 this Haitian legacy."

Issa, who became so well known that everyone called him by his first name. Older than Nader by a dozen years, he studied English and played in the school band in a military academy near Boston. Returning to Port-au-Prince in the early 1940's, he seemed to be headed for the family trade when he started manufacturing underwear, but his passion for music won out. He created the Issa El Saieh Orchestra, and its big-band sound cut across color lines and genres well into the 1950's. Honored by Lincoln Center in 1997 as a giant of Haitian music, the maestro recorded albums on his own "La Belle Époque" label that are available on the Internet today.

The Centre d'Art that Dewitt Clinton Peters founded was the main outlet for fledgling Haitian artists, but in the 1950's Issa decided to try marketing art in his brother's restaurant and department store. Nader remembers Issa asking him to invest his \$1000 La Belle Créole bonus in a promising new venture. When he discovered his money was being used to acquire the art Nader himself was merchandising, he opened his own gallery above his wife's downtown gift shop. Issa, too, opened a shop near the port before moving his gallery in 1964 to a family mansion up a steep hill near the Hotel Oloffson, popular with celebrities like Graham Greene, who may have modeled Hamid, the Syrian shopkeeper in *The Comedians*, on Issa.

Both galleries thrived as the two men followed the Centre d'Art model of cultivating artists. "Every time I sold one painting, I bought



**Now increasingly scarce, lush tropical forests once dominated Haiti's mountainous land, and their verdure can often be found in Haitian paintings.**

two,” Nader says. People familiar with his collection believe he underestimates. The Arab art merchants not only sold the artwork but also often provided the artists with food, medicine and encouragement. Artists regularly gathered at Issa's to work, discuss art, eat communal meals and receive constructive criticism from the maestro, who had a good eye as well as a good ear. Issa told Roger François, a prominent wood sculptor, that he should try painting and handed him a box of paints. The artist found even greater success as a painter.

“So many of the great artists of Haiti would not have been able to work continuously without the personal and business support that allowed them to create this Haitian legacy,” says Shankle of the Waterloo Center for the Arts. “Issa and the Naders supported artists on a continuing basis. They were constantly buying and holding their work, sustaining them.”

Many of the masterpieces in the Waterloo collection came indirectly through Issa and Nader, purchased by tourists who became major Haitian art collectors because of them. The two were conduits for some of the greatest names in Haitian art. Philomé Obin, probably the greatest of them, painted almost identical portraits of himself with each of the men, whom he identified on the canvases as his good friends.

The Belle Époque ended when François Duvalier came to power in 1957. Issa's brother André, who had backed the opposition, fled to the US; Issa himself was briefly jailed. After Tonton Macoutes, Duvalier's thugs, began frequenting La Belle Créole, Noustas shuttered the famous department store and moved to Canada. Other Arab-Haitians

fell victim to the Duvalier regime, including Antoine Talamas's son and Yvonne Hakim-Rimpel, a feminist and journalist, who was silenced after she was abducted and abused.

Yet Duvalier also courted Arab-Haitians for their skills. One was named to a cabinet position as minister of health, and another was elected mayor of Port-au-Prince. For the first time, Arab-Haitians began to be integrated into Haitian life, and today they are influential in the economy and politics of the nation.

After a new international airport opened in 1965, tourism continued to flourish as American vacationers and such international jetsetters as Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Mick Jagger discovered the country. Issa and Nader managed to do business at home and abroad throughout the Duvalier dictatorships, the US embargo and natural disasters, establishing Haitian art as more than a quai-side novelty.

Issa, a natty dresser, charming conversationalist and natural *bon vivant*, hunkered down in his hillside studio, surrounded by artists, entertaining the clients and celebrities who found their way to his door by word of mouth. “He created a world of art for himself,” says his son Jean Emmanuel. Like the early peddlers, the younger El Saieh and his family “carried art with us wherever we went” after they left Haiti for the US.

Issa shipped art throughout the Caribbean and traveled to Europe, where he sold naïf canvases and bought tailored suits. His grandson Tomm, a Miami art dealer, remembers the ritual surrounding the packing of Issa's leather suitcase, filled with artwork

**Georges Nader, Sr., contemplates the future of Haitian art on the third floor of the ruined Centre d'Art.**

and gifts of Arab pastries and Haitian coffee for his clients. He always carried a shopping list of art supplies and medicines to buy for the painters who frequented his studio. Beneath his charm, however, was a keen business sense. "He would say, 'How wonderful! How beautiful! How much?'" his son remembers. Issa died in 2005; his son and daughter-in-law now run the gallery, which Tomm is helping to reorganize. In Issa's day, it more resembled a wholesale warehouse than the premier art gallery it was.

Nader was the natural salesman, who made art a family business. "He's a good seller. No one can beat him," said Georges Jr., one of the four of Nader's



**Women carry freshly washed clothes home along an inlet off the ocean. Such scenes are typical of those that inspire painters in Haiti.**

on the top floor, and the Hector Hippolyte collection on the floor below.

Almost three years to the day after he left Haiti, Georges Sr. moved into a Pétionville penthouse in a building his son owns a few blocks from the family gallery and across the street from the Expressions Art Gallery owned by his daughter Katia and her husband, whose family comes from Bethlehem. Another Nader gallery is planned in a restaurant that Georges Jr. is opening in a picturesque old house in the resort town of Jacmel.

The Nader patriarch has been revitalized by returning to Haiti after his reluctant exile to Miami. Picking out which of his favorite canvases would hang in his new home, he explains why he chose to be an art dealer instead of a department-store executive: "First it was the

seven children who became art dealers. His daughter Myriam runs an on-line gallery, [www.naderhaitianart.com](http://www.naderhaitianart.com), from New York. His Dominican-born nephew Gary, who decided at age six to sell art after visiting his uncle's gallery, specializes in contemporary Latin American artists like Fernando Botero, Roberto Matta and Wifredo Lam in a Miami gallery whose display space is the size of a football field.

Nader didn't wait around for people to discover Haitian art. He printed up postcards, which he mailed to clients all over the world, and he published glossy art books. He participated in international conferences and auctions, sponsored competitions and launched *Haiti Art*, the only journal dedicated to the subject. The Naders have operated over 10 galleries over the years in the Dominican Republic, Miami, Atlanta and New York. His eldest son, Ralph, a Miami cardiologist who worked in the family trade as a youth, remembers the celebration when gallery sales in Haiti surpassed \$1 million for the first time in the early 1970's.

As the story turns out, Georges Nader did not lose his life's work in the earthquake. Thanks to a retrieve-and-restore project by the Smithsonian Institution and efforts by the Nader family, a good part of the collection was salvaged, although restoration may not be complete for a decade. Fortunately, storerooms were

market," he says. "Then it was the heart." 🌐



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 <http://haitianartsociety.org>  
[www.garynader.com](http://www.garynader.com)

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# firstsocialnetwork@coffeehouses.mideast

WRITTEN BY CAROLINE STONE

Coffee, native to Ethiopia, was probably drunk there long before there were written records of it, both as a tea-like drink, *al-qahwa al-qishriya*, made from the husks of the coffee bean, and as brewed coffee made from the beans themselves, called *al-qahwa al-bunniya*. The beans were also often simply chewed. But the 16th-century jurist al-Jaziri says that coffee was first used in Yemen, across the Red Sea from Ethiopia, to enable the pious to remain alert during nighttime prayers. Surely it was no less valuable for ordinary working people, much as it is today, and its use spread across the Arabian Peninsula.

As it spread, there was much discussion about the new drink—whether or not it was, in religious terms, permitted, whether it should be considered “mind-altering,” and whether it was good or bad for the health. Serious moves to prohibit the drink began in Makkah in 1511, and recurred throughout the centuries. In response, both religious and medical scholars set pen to paper in coffee’s defense. Although the literature that these debates generated tells us little about the places where coffee was drunk, it is clear from these and other sources that coffee shops were numerous from early times. Interestingly, many of the arguments made in Arabia about both coffee and coffee houses were to be repeated almost word-for-word in the West a century later, and indeed the medical debate about coffee continues globally to this day.

Perhaps one reason for the

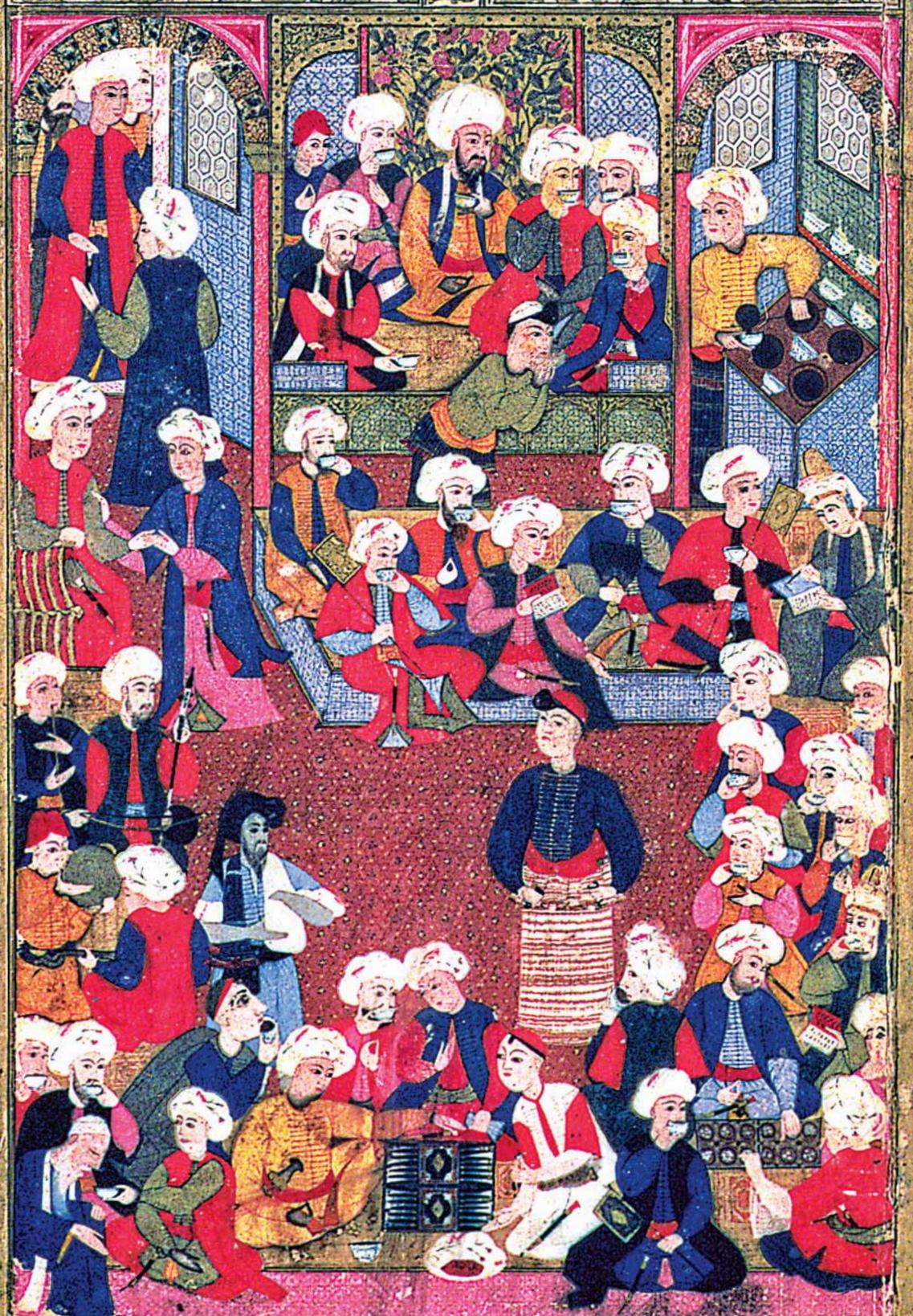


rapid spread of coffee shops, beyond simply a taste for coffee, is that the preparation of coffee is somewhat complicated, since the beans need to be roasted and ground. Coffee shops offered the product ready-made by an experienced hand.

Writing in about 1530, Ibn ‘Abd al-Ghaffar notes that, by the beginning of the 1500’s, there were many coffee shops in cities, especially near the Great Mosque in Makkah and the central mosque of al-Azhar in Cairo. This is an early direct mention of coffee houses, though earlier juridic decisions imply their existence. Fifty years later, in his *Umdat al-Safwa fi Hill al-Qahwa* (*The Best Defense for the Legitimacy of Coffee*),

A French illustration published in 1693 shows coffee-drinking from a bowl and an *ibrik* for brewing coffee, as well as a branch of a coffee tree, beans and a cylindrical “instrument for roasting the coffee.”

کافه کلینک  
 زلف کلینک



کافه کلینک  
 زلف کلینک

This banquet scene, from a 16th- or 17th-century Turkish album of miniatures and calligraphy, shows men drinking coffee and playing backgammon.

al-Jaziri mentions, as if it were something unusual, that the people of Madinah preferred to drink their coffee at home. He describes coffee as having spread rapidly once it left Yemen, first being drunk publicly by the *fuqaha*, or scholars, teachers and students, but soon being adopted by large numbers of people. He also tells us that, although terra-cotta bowls were standard, in the Red Sea port of Jiddah coffee drinkers used porcelain from China. Unfortunately, neither writer actually describes the coffee shops and their owners, although we do learn that, when a woman who was running one in Makkah was ordered to close down, she appealed, citing poverty, and was told she might continue running it provided she veil, which she did.

The absence of complaints against coffee shops on grounds of excessive luxury or extravagance makes it safe to infer that, in all likelihood, these early coffee shops were of a simple type still found throughout the Middle East. As coffee drinking spread from the Hijaz in the western Arabian Peninsula northward to Syria, however, this changed. There, a fine coffee house became an important element of urban planning for governors who wished to emphasize their wealth and power. Every *mahallah*, or city ward, it seemed, soon had at least one, and they were a key component when a new market was built. In Cairo, in the 17th century, it was noted that the coffee house was the first building to be completed in any of the new upmarket housing developments along the Nile.

## Coffee Houses Move West



The taste for coffee and coffee houses spread westward, but not along the paths one might expect. English merchants to the Levant had developed a taste for the drink, and the earliest recorded coffee houses were set up shortly after 1650 either in London or at Oxford—the latter one is still there today. Just as in the Muslim world, coffee houses were to have a profound social impact. Seating was often at long tables with benches or chairs on either side, providing an opportunity for general conversation and a breaking down of social divisions, since it was traditional to take the next vacant seat. (Pubs did not lend themselves to mingling across class boundaries, nor to quiet discussion.)

Coffee houses were sometimes known as “penny universities” because, in the early days, for one penny anyone could come in, read the papers and listen to the conversation, as well as hear lectures often given by the most eminent men in their field. This provided ongoing educational opportunities for those who traditionally would have had little access to information. The diarist Samuel Pepys mentions literally hundreds of visits to coffee houses, both to gather news useful to his position at the Admiralty and to meet with the prominent men of his day, particularly scientists and scholars.

Other coffee houses, such as Jonathan’s in London’s Change Alley, were of the greatest importance to the business community and were closely associated with what came to be known as the London Stock Exchange. Similarly, Lloyd’s of London began as a coffee house, founded in 1668, that particularly attracted the seagoing merchant community.

More widely throughout Europe, coffee houses were almost always established by entrepreneurs from the Levant, generally Armenians or Syrians. Although it might seem logical for the earliest ones to have been in the cities with the closest trade connections to the Middle East—Venice, for example—in fact this was not the case. Coffee houses seem to have spread first in northern Europe, especially to ports with English merchant colonies, such as Bremen in 1669. In 1670 the first coffee house in the Americas opened in Boston; as in London, it was close to the commercial center and initially frequented primarily by merchants and bankers. The same was true in New York, where the somewhat later Merchants’ Coffee House helped the business community gather along Wall Street.

English and American coffee houses tended to be utilitarian, rather than glamorous like the grand ones in major Middle Eastern

cities. In continental Europe, however, the development was somewhat different. Although the first coffee shops in Paris, established by Armenians, were basic places where “gentlemen and people of fashion were ashamed to go in,” this changed when an Italian set up a coffee house much closer to the Ottoman or Syrian pattern, with “tapestry, large peers of glass [mirrors], pictures, marble tables, branches for candles.” This was the Café Procope, which still survives today as a restaurant. The success of this model led to imitation by many continental café owners.

There was yet another difference between the Middle Eastern and the European and American coffee shops. The former were strictly male preserves where little was served besides coffee and tea. Because establishments that served drinks only—even only tea and coffee—were taxed more heavily than places that served food, western European cafés tended to serve food as well. This meant that, although they were equally important as meeting places and exchanges, they had a somewhat different flavor from the traditional coffee house.

In Venice, the first known coffee shop opened on the Piazza San Marco in 1683, although as early as 1575 a Muslim merchant who had been murdered in the city was recorded as having coffee-making equipment among his possessions. The Venetians shared the same doubts about coffee houses as the rulers of Egypt, the Ottoman Empire and indeed England, as a work describing the government of Venice makes clear:

It is in conformity to this Advice, that the Venetians do not allow of any Coffee houses in their City, that are able to contain great numbers of people. Their Coffee houses are generally little shops, that will not hold above five or six Persons, and there are not Seats for above two or three. So that the Company having no where to rest themselves are gone as soon as they have made an end of drinking their coffee.

Nevertheless, prohibition was as unsuccessful in Venice as elsewhere: Florian’s on Piazza San Marco, still one of the most famous cafés in the world, opened a few years later, in 1720. It was the first coffee house in Europe to allow women, which probably reassured the authorities that it was an unlikely locus for seditious political debate.

The first coffee house in Vienna opened shortly after the Ottoman siege of 1683. Various stories recount that the beans were left behind by the Turkish troops (and that croissants were invented as a mockery of the Turkish crescent), but they cannot be substantiated. The owner of the coffee house seems to have been either Greek or Armenian, and certainly Vienna, like much of Ottoman-influenced Central Europe, was one of the places where the coffee house became most culturally important.

All this had consequences: Coffee beans became an important item of trade, of course, but—much more important—the spread of coffee shops revolutionized social intercourse, first in the Muslim world and then in the West.

Before the advent of the coffee shop, it was often difficult to find a public place to meet and talk with one’s friends. The outdoors, for much of the year, was too hot or too cold. Islamic custom

insisted on the privacy of the home and, for all but the rich, it was difficult for a man to entertain a visitor without forcing the women of the house to remain secluded, in perhaps the only other room.

Nor was there a custom of eating away from home, except when traveling, so there were no restaurants to provide neutral, public meeting grounds. The traditional gathering place was, of course, the mosque, but there a certain restraint was demanded:



This 1854 watercolor coffee-house scene from Istanbul shows the informality of seating that made the coffee house a place where men of diverse occupations and classes could mingle. The artist, Amedeo Preziosi, was born in Malta and lived in Istanbul for some 40 years.

It was hardly a place for a group of young men, for example, to relax and spend a lighthearted evening, or for that matter, for men of different faiths to discuss a business venture. Another possibility would have been the *hammam*, or bath house, but that was apparently not the right atmosphere for serious debate or discussion.

Coffee shops changed all that. They provided a place, neither

home nor work, where people could meet and talk more freely than anywhere else, widen their social circle, make new contacts and learn what was going on in the world from points of view they might not otherwise encounter. The numerous western accounts of coffee shops—which initially fascinated travelers—are unclear as to who exactly patronized them, and probably it varied much from

place to place and period to period. It is likely that the smaller neighborhood coffee shops had a relatively homogeneous, local clientele, or possibly served members of a particular guild,



This anonymous painting dated 1856 shows a coffee house in Antalya, Turkey, set along water—much as outdoor cafes are today.



3 SCÈNES ET TYPES. — UN CAFÉ MAURE.  
Collection Idéale P. S.

**“A Moorish Café” is the title on this 1890 French postcard of an Algerian coffee house, in which one of the men is reading to the others. Readings, study, debates, lectures and storytelling were all popular coffee-house activities in both East and West. In England, coffee houses were sometimes referred to as “penny universities.”**

ethnic group or work affiliation; the great coffee houses, such as those along the waterfront in Istanbul, offered cosmopolitan meeting places for a wide variety of people. The French traveler Jean de Thévenot, writing in the mid-17th century, may have exaggerated, but there was a measure of truth in his observation that, especially in major cities, “all sorts of people come to these places, without distinction of religion or social position; there is not the slightest bit of shame in entering such a place, and many go there simply to chat with one another.”

There was also a further element in the allure of coffee houses, beyond a stimulating and flavorful drink, agreeable surroundings and companionship: In the coffee shop, patrons were to various extents freed from the rigid protocols of their times. The physical layout that became most common was a single large room with cushioned benches running around the walls—individual tables and chairs were a much later, western development—and in the grander coffee houses there would be a fountain in the center. Conversation, then, was never very private, and could easily become general, perhaps turning into a debate on a topic of broad interest; written sources mention informal seminars in coffee shops, and even sermons by wandering preachers. Besides this, apart from the dais in grander establishments, which was reserved for the most distinguished visitors, patrons were customarily seated in the order of their arrival, and not according to rank or wealth. This made for a very exciting sense of freedom from

social constraints, and it gave society an entirely new dimension for what today we call “social networking.”

Then there was the matter of entertainment. Numerous authors have described the attractions that coffee houses provided, a major one being storytellers, particularly during the nights of the holy month of Ramadan. (Today they are rare, having been displaced by television serials.) Earlier writers also mention music as a pleasure of the coffee house, while European travelers in Cairo and Syria speak somewhat unenthusiastically of shadow-puppet shows.

As businesses, coffee houses were often excellent investments. Some of the most elaborate and beautiful ones, particularly in Istanbul, were built by the Janissaries, who employed famous architects; an example is an internationally known establishment on the waterfront at Çardak Iskelesi. These then also served as clubhouses for a particular *orta*, or battalion, and later they provided income when official financing for the Janissaries was reduced.

The Ottoman historian Ibrahim-i Peçevi, writing in about 1635, describes the spread of coffee houses throughout the Ottoman world from the middle of the 16th century, with special reference to Istanbul. Like many writers, he expresses mixed feelings about them, but it is hard not to feel that the comments say more about the writer, or perhaps his individual experience, than the subject. Whereas Thévenot takes a positive view of both coffee and coffee houses, commenting that “French merchants, when they have a lot

## Rural and Roadside Coffee Shops



Coffee drinking was not reserved to the cities. Simple coffee shops were to be found in villages, and indeed anywhere that there were sufficient passers-by. The mathematician Carsten Niebuhr, traveling in the Arabian Peninsula in the 1760's, describes a coffee shop on the road to Bayt al-Faqih, now in Yemen:

We rested in a coffee-shop situated near a village. Mokeya is the name given by the Arabs to such coffee-houses which stand in the open country, and are intended, like our inns, for the accommodation of travelers. They are mere huts, and are scarcely furnished with a Serir, or a long seat of straw ropes; nor do they afford any refreshment but Kischer, a hot infusion of coffee-beans. This drink is served out in coarse earthenware cups; but persons of distinction carry always porcelain cups in their baggage. Fresh water is distributed gratis. The master of the coffee-house lives commonly in some neighboring village, whence he comes every day to wait for passengers.

Simple coffee houses of this type are still found along roads from North Africa to—until recently—Afghanistan, whereas in Iran, tea has largely taken the place of coffee. These rural coffee- and/or tea houses catered to a passing clientele, rather than serving as centers of village life. Until the late 20th century, they might be decorated with paintings. Often, there were symbols of hospitality: a tea- or coffee pot; a cut melon; a water-pipe; a bunch of flowers. Where a storyteller performed, the attributes of the hero of his tales might be painted: his sword or gun, his horse or perhaps the scene of some of his adventures. Sometimes landscapes would show national monuments, or there might be entirely fanciful motifs.

Many travelers comment on the preference for siting coffee houses near water: Thévenot, so often positive in his impressions, remarks

that “all the cafés of Damascus are beautiful—lots of fountains, nearby rivers, tree-shaded spots, roses and other flowers; a cool, refreshing and pleasant spot.”

The Portuguese traveler Pedro Texeira in 1604 describes drinking coffee from Chinese porcelain cups in Baghdad: “These places are chiefly frequented at night in summer, and by day in winter. This house is near the river, over which it has many windows, and two galleries, making it a very pleasant resort. There are others like it in the city, and many more throughout Turkey and Persia.”

This was true also of rural coffee houses. Swedish historian and diplomat Abraham d’Ohsson, writing in the late 18th century, tells us that “in the countryside, they are shaded by great trees and trellises of vines, with large benches on the outside.”

Across the Ottoman Empire in particular, where they were the center of secular village life, there was a preference for setting coffee houses beside a spring. Generally the little kiosk stood in the shade of a vast and ancient tree, often a plane, which had been carefully pruned and the branches skillfully grafted together to provide a wonderful canopy of shade. At the small town of Libohovë, near the World Heritage site of Gjirokastrë in Albania, a great tree standing by a little stream is recorded as having shaded a coffee house for nearly 400 years and is itself even older—perhaps, they say, the oldest in the Balkans.

Also from a late 19th-century French postcard set is this photograph of a rural coffee house in Morocco.



of letters to write and want to work all through the night, take a cup or two of coffee in the evening,” the Venetian *bailo*, or permanent representative at Istanbul, Gianfrancesco Morosini, writing in 1585, takes a rather jaundiced view:

All these people are quite base, of low costume and very little industry.... They continually sit about, and for entertainment they are in the habit of drinking, in public, in shops and in the streets, a black liquid, ...[as hot] as they can stand it, which is extracted from a seed they call Caveè.... It is said to have the property of keeping a man awake.

And whereas Ottoman writer Evliya Çelebi’s opinion was generally favorable, Mustafa ‘Ali Çelebi, a historian, was harsh in describing Cairo in 1599: “Some coffee houses are full of madmen, in spite of the fact there are perfectly good lunatic asylums.”

With the passing of time, the debate of the *fuqaha* in the East and the Catholic Church in the West as to whether or not coffee was religiously permissible gave way to a social and political concern that was also expressed in almost identical terms in both East and West: that coffee shops were encouraging men—especially young men—to waste time when they should be working, and

## Coffee Houses in Iran



Coffee also traveled east. In Iran, in particular, it seems to have quickly become less controversial than elsewhere.

The first mention of coffee in Iran comes in the work of the doctor Imad al-Din Mahmud al-Shirazi, in the mid-16th century, and his interest in it is largely medical. Yet as early as 1602, an Austrian envoy to the court mentions something that sounds like coffee, and coffee soon became part of hospitality at the Safavid court. The Spanish envoy Don Garcia de Silva y Figueroa, writing in 1619, mentions Shah Abbas visiting the coffee houses of Isfahan, as do Pietro della Valle and the Russian traveler Fedot Kotov—testimony to the social acceptability of the institution.

Further evidence comes from records showing that Iran imported coffee in large quantities through the Dutch, and the mention in records from 1634 of a shipment of 5000 loads of small Chinese coffee cups, intended for sale in Iran, gives an idea of how popular the drink had become by that early time.

Jean Chardin, writing his account of travels in Persia “and other places in the East” in 1686, describes Iranian coffee houses this way:

These houses, which are big spacious and elevated halls, of various shapes, are generally the most beautiful places in the cities, since these are the locales where the locals meet and seek entertainment. Several of them, especially those in the big cities, have a water basin in the middle. Around the room are platforms, which are about three feet high and approximately three to four feet wide, more or less according to the size of the location...They open in the early morning and it is then as well as in the evening that they are most crowded.

that the mixing of different classes and the freedom of debate found in coffee houses would foment discontent and disruption of the social order.

This concern was particularly acute in the Ottoman Empire, where rioting by disaffected Janissaries was a perennial problem. The English ambassador Sir Thomas Roe, writing in 1623, makes the point that the general perception was completely wrong, and that in fact all was quite well as long as the Janissaries were merely “muttering and grumbling in the coffee houses”; danger, he maintains, came only when they fell silent. He was quite correct, but this was not how the situation was perceived by the authorities: Repeated efforts were made to close coffee houses across the Muslim world, and in the 1630’s, Murad IV ordered them not only closed but razed.

In England, King Charles II expressed essentially the same view in his 1675 “Proclamation for the Suppression of Coffee Houses,” which states that they were “the great resort of idle and disaffected persons [which] ... have produced very evil and dangerous effects [and] ... divers false

rumours.... Malicious and Scandalous Reports are devised and spread abroad, to the Defamation of the Peace and Quiet of the Realm.”

Prohibition did no good for either ruler. Far too many respectable people—*qadis* and lawyers, scholars and students, merchants and clerks—wanted not only a cup of coffee, which Europeans, at least, considered secondary, but a space in which to meet and talk, an extension of often cramped housing, a way to offer inexpensive entertainment to friends and a place to relax that was both public and familiar. Charles II’s ban came to naught; Murad IV’s resulted in coffee-house culture transferring to Bursa, some 90 kilometers (56 mi) away. The soldier and scholar Kâtip Çelebi, writing in about 1640, describes the process; ironically, he himself died suddenly and peacefully while drinking a cup of coffee.

Over and over again, travelers commented on the hundreds—and in great cities such as Cairo they asserted there were thousands—of coffee houses and coffee shops, and even smaller towns in the provinces were well supplied. Evliya Çelebi, writing

**In Milan, the grand Caffè degli Specchi took on a seating arrangement not unlike Turkish establishments, but with the addition of tables and chairs.**





Coffee houses became popular in England around 1650. This London establishment, above, was depicted by an anonymous artist probably in the late 1600's. Because small coins were often scarce, many coffee houses issued tokens such as this one, right.



in his *Seyahatname* in 1670, always enumerates the coffee houses as well as other buildings of note. In *A Journey to Berat and Elbasan*, he says, for example, of Berat (now in Albania):

In the vicinity of this bazaar there are six coffee houses, each one painted and decorated like a Chinese idol temple. A few of them are on the bank of the ... river which flows through the city. Here some people bathe in the water, some come to fish and others gather to converse with their friends on matters both religious and secular. There are many poets, scholars and writers here possessing vast knowledge. They are polite and elegant, intelligent and mature, and given more to carousing than to piety.

The esthetic he refers to is another fascinating aspect of the grander coffee houses. In Istanbul, Damascus and Cairo, as elsewhere, particular coffee houses often had a particular "flavor." Fishawy's, said to be Nobel Prize-winner Naguib Mahfouz's favorite café and a treasured meeting place of poets and writers, has retained much in the way of traditional furniture and arabesque decoration, as has the Zahret al-Bustan, now more popular, however, with tourists than intellectuals.

In contrast, the M'Rabet in the madinah of Tunis is the exact opposite of the grandiose interiors that have been mentioned. Absolutely simple, whitewashed, with columns painted in red and green and along the walls masonry divans covered with matting, it has an atmosphere of tranquility, and the place seems to

take one back to the very origins of coffee drinking, and the coffee house, in the Arabian Peninsula. ☉



**Caroline Stone** (stonelunde@hotmail.com) divides her time between Cambridge and Seville. Her latest book, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*, translated with Paul Lunde from the medieval Arab accounts of the lands in the Far North, was published in 2011 by Penguin Classics.

 **Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants and Intoxicants.** Wolfgang Schivelbusch. 1993, Vintage, 978-0-67974438-2, \$16 pb.

**Coffee and Coffeehouses.** Ralph S. Hattox. 2000, University of Washington, 978-0-29596231-3, \$22.95 pb.

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# The Forgotten Apogee of Lebanese ROCKETRY

Fifty-two years ago, as Soviet cosmonauts and us astronauts were first venturing into space, another space program was also taking off—in Lebanon.

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY SHELDON CHAD



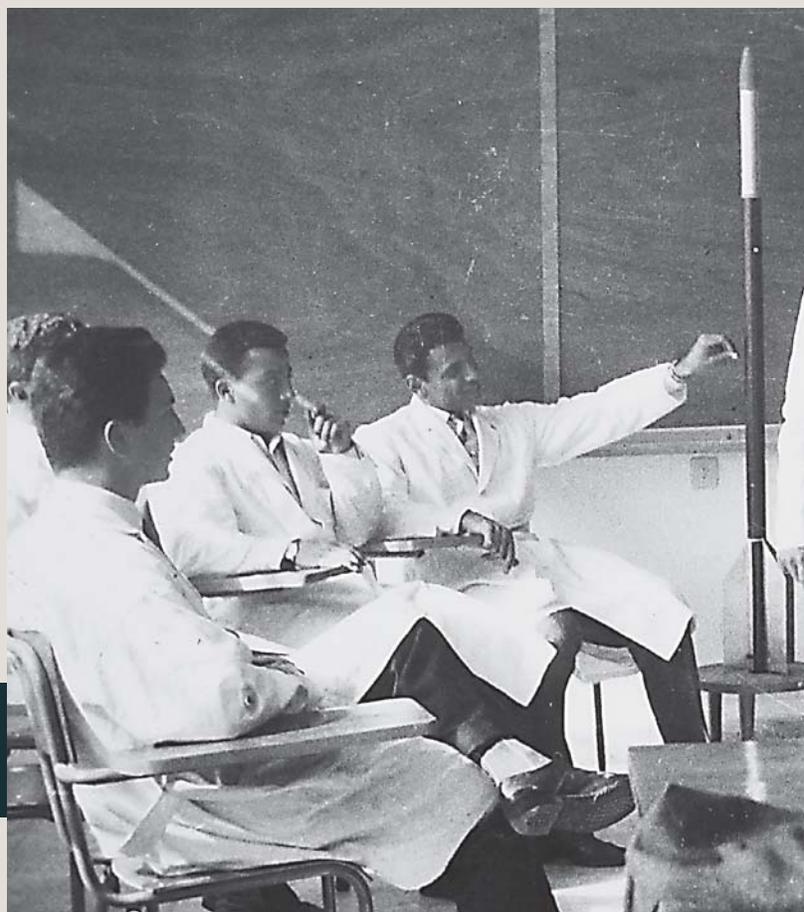
Yes, in the early 1960's, the country of 1.8 million people, one-quarter the size of Switzerland, was launching research rockets that reached altitudes high enough to get the attention of the Cold War superpowers.

But the Lebanese program was more about attitude than altitude: Neither a government nor a military effort, this was a science club project founded by a first-year college instructor and his undergraduate students. And while post-Sputnik amateur rocketry was on the rise, mostly in the US, no amateurs anywhere won more public acclaim than the ones in Lebanon.

But that is forgotten history now, says Manoug Manougian, now 77 and a mathematics professor at the University of Southern Florida in Tampa. He leads me into a conference room where he has set out on a table file boxes filled with half-century-old newspapers, photographs and 16mm film reels.

“When I decided to leave, no one was interested to take care of all this,” says Manougian. “But I felt, even at that point, that it was a part of Lebanese history.”

**Manoug Manougian, right, with members of the Haigazian College Rocket Society, which he founded in 1960. It later became the Lebanese Rocket Society.**



Born in the Old City of Jerusalem, Manougian won a scholarship to the University of Texas, and he graduated in 1960 with a major in math. Right away, Haigazian College in Beirut was glad to offer him a job teaching both math and physics. The college also made him the faculty advisor for the science club, which Manougian reoriented by putting up a recruitment sign that asked, "Do you want to be part of the Haigazian College Rocket Society?"

He did this, he explains, because even as a boy, he loved the idea of rockets. He recalls taking penknife in hand and carving into his desk images of rocket ships flying to the moon. "It's the kind of thing that stays with you," Manougian says.

John Markarian, former head of the college, now 95, recalls thinking it was "a rather harmless student activity. What a wonderful thing it was." The first rocket, he says, "was the size of a pencil."

Six students signed up, and in November 1960, the Haigazian College Rocket Society (HCRS) was born. "It is not a matter of just putting propellant in the tube and lighting it," says Manougian. Former HCRS member Garo Basmadjian explains that at the time, "we didn't have much knowledge, so we looked at ways to increase the thrust of the rocket by using certain chemicals." After dismissing gunpowder, they settled on sulfur and zinc powders. Then they would pile into Manougian's aging Oldsmobile and head to the family farm of fellow student Hrair Kelechian, in the mountains, where they would try to get their aluminum tubes to do, well, anything.

"We had a lot of failures, really," says Basmadjian.

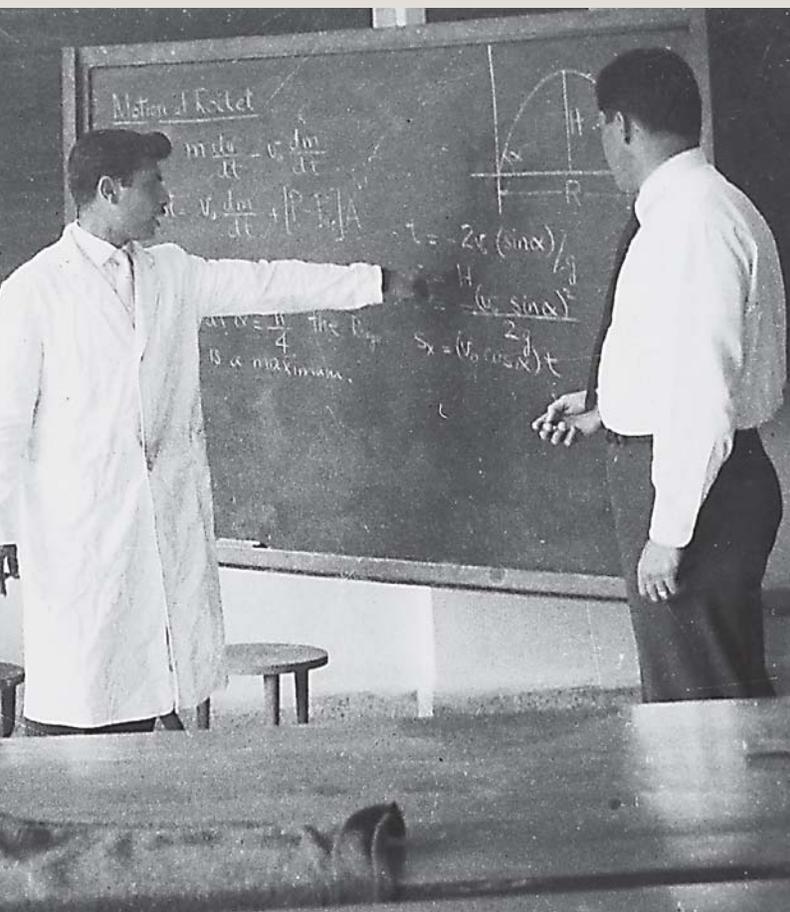
But soon enough "it did fly some distance," Manougian adds.

The HCRS began using a pine-forested mountain northeast of Beirut to shoot off the "tiny baby rockets," as Manougian calls them, each no longer than half a meter (19").

As they experimented, the rockets grew larger. By April 1961, two months after the first manned Soviet orbital mission, the college's entire student body of 200 drove up for the launch of a rocket that was more than a meter long (40").



Above: Manougian now teaches at the University of Southern Florida, where he keeps newspaper front pages on his office wall. "It was a part of Lebanese history," he says. Top: The Society launched its first "tiny baby rockets" at the mountain farm of one of its members.



The launch tube aimed the rocket across an unpopulated valley, but at ignition, Manougian recalls, the thrust pushed the "very primitive" launcher backward, in the opposite direction, and instead of arcing up across the valley, the rocket blazed up the mountain behind the students.

"We had no idea what lay in that direction," says Manougian. To investigate, the students started climbing, and on arrival at the Greek Orthodox church on the peak, they came on puzzled priests staring at the remains of the rocket, which had impacted the earth just short of the church's great oaken doors. Manougian calculated that, even with the unplanned launch angle, considering thrust and landing point, the rocket had reached an altitude of about a kilometer (3300'), and he adds the bold claim that this was the first modern rocket launched in the Middle East.



**1963 saw the launch of Cedar 3, a three-stage rocket that allegedly broadcast "Long Live Lebanon" from its nose cone as it rose.**

The next day, Manougian got a call from Lieutenant Youssef Wehbe of the Lebanese military. He cautioned that the HCRS couldn't just go up any old mountainside and shoot off rockets. They could, however, do it as much as they wished under controlled conditions at the military's artillery range on Mt. Sannine. Wehbe, also in his 20's, was a ballistics expert, and he was more than intrigued. "Our first success," says Manougian, came there at Mt. Sannine, where the rocket they demonstrated for Wehbe soared 2.3 kilometers (7400') into the air.

Newspapers got wind of the launches, and they reported that the "Cedar 2C" (named for the symbol of Lebanon) had reached 14.5 kilometers (47,500'). "Obviously, that's not yet the moon distance of 365,000 kilometers. But the Lebanese aren't after that, they're after technique," stated the report.

Under Wehbe's supervision, HCRS developed two-stage and then three-stage rockets, each bigger



**The Cedar launches were commemorated on this postage stamp issued on Lebanon's independence day.**

than the last and soaring higher and farther.

In the papers, the rocket men were portrayed as both brawny and brainy, and they were the talk of Lebanon. A fan club of prominent Lebanese—mostly women—formed the Comité d'encouragement du Groupe Haigazian. In the photos and films of the launches, one can see generals deferring to college kids in HCRS hardhats and eagerly posing in the press photos with them. Even Lebanese president Fuad Chehab invited Manougian and his students to the palace for a photo op.

"We were just having fun and doing something we all wanted to do," says Basmadjian. "When the president came into the picture and gave us some money, it took off."

"We were members of a scientific society. We felt good about it," says Simon Aprahamian, another former student. "But it didn't feel like what the us or USSR were doing. It's a small country, Lebanon. People felt, 'This is something happening



**Launches at the military site of Dbayea, overlooking the Mediterranean north of Beirut, drew crowds of spectators, journalists and photographers.**



**Ballistics expert Lt. Youssef Wehbe (in uniform) began supporting the rocket society in 1961, initially by allowing it access to an artillery range on Mt. Sannine.**

in our country. Let's get involved.”

Launches now drew hundreds of spectators to the site overlooking the Mediterranean Sea at Dbayea, north of Beirut, and Haigazian itself became known as “Rocket College.” As the HCRS was now the country's pride, its name changed to the Lebanese Rocket Society (LRS).

Lebanese weren't the only ones watching. Both superpow-

ers, according to Manougian, had “cultural attachés” observing the launches, and he believes they did more than that. “My papers were always out of place on my desk,” he says, and he recalls once leaving a note: “My filing cabinet I am leaving open. I have nothing to hide. But please don't mess up my desk!”

One night in 1962, Manougian was taken in the back of a limousine to a factory in the heart of downtown Beirut. There, he was introduced to Shaykh Sabah bin Salim Al-Sabah of Kuwait, who offered to fund Manougian's experiments generously if he moved them to Kuwait. Manougian hesitated, recalling the commitment he made to himself when he accepted the post at Haigazian: “Don't stay too long. You only have a bachelor's degree.” More than a private lab, Manougian wanted to get back to Texas to get his master's.

Before Manougian left for Texas, however, he sat down with Wehbe to plan two launches for Lebanese Independence Day, November 21, in both 1963 and 1964. The rockets would be called Cedar 3 and Cedar 4, and each would have three stages. They would dwarf what went before in both size and strength: seven meters (22') long, weighing in at 1270 kilograms (2800 lbs) and capable of rising an estimated 325 kilometers (200 mi) and covering a range of nearly 1000 kilometers (about 620 mi), the rockets would generate some 23,000 kilograms (50,000 lbs) of thrust to hit a top speed of 9000

## It Is Rocket Science

Three thousand years ago, the Phoenicians, who lived on today's Lebanese coast but traded as far away as England, were pioneers of celestial navigation using Polaris, the North Star, recognized by other cultures as the “Phoenician star.”

Today, natives of Lebanon are helping lead the way to the stars.

“As a child in Lebanon, I was an avid reader of books about Sinbad, Ali Baba, Ibn Battuta, Captain Cook, Magellan and Columbus, wondering how exciting it was for these explorers to anticipate what they were going to see and discover,” says Charles Elachi, who for 12 years has directed the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. “I lead a team of 5000 explorers in defining objectives that seem almost impossible, then going ahead and implementing them. In the last few decades, we have visited every planet in the solar system and discovered volcanoes on Io, geysers on Enceladus, lakes on Titan and river beds on Mars.”

At Princeton University, Edgar Choueiri is director and chief scientist of the Electric Propulsion and Plasma Dynamics Laboratory. “Plasma rockets differ from chemical rockets, which were the focus of the Haigazian group and which have been the standard means for launching and propelling spacecraft into space,” he says. The rockets Choueiri is developing use magnetic fields and electrically charged gases (plasmas) to produce thrust, and they are intended for cargo and manned missions to the moon and Mars. The first toy Choueiri remembers from his childhood in Lebanon was a water-propelled rocket that he launched with his father. “It was a poetic moment for me when, decades later, I found myself working, under NASA funding, on a plasma rocket concept that uses water as propellant,” he says.

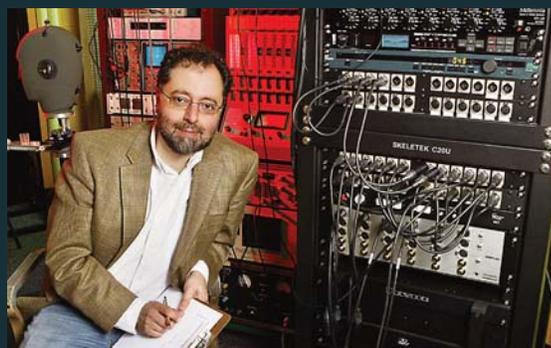
George Helou is the director of the Infrared Processing and Analysis Center at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech), also in Pasadena, California, and of NASA's Herschel Science Center. He says it was one of his teachers at the American University of Beirut, Pierre Monoud, who was also a faculty advisor to the LRS, who “encouraged me to pursue astrophysics.” Helou has provided research and management for every major infrared astronomy project launched by NASA and the European Space Agency. He researches galaxies, and in particular how they turn gas and dust into stars. “The starry nights of Lebanon's mountains attracted me to the cosmos,” says Helou. “Astrophysics has been and still is a wonderful journey.”



Charles Elachi



George Helou



Edgar Choueiri

kilometers per hour (5500 mph). From the nose cone, a recording of the Lebanese national anthem would be broadcast.

On November 21, 1963, a model of Cedar 3 was paraded through Beirut's streets to great applause. The cover of the souvenir booklet shows a rocket overflying the city. For Cedar 4, Lebanon issued commemorative postage stamps showing the rocket leaving Earth's atmosphere. On launch day, 15,000 people showed up, along with generals and even the president.

The newspapers reported with national pride that the rockets flew into "space" and landed on the far side of Cyprus. The altitudes that were published varied from 145 to 200 kilometers (90–125 mi). The actual figures, however, are likely more modest. "That was totally wishful," says Ed Hart, the Haigazian physics professor who took over as faculty advisor to the LRS. "It never came close. We kept our mouths shut [because] it was not a student matter anymore. It had become a social, society kind of matter."

For Manougian, Wehbe told him that according to calculations, the rockets achieved their aims. Hart, whose specialty is science education, brings it back to empirical achievement: "We were teaching students a great deal, and that is what we came for: the mystery and structure of forces."

In 1964, master's degree in hand, Manougian returned to Lebanon, and again collaborated with Wehbe on a few more launches. By then, world powers were interested: France supplied the rocket fuel; the US invited Wehbe to Cape Canaveral.

Cedar 8 was the last LRS rocket. Launched in 1966, it was a two-stage, 5.7-meter (18') rocket with a range of 110 kilometers (68 mi)—a long way from the pencil-sized rockets of five years earlier. "We were launching in the evening, and we put lights on top of the second stage

to be able to witness the separation. There were no hitches. It took off beautifully, the separation was fairly obvious, nothing exploded and it landed at the time it was supposed to land. To me that was a perfect launch," says Manougian, still in awe 50 years on.

By 1966 Manougian grew concerned about the extent of military involvement. "I'd accomplished what I'd come there to accomplish. It was time for me to get my doctoral degree and do what I love most, which was teaching," he says. He left in August, and the Lebanese Rocket Society was no more.

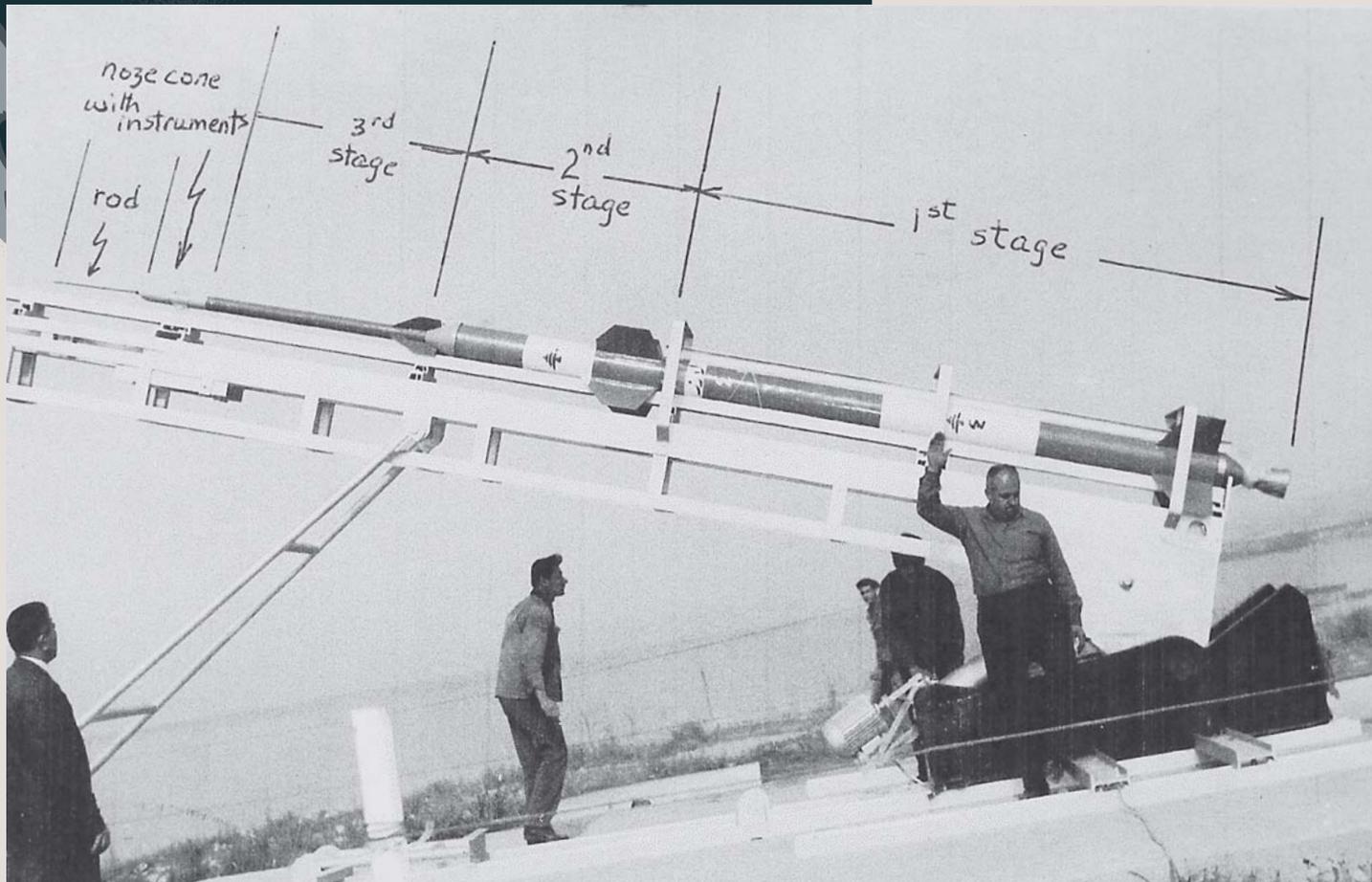
But under military auspices, a last Lebanese rocket, Cedar 10, flew in 1967. According to Manougian, Wehbe told him that French president Charles de Gaulle soon pressured President Chehab to shut down the rocket project for geopolitical reasons.

Decades of political turbulence followed, and the story of the LRS lay hidden away in Manougian's boxes.

Two years ago, science and engineering students at the University of Southern Florida approached Manougian to set up a rocket society. "My students did this 50 years ago," he replied, adding, "What can you do now that's innovative?" That's how he became faculty advisor of the Society of Aeronautics and Rocketry (SOAR), which is exploring rockets powered by electromagnetism and nano-materials. As in Beirut, he says, "the



**Cedar 4 was the society's most powerful rocket. Newspapers claimed that it reached a maximum height between 145 and 200 kilometers (90–125 mi), though the reality was surely much less. For Manougian, however, the rockets and their launches were not about setting records, but about teaching future scientists.**



## History's First Documented Rocket?

Today, historians regard it as more likely that the rocket was accidentally discovered, rather than invented, by the Chinese during the Sung Dynasty between 960 and 1279 CE. And although historians have pinpointed reports of "rockets" used in 13th-century battles, Frank H. Winter, curator emeritus of the Smithsonian Institution's Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., sees them as isolated incidents of the use of "gunpowder-type weapons" and not necessarily rockets, which are distinguished, he says, by being self-propelled.

There is an intriguing manuscript, dating from between 1270 and 1280, written by a Syrian military engineer named Hasan al-Rammah. His book, *Al-Furusiyya wa al-Manasib al-Harbiyya (The Book of Military Horsemanship and Ingenious War Devices)*, describes uses for gunpowder as well as the first process for the purification of potassium nitrate, a key ingredient. He also includes 107 recipes for gunpowder and 22 recipes for rockets, which he called *al-siham al-khatai* ("Chinese arrows"). Al-Rammah astonishes any contemporary reader by describing and illustrating one rocket-propelled device that looks like a scarab beetle. He called it "the egg which moves itself and burns." Comprised of two pans fastened together and filled with "naphtha, metal filings and good mixtures" (likely containing saltpeter), it had two rudders and was propelled by a large rocket. It seems to have been designed to ride on the surface of the water as a kind of torpedo.

Ahmad Yousef al-Hassan, the late scholar of Islamic technology, concluded that this book "cannot be the invention of a single person," and thus the "al-Rammah rocket" could possibly be an even earlier invention.

Was it history's first rocket? "This is really hard to pin down exactly," says Winter. "Its appearance in the work of al-Rammah shows that the rocket was known in the Arab world by ... about 1280." He adds that al-Rammah "clearly used 'Chinese materials,' i.e., terms and sources." Thus, at the very least, the knowledge of gunpowder and rockets in the Eastern Mediterranean would argue for the exchange of scientific knowledge among the leading civilizations of the time.



In those years, Manougian recalls, the "rocket boys" were celebrities and Haigazian College was "rocket college." Above, Manougian answers a journalist's questions after a launch. The last rocket, Cedar 10, flew in 1967, after Manougian had returned to the US to earn his doctorate. Then, Cold War politics shut down the program.

important thing is not the rocket. It is the scientific venture."

"Soar" is an apt metaphor for all involved. With the HCRS/LRS rocket projects, Lebanon punched well above its weight. Wehbe retired as a brigadier general. Manougian went on to win teaching awards, and he is loved by his students now as then. Many of the LRS students, and others inspired by them, went on to excel in scientific pursuits.

"Most of us come from very humble beginnings. But we had some brains and we studied hard," says Basmadjian.

"Did that experience help with regard to making new inventions?" asks another former student, Hampar Karageozian, who later studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and founded several ophthalmological drug companies. "Yes, it did. Because it completely changed my attitude. The attitude that we could say that nothing is impossible, we really have to think about things, we really have to try things. And it might work!"<sup>10</sup>



Under Manougian's guidance, a new rocket society at USF is exploring rockets that use plasma engines.



**Sheldon Chad** (shelchad@gmail.com) is an award-winning screenwriter and journalist for print and radio. From his home in Montreal, he travels widely in the Middle East, West Africa, Russia and East Asia. He will be reporting from Chad for his next story for *Saudi Aramco World*.



<http://greathistory.com/very-very-early-torpedoes.htm>  
[www.smithsonianchannel.com/site/sn/show.do?episode=136003](http://www.smithsonianchannel.com/site/sn/show.do?episode=136003)

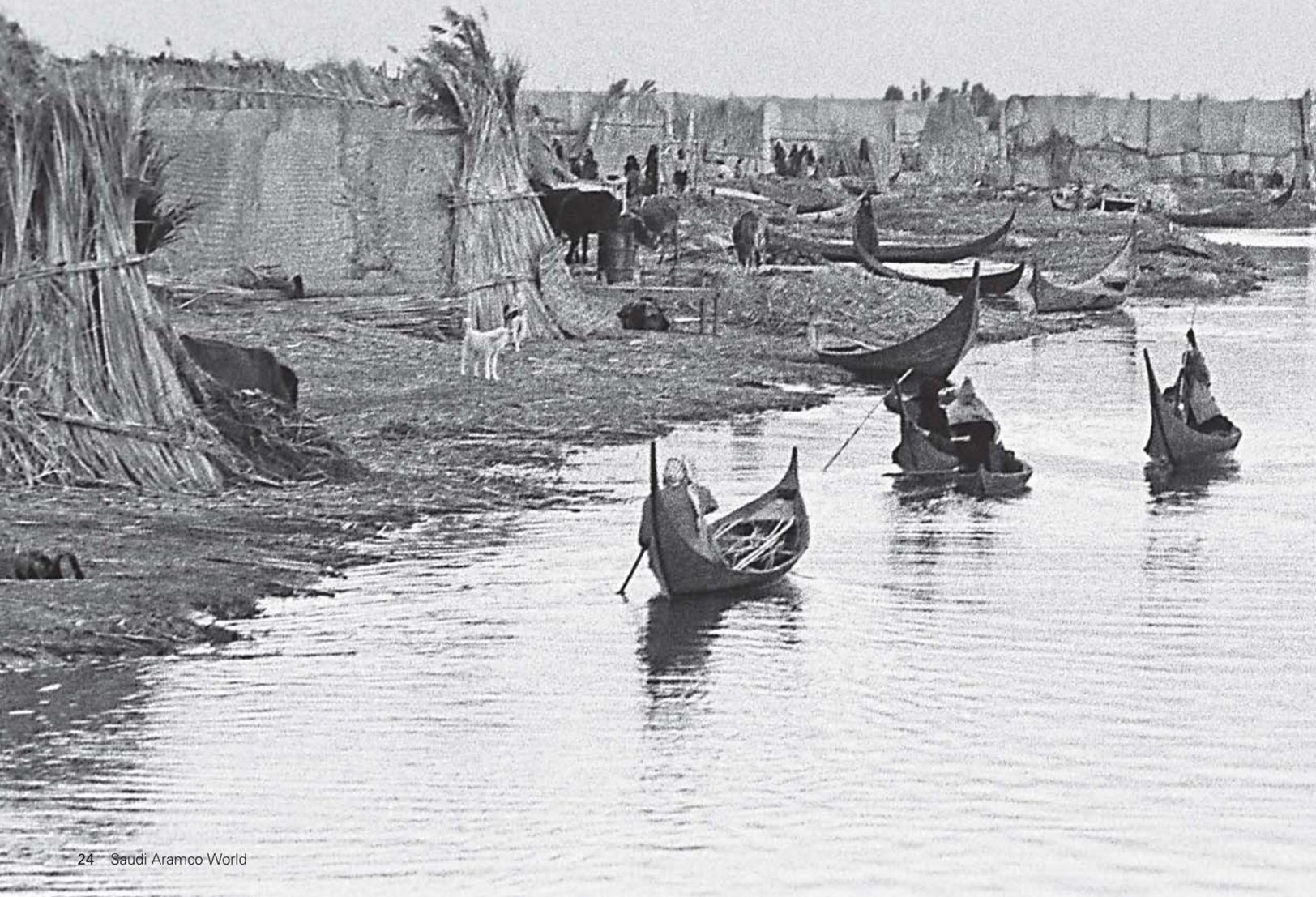


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Charles Elachi: N/D 83, J/F 04  
 "gunpowder-type weapons": J/F 95

Ibn Battuta: J/A 00, J/A 05, M/A 06  
 Phoenician trade: J/A 06

*All*  
THE  
*Lands*  
WERE  
*Sea*



*These precious images stand as a monument,  
a rare and ethnographic record of a lost world. They bring us back to a time  
and place where people lived in harmony with their environment and  
respected the balance the natural world needs to thrive.*  
—Anthony Sattin

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According to Enûma Eliš, the Bronze Age Babylonian creation story, the world began when the god Marduk built a platform of earth and reeds in the primordial marshes, where all the lands were sea. Such a place still existed as recently as half a century ago.

PHOTOGRAPHED *and* WRITTEN *by* TOR EIGELAND



Previous spread: **As we traveled among the villages of the marshlands, Al-Bedda presented a typical scene: reed houses along the banks of a canal; slender canoes called *mashuf*, water buffalo, and families going about the day's work.**

# M

Marshes once occupied 20,000 square kilometers (7700 sq mi) of southern Iraq, and in October and November of 1967 I had the good fortune to spend more than a month there, in what was then one of the most unspoiled parts of the world. At times it seems hard to believe, but today's Iraq was once the center of the Eurasian universe. Mesopotamia and Sumeria were cradles of civilization, developed here thousands of years ago.

*Mesopotamia* means “the land between the rivers,” and the rivers are the Tigris and the Euphrates. Within their confluence lay vast marshlands with lakes, channels and rivers, islands, forests and vast beds of tall reeds, some three and even four times the height of a person. Some say the Garden of Eden was here.

Beyond the marshlands, along its edges, there are still visible traces of Sumerian cities like Uruk, Ur and Larsa. Those civilizations died and vanished—with one exception: Within the Marshes lived people calling themselves Ma'dan, which loosely means “plains dwellers”; they are commonly known in English as Marsh Arabs.

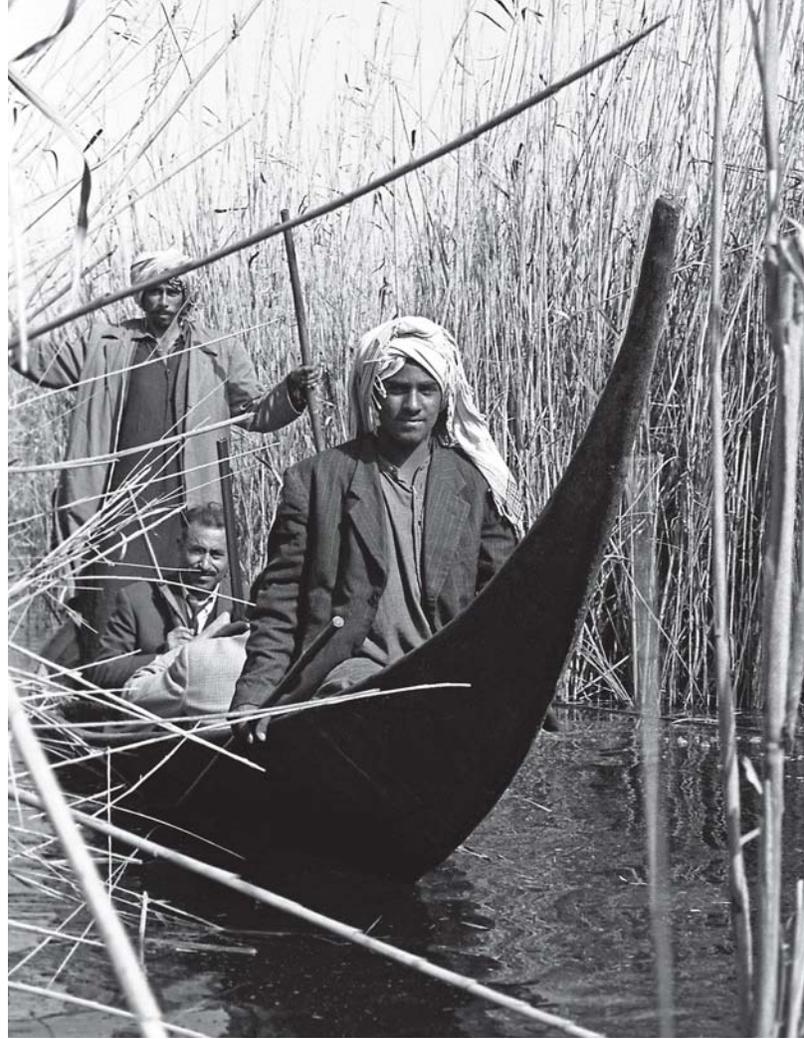
Although they speak dialects of Arabic, many of the Ma'dan may well be direct descendants of the Sumerians. The estimates of their numbers at the time of my visit ranged from 250,000 to 500,000.

Since I had heard that the last western writer to be allowed to visit the Marshes was Wilfred Thesiger—author of the masterpieces *Marsh Arabs* and *Arabian Sands*—back in the 1950's, I expected that official permission to go there would be hard to obtain.

Indeed, it took three weeks, and the necessary papers were ultimately issued thanks to the intervention of the mayor of Baghdad himself. The Iraqi government was already threatening to drain the Marshes, thereby



**On the right stands my guide and interpreter, Ibrahim, next to the Iraqi secret policeman who hopped on board wearing this suit, and equipped only with an ill-concealed pistol. As it turned out, he largely kept out of our way.**



**As we entered the marshes, everyone fell silent. The reeds in places grew three or four times the height of a person.**

extinguishing an ancient way of life. This added to the strength of my desire to go there.

My original plan was to paddle off with a guide, in a large, marsh-type canoe, from the little trading village of Majar al-Kabir. To keep everything simple, I had hoped to limit the cargo to myself, a guide, my cameras, two shotguns and—in case I tired of the local diet—200 tins of nutritious Norwegian sardines which, inexplicably, I found in a local grocery shop.

The authorities, however, insisted that I take an armed soldier along—for protection, they said. I knew that the Ma'dan loathed anything that looked like government authority, and I knew the soldier could make it harder for me to do my work.

The canoe had to be changed for a flat-bottomed motorboat, which came with a boatman-guide-interpreter, Ibrahim, who had grown up in the Marshes and learned English in an American-owned sugar factory. Our soldier turned out to be well on in years, with a kindly wrinkled face and a nearly antique rifle. In his motley brown uniform, he was hardly a ferocious sight.

Ibrahim at this point mentioned that he might want an assistant boatman, but I cut him off by telling him that, if so, I wanted an assistant cameraman as well—and perhaps the old soldier should have a sub-soldier... Fortunately, that made him roar with laughter, and on that note, we sputtered out of Majar al-Kabir and headed south down the muddy river toward the marshes.

Since it was a beautiful, cool, early spring morning, and since I thought I had left the frustrations of Iraqi officialdom behind, I

**Domesticated in this area by the Sumerians about 4000 BCE, water buffalo provided milk, yoghurt, meat, leather and dung for fuel. Here a herd rests in the midday sun amid homes.**

finally felt happy and was looking forward to adventures to come.

The euphoria was not to last. Barely a few moments later, we spotted a cloud of dust behind us on the riverbank and saw a Jeep chasing wildly in our direction, the driver leaning on its horn. A man in the Jeep stood up, waving frantically. We pulled over to the bank and waited.

The Jeep stopped, and a youngish, swarthy man jumped out. He was dressed in a cheap-looking black suit, white shirt, black tie and black polished shoes. Without hesitation, explanation or apology, he said, "*Salaam alaykum*," boarded our boat, sat down and lit a cigarette.

I stared at him, speechless. The man was wearing the informal uniform of the dreaded Iraqi secret police, including the pistol bulge under his jacket. Just as obviously, he was joining us. I knew it was useless, but to make myself feel better I feigned a burst of fury. Ibrahim shrugged and whispered to me: "When we get to the villages, we'll park them on the islands, give them cigarettes to smoke and food, then get our own canoe and we can do your work."

Ibrahim's solution would prove workable, and I should add that after the initial high tensions, the policeman actually warmed up, became almost friendly and left me alone to do my stuff.

By the time our little regiment settled down and got somewhat



acquainted, we had left the muddy river and entered a narrow, deep, clear waterway surrounded on both sides by towering reeds, some as tall as seven or eight meters (23–26'). Everyone fell silent. We had entered the marshlands.

At first, the chugging of the engine and the shrieks of unseen birds were the only sounds. Then, a bit further on we spotted a number of graceful canoes darting in and out of the reeds. These were the first

**A *mudhif*, or reed house, is built using techniques that date back to the Sumerians. This was a particularly large one built for guests. From the rack of pots, our host served coffee, unsweetened and strong, in tiny cups. Greetings among the men customarily began with "How are you? How is your family? Your crops? Your animals?" repeated over and over and over, before they moved on to other subjects.**





Men build a house from bundled reeds in the village of Al-Dubbon. After more horizontal bundles are added, it will be roofed with mats of split, plaited reeds that direct rainwater down the sides.

Ma'dan we saw. They were busy collecting reeds and picking edible plants, and some were spearfishing.

A few, however, turned their boats and slipped away as soon as they spotted the uniform among us—afraid, apparently, that we might be out to enforce Iraq's compulsory two-year military service law.

Soon, in some odd way, word of what we were flew on birds'

wings ahead of us. When people realized that this was a photographic expedition for a foreigner and not a police raiding party, they no longer slipped away.

The canal widened, and we entered a lagoon. On its right side I saw the reed huts of a village, Al-Sahein. We waited on the outskirts to give the headman time to get organized to receive us. That is the custom in these parts, Ibrahim told me.

I soon learned that, for the hosts, this meant getting a fire going, rounding up a few packs of cigarettes, putting rice on to boil, getting the women to bake bread, killing a chicken or two or rounding up some fresh fish, sweeping out the *mudhif*, or guest house, and putting clean reed mats and rugs on the floor.

While waiting, I had lots of time to observe the village. Each hut was on a little island, some made from bundles of reeds piled on top of each other. The architecture is ancient and the shape of the structures dates right back to the Sumerians.

Big and small canoes crisscrossed the village, punted or paddled by men, women and even small children. Among the huts, swimming, floating or climbing clumsily onto the islands, were the huge water buffalo without which the Marsh people could not survive.

Domesticated in this area by the Sumerians about 4000 BCE, the big black beasts provided milk, yoghurt, meat, leather and, very importantly, dung for fuel. Pats of dung were plastered all over the outside walls of the reed huts to dry. Smelly? I never noticed any unpleasant odors.

At last, a *mashuf*, a canoe, headed toward us, and an elderly man jumped on board, shook hands all around and said: "Please, please—you're welcome to our mudhif." We politely refused, giving him a chance to get out of it, but of course not meaning a word of our protestations.



**A villager applies thick bitumen, purchased with the proceeds of fish and reed-mat sales to Iraqis outside the Marshes, to seal a mashuf in Al-Sahein village.**

When the old man insisted, we happily went along. With him in the lead, we headed for one of the biggest islands, dominated by a splendid, large mudhif. The headman, in reality a *shaykh* even though the Iraqi government had officially banned the title, helped us ashore and led us to the spacious reed house.

We kicked off our shoes and entered. Sure enough, a fire was lit and the ritual Arab coffee pots were ready. We all sat down and began to ask each

other, “How are you, how is your family, your crops, your animals?” over and over and over, as is the custom.

In the Marshes, as in many other parts of the Arab world, it was customary to serve guests bitter, unsweetened and very strong coffee flavored with cardamom. Normally it was served by one man who filled and refilled the small cups. Only a few drops were served at a time, and you usually drank three small servings before indicating, by shaking the cup, that you had had enough. By this time your nerves might be tingling from the caffeine.

Our host also put a full package of cigarettes in front of every guest, an exceptionally generous gesture. After coffee there was very

sweet tea in glasses, and then more tea and endless smoking as the conversation started, stopped and started again.

These long periods of silence never bothered the Ma’dan. I found it an attractive trait. There was an unending procession of men coming and going the whole time; women kept peeping in through the entrance.

An enormous tray of boiled rice was brought in, followed by another tray containing fried fish and bowls of soup. The bowls were passed around so everyone could gulp down a hefty swallow. Some of the soup was then poured over the rice, and bowls of fermented water-buffalo milk were passed around.

We and a few prominent men of the village ate first, sitting cross-legged in a circle on the reed mats. You eat everything with your right hand. The way to do it is to shape and knead a little ball of rice in the palm of your hand and then, with your thumb, elegantly flick it into your mouth. I noticed that the men discreetly watched me clumsily shoving little balls of rice into my mouth with my fingers. An embarrassing amount of it dropped on the mat each time. This evoked a few chuckles, but most were too busy eating.

Our gracious host in this case did not eat or sit down but hovered, watching over us, ready to assist. Seeing my troubles, he helpfully sent for a spoon which, to everyone’s delight, I turned down. Ibrahim, trying to make me feel better, said, “Before you know it, you’ll be one of us.”

We finished and went outside to wash our hands. One by one, we were handed a piece of soap and water was poured from a jug over our hands to rinse them. In the mudhif, our places around the food were immediately taken by the women, children and others lower on the Ma’dan social scale. In a matter of moments, that mountain of food was gone.

All the meals we had were served on a bed of rice. There would normally be some kind of vegetables cooked along with the other food. Some spices were used and I must say the food always seemed tasty. This may have had something to do with the fact that I was always hungry.

The main reason for this state of affairs was that, when a senior person had finished eating—usually in about half the time it took me—he would immediately get up, and so would everyone else.

**Canoes laden with reeds, men paddle home, left. Spearfishing at night requires balancing in a narrow mashuf by the light of a torch of bundled reeds.**





Lesson time for these girls meant watching their grandmother weave on a ground loom with a reed heddle, supported on stones. The girls would soon make their own attempts at weaving.

Normal protocol, but I was invariably only half-full.

Nonetheless, during my time in the Ma'dan I felt healthier than ever before. As for the Ma'dan themselves, I did not see much evidence of disease, contrary to reports by Thesiger and others. Of course, fish, rice and vegetables with occasional meat constitute a healthy diet on top of a physically active life. But then there is the men's smoking....

Our lunch, as ever, was followed by more sweet tea, more cigarettes and more talk. Even if one doesn't smoke, on occasions like these it was a polite ritual, the thing to do, just like drinking the coffee and the tea.

Very little of the conversation was personal, but the host did extract from us the reason for the trip, which reassured him as to our innocent purpose. And word travels much faster in the Marshes than our boat.

A couple of hours before dark, we pushed on, not so much because we wanted to, but to save the shaykh from bankruptcy. He had already spent a small fortune on entertaining us, but custom obliged him to repeat if we stayed on. We did not pick up the cigarettes he had put in front of us, and I left a few tins of Norwegian sardines as a gesture.

Practically the whole village turned out to wave as we wound our way out of this little Mesopotamian Venice. It was a warming experience.

Our days were spent like this. We chugged on through reed beds, reed forests, canals, lagoons and lakes. Near their settlements, people young and old were forever busy

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*Throughout the Marshes I found a people with a keen sense of humor, and as we sat around in the evenings, they invariably got a great kick out of my trying to do things their way.*

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gathering reeds, harvesting edible plants and fishing with spears or nets.

The people who lived near the edges of land bartered or sold the fish as well as mats that they made from the reeds. This was the only means they had of obtaining essential goods from outside: wood to build and bitumen to seal their boats, sugar, salt, ammunition, tobacco and a few textiles.

Where we didn't see people, we spotted ducks, white pelicans, herons and a multitude of birds I did not recognize. Herds of water buffalo roamed unattended, either wading slowly or swimming peacefully where the water was deep enough.

As we floated around from one place to another,

visiting and observing, it became very clear to me that although the Ma'dan inhabit a world "where all the lands were sea" and Bedouin lived in one where all the lands were sand, similarities between the Ma'dan and the desert nomads were considerable. I had spent time with the Bedouin of Saudi Arabia, and every day some detail of the Ma'dan way of life reminded me of them.

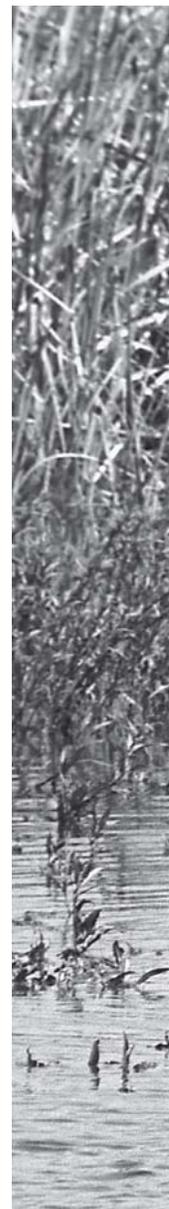
One day we arrived at the village of Al-Chiddee. Barking dogs announced our arrival: Here, every home had its watchdog, and they meant business at any time of day, but especially after dark. Visitors were ill-advised to enter one of the homes without one of the family to calm the dog, or without carrying a very heavy stick.

Our boatman was related to the village chief, so this time we floated straight to his house without waiting outside the village. This jolly old Marsh man somehow knew we were coming and had all prepared. Dressed in the regional *bisht*, or cloak, and *ghutrah* (head scarf), he and the whole family were standing outside waiting for us.

Although women were much freer to be friendly here than in other parts of the Arab world, this was the first and only time I shook hands with the women of the family. The jovial chief's wife

even sat in the mudhif with us for brief periods as we ate our way through another feast, this time with chicken as the main course. It was usually one or the other, and occasionally lamb.

Since we were invited to stay in this mudhif for more





than one night, the chief's family unloaded everything from our boat and piled all the gear and provisions into the mudhif. They did not want anything to be stolen while we were his guests, he said—not that this would be likely to happen.

I was discovering what my main troubles would be in the Marshes: lack of sleep and lack of privacy. I needed the sleep because I would get up at dawn to photograph—and the days out in the Marshes got very long.

No way! Having distinguished guests, none of the village men felt like paddling home to sleep. They could do that after we left. So the festivities, the sitting and the talking, went on until about two or



Above: **Women and a young boy fish with hand-lines and gather edible plants.**  
Right: **Baking flatbread on a metal plate.**

# THE HORRORS

What happened in the lands of the Ma'dan after 1990 broke my heart. In retribution for their support of the us- and uk-led war that drove Iraqi troops out of Kuwait, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein dammed and burned the Ma'dan's marshes and bombed villages not only in the Marshes, but throughout southern Iraq. The aim was total destruction of the Marshes, the Ma'dan, their culture and their precious environment. Only a fraction of the population remained in their homes.

Yet no sooner had Saddam Hussein's regime fallen in 2003 than the Ma'dan themselves, not waiting for government action, breached the dams in an attempt to refloat their Marshes. Later, more organized reflooding took place, and now between 30 and 40 percent of the Marshes have been rehydrated, although dam projects in northern Iraq, Syria and Turkey are severely restricting the water flow anew.

Nonetheless, the Ma'dan way of life has gone forever. There are fewer than 40,000 Ma'dan today, and many are living in the city of Basra, just south of the Marshes. When researchers ask Ma'dan whether they want to return, a common answer is something like, "Yes, but we also want television, phones, hospitals, schools and electricity."

With some funding available, dreamy-eyed architects and designers have planned reed homes with separate rooms, kitchens, bathrooms, sewage collection, solar panels, satellite dishes and—no doubt—internet connections. But even if those plans were realized, a 5000-year-old way of life has been lost. That is not to say that nobody will live in the Marshes, but possibly the Ma'dan will be watching satellite tv in their modern reed homes, when they're not taking tourists out on fishing trips in aluminum canoes, showing off their greatly diminished homeland.

three in the morning, when I fell asleep sitting on my sleeping bag.

At five a.m. the sun and I got up. Our host was up organizing breakfast. I slipped out the front entrance with my camera gear and the now-friendly watchdog at my heels. For the first time I understood what others had told me about the "timelessness" of the Marshes. There was a dark pink glow in the morning mist that covered the water.

Nothing stirred. A few frogs were croaking far away, but there was no other sound. The reed huts and islands were reflected sharply in the water. Beyond, I could vaguely see the tall reeds and, just above, a flock of pelicans flying from nowhere to nowhere.



Then, a soft swooshing sound. A fishing mashuf appeared out of the reeds, its sharp, elegantly curved prow slicing through the water. The fisherman greeted me quietly and I greeted him back. But the spell was not broken. The water buffalo had started to stir, and some slipped quietly into the water. Smoke started to curl out of some reed houses; a few quiet voices could now be heard. I was working my camera as if in a trance.

Day by day, my life settled into a pattern of sorts. Before and sometimes after breakfast, Ibrahim and I would borrow a canoe and paddle off by ourselves, and I would take photos, talk to people and observe life in the Marshes, leaving the army and secret police to sleep, eat, drink tea, coffee and smoke all day long. For all practical purposes, they had ceased to exist.

When the sun rose too high and the light became too harsh for good photography, we would all pile into the boat and chug on to the next place along the way, often shooting ducks for food. They were plentiful and made for a good addition to our diet as well as gifts to our hosts.

Throughout the Marshes I found a people with a keen sense of humor, and as we sat around in the evenings, they invariably got a great kick out of my trying to do things their way, and my feeble attempts at speaking their Arabic. Some of the men also taught me a few rude words. Whenever I used them it had an immediate ice-breaker effect. It invariably cracked them up.

One day we came close to getting into the middle of a family dispute that could have evolved into a bloody feud, turning one village against another. Perhaps it did. I'll never know.

On arriving in a tiny village in the central Marshes, we soon sensed that something was wrong. The basic niceties of serving coffee and tea were just barely observed. Meanwhile canoes were zipping back and forth, and there was a general feeling of excitement which was even evident to me, an outsider.

As we uneasily ate a small meal, Ibrahim learned that a girl from that village had married a boy from a nearby hamlet the night before, an arranged marriage. As it turned out, the girl had a childhood boyfriend in her home village whom she dearly loved and wanted to marry, but her parents had insisted on the arranged union.

As Ibrahim discovered, the girl had gone through the marriage ceremony but had paddled off from her new husband in the night to take refuge with her boyfriend.

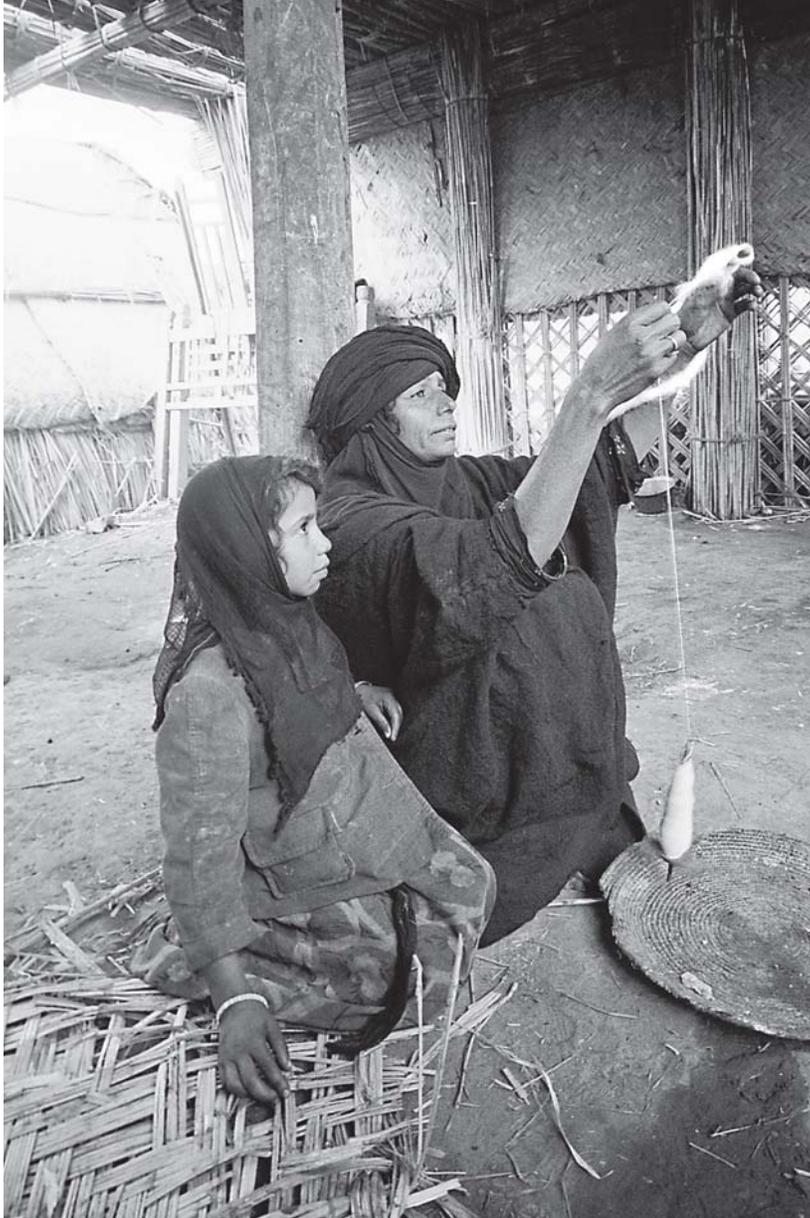
This meant a serious loss of face for the family. A number of water buffalo, money and possibly other things were at stake as reparation if she did not return. The two village councils were to meet to discuss it, but in the meantime guns were being loaded. So, yes, trouble happens everywhere, here in "paradise" as well.

It was suggested to us that it would be advisable to move on. And so we did. We never found out how this crisis was resolved.

Possibly the biggest curse of the Marsh people were the giant



**Large and often spontaneously aggressive, wild boar were the bane of the Ma'dan. Some such as these, seen at nightfall, were so large they could be mistaken for water buffalo.**



Spinning wool by hand was one of the many skills taught by one generation to the next.

in the Marshes were caused by these creatures, which the Marsh Arabs, as Muslims, can't even eat.

Since nothing made the Marsh Arabs more grateful than to have some of the boars killed, we were looking out for them every day. Besides, I very much wanted to just see one even if we could not kill it. We saw boar tracks, we heard them at night, but we had no luck until the last night in the Marshes.

We had traveled all day in little canoes in heavy brush and reeds where pigs had been observed the previous day. We found nothing, and at dusk decided to return to our boat.

To my left, at the far end of a shallow, flooded area, I saw some water buffalo move and pointed them out to Ibrahim. Startled, he froze and said, "That's no water buffalo. That's boars." There were six of them, three so big that they could easily be mistaken for water buffalo in the dark.

Ibrahim readied his gun; a local Marsh man who accompanied us that day did the same. I grabbed two cameras and a 300mm lens.

"They are getting ready to attack," whispered Ibrahim and cocked his gun. I leaned my telephoto lens on Ibrahim's shoulder and began popping off frame after blurry frame, never taking my eyes off their ugly curved tusks. It was so dark now we realized it would be crazy to try to shoot except strictly in self-defense. It was also far too dark for photography.

All we could do was to wait and not move. Then one of the boars snorted, and they all turned and trotted off into the reeds.

There were deep sighs of relief all around, and I realized I felt shaky, actually trembling. Those few scary moments have remained etched in my mind forever.

The incident also served to remind me that there really is no paradise anywhere, although the Marshes had moments when I thought I might have found the real thing.

It was a colossal privilege to be able to share an ancient lifestyle that no longer exists, and I have never forgotten the generous hospitality and kindness of the Ma'dan people. 🌍

wild boars that roamed the marshes by the thousands. Evil-tempered brutes, they often attacked without provocation if startled, or even if not. About one-third of all the injuries and deaths

For this group photo, taken at the request of one of my many hosts over my time among the Ma'dan, we stood in front of a mudhif.



Norwegian-born **Tor Eigeland** ([www.toreigeland.com](http://www.toreigeland.com)) has traveled extensively all his life as a freelance writer and photographer, and has contributed to *Saudi Aramco World* for decades, as well as to many other publications. From his home in France, he is now easing his way from photojournalism to books, of which *All the Lands Were Sea* will be the first, but he vows never to entirely give up his cameras.

See more of Tor Eigeland's photographs at [www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com)

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Marsh Arabs: N/D 66, M/A 82  
 Wilfred Thesiger: J/A 81, M/J 05  
 Marshes: N/D 80, M/J 04



Right: Plate, Creil et Montereau (France), 1884–1900, 21.5 cm (8½") Ø, collected in Tunisia. Below: Dish, Walker & Carter (UK), 1865–1889, 19 cm (7½") Ø, collected in Iran. The inscription and the lion and sun honor King Shihab al-Din of Iran.



# EUROPEAN CERAMICS *for the East*

WRITTEN BY WILLEM FLOOR AND JAAP OTTE  
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE MONTAGUE COLLECTION

In 1972, Joel Montague was wandering through a market in Rabat, Morocco, looking for a birthday present for his daughter. He had in mind a piece of the traditional Moroccan ceramics he had often seen in the region. An American with a decade of experience in three Middle Eastern countries, Montague read Arabic and had become enamored of Islamic design and of the skill of the region's craftsmen. He spotted a bowl on the shelf of a shop selling antiques and traditional crafts. It looked just right: clean, bright and decorated with traditional Islamic crescents and stars in abundance.

And yet, something in the design seemed a little off: It was clearly Islamic, but unlike the other bowls on offer. To his surprise, the proprietor told Montague that the bowl was not Moroccan at all, but French. He added, somewhat testily, "The French sent their missionaries, then their soldiers, and then their ceramics!" Joel turned the bowl over and found the mark of a French manufacturer clearly visible on the bottom.

Thus began a 40-year passion: collecting ceramics made in Europe for export to Muslim nations. As Montague soon discovered, his lone Rabat pottery bowl was one of hundreds of thousands of ceramic pieces intended for daily use that had been exported by European potters to Muslim countries from around 1840 until the 1930's. The exporters included some of the largest ceramics manufacturers in Europe, such as the



**Bowl, Sarreguemines et Digoin (France), 1920–1940, 26 cm Ø, 8.25 cm h (10¼ by 3¼"). This bowl, which collector Joel Montague found in Morocco in 1972, began his interest in European pottery manufactured for export to Islamic lands.**

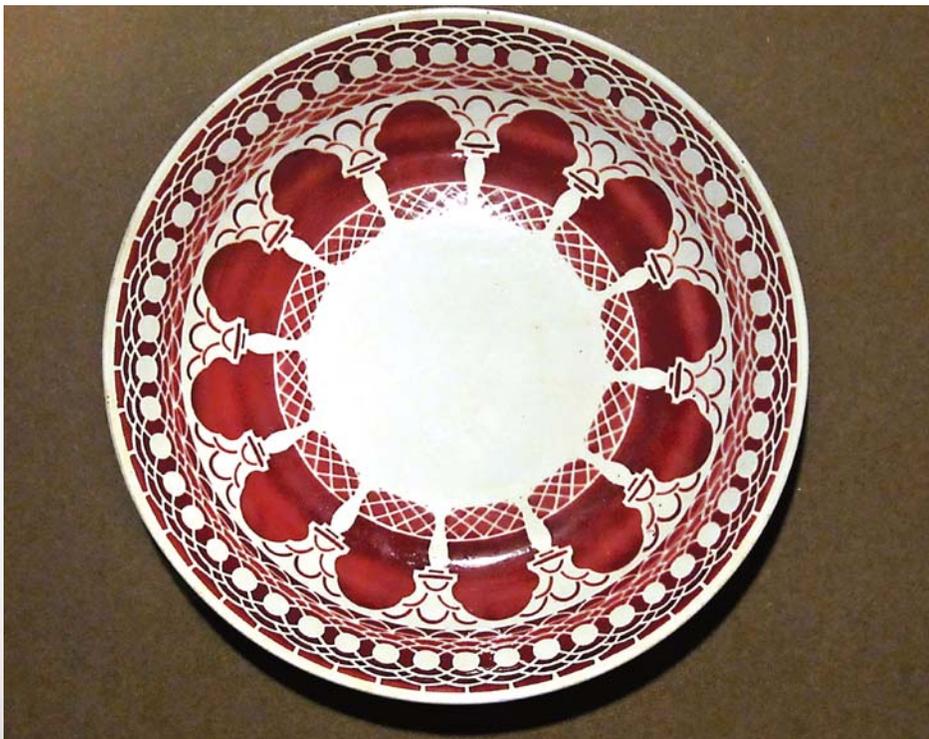
still-famous Spode company of England, and their striking designs were customized for Islamic markets.

This simple, strong earthenware consisted mostly of cups, bowls, large dishes and plates. As export goods, they fetched good prices, and they displaced locally manufactured goods since they were generally more durable and their price was competitive. As this earthenware was mostly for everyday use, only a few samples of these once-common goods exist today, and their significance has been largely overlooked by craft and art historians.

Dating from the first half of the 19th century, the first designs were imprinted on the ceramic body of the item using a technique called transfer printing, invented in England in the 18th century, that made it possible to decorate a large number of pots identically, even with complex designs.

Printing images was much faster than painting by hand, although each step still required a great deal of manual labor. Working from drawings or prints on paper, an engraver would inscribe a design on a copper plate, which would then be covered with a thick and sticky ink. The plate's surface was then wiped clean, leaving ink only in the engraved lines of the image. The plate was then printed onto treated paper, and the paper print was carefully pressed onto the surface of a pre-fired pot. (This last job was traditionally done by women and girls.) When the paper was

Below: **Plate, W. H. Grindley (UK), 1880–1926, 24 cm (9½") Ø, collected in Turkey. The inscription is from a Kurdish poem imploring God's help for the sick and specifically mentioning cholera.** Right: **Large dish, manufacturer unknown (probably French), 1910–1940, 35 cm (13¾") Ø, collected in Morocco. The pattern is called "Riad," referring to the depiction of pillars around a courtyard.**





Above left: **Rice dish, Petrus Regout (Netherlands), 1890–1910, 26 cm (10¼") Ø. The names of archangels surround those of the first four "rightly guided" caliphs of Islam.** Above right: **Plate, Sarreguemines et Digoïn (France), 1920–1940, 22.8 cm (9") Ø, collected in Morocco.**

removed, the image was left behind, and the printed decoration would be made permanent by firing the pot again.

combined their carefully copied Arabic script with European decorative elements, creating eclectic designs that turned out to be popular with consumers in the Islamic world.

Since the designs were almost always printed on the ceramics, there was no need for decorators to actually write the inscriptions that often appeared in Arabic and other languages.

Also common were designs with images of a crescent moon and star; similarly, arabesques and stars were popular in Malaysia and Indonesia, where they were known as *bintang*, which means "star" in both Malay and Bahasa Indonesia.

Agents and business owners from the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia all traveled to Europe to see the latest designs and place their orders. While ceramics with calligraphy in Arabic were sold to all Muslim countries, others were produced in Persian, Urdu and Basa Jawa—Javanese.

Decorations with Arabic texts were almost always printed in this way, eliminating the need for pottery decorators to actually write Arabic. Engravers often

Whereas printing on ceramics was a specialized craft, hand-painting could be done by relatively untrained workers. Each painter used a large variety of brushes made from animal hair—generally camel, cow or ox—which was thought to be the best material because of its strength, springiness and ability to retain its shape. Hair brushes also hold a very fine point or edge. The decorations, mostly simple leaves and flowers, were hand-painted onto the unglazed earthenware in one or more bright colors.

To enhance the design, workers sometimes used shape-cut sponges, sometimes grouping shapes next to one another; sponging the pot with different colors or types of paint also yielded distinctive and unusual patterns. These floral designs, though European in origin and style, also turned out to be popular in many parts of the Islamic world.

By the 1920's, manufacturers began to decorate ceramic wares destined for Muslim



**Bowl, Nimy (Belgium), 1910–1930, 11.4 cm Ø, 8.9 cm † (4½ by 3½"), collected in Tunisia.**



Above left: **Plate, Saint-Amand (France), 1910–1940, collected in Tunisia.** Above right: **Rice dish, possibly Swinnertons (UK), 1906–1940, 37.5 cm (14 3/4") Ø, collected in Sri Lanka.**

countries using stencils and paint sprayed directly onto the object. This permitted a large variety of decorative images, such as the pillars of mosques, the Hand of Fatima, more half-moons and stars, and others.

England, where a huge ceramics industry had developed in the 18th century, was an important source of the earliest exports to the Islamic world, primarily between 1840 and 1880. English potteries had traditionally exported their wares to continental Europe and North America, but by about 1840 those markets had become saturated, and the middle classes increasingly preferred more fashionable porcelain over earthenware. English potteries looked elsewhere for customers, and expansion into the Islamic world roughly followed the path of colonization.



Right: **Plate, Sacavém (Portugal) for J. S. Benchaya (Casablanca), 1920–1940, collected in Morocco.** Far right: **Plate, Copeland Spode (UK), 1853–1970 (possibly 1870), 26 cm (10 1/4") Ø, collected in Indonesia. The Arabic inscription testifies to the oneness of God and Muhammad as God's Prophet.**



Lidded bowl, manufacturer unknown (France), 1910–1930, collected in Tunisia.



From 1860 onward, potteries in Scotland also started to export worldwide, particularly to Southeast Asia. Exporters included Methven, Cochran and others, but standing above all was the famous Glasgow Pottery, established in 1841 by brothers John and Matthew Bell and aimed squarely at the export market. Trade to Southeast Asia proved so successful that the Bells ordered a large number of printed designs adapted to local tastes with stylized dragons, mythical figures and geometric patterns. Plates often had the name of the decoration written in Arabic script under the Bell factory mark.

Most of the ceramics exported to the Muslim world consisted of plates and large dishes, because many customers were accustomed to eating from a communal plate. Chinese manufacturers produced only bowls designed for eating with chopsticks, but those proved impractical for people who ate with their fingers. European soup plates, however, with their sloped rims, had the desired form.

Bell's competition came from Dutch, German and French potteries that started making the same wares. One of the largest European ceramics factories was named after its founder, Petrus Regout, in Maastricht, The Netherlands. In 1836 Regout built a modern steam-powered pottery and was soon able to make ceramics that could compete with the best English products. From 1880, his exports took off worldwide. From order books and correspondence with agents and buyers in the firm's extensive archives, we know Regout sold his wares in Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Iran, British India and Indonesia. Regout

Copeland Spode, still known today for its tablewares, was one of the largest English manufacturers. The famous firm, founded by Josiah Spode in 1770, passed into the hands of the Copeland family in 1883. The earliest pattern designed for export to the Muslim world, with Jawi, a historic Malay script that used Arabic letters, was registered with the Patent Office in London in 1853. As with most manufacturers, not much is known about Copeland's exports to the Islamic world beyond the remaining products themselves, which carry the distinctive Copeland factory mark.

Below: Plate, W. Adams & Sons (UK), 1840–1860, 26.7 cm (10½") Ø, collected in Sri Lanka. The pattern was called "Malay." Below right: Large dish, Saint-Amand (France), 1910–1930, 30.5 cm (12") Ø, collected in France. The decoration depicts the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, Saudi Arabia, and the Arabic city name indicates the dish was made for the Arabic-speaking market.





Above left: **Tankard, Gien (France), 1880–1910, 10.8 cm Ø, 15.9 cm † (4¼ by 6¼"), collected in France, possibly intended for the Turkish market. The Arabic inscription reads "drinking cup of the shrine."** Above right: **Two *café au lait* bowls, Digoin (France), 1910–1930, 9.5 cm (3¾") Ø, collected in Morocco.**

made small coffee cups for Turkey and the Middle East, tea sets for Iran, and plates, bowls and large dishes that can still be found all over the Islamic world.

Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, under French rule at the time, were supplied by large factories in France: Sarreguemines, Digoin, Saint-Amand, Gien and Creil et Montereau. The largest, the Sarreguemines pottery, also exported to other Muslim lands, mainly Turkey, Egypt and the Sudan, as well as the Dutch Indies. The large variety of wares, in particular *café au lait* cups for North Africa, display many different star and half-moon designs.

The first evidence of an attempt to create an export product that was not purely a European interpretation of Islamic design appeared on ceramic wares made in Portugal between about 1920 and 1940 for S. J. Benchaya, a Jewish businessman in Casablanca, Morocco. The products were unusual in that Benchaya sought to create designs influenced by both traditional Moroccan pottery and European Art Deco, and characterized by strong geometric elements. They were made exclusively for him at the Sacavém ceramics factory in Portugal.

Other potteries making wares for the Muslim world included the Nimy pottery in Belgium, the large potteries owned by members of the well-known Boch family in Belgium and Germany, and the Kuznetsov and Gardner potteries in Russia.

World War II disrupted the ceramic export trade, and it never recovered. Colonies became independent and often did away with the privileged status that the European manufacturers had enjoyed, switching instead to lower-priced ceramic imports from countries like Japan and China, while others founded their own ceramics industries.

And what about the bowl Joel Montague bought more than 40 years ago in Rabat? It became the cornerstone of a collection now comprising well over 100 everyday ceramics made in Europe for Islamic markets, and which Joel collected from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, Iran, India and as far away as Southeast Asia. It is probably the only collection that shows the whole breadth of styles of these simple but enjoyable ceramics from all across the Islamic world. 🌐



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The authors wish to thank **Joel Montague** for making his collection available for this article and for sharing his deep knowledge of the topic. He is a retired public-health specialist, and trustee and chairman emeritus of the international aid group Partners for Development.



[www.pfd.org/who-we-are/people#Montague](http://www.pfd.org/who-we-are/people#Montague)  
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**PART 3:**

**Food and Drink**

WRITTEN BY TIM MACKINTOSH-SMITH

TITLE CALLIGRAPHY BY SORAYA SYED

This is the third of the author's six collections of eclectic, occasionally irreverent, excerpts from the vast treasure-house of Arabic literature. In each, he samples and comments thematically, seeking that which is insightful, prescient or poignant, as well as the curious, mischievous or wisely satirical. Like the original authors, his goal, and ours, is to entertain, educate and enlighten.

—The Editors

**ARABIC LITERATURE IS AS RICH AND VARIED**

in its references to food and drink as the cuisines of the lands where the Arabic language is spoken and written. Arabic-language recipe books reflect that richness over a surprisingly long period—the oldest dates back to the 10th century. Today's food often goes back a long way, too. My usual *suq* (market-place) lunch in my adoptive city of Sana'a, the Yemeni capital, is the same one that Ibn al-Mujawir wrote of some 800 years ago:

“Their diet is wheat bread, fenugreek and meat.”

Despite such conservatism, necessity—and occasionally eccentricity—have inspired some people to try more exotic diets. An early culinary adventurer was the pre-Islamic poet, warrior and vagabond Ta'abbata Sharran. His Arabian take on what the Australians call “bush tucker” was to have unexpected consequences. When news of his death in a fight reached his tribe, some of his fellow-clansmen set off and

*The fenugreek comes whipped into a frothy topping on a meat stew, saltah, served bubbling hot in stone bowls and eaten with large rounds of wheat bread.*

*Philologist, antiquarian and expert on all things Arabian, al-Asmai (born 739) was a favorite scholar of the caliph Harun al-Rashid. This passage is a later addition to The Book of Crowns, one of the earliest surviving Arabic histories.*

**R**ode to the place where his body lay, meaning to take it away for burial. When they reached the spot they found the body surrounded by the corpses of wild animals, birds of prey and vermin that had gnawed at his flesh.... Al-Asmai said that the Arabs claimed his flesh was poisonous. He also said, “He lived on a diet of ‘ilhiz, the fat of vipers, and the seeds and fruit of the colocynth. His clan used to roast vipers, and they asserted that if anyone who lived on such a diet were to bite a person whose diet was wheat, normal meat and other kinds of decent food, inflicting a flesh wound with his teeth, then the person bitten would contract leucoderma [vitiligo] or leprosy or would die.

*His real name was Thabit ibn Jabir, but he is always known by this extraordinary nickname, which translates “he carried an evil in his armpit.” The “evil” is said by some to have been a sword, and by others a ghoul that he had defeated in combat.*

*This is something you'd be unlikely to want to order in a restaurant—camel hair mixed with the blood of ticks, then roasted. It was supposedly eaten in extremis by pre-Islamic nomads.*

At the risk of putting readers off with yet more unappetizing appetizers, the next passage concerns another dubious Arabian

delicacy: locusts. (I can confirm from personal experience, however, that the insects are both nutritious and delicious.)

*Leucoderma is the partial loss of skin pigmentation. Taabbata Sharran brings to mind a similarly poisonous character in Samuel Butler's Hudibras: “The Prince of Cambay's daily food/Is asp and basilisk and toad./Which makes him have so strong a breath./Each night he stinks a queen to death....”*

*An old Arabic term for prawns is jarad al-bahr, “sea-locusts.” I've found, when eating locusts proper, that it helps to think of them as land- (or perhaps air-) prawns. It's all in the mind, after all.*

*Colocynth, also known as Sodom apple, belongs to the gourd family. A violent purgative, “even one and a half teaspoonfuls of the powdered seed has been known to be fatal,” my Arabian botanical reference book says.*

The wonderfully rambling autobiography of a late Yemeni acquaintance of mine, Qadi Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Akwa', gives three recipes for cooking locusts—boiled, grilled and roasted in

the *tannur*. In case of any doubt about the permissibility of eating them, he goes on to quote a *hadith*, or Tradition, of the Prophet Muhammad:

*A large clay oven, usually barrel-shaped. Cf. Indian "tandoori" dishes.*

“Two sorts of carrion have been made lawful for us to eat, and two things containing blood: fish and locusts, and liver and spleen.

*"Carrion" here means creatures that have died without ritual Islamic slaughter. With these exceptions, the consumption of carrion and of blood is prohibited for Muslims.*

He then tells an anecdote:

**M**y teacher, 'Ali ibn Yahya 'Aqabat, told me that when he moved to Cairo in the early '30's he married an Egyptian woman. No sooner had the marriage taken place than a swarm of locusts, bigger than the sort they are used to in Yemen, appeared and began devastating the local farms. Shaykh 'Ali began catching locusts, then grilling and eating them. When his Egyptian wife saw him doing this, she called for her father to come, and told him that she'd "seen the Yemeni eating locusts." The experience so put her off her husband that she ran away from him, and it all ended in divorce.

*The 1330's AH began at the end of 1911 CE. The swarm in the story may well have been part of the great plague of locusts that invaded Egypt and the Levant in April 1915. A witness in Egypt said, "As far as we could see for miles ... there was nothing visible in the heavens above or the earth beneath but myriads of buzzing locusts." The Ottoman authorities in Palestine compelled every adult male to collect 20 kilograms of locust eggs, on pain of a hefty fine.*

*The locust is alluding to the principle in Islamic law that hungry (human) travelers are allowed to take produce from a field or orchard—enough to keep them going, but no more.*

Many verses have been composed about locusts, but all I can recall at the moment is this one:

A swarm of locusts came and landed on my crops—  
"Be off! You'll eat me out of house and home!" I said.  
Then one climbed up an ear of corn and lectured me:  
"We're on a journey, so we're due our daily bread!"

Staying in Egypt for our main course, but turning to more conventional food, here is a recipe for what may be the ultimate pie. It comes from an account of the country written in the late

12th century by the Iraqi physician 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi. Among their unusual dishes is the "tray pie." The recipe is as follows:

*Raghif is usually a thickish round of bread, but "pie" makes more sense in view of the movable feast to come.*

**T**ake thirty Baghdadi pounds of white flour and knead it with five and a half pints of sesame oil, using the same method you would use to knead the dough for *khashkunan*. Divide the dough in two, and use half of it to line a copper tray. The tray should be of the correct type, roughly four spans in diameter and provided with stout handles. Next, take three whole roast lambs stuffed with a mixture consisting of minced meat fried in sesame oil, pounded pistachios and aromatic hot spices (pepper, ginger, cinnamon, mastic, coriander seed, cumin, cardamom, nutmeg and other similar spices may be used). Arrange the lambs on the dough base, and sprinkle them with rosewater in which musk has been infused. Then take 20 chickens, 20 pullets and 50 small fowl, some of them roasted and stuffed with eggs, others stuffed with meat, and the rest stewed in the juice of sour grapes, lemons or similar. Place the birds on top of the lambs and in the spaces in between them. Next, scatter on top of the pile samosas and small round pasties, some filled with meat and others with sugar and sweetmeats. If at this stage you wish to add another lamb, carved into slices, and some fried cheese, feel free to do so.

*In his description of Egypt, 'Abd al-Latif (1162-1231) has some interesting reflections on the esthetics of pharaonic sculpture and—ironically, given the contents of the passage translated here—one of the most harrowing accounts of famine ever written. There is an English version of his book—done, the translators assert, following an encounter with the author's spirit. Intrigued by their claim, the present translator has traced the admittedly curious history of 'Abd al-Latif's manuscript in an extended essay entitled "Ghost Writer."*

*The weight of the pound has varied over time and place, but the standard Baghdadi measure is said to have been 340 grams (12 oz).*

*A Persian name for a kind of pastry, stuffed with sugar and nuts, then fried.*

*The spices are "hot" in the sense employed by Graeco-Arab dietetics, which classifies comestibles as hot or cold, dry or moist. Mastic is the gum of a shrub native to the eastern Mediterranean region.*

*A meter, say: about three feet.*

When all these ingredients have been neatly piled up in the shape of a dome, sprinkle them with rosewater in which musk and aloes-wood have been infused. Now take the other half of the dough, stretch it out into the form of a disc, and use it to cover the piled-up ingredients. Seal the edges of the upper and lower halves of the dough casing, as one does with *khashkunan*, ensuring that the seal is absolutely airtight. The tray should then be placed on

*Literally, "blushed pink and turned red." Is the subsequent wiping with a sponge to remove traces of ash?*

top of the tannur until the dough becomes firm and begins to cook through. At this point, the attached handles should be used to lower the tray gradually into the tannur. This needs to be done slowly and patiently, allowing the pastry to become fully cooked. When it has changed color and browned nicely, remove the tray from the tannur, wipe the pie with a sponge then sprinkle it with musk-infused rosewater. It is now ready to serve.

This is a fitting dish for royalty and lovers of luxury, and may conveniently accompany them to their distant hunting-grounds and remote picnic-spots. It is a varied banquet in itself, easy to transport and hard to spoil, splendid in appearance and a pleasure to experience, and it keeps hot for long periods.

As for the common people of Egypt, they seldom know anything of such dishes.

A century earlier, high-end dining in the Syrian capital held a surprise for the Spanish judge and traveler Abu Bakr ibn

al-'Arabi. The later scholar of all things Andalusian, al-Maqqari, wrote that

his travel book includes several extraordinary anecdotes. In one of these, he tells how in Damascus he entered the house of a prominent citizen and saw a stream flowing into it, passing by the place where they were sitting, and then flowing out again in the other direction. "I only understood the reason for this," he says, "when tables loaded with food began to appear, floating toward us on the stream. The servants took them out of the water and placed them before us. When we had finished eating, they put the used crockery and other things in the outward-flowing part of the stream, and the water carried them away to the women's quarters without the servants having to go anywhere near them."

*This forerunner of the dumb-waiter might appeal to innovative sushi-bar proprietors. In India, I was equally impressed by the Maharaja of Gwalior's method of delivering dessert and cigars to his dinner guests—via a tabletop model train set made of silver.*

Staying in the 11th century and returning to Egypt—but at the hungry end of the culinary scale—here is the scholar Muhammad ibn

Tahir al-Muqaddasi, a native of Jerusalem, reminiscing about his days as a penniless student:

*Tinnis is on an island in a lake seven kilometers (4.3 mi) southwest of Port Said. Once a flourishing city, it was the object of Crusader incursions and was largely abandoned in the early 13th century. Muhammad ibn Tahir's travels focused on the collection and study of the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, and took him as far as eastern Iran.*

I stayed in Tinnis for a period, pursuing my studies.... While I was there I fell on hard times, and the day came when I had nothing but a single dirham to my name. Now, that day I needed bread and I needed writing-paper, and I couldn't decide which to spend my dirham on: If I bought bread, I'd have no paper, and if I bought paper, I'd have no bread. I remained in this quandary for three days and nights, during which I ate nothing. On the morning of the fourth day, I said to myself, "Even if I did get hold of some paper today, I'm so weak from hunger that I wouldn't be able to write anything." So I went out to buy bread, putting the dirham in my mouth—and I swallowed it. When this happened, I got the giggles. Just then, a man came up to me and said, "What's so funny?" I said, "Oh, nothing." He insisted on knowing, but I wouldn't tell him. Finally he swore he'd divorce his wife if I didn't come clean. So I told him what had happened, and he took me by the hand, led me to his house and promised he'd see me fed.

*Integral pockets were not a feature of 11th-century clothing.*

*An extreme but-to this day—not infrequent way of putting pressure on someone.*

The disappearing dirham turned out to be a good investment, for at this point in the story the call to prayer sounds, the two men go to the mosque, bump into a philanthropic local magnate—and Muhammad ibn Tahir ends up with a stipend of 30 dirhams a day! As the later traveler Ibn Jubayr assured wandering scholars, "in

every village they will shower you with your daily bread."

Back now to conspicuous consumption. Planning her pilgrimage to Makkah in the 1320's, Tughay Khatun, favorite wife of the Mamluk sultan al-Nasir, decided she couldn't do without her comfort food. So the official in charge of logistics

provided her with fresh greens growing in earthenware containers carried on the backs of camels. He also brought dairy cows, and these stayed with her for the whole journey so that she could have fresh milk and a supply of cheese.

But al-Maqrizi, the historian who recorded the anecdote, was unimpressed by the sultana's food-to-go:

**S**he had fried cheese every single day, for lunch and dinner—and what more can one say about someone whose daily diet is greens and cheese, the two vilest things one can eat? What, pray, might the consequences be?

*The consequences weren't fatal. Tughay Khatun lived another quarter century and died in the Black Death of 1349, having founded a khanqah, or religious hospice, and emancipating in her will 1000 slave girls and 80 eunuchs.*

To round off her mobile lunches (for, as an old Arabic proverb says, "On lunch and a pudding, you can raise a high building"), the

cheese-loving sultana might have enjoyed *mujabbanah*, a type of cheese-filled confection lovingly described by a Spanish contemporary of hers:

*The word may have gone through a copyist's version of the game of "Chinese whispers" or "Telephone," in which misunderstandings accumulate. My guess is that sakh is a mistake for shaj, and that it arrived via a Persian form, sha, which is about as close as Arabic script gets to the Chinese cha.*

You sweetie-pie with yellow cheek,  
Whose inmost parts conceal ripe cheese,  
I fear your outlook may be bleak—  
Your jaundiced look suggests unease.  
Quite right, too, for your yellow face,  
As lovely as the rising sun,  
Is doomed to set, and set apace—  
Deep in the darkness of my tum!

*Abu 'l-Barakat al-Balafiqi, a distinguished judge of Granada.*

But perhaps the overdose of fried cheese and greens (not to mention the rest of this motley banquet from my bookshelves) is better followed by a digestive beverage. Tea, though it wasn't to become widespread in the Arab world until long after Tughay

Khatun's time, was mentioned in an Arabic book 700 years before its first appearance in European works. According to Sulayman the Merchant in his mid-ninth-century *Accounts of China and India*, the ruler of China

has a monopoly on a plant which they drink with hot water. It is sold in every city, and huge sums are spent on it. It is called "sakh". It is leafier than alfalfa and a little more aromatic, and there is a bitterness to it. They boil water, then sprinkle it on, and it serves them as an antidote to all ailments.

Then again, to quote the concluding decision on a whimsical literary sparring-match, *The Cheering and Consoling Tale of a Disputation Between Coffee and Tea*, "Coffee is the sultan of the

drinking-places, tea its prince and deputy." So what better way to end than with a verse on *Coffea arabica*, from its home in the mountains of southern Arabia?

*Given that the author was a Hadrami (Ahmad ibn Abdallah Barakat, d. 1929), the decision is surprising—the people of Hadramawt are famously fond of tea, and few households lack a well-used samovar.*

**H**ow fine they look, these coffee beans, when first  
They ripen on the leafy bough! Red hung  
Among the green, as if, with emeralds strung,  
We see bright beads of coral interspersed.

*Quoted without ascription in a 19th-century work on coffee by a native of the Yemeni coffee-growing region of 'Utamah.*

"Treasure," as a homelier folk-song puts it, "on a tree."

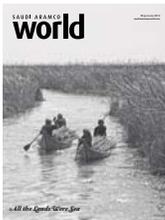


*Even the best efforts at translation often entail some loss. However, the pleasing sound of the original Arabic title of this series, *Tarjuman al-Kunuz*, makes up for some of the literary shortfall when it becomes the syntactically accurate but less euphonious English "Interpreter of Treasures." *Tarjuman* is the root of the English word "dragoman," which refers to an interpreter serving in an official capacity. The full title echoes Ibn al-'Arabi's early-13th-century collection of poems, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* (Interpreter of Desires).*



**Tim Mackintosh-Smith** (tim@mackintosh-smith.com) recently appeared in *Newsweek's* list of the top dozen travel writers of the last 100 years. Following his award-winning trilogy of travels in the footsteps of Ibn Battuta, he is working on a history, a thriller set in 14th-century Spain and the translation from Arabic of an early collection of travelers' accounts from around the Indian Ocean.

**Soraya Syed** (www.artofthepen.com) is a calligrapher and graphic designer in London.



## FOR STUDENTS

We hope this two-page guide will help sharpen your reading skills and deepen your understanding of this issue's articles.

## FOR TEACHERS

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— THE EDITORS

## Curriculum Alignments

To see alignments with us national standards for all articles in this issue, click "Curriculum Alignments" at [www.saudiaramco-world.com](http://www.saudiaramco-world.com).

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## CLASS ACTIVITIES

*Classroom Guide: The Role-Play Edition.* This Classroom Guide focuses on developing your historical empathy skills. Historical empathy is the ability to understand the world as someone in the past experienced and understood it, to imagine how someone might have felt or what he or she might have done in a particular situation in a particular historical moment. The ability to empathize is an important part of our humanity. In terms of your studies, empathy can help you understand the past because it stretches you to see it as people at the time saw it. Role playing—although it sometimes makes people feel uncomfortable at first—is a fun and memorable way to develop historical empathy.

The first role-play activities build on "All the Lands Were Sea." In them, you will use role playing to understand some of the customs that shaped the daily lives of the Ma'dan, the "Marsh Arabs" of Iraq, and to think about the often unstated customs that shape your own behavior. The second set of activities is based on "European Ceramics for the East." In those role-plays, you will imagine yourselves in different roles in an economic and cultural exchange.

If you've only got 15 minutes, you won't be doing a role-play, alas. Instead, you'll be comparing past and present to see what's changed and what's remained the same in the world of coffee houses.

### Theme: Etiquette

Etiquette might seem trivial or bothersome, but entertain the possibility that it might be more important than you think. In these activities, you'll have a chance to see. Start by defining the word *etiquette*. Look up a few definitions,

and then use them as the basis for writing your own definition. With definition in hand, and a group of your peers, identify some of the rules of etiquette that are part of your world. For example, if you have dinner at a friend's house, you say "thank you" before you go home. And so on. List as many rules as you can come up with. Put a check mark next to any that you think are especially important, and explain to the people in your group why you think they are important.

When you're done, read "All the Lands Were Sea." Form a group of six to 10 people, and have each person take a role from the article. Roles include photographer Tor Eigeland, his guide, Ibrahim, the host shaykh, and a few of the men and women of the village. Finally, have two people take the roles of observers. With your group, act out a scene like one the article describes. Have your characters play their parts as the article describes what they did. For example, the guests waited in their boat while hosts prepared for their arrival. As the group acts out the scene, the observers will be on the lookout for the rules of etiquette that guide the behavior of the different participants, and they will write them down. (This shouldn't be too hard, since the article explicitly identifies many of these expectations and behaviors.) When the role play is finished, have different actors share what it felt like to take on the role they took on. How did the customs make things easier or harder for you? Have observers share the "rules" that they saw in action in the role play. Actors can add to the list based on their experiences.

Now try the role play again, but this time, have the visitors be themselves—21st-century young people, people who have no knowledge of the customs of the Ma'dan. Have the hosts remain in character and respond the way you imagine they would.

When the role play is finished, debrief by talking about how it felt to be a guest who didn't know the customs, and how it felt to be a host to guests who didn't understand and may even have behaved in a way that seemed rude.

The tricky thing about customs and etiquette is that when you look at other people's, they may seem strange or quaint. But when you look at your own, they may seem, well, invisible. "We just do it that way," you might say. But in the interests of improving understanding—of yourself and others—try the following activity to





### IF YOU ONLY HAVE 15 MINUTES...

Read “firstsocialnetwork@coffeehouses.mideast.” Make a T chart. In one column, list the reasons why people liked coffee houses at the various points in time that the article describes. In the other column, list the controversies that arose about the coffee houses. Then make another T chart, with the same two columns about coffee houses today. Compare the two T charts. What similarities do you notice? What differences? Write a short comparison of then and now. Then write a tweet that sums up your main point. Make it interesting enough that people will want to read your comparison.



make your own invisible rules of custom and etiquette visible.

Working with your group, assign roles again. This time, you will be members of your own community. Have some people take on roles of those who live in a household, while others take the roles of visitors to that household. With the people on your “team” (hosts or guests), determine specific roles and plan what you would do—and not do—to prepare either for the arrival of guests or to be guests who are arriving. Then act out the scene.

Here’s an example of something that might happen: Maybe the household includes two long-haired cats (no, you don’t need to have anyone play their parts!), and there’s cat hair all over the furniture. Maybe the hosts prepare for guests by cleaning everything so that there won’t be cat hair to offend the guests. Or maybe they don’t clean the house, and guests arrive and start sneezing, appalled that people live with so much cat hair everywhere. You get the idea. Have some fun with it. When you’re done, debrief as you did before. What did you notice about your expectations, your behavior and how you responded to the other group? What happened when your customs did not match up with the other group’s customs?

Now imagine that you are going to a foreign country. Decide which country you would like to go to. Find out what some of the expectations are for how you should behave while you are there. How do the customs in that country differ from your own? How do you imagine you would feel going to that country, given the differences?

### Theme: Motivations for Exchange

Read “European Ceramics for the East.” To help you focus on some key ideas, answer the following questions, either in writing or in conversation with another student. What prompted Joel Montague’s interest in the

European-made ceramics that were exported to Muslim countries? During what time period was the export business thriving? What was going on politically during those years? What was the connection between the ceramics export business and the political situation? What became of the business during and after World War II? Why?

The shopkeeper to whom Joel Montague spoke in 1972 said this: “The French sent their missionaries, then their soldiers, and then their ceramics.” The following activities will help you explore what the shopkeeper meant. Here’s where the role play comes in. It will help you explore the ceramics trade further.

There are two key “players”: the European ceramics producers and the Muslim ceramics consumers. Why do you suppose each of them participated in the exchange? To find an answer, try putting yourself in their shoes. Work with a partner. Have each person choose one of the roles—either producer or consumer. It’s the 1880’s. Take some time alone to think about your character, and make some notes for the role play. If you’re the French manufacturer, why do you make pottery with Islamic designs? What do you hope to gain by doing so? What, if anything, do you have to lose? What incentives, if any, do you imagine that the French government might have established to encourage you to market your wares in Morocco? Why might it have done so? If you’re the Moroccan buyer, would you buy the French ceramics? If you say that you wouldn’t, explain your reasoning. Then answer this question: Why did so many Moroccans buy the French ceramics? Why did the European pottery become so popular in Morocco? What did Moroccans have to gain by buying French pottery? When you’re comfortable with your character’s position, role play a conversation with the other person in which each party explains his/her motivation.

Then come together as a class. Respond

to these prompts as a way of discussing what your role plays revealed. The first set of statements might have come from the sellers, the second from the buyers. Which do you think are most believable? Least believable? Why?

Sellers:

- “Morocco is a ready-made market. I can make a lot of money selling pottery there.”
- “The French government says we don’t have to pay taxes when we send goods to Morocco, so that makes our profit margin bigger.”
- “These designs are beautiful, and I’d like to know more about Islam and Muslim cultures.”
- “I’d really rather not make pottery with these designs on it, but it’s too good an opportunity to pass up.”

Buyers:

- “The French pottery is less expensive than the locally made pottery.”
- “The local market only sells the French pottery, so I can’t get Moroccan pottery anymore.”
- “I think the French pottery is prettier than the locally made pottery.”
- “The French pottery is the style now. Everyone has it, and I don’t want to be left out.”

Add your own additional comments if they occur to you.

Now return to the Moroccan shopkeeper’s quotation: “The French sent their missionaries, then their soldiers, and then their ceramics.” Take the role of this shopkeeper. Using what you’ve learned from the role play and discussion, write a paragraph that explains what this quotation means. For your answer, think about these questions, and incorporate answers to them as appropriate. How does the shopkeeper understand the relationship between France and Morocco? How does he seem to feel about the relationship? What does the pottery mean to him?



**Corinne Whitlatch spent a two-month sabbatical in Bethlehem teaching local women to make new items for the tourist market using broken window glass, bottles and scrap discarded by the glass-blowers of Hebron.**

## Visual Musings on a Search for Peace:

*Glass Sculptures by Corinne Whitlatch displays glass wall and window sculptures that reflect*

the artist's travels in Palestine and the Middle East, and her thoughts on the peace these lands seek. Many of the works incorporate found objects she has acquired on her travels: Pieces of glass, iron, ceramics, pressed plants, minerals and mosaics are joined with glass and hammered and pierced brass. Whitlatch's designs are influenced by her study of Islamic ornamentation and of Middle Eastern cultures, history and political struggles. The exhibition also includes a unique installation, "The Ultimate Washington Dinner Party" (with thanks to Judy Chicago), comprising a series of plates inspired by notables whom she would like to engage in conversation. Jerusalem Fund Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through May 24.

### Current **May**

**Resilience and Light:** *Contemporary Palestinian Art* includes work by Laila Shawa, Taysir Batniji; Hani Zurob, Hazem Harb and Mohammed Joha. While diverse in approach and style, the artists in this exhibition work within shared circumstances that define the reception of contemporary art, within and beyond the Arab world. *Resilience and Light* explores a number of themes arising from their specific situations, including how art is interpreted within and outside its historical, social and political context. Studio 3 Gallery, School of Arts, **Canterbury [uk]**, through May 18.

**Beauty and Belief:** *Crossing Bridges With the Arts of Islamic Culture* aims to bridge differences and inspire insight through beauty, and address the question, "What makes Islamic art Islamic?" Tunisian-born project director Sabiha Al Khemir has assembled more than 250 works from 40 lenders in the us and nine other countries, including unique manuscripts from the Royal Library in Morocco. The exhibition represents a journey through Islamic culture from the seventh century onward, combining historical and geographic background with successive sections on calligraphy, figurative imagery and pattern, but it makes a point of touching on the present day, also including works by contemporary artists. **Newark [New Jersey]** Museum, through May 19; **Portland [Oregon]** Art Museum, June 15 through September 8.

**No Country:** *Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia* charts contemporary art and creative activity across three geographic regions. Featuring recent acquisitions in painting, sculpture, video, film, work on paper and installation, the exhibition proposes a reevaluation of the region and its countries based on its cultural relationships, influences, affinities and negotiations. It offers a glimpse into the region's diverse contemporary art practices, and presents the possibility of understanding its countries as greater than the contents of their political and geographical boundaries. The works displayed explore universal themes of national identity and community, cultural knowledge, power and faith. Guggenheim Museum, **New York**, through May 22.

**Little Syria, New York:** *An Immigrant Community's Life and Legacy* documents the rich history of New York's first Arab-American community. From the late 19th century through the mid-20th century, an area of Manhattan's Lower West Side was the home to a vibrant and productive community of Arab-Americans. Dubbed the "heart of New York's Arab world" by *The New York Times*, the Washington Street neighborhood was where many participants in the first wave of Arab immigration to the United States got their

start. Their experiences, all but lost to living memory, parallel those of other immigrant groups of the Great Migration period. 3LD Art + Technology Center, **New York**, through May 26; Immigration History Research Center, Andersen Library, University of **Minnesota, Minneapolis**, Fall.

**Threshold to the Sacred:** *The Ark Door of Cairo's Ben Ezra Synagogue* focuses on a work of exceptional historical importance: an intricately decorated and inscribed wood panel believed to come from the Ben Ezra Synagogue of Old Cairo (Fustat), which has captured public imagination for more than a century. Walters Art Museum, **Baltimore**, through May 26.

**Beyond the Chador:** *Dress From the Mountains and Deserts of Iran* offers the surprise of diversity, bright colors and a multitude of shapes that contradict the perception of Iranian clothing as being dull and uniform. The country's complex geography, climate and human history are reflected in a wide diversity of cultures and traditions. Although rapidly vanishing in some areas, many aspects of these traditions can still be found in Iranian regional dress, especially that worn by women. Most of the outfits in the exhibition date from the late 19th and 20th centuries and were collected between 1998 and 2003. Textile Research Centre, **Leiden, The Netherlands**, through May 30.

### Current **June**

**In Harmony:** *The Norma Jean Calderwood Collection of Islamic Art* showcases some 150 works ranging in date from the first millennium BCE to the mid-20th century, including luxury glazed ceramics from the early Islamic era and illustrated manuscripts of medieval epic poems, including the *Shahnama*. The exhibition is organized chronologically, beginning with

earthenware from the ninth and 10th centuries, and closing with lacquerware from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Interspersed are several thematic clusters, as well as groupings of folios from four illustrated manuscripts that Mrs. Calderwood endeavored to reassemble when they were dispersed on the art market. The exhibition marks the first time the museum is offering augmented reality technology: After downloading an app, visitors can point their device at one of six designated objects in the gallery, and additional content will appear. Content may include photomicrographs from the object's conservation treatment, comparative images in other collections or video showing the recreation of a vessel's construction. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, through June 1.

**Beyond the Surface:** *Scientific Approaches to Islamic Metalwork* examines key examples of Islamic and pre-Islamic metalwork from the fourth through 14th centuries to investigate the ways that craftsmen adapted the technological and stylistic legacies of Roman, Byzantine and Sasanian precursors. Photomicrographs and x-radiographs illuminate the composition of the exhibits, two major manufacturing technologies (casting and sheet metalworking) and techniques of decoration. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, through June 1.

**Journey** is a photography exhibition by Hala El-Koussy. Mashrabia Gallery for Contemporary Art, **Cairo**, through June 6.

**Poetics and Meanings** by Fred Eerdekens and Mohammed Kazem. Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, **Dubai**, through June 8.

**The Sahmat Collective:** *Art and Activism in India Since 1989* introduces the vital work of Sahmat, a Delhi-based collective. Animated by the urgent belief that art can propel change and that culture can reach across boundaries, Sahmat has offered a platform for an expansive group of artists and collaborators to present works of art that defend freedom of expression and battle intolerance within India's often divisive political landscape. Smart Museum of Art, **Chicago**, through June 9.

**Images of the Afterlife** brings two Egyptian mummies from the museum's collections face-to-face with the public. Recent CT scans and the latest 3-D imaging have revealed the mummies' secrets and enabled an artist to recreate realistic sculptures portraying how these two individuals looked in life, thousands of years ago. No longer merely mummies #30007 and #11517, they can now be envisioned as a woman in her 40's and a teenaged boy named Minirdis. Field Museum, **Chicago**, through June 9.

**Youssef Nabil:** *Time of Transformation* presents three new series of characteristic hand-painted silver gelatin photographs in which the New York-based Egyptian artist explores notions of transition and change as he reflects on the clash of archetypes that defines his country today. Third Line, **Dubai**, through June 12.

**The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia:** *A New Beginning* focuses on a document sometimes referred to as the first “bill of rights,” a football-sized, barrel-shaped clay object covered in Babylonian cuneiform that dates to the Persian king Cyrus the Great’s conquest of Babylon in the sixth century BCE. Almost 2600 years later, its remarkable legacy continues to shape contemporary political debates, cultural rhetoric and philosophy. The text on the cylinder announces Cyrus’s intention to allow freedom of worship to his new subjects. His legacy as a leader inspired rulers for millennia, from Alexander the Great to Thomas Jefferson, and the cylinder itself was used as a symbol of religious freedom and the hope for peace in the Middle East. Museum of Fine Arts, **Houston**, through June 14; Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, June 20 through August 4; Asian Art Museum, **San Francisco**, August 9 through September 22; Getty Museum, **Los Angeles**, October 2 through December 2.

**Hey’Ya:** *Arab Women in Sport* features photographs and videos of 90 Arab sportswomen from 20 Arab countries, made by sisters Brigitte and Marian Lacombe. QMA Gallery, **Doha, Qatar** through June 16.

**Eye Level in Iraq:** *Photographs by Kael Alford and Thorne Anderson* presents the photographs of two American-trained photojournalists who documented the impact and aftermath of the us-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. They made the photographs during a two-year span that began in the months leading up to the allied invasion in spring 2003 and covers the emergence of the armed militias that challenged the allied forces and later the new central Iraqi government. Alford and Anderson photographed outside the confines of the military’s embedded-journalist program in an attempt to get closer to the daily realities of Iraqi citizens and to learn how the war, and the seismic political and cultural shifts that accompanied it, affected ordinary people. A decade after Baghdad fell, Kael Alford said, “I consider these photographs invitations to the viewer to learn more, to explore the relationships between public-policy objectives and their real-world execution and to consider the legacies of human grief, anger, mistrust and dismay that surely follow violent conflict. I hope that these images will also open a window on the grace of Iraq and perhaps help to give a few of these memories a place to rest.” De Young Museum, **San Francisco**, through June 16.

**Ferozkoh:** *Tradition and Continuity in Afghan Art* is an exhibition showcasing works created by Afghan artists inspired by masterpieces from the museum’s collection. Museum of Islamic Art, **Doha, Qatar**, through June 22.

**Modern Iraqi Art:** *A Collection* showcases the works of Dia Azzawi, Halim Al-Karim, Hanaa Malallah and other modern and contemporary artists. Meem Art Gallery, **Dubai**, through June 27.

**Against the Wall II**, by Syrian artist Abdul Karim Majdal Al-Beik, Ayyam Gallery, **Dubai**, through June 27.

**No Limit 2:** *One Work / One Artist* by Mohamed El Baz. Galerie Imane Fares, **Paris**, through June 30.

**Tradition and Continuity:** *Woven and Decorated Textiles of the Malay Peninsula* showcases more than 50 objects that delineate the beauty and importance of traditional Malay textiles and costume. A section of contemporary textile masterpieces will also be on display, and a special section of the exhibition shows how the traditional textiles’ aesthetics have inspired designers at the Prince’s School of Traditional Design in London. Islamic Arts Museum **Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur**, through June 30.

#### Current July

**Shirin Neshat**, an Iranian–American artist living in New York City, is widely acclaimed for her extraordinary video installations and photographs, yet her collected works are rarely considered as a singular production or displayed together. This mid-career retrospective includes eight video installations and two series of photography. Through visual metaphor and compelling sound, Neshat confronts the complexities of identity, gender and power to express her own vision that embraces the depth of Islamic tradition and western concepts of individuality and liberty. **Detroit** Institute of Arts, through July 7.

**Living Shrines of Uyghur China:** *Photographs by Lisa Ross* presents images of the vibrant manmade shrines that dot the breathtaking natural landscape of rural Uighur China. Twenty-three large images and two short videos offer a rare look into a region on the verge of modernization, capturing much of the cultural blending that is at once indicative of the region’s historic diversity and the impending modernization that threatens its holy sites. Rubin Museum of Art, **New York**, through July 8.

**Resplendent Dress From Southeastern Europe:** *A History in Layers* presents 57 beautiful 19th- to 20th-century women’s clothing ensembles from Macedonia, Croatia, Albania, Montenegro and neighboring countries—all formerly parts of the Ottoman Empire—and more than 100 additional individual items such as vests, aprons and jewelry. These colorful and intensively worked garments were often adorned with embroidery, lace, metal threads, coins, sequins, beads and—most important—fringe, which has been a marker of virginity in women’s dress for more than 20,000 years. By 1900, a southeast European village woman’s clothing and its historically accreted layers could be read at a glance, informing the viewer of her marital status, religion, wealth, textile skills and more—all part of her suitability as a bride. Fowler Museum at UCLA, **Los Angeles**, through July 14.

**New Blue and White.** From East Asia through the Persian and Arab lands and finally to Europe and the Americas, blue and white porcelain was a cultural marker of certain times and places, and is now one of the most recognized types of ceramic production worldwide. Today’s artists refer to those markers and continue the story, creating works that speak to

contemporary ideas and issues, and working not only in ceramics but in glass, fiber and furniture. Museum of Fine Arts, **Boston**, through July 14.

**Darling Hair:** *Frivolity and Trophies* uses the hairdo and hair undone to explore intimacy, social signaling and self-definition. Hair is socially significant in almost every culture, whether hidden or displayed, often linked with intimacy, decency and sexuality, sometimes symbolizing masculine strength, sometimes femininity. Highly constructed, shaved off, colored, covered with ashes or clay, hair can have ceremonial functions and can express individuality or group adherence. The exhibition begins with rivalry among blond, dark or red hair and among straight, curly and frizzy, drawing on a wide range of classical paintings, sculptures and photographs; it continues through the notion of hair as a human raw material, and closes with hair as a symbol of loss, of the passing of time, and of illness and death. Musée du Quai Branly, **Paris**, through July 14.

**A Cheque Stencil Une Revolution** is titled after a quotation from Yasser Arafat, referring to the power of carbon paper as a duplication technology that was central to the abilities of political groups of earlier generations to disseminate information and opinions. Moroccan-born artist Latifah Echakhch pays homage to the uprisings of the 60’s and 70’s, but her work also rings with melancholy as it links abstract art with politics. Hammer Gallery, **UCLA, Los Angeles**, through July 18.

**Birth of a Museum** is the first large-scale presentation of the collection of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, in the context of Jean Nouvel’s architectural vision. The exhibition unveils a selection of 130 works, most never before seen, and is based on artistic and esthetic themes that reveal the principles of the museum: universality, dialogue among artistic expressions of major civilizations and emphasis on the multidisciplinary nature of artistic creation. Mirroring the future museum, *Birth of a Museum* proposes a new and unique reflection on the history of art. The suggested dialogue between the Bactrian Princess, a Cypriot idol-statue, and Yves Klein’s figural expression is a demonstration of key issues of human representation. Manarat al Saadiyat, **Abu Dhabi, UAE**, through July 20.

**The Shortest Distance Between Two Points** by Rayyane Tabet. Sfeir-Semler Gallery, **Beirut**, through July 20.

**Cairo to Constantinople:** *Early Photographs of the Middle East*. In 1862, the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) was sent on a four-month educational tour of the Middle East, accompanied by the British photographer Francis Bedford. This exhibition documents his journey through the work of Bedford, the first photographer to travel on a royal tour. It explores the cultural and political significance Victorian Britain attached to the region, which was then as complex and contested as it remains today. The tour took the Prince to Egypt, Palestine and the Holy Land, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and Greece. He met rulers, politicians and other notable figures, and traveled in part on horseback, camping in tents. On the royal

party’s return to England, Francis Bedford’s work was displayed in what was described as “the most important photographic exhibition that has hitherto been placed before the public.” Queen’s Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, **Edinburgh**, through July 21; Queen’s Gallery, Buckingham Palace, **London**, October 2014.

**The Philippines:** *Archipelago of Exchange*. The Philippines archipelago includes more than 7000 islands extending over nearly 7000 kilometers; its geographical and historical situation has resulted in extensive and varied artistic expression of a dual nature: One artistic vision is turned toward the mountains, the other toward the sea, and they are linked by the concept of exchange—symbolic or commercial—that creates relationships between donors and recipients, whether they are individuals or groups, real or divine. The exhibition includes more than 300 works of art. Musée du Quai Branly, **Paris**, through July 24.

**Unveiling Femininity in Indian Painting and Photography** considers the depiction of women in Indian court paintings and photographs from the 17th to the 19th century. Women are often depicted as archetypes from Indian literature and poetry—the devoted heroine awaiting the return of her lover, or the *ragini*, a personification of classical musical modes. Other paintings offer a rare view into the seclusion, showing them unveiled and enjoying music, poetry, dance and food. The allure of Indian femininity—and of the “exotic other”—continued into the colonial period, when photographic portraits were made of dancers or courtesans. **Los Angeles** County Art Museum, through July 28.

**Alia Syed:** *Eating Grass* comprises five overlapping narratives, filmed in Karachi, Lahore and London, each representing different emotional states experienced throughout the day that correspond to the five daily prayers of Islam. The film captures the ebb and flow of urban dwellers as they move between bustling streets and quiet interior spaces. A soundtrack that includes Syed’s prose, in English and Urdu, adds a further narrative dimension. **Los Angeles** County Museum of Art, through July 28.

**Eve II** is a group show by artists from France, Mexico, Spain and Jordan. Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, **Amman**, through July 31.

#### Current August

**Making the Invisible Visible:** *Conservation and Islamic Art*. Conservators and conservation scholars made many exciting and interesting discoveries as they and the curators re-examined the museum’s collection of Islamic art in preparation for the reopening of the new galleries in November 2011. This exhibition traces their investigative journey with a range of works of art, providing new perspectives for appreciating this extraordinary collection. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through August 4.

**Objects From the Kharga Oasis**, where the museum excavated for 30 years, includes late Roman and

Byzantine textiles, ceramics and grave goods from an intact tomb. Kharga and the neighboring Dakhla Oasis have yielded evidence of human habitation in the Middle Paleolithic (300,000 to 30,000 years ago), and close contacts with the Nile Valley as far back as the Old Kingdom (2649–2150 BCE). Vital to Egypt's trading network, the oasis towns were access points for Saharan and sub-Saharan trade, as well as producing numerous crops and manufactured goods—ceramics and glassware—for export to the Nile Valley. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through August 4.

**Trading Style:** *An International Fashion Dialogue* presents the results of the cross-fertilization of more than 500 historical ethnographic objects, photographs and films from the museum's collection with such modern-day fashion labels as Buki Akib (Nigeria), A Kind of Guise (Germany), Cassette Playa (UK) and P.A.M./Perks and Mini (Australia). Working in the museum, each designer investigated ethnographic artifacts and then created new prototype garments inspired by them. Weltkulturen Museum, **Frankfurt/Main**, through August 31.

#### Current **September**

**Datascape:** *What You See May Not Be What You Get*. The landscape, whether realistic or imagined, has been painters' subject or backdrop for centuries. The artists in the exhibition perpetuate this tradition and also reflect on the intricate blend of visual information and data enhancement that has modified our perception of the world. The landscape has become a composite that is as much an interface as our multiple digital screens, which in turn look increasingly like landscapes. This "enhanced reality" is a new landscape: a datascape. Borusan Contemporary, **Istanbul**, through September 1.

**Shirin Neshat:** *The Book of Kings* features a new body of photography works and a video installation by the acclaimed Iranian artist. Her work interweaves an austere yet sensuous visual language with music, poetry and history, as well as political and philosophical matters. Faurschou Foundation **Beijing**, through September 8.

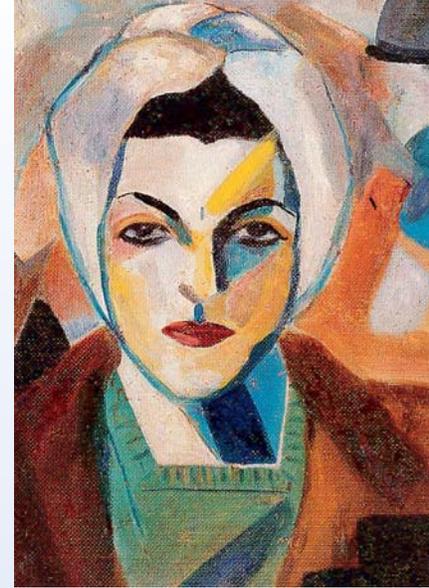
**Projects 100:** *Akram Zaatari*. Working in photography, film, video, installation and performance, Beirut-based Akram Zaatari has built a complex, compelling body of work that explores the state of image-making today. One of

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**Saloua Raouda Choucair** is a pioneer of abstract art in the Middle East and a significant figure in the history of 20th-century art. Though she was born in 1916, this is the first major museum exhibition of her work. A rare female voice in the Beirut art scene from the 1940's onward, Choucair combines elements of western abstraction with Islamic esthetics. Her work is characterized by an experimental approach to materials alongside an elegant use of modular forms, lines and curves drawn from the traditions of Islamic design. Viewing her paintings and drawings, architecture, textiles and jewelry, as well as her prolific production of experimental sculptures, visitors can discover how Choucair worked in diverse media as she pursued her interests in science, mathematics and Islamic art and poetry. The exhibition focuses on Choucair's sculptures from the 1950's to the 1980's, created in wood, metal, stone and fiberglass, as well as extensive examples of her early abstract paintings and such key figurative works as *Self-Portrait* (1943) and *Paris-Beirut* (1948). Tate Modern, **London**, through October 20.



**Saloua Raouda Choucair, Self Portrait (1943).**

the founders of the Arab Image Foundation, which aims to track down and preserve photos from North Africa, the Middle East and Arab communities around the world, Zaatari collects, examines and recontextualizes a wide range of documents—from found audiotapes to family photographs to videos found on YouTube—that testify to the cultural and political conditions of Lebanon's postwar society. His artistic practice involves the study and investigation of the way these documents straddle, conflate or confuse notions of history and memory. *Projects 100* features the American premiere of two video installations: "Dance to the End of Love" (2011) and "On Photography, People and Modern Times" (2010). Cutting across temporal and geographic borders, they probe the nature of time and assert the permeability of memory. Museum of Modern Art, **New York**, through September 23.

**Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum.** The two cities on the Bay of Naples, in southern Italy, were buried in just 24 hours by a catastrophic volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. This event ended the life of the cities but also preserved them until their rediscovery by archeologists nearly 1700 years later. Herculaneum was a small seaside town, Pompeii the industrial hub of the region. Work continues at both sites, and recently uncovered artifacts include such treasures as finely sculpted marble reliefs and intricately carved ivory panels. The exhibition gives visitors a taste of the cities' daily life, from the commerce of the bustling street to the domesticity of the family home, and explores the lives of individuals in Roman society—businessmen, powerful women, freed slaves and children. Thus a beautiful wall painting from Pompeii shows the baker Terentius Neo and his wife holding writing materials to show they are literate and cultured and posed to suggest they are equal partners. Other evocative items include six pieces of carbonized wooden furniture, among them a linen chest and a baby's crib that still rocks on its curved runners. British Museum, **London**, through September 29.

#### Current **October**

**Out of Southeast Asia:** *Art That Sustains* displays treasures from the museum's own collections alongside the work of four contemporary textile artists and designers: Carol Cassidy, the team of Agus Ismoyo and Nia Fliam and Vernal Bogren Swift. The exhibition demonstrates how contemporary artists are preserving the traditional arts even as they interpret them in innovative ways. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, through October 13.

#### Current **November and Later**

**The Roof Garden Commission:** *Imran Qureshi* is a site-specific work painted directly onto the surfaces of the museum's roof garden and relating both to elements of his earlier works and to the broad vistas of Central Park visible from the roof garden, as well as to the area's architectural and historical contexts. The Pakistani artist is considered one of the leading figures in developing a "contemporary miniature" esthetic, integrating motifs and techniques of traditional miniature painting with contemporary themes. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through November 3.

**Echoes of Egypt:** *Conjuring the Land of the Pharaohs* considers 2000 years of fascination with ancient Egypt. Visitors enter through a reproduction of the Egyptian-style gateway that is the entrance to New Haven's Grove Street Cemetery, designed by Henry Austin in 1839, and then discover how a culture that flourished thousands of years ago has impacted our own world. Echoes of ancient Egypt appear in art, architecture and literature around the world, from ancient Africa, to medieval Europe and the Middle East, to modern North America. Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, **New Haven, Connecticut**, through January 4.

#### Coming **May**

**Steel and Gold:** *Historic Swords From the MIA Collection* displays swords not as weapons, but as means of self-expression, historical artifacts and masterpieces of technology and design. Museum of Islamic Arts, **Doha, Qatar**, May 15 through December 14.

**Popcornographic** by Kuwaiti artist Shurooq Amin. Sana Gallery, **Singapore**, May 17 through June 9.

**Monster** by Jennifer Stelco. 4 Walls Gallery, **Dubai**, May 18 through June 1.

**Found in Translation:** *The Art of Steven Naifeh* includes 26 large-scale works of modern art that reflect the artist's personal preferences and attitudes about geometric abstraction, developed over the span of 40 years. His childhood in the Middle East educated his eye to the rigorous forms of Arab and Islamic art. Naifeh's work represents universal harmony and attains this geometric symmetry with intellectual discipline, rigorous skill and authentic joy in the process of communication. Naifeh studied contemporary art with Sam Hunter, former curator of the Museum of Modern Art and the Jewish Museum, and Islamic art with Oleg Grabar and Cary Welch. He is co-author of the biography *Van Gogh: The Life*, one of the "best books" of 2011. This is the first retrospective museum exhibition of Naifeh's paintings and sculpture. **Columbia [South Carolina] Museum of Art**, May 18 through September 1.

**Mediterranean Photography Festival** features Lebanese photography curated by Tony Hage. Hotel des Arts, **Sanary-sur-Mer, France**, May 23 through June 16.

**Hopes and Dreams:** *Paintings by Vian Shamounki Borchert* includes a number of landscapes and cityscapes of Jerusalem, along with expressionistic figurative artwork that the Palestinian-American artist describes as "visual poems that capture human emotions." Jerusalem Fund Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, May 31 through July 12.

#### Coming **June**

**Disappearing Heritage of Sudan, 1820–1956:** *Photographic and Filmic Exploration in Sudan* documents the remnants of the colonial experience in Sudan from the Ottoman, Egyptian and British periods. This photographic and video project by Frederique Cifuentes explores the mechanics of empire, highlighting

colonial architecture, design and construction—official buildings, private residences, cinema houses, railways, irrigation canals and bridges—and the impact they had on Sudanese society before and after independence in 1956. It also helps us understand the ways in which people appropriated and used the buildings after the end of the colonial period. Oriental Museum, University of **Khartoum, Sudan**, June through December 2013.

**Sky Spotting Stop** is a temporary site-specific installation that shades the courtyard of the museum while floating gently on the hidden waters of the Bosphorus and projecting its host space upon the city. Thanks to this ephemeral, lively addition, part of the museum's Young Architects Program, the courtyard will become part of the skyline. On the ground, a changing landscape, made of mobile recycled elements, transforms the courtyard into a new stop in the city for special events aimed at young people, for sitting, resting, gathering, playing or "sky-spotting." **Istanbul Modern**, June 1 through September.

**RE:Orient** is an exhibition showcasing modernism in the Arab world. Barjeel Art Foundation, **Sharjah, UAE**, June 3 through November 22.

**Mantek Al Tayr** is a solo exhibition by Mirielle Kassab showcasing works from the past six years. Agial Art Gallery, **Beirut**, June 6 through June 20.

**Rhino Story** by Ahmed Sabry. Mashra-bia Gallery for Contemporary Art, **Cairo**, June 9 through July 9.

**Zarina: Paper Like Skin**, the first retrospective of the Indian-born American artist Zarina (Zarina Hashmi), features some 60 works dating from 1961 to the present. Paper is central to Zarina's practice, both as a surface to print on and as a material with its own properties and history. Works in the exhibition include woodcuts as well as three-dimensional casts in paper pulp. Zarina's vocabulary is minimal yet rich in associations with her life and the themes of displacement and exile. The concept of home—whether personal, geographic, national, spiritual or familial—resonates throughout. Art Institute of **Chicago**, June 26 through September 22.

**From Palestine With Hope** by Jelfar Khaldi and Tarek Al-Ghoussein. Artspace, **London**, June 27 through 3 August.

**Terms & Conditions** presents an open-ended debate into how history and social realities are represented, with an emphasis on the Arab world. The artists examine the divide between those who control the discourse and those who are silenced or forgotten. The title phrase may refer to the fixed guidelines at the basis of any official contract or agreement. Though sometimes overlooked in everyday practice, their implementation can dictate the representation and interaction between people, entities and countries, and set rigid parameters. Yet, separately, the words "terms" and "conditions" convey fluid and precarious concepts that can, in

actuality, be continually negotiated and modified. Many artists with roots in the Arab world work simultaneously across different geographic, physical and cultural contexts, making it difficult to define and constrain them to specific identities and representations. Their work thus enables them to navigate and speak within multiple contexts. **Singapore Art Museum**, June 28 through September 8.

Coming **August**  
**Count Your Blessings** exhibits more than 70 sets of long and short strings of prayer beads from various Asian cultures, many with flourishes, counters, attachments or tassels. Some are made of precious or semi-precious stones, others of seeds, carved wood, ivory or bone. Collectively, they reveal sophisticated and complex arrangements and structures based on symbolic meanings. Rubin Museum of Art, **New York**, August 2 through March 24.

Coming **September**  
**The Map Is Not the Territory: Parallel Paths: Palestinians, Native Americans, Irish** is a juried invitational exhibition showing 50 works on paper by artists from these three cultures, who examine their shared historical and contemporary paths. Jerusalem Fund Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, September.

Coming **October**  
**Meditation on Nature: Photography by Karam Mishalani**. Jerusalem Fund Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, October.

**Arab Festival: Naseej—Weaving the Threads of Arab Culture** is an opportunity to sample Arab food, dance to Arab music, and engage in the culture

through exhibits, films, music and dance, workshops and panel discussions on current and historical events and issues. Entertainment and presentations will include both local and visiting performers and speakers representing the cultural heritages of 22 countries and two continents. All events are free and open to the public. **Seattle [Washington] Center**, October 12–13.

**PERMANENT / INDEFINITE**  
**Greenbox Museum of Contemporary Art From Saudi Arabia** is a small private collection exhibiting works by artists living and working in Saudi Arabia, including Ahmed Mater, Abdulnasser Ghareem, Maha Malluh, Reem Al-Faisal, Lulwah Al-Homoud and Ayman Yossri Daydban. Open Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sunday afternoons and by appointment. Admission €5. Phone 420-92-69 before visiting. Korte Leidsdwardsstraat 12, **Amsterdam**.

**Feast Your Eyes: A Taste for Luxury in Ancient Iran** displays luxury metalwork dating from the first millennium BCE, beginning with the rule of the Achaemenid kings (550–330 BCE), to the early Islamic period, exploring the meaning behind these objects' overarching artistic and technical characteristics. Highly sophisticated Iranian metalwork, especially in gold and silver, was created in an area extending from the Mediterranean to present-day Afghanistan. Favored with an abundance of natural resources, the region became known for works ranging in shape from deep bowls and footed plates to elaborate drinking vessels ending in animal forms, largely associated with court ceremonies and rituals. Others objects, decorated with

such royal imagery as hunting or enthronement scenes, were probably intended as gifts to foreign and local dignitaries. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**

**The New Islamic Art Galleries of the Louvre** provide a permanent home for the museum's renowned collection of Islamic art, considered the greatest outside the Islamic world. Over 2500 objects, many never on public display before, are shown in rooms totaling 3000 square meters (32,000 sq ft). The galleries present the entire cultural breadth of the Islamic world, from Spain to India, spanning the seventh to the 19th centuries; their \$127-million renovation was financed by the French state, supplemented by donations from a Saudi prince, the King of Morocco, the Emir of Kuwait and the Sultan of Oman. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**.

Information is correct at press time, but please reconfirm dates and times before traveling. Most institutions listed have further information available at their Web sites. Readers are welcome to submit information eight weeks in advance for possible inclusion in this listing. Some listings have been kindly provided to us by *Canvas*, the art and culture magazine for the Middle East and the Arab world.

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