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*Between*  
**SALT**  
*and*  
**SEA**



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Laborers fill and shoulder bowls of salt, produced from seawater or from underground brine, at an evaporation pan in the Little Rann of Kutch, not far from where Gandhi's 1930 Salt March helped set India on its path to independence. Photo by David H. Wells.

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**Back Cover**



From each *Crocus sativus* blossom sprout a trio of stigmas that, when laboriously plucked and dried, become saffron, the precious spice that infuses Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cuisine with its gentle earthy flavor. Photo by Jeff Koehler.

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.



## Morocco's Threads of Red Gold

Written and photographed by Jeff Koehler

When autumn afternoons turn chilly in the hills around Taliouine, lavender blossoms of *Crocus sativus* dot the brown fields. The flowers' red stigmas are hand-harvested to yield the world's most expensive spice: saffron.

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### An Opera for Egypt

Written by  
Jane Grutz

October marks the bicentennial of the birth of composer Giuseppe Verdi, whose *Aida* ranks among the most popular operas of all time.

Egypt's khedive wanted a new opera composed to celebrate his new Suez Canal, but Verdi put him off until he saw a story he liked. Even then, the curtain almost never rose on this masterpiece's 1871 premiere.



## A Legacy of Light 16

Written by Piney Kesting

Photographs courtesy of the Archives for Historical Documentation

Sleuthing out forgotten attics, closets, drawers and even a barn, the “photo-archeologists” of the Archives for Historical Documentation have spent decades recovering, cataloging, restoring and exhibiting tens of thousands of early photographs from the Middle East.



## Between Salt and Sea

Written by Louis Werner

Photographed by David H. Wells

India's largest district since 1947, once-independent Kutch remains something of a place apart, with sea-level flats that produce half of India's salt, a coast that harbors historic ties to Arabia, Persia and East Africa, and villages where traditional textiles are as diverse as Kutch's own people and its fusions of cultures.



## ترجمان الكنوز INTERPRETER of TREASURES

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Written by Tim Mackintosh-Smith

From pre-Islamic poetry to classical scholarship, vivid sketches of people “illustrate” countless Arabic books. Fanciful, factual and in-between, this serendipitous harvest reveals a few memorable faces from an often invisible, historic crowd.



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MOROCCO'S



# THREADS



# RED GOLD



WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY JEFF KOEHLER

The village of Taliouine sits along a rock-strewn dry riverbed on the arid Souktana Plateau of Morocco's Anti-Atlas range, about an hour and a half east of the majestic walled city of Taroudant. It's a treeless, undulating landscape jagged with eroded, mineral-rich hills etched in geological whorls like fingerprints. Here and there in the distance, a white minaret juts up from a compact village and, on certain ridgelines, the crumbled ruins of an old citadel can be spotted. In autumn, the sun falls early behind the hills and, at some 1200 meters (4000') altitude, the late afternoon quickly turns chilly. The sporadic patchwork of fields in the hills around town looks tilled but unplanted in the fading light.

**Y**et for a few short weeks each year, morning reveals an altogether different scene. Scattered on the brown, hoed fields are lilac-colored *Crocus sativus* flowers that have bloomed—mysteriously, miraculously—during the night. Tucked within the delicate petals of each of these solitary flowers are three precious, thread-like red stigmas: saffron!

Each of those mornings, in the first hours of the day, workers—women mostly—pick the flowers before the petals can open and expose the precious threads to the sun, which wilts them and diminishes their color and aroma.

The short, intense harvest around Taliouine begins at the end of October some 15 miles east of the town and another 1500 meters (5000') up the mountain, and gradually works its way down to Taliouine proper, where the fields are the last to flower. The entire harvest lasts about one month, though only 10 days to two weeks in any particularly field. (Sometimes, in years when the climate is uncooperative, it is even shorter.)

In the last decade, saffron production has spread to other areas in Morocco: the Ourika Valley on the western slopes of the High

**Freshly harvested *Crocus sativus* blossoms are ready to have their trio of precious stigmas removed. They are saffron, which is used widely in such typical Moroccan dishes as this vegetable *tagine*.**

Atlas not far from Marrakesh; Sefrou and Imouzzer Kandari in an apple-rich region of the Middle Atlas south of Fez; Chefchaouen in the Rif Mountains; and Debdou in the northeast. These disparate locations use bulbs from Taliouine and account for just a couple percent of the country's total crop.

Taliouine (population 5000) remains the capital and heart of Morocco's saffron industry. The rich volcanic soil here has excellent drainage, which is important for the health of the bulbs, and an ideal climate—dry, with brutally hot summers and cold winters—to

## BUYING SAFFRON

Two thousand years ago, Pliny the Elder wrote in his *Natural History*, "There is nothing so much adulterated as saffron."

The same is true today. Saffron remains the most tampered-with or falsified spice in the market, cut or replaced with everything from safflower petals and dyed coconut fibers to turmeric, in the case of the ground version. The most important element in purchasing saffron is to buy from a trusted source. I recommend threads rather than ground saffron because they are more difficult to adulterate. Look for ones that are bright red to reddish-purple, long, and unbroken.

give the saffron its potency, color and exceptional aroma. Saffron is deeply embedded in the local Berber culture, and centuries of honed agricultural skills have given locals the know-how to produce some of the world's finest threads.

There are nearly three dozen cooperatives in the area, with the oldest and largest in Taliouine itself, the Cooperative Souktana du Safran. Founded in 1979, its 154 members own some 1098 hectares of land (2712 acres), with 275 hectares (680 acres) dedicated to saffron. (Local farmers also cultivate almonds, olives, vegetables and aromatic herbs.) During the 2012 harvest, these fields produced 300 kilograms (660 lbs) of dried saffron, according to the cooperative's Zahra Tafraoui. Overall, she says, Taliouine produced 4000 kilos, or 98 percent of Morocco's total. While the year was not considered a good one—it rained during the harvest—that amount still makes Morocco the fourth-largest producer of saffron in the world. Perhaps surprisingly, Taliouine now produces more than three times the amount of Spain.

**H**ow did saffron come to this isolated place? “We have many legends,” Tafraoui tells me with a smile, “but few verifiable details.” The first written reference to saffron in Taliouine goes back only about 240 years, when *zaafrane* is mentioned three times in a contract dated 1776. But local historians say that saffron was being stored in a large, clifftop *agadir* (granary) less than 16 kilometers (10 mi) from Taliouine some 500 years ago, along with barley, oil and sugar.

Saffron most likely arrived in Morocco well before that, though,



at least as far back as the ninth century, brought in stages on its long journey from Greece or Asia Minor, where it originated.

Ancient civilizations like the Egyptians and Sumerians appreciated saffron. It appears in the Old Testament of the Bible among the most sought-after aromas. “Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices,” hymns a love verse in the Song

**Though Taliouine’s saffron harvest often lasts about a month, beginning in late October, each field is picked within a period of a week to 10 days. Inside the blossom, the three long, orange-red stigmas are saffron; the shorter, yellow pistils bear pollen—though the plant has been domesticated so long that it can no longer reproduce without human help. Harvesting and picking is most frequently done by women.**





**The old citadel of Taliouine, population 5000 and center of Morocco's saffron industry, rises over a planted field.**

blending it with sweet wine. In his recipe collection *De Re Coquinaria*, the Roman cookery writer Apicius likewise adds it to wine, and uses it in sauces for boar, offal and various fish dishes.

Arab traders introduced saffron to Spain around 900 CE, according to Ian Hemphill's 500-page *Spice Notes*, and Crusaders returning from Asia Minor with bulbs perhaps brought it to Italy, France and Germany in the 13th century. A century later, it was being cultivated in the English region of Essex.

During the reign of Henry VIII (1509–1547), it brought great wealth to parts of the country, including the well-known saffron-producing town of Chipping Walden, whose name Henry changed to Saffron Walden in 1514. During Henry's rule, those who adulterated the spice could be put to death. (In Germany, they were burned at the stake.) Cultivation in England lasted 400 years before fading away.

Spain was for centuries the world's leading producer. No longer. Today, Iran produces a dominant 96 percent of the global

of Solomon. Cleopatra supposedly washed her face with a saffron infusion to enhance her beauty and prevent blemishes, and to make herself more attractive. The ancient Greeks and Romans used it to dye hair and fingernails, as a perfume and to sprinkle around theaters for its fine, refreshing scent. In *Natural History*, a 37-volume work published around 77 CE, Pliny the Elder writes that the most esteemed saffron came from Cilicia, the kingdom located on today's southeastern Turkish coast, and speaks of

**Saffron can be removed only by hand, by pinching the bottom of the blossom and gently extracting the stigmas. Some 140,000 to 150,000 flowers are required to produce one kilogram (2.2 lbs) of saffron. Petals and pistils are discarded.**



## USING SAFFRON IN THE KITCHEN

“The use of [saffron] ought to be moderate and reasonable, for when the dose is too large, it produces a heaviness of the head and sleepiness,” warns Culpeper’s 1649 *Complete Herbal*. “Some have fallen into an immoderate convulsive laughter which ended in death.” While I wouldn’t go that far, saffron’s potency does need to be respected while cooking. Only a pinch or two—10 to 20 threads—is required for most dishes.

Before adding, though, in order to fully maximize their flavor and color, the threads should be either dry-toasted and crushed, or else steeped in warm liquid.

To dry-toast, heat a small ungreased skillet over medium-low heat, add the saffron threads, and toast for 2 to 3 minutes, or until the threads have turned a shade darker in color and started to release their aroma. Place the toasted threads in a folded piece of paper and, with dry fingers, crumble them from the outside, and then shake the saffron from the paper into the dish. Alternatively, transfer the toasted threads from the skillet to a mortar, pound them into a powder, and add them to the dish. Swirl a touch of water around the mortar to get all of the crushed saffron.

To steep, place the threads in 120 ml / 1/2 cup hot water and infuse for 20 to 30 minutes. Incorporate the highly aromatic, brilliant golden liquid into the dish. Discard the threads or, if desired, use them in the dish.

harvest. According to The Crocus Bank, a project supported by the European Commission, Spain had around 6000 hectares (15,000 acres) of saffron fields to Iran’s 3000 in the 1970’s; in 2005, there were just 83 hectares of saffron plantings, statistics from Spain’s Ministry of Agriculture show, though that number has approximately doubled in more recent years.

Saffron cultivation in Iran, meanwhile, has skyrocketed to 50,000 hectares (123,500 acres). The Iranian Fars News Service reported in early 2013 that the country was producing 250 tons of the red gold annually and had set a goal of 500 tons by 2021. Iran exports to over 40 countries, including bulk quantities to Spain. It’s big business: According to Fars, saffron accounts for about 13.5 percent of Iran’s non-oil exports.

Making up the remaining global saffron production are the Kashmir region of India, the world’s second largest producer (mostly for domestic consumption), followed by the western Macedonian region of Greece, and then Morocco, Spain, Italy and Turkey. A handful of other countries also produce small amounts.

Prices are high. During the 2012 harvest, the Cooperative Souktana du Safran

**To make the most of saffron’s flavor, after extraction from the blossoms the threads are put out in the sun—or, less commonly in Morocco, on top of a low-heat oven—to dry to about 20 percent of their original moisture content.**

was selling 1 gram packages of saffron from their office for 32 Moroccan dirham (about \$3), which translates to about \$112 an ounce and \$1800 per pound. Expensive, but a mere fraction of what consumers pay in Europe, the Middle East and North America—or even in the *sucs* of Marrakesh—for similar top-quality, unadulterated threads.

**C**ultivating the world’s most expensive spice is laborious and time-consuming, and cannot be automated. According to local co-ops, about 90 percent of the production in Taliouine is done by small-hold farmers.

Planting takes place in Taliouine from the end of August through mid-September.

Workers dig shallow furrows, place the onion-like bulbs (correctly called corms) about a short hand-span apart, and then cover them with earth. At the end of October, purple blossoms begin shooting up through the soil.

Just after dawn, women begin moving swiftly across the fields. Bent over at the waist and wrapped in colorful woolen scarves against the morning chill, they pinch blooms off at the base and place them in the wicker basket hooked over their other arm.

Once the baskets of blooms have been carried back to the family home and dumped out on a large table, the truly laborious and repetitive work begins.

Each flower has three bright-orange to reddish-purple stigmas—the female parts of the flowers—that are connected at the base of the bloom. Around 25 mm (1") in length, the stigmas are sharply pointed on the bottom end while the other flares out slightly. (There are also three short, yellow pollen-bearing stamens.)

To remove the precious stigmas, pluckers pinch the bottom of the blossom and then nimbly extract the threads from the folds of the petals. The threads are set into a dish on the table while the petals and stamens are dropped to the floor. They





Near Taliouine, a sign advertises saffron. Some 90 percent of the region's saffron farms are small and family-owned. Much of the area's marketing is done by some three dozen local cooperatives.

pile up around the legs of the chairs, giving the room a heady floral, tropical aroma.

Like picking, the removing of the threads is mostly, though not exclusively, done by women. They spend the remainder of the long day (and often late into the night) around the table doing this easy but

tedious work. Among the Ouhsoo family in the village of Ighri, where I experienced this past harvest, the hours pass in chatting, munching on local toasted almonds and sipping sweet, fragrant saffron tea.

To accentuate the flavor and aroma of saffron, the stigmas need to be dried, their moisture content reduced by about 80 percent. It takes around 140,000 to 150,000 flowers to make 1 kilo (2.2 lbs) of threads. In Morocco, drying is traditionally done by spreading out the saffron in the sun or inside a room, while Spanish producers put the stigmas in a drum sieve set on a stove. Open-air drying tends to give a spicier, stronger flavor to the threads while toasting over heat can bring out a deeper aroma. Recently, some Moroccan farmers have begun switching to the Spanish method. "But no more than one in 20," Tafraoui tells me. For the moment at least, nearly all are sticking with the old way.

**A**s befits its vagabond history and celebrated properties, saffron is the defining ingredient in a number of popular, even iconic, dishes across the globe. Saffron lends its golden hue and sweet-woody aromas to bouillabaisse in Marseille, saffron buns for St. Lucia's Day in Sweden, saffron cakes around Cornwall and Pennsylvania Dutch chicken pot pie. It laces Indian ice cream and sweets, and, in Saudi Arabia, authentic Arab coffee is flavored with cardamom and often also saffron. But if saffron is queen of the spice-box, then rice is her most gallant consort: Northern Italian *risotto alla milanese* (Milan-style risotto with saffron), Spanish paella, Moghul biryani and Iranian polo all demand it.

In Morocco, cooks add a pinch of saffron to marinades and ground-meat *kefta* (meatballs), blend it with other spices in lamb, beef and chicken *tagines* (stews), and add it to cakes, especially during Ramadan. The country's iconic spice blend, *ras el hanout*, always includes it.

It's no surprise that saffron makes an even more frequent appearance in kitchens around Taliouine. Sometimes it's as simple and unexpected as adding a pinch of crushed threads to a bowl of chopped fruit salad for dessert. For me, it reigns supreme in the



## SAFFRON TEA

While mint tea is Morocco's national drink, around Taliouine, saffron tea is a wintertime favorite, especially to serve to guests. It should be dark, sweet and aromatic. This method is that used by Mahfoud Mohiydine in one of the upstairs sitting rooms of Auberge du Safran on a late afternoon during the saffron harvest.

Makes 1 pot; serves 4  
10 saffron threads plus 1 or 2 more per glass for garnishing  
1 Tbs loose-leaf gunpowder green tea  
2 to 3 Tbs sugar

Crumble the 10 saffron threads into a heat-proof teapot or a saucepan and add 720 ml / 3 cups cold water. Bring the water to a boil, remove the pot from the heat, and let the saffron infuse and the water cool for 1 minute. Add the tea to the pot, place over low heat, and simmer for five minutes. Remove from the heat, and stir in the sugar.

Pour the tea back and forth between a glass and the teapot several times to blend. The color should be a dark, golden caramel color. Taste for sweetness and add more sugar if needed. Strain the tea into clear tea glasses, place a thread or two of saffron in each, and serve hot.



- 1 medium red onion, finely chopped
- 2 Tbs fresh orange juice
- 1 tsp honey
- 1 Valencia orange, scrubbed
- 50 g / ¼ cup sugar
- 8 cloves
- 1 tsp toasted sesame seeds for garnishing

In a tagine, flameproof casserole, or large, heavy skillet, add the butter, ginger, *ras el hanout*, cinnamon, turmeric, white pepper and saffron. Season with salt. Moisten with the olive oil and blend well. One by one, place the pieces of lamb in the spice mixture and turn to coat. Add half of the cinnamon stick and scatter the onion across the top. Place the tagine over medium heat, cover and cook, turning the lamb from time to time, until the meat is browned and the onion is softened but not scorched, about 15 minutes. Add 240 ml / 1 cup water, loosely cover, and cook over medium-low heat for 45 minutes, stirring from time to time. Add 120 ml / ½ cup water and 1 Tbs of the orange juice and cook until the meat is tender, about 45 minutes. Add a bit more water if necessary to keep the sauce loose, or remove the lid to evaporate and thicken it. Stir in the honey and cook the lamb uncovered for a final 5 minutes.

## LAMB TAGINE WITH ORANGES, SAFFRON, AND CANDIED ORANGE PEEL

This sophisticated tagine from La Maison Arabe in Marrakech, the city's first boutique hotel and its finest kitchen, uses the trademark combination of sweet and savory, and draws on the riches of the citrus groves around Marrakech.

Serves 4

- 1 tsp butter, softened
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- ½ tsp *ras el hanout*
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp turmeric
- ¼ tsp freshly ground white pepper
- 1 generous pinch saffron threads
- salt
- 2 Tbs olive oil
- 1 kg / 2 ¼ lb bone-in leg of lamb, cut into 8 or so pieces
- 1 small cinnamon stick, broken in half

Meanwhile, peel the orange, reserving the fruit. With a knife, scrape away some—but not all—of the white pith from the peel. Cut the peel into long, very thin strips about 3 mm / ⅛" wide. In a small pan, bring 120 ml / ½ cup water to a boil. Add the strips of peel and a pinch of salt, and simmer for 2 minutes. Drain, discard the liquid, and rinse out the pan. Return the strips to the pan, cover with 180 ml / ¾ cup water and bring to a boil. Stir in the sugar and add the remaining cinnamon stick and the cloves. Simmer until the liquid is syrupy and the strips of peel are tender but still al dente, about 20 minutes. Stir in the remaining 1 Tbs orange juice, remove from the heat and let cool.

With a sharp knife, cut away any white pith from the reserved orange. Carefully cut along the membranes separating the segments and remove them. Lay the segments in a shallow bowl, spoon the syrup from the pan over them, and let soak until ready to serve. To serve, divide the lamb among four plates, and top with the sauce, orange segments and strips of caramelized peel. Lightly sprinkle with the sesame seeds.

unique local saffron tea, a winter favorite to prepare for guests.

Historically, though, saffron was valued foremost for purposes other than culinary ones. In Taliouine, women used saffron's coloring agent like kohl to encircle their eyes. According to the displays at the Maison du Safran, an information center, laboratory and shop in Taliouine, this type of cosmetic use enhanced beauty as well as protected against evil. During weddings, designs were drawn on the faces of brides. Local artisans used it to dye wool for making carpets. In some southern towns, they used it to stain the cedar-wood ceilings.

Perhaps its most important use was in medicine, where it was used to treat ailments as varied as menopausal problems, depression and chronic diarrhea, and as an antidote for poison. In his authoritative *Les plantes médicinales du Maroc (Medicinal Plants of Morocco)*, Abdelhai Sijelmassi writes of saffron's use as a stimulant, tonic and sedative. It whets the appetite, he reports, and can be a pain reliever for the mouth when ground into powder, mixed with honey and gently massaged into sore gums. Jamal Bellakhdar has similar advice in his *Plantes médicinales au*



Spain, too, produces saffron, where it is a traditional ingredient in paella, the rice-based dish from Valencia, on the Mediterranean coast. Cooking paella over an open fire—carefully—toasts the rice at the bottom of the pan, lending the dish another of its essential flavors.

*Maghreb et soins de base (Medicinal Plants of the Maghreb and Basic Care)* and offers a saffron-syrup recipe for teething infants.

W

hile Europe accounts for a shrinking fraction of global production, its saffron has prestige as well as legal protection. The European Union has awarded “appellation of origin” status to Greek “red saffron” called “Krokos Kozanis,” Italian

“Zafferano dell’Aquila” and, most famously, “Azafrán de la Mancha” in Spain.

Recently, Taliouine has begun to actively promote its most famous product beyond Morocco’s borders. There is an autumn Saffron Festival, fair-trade certification and an alliance with Italian chefs. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations is working with groups such as Slow Food,

as well as the local government, to give Taliouine’s saffron more geographic identity.

Tighter regulations mean a better guarantee of authenticity and thus quality. “The government of Morocco has developed its own legislation on appellation of origin and geographical indication,” Emilie Vandecandelaere of the FAO explains, which “corresponds to the PDO [Protected Designation of Origin] in the European Union.” The 2008 law also introduced the slightly less stringent IGP (Protected Geographic Indication) status as well. As of now, 25 of the 35 saffron cooperatives in Taliouine have been granted protected status.

The designation has helped push up the value of the local crop. In 2006, Taliouine’s saffron sold for just 8 dirhams per gram, compared to today’s 30 to 50. This is in part because of a global rise in prices but also partly a result of the PDO status, according to Lahcen Kenny, a professor at the Institut agronomique et vétérinaire Hassan II in Agadir, Morocco. “But there was also a quite aggressive marketing strategy pushed forward by the grower associations and the regional council.”

The next step, says Vandecandelaere, “would be to request registration by the European Commission, so that their product could be also protected in the European Union member states.” This would give producers direct links to large distributors and retail stores, skipping the middlemen and keeping more profits locally. European-backed PDO would also be a powerful confirmation of the uniqueness of this product that is so deeply rooted in the land and traditions of Taliouine. ☺

## “SPANISH” SAFFRON

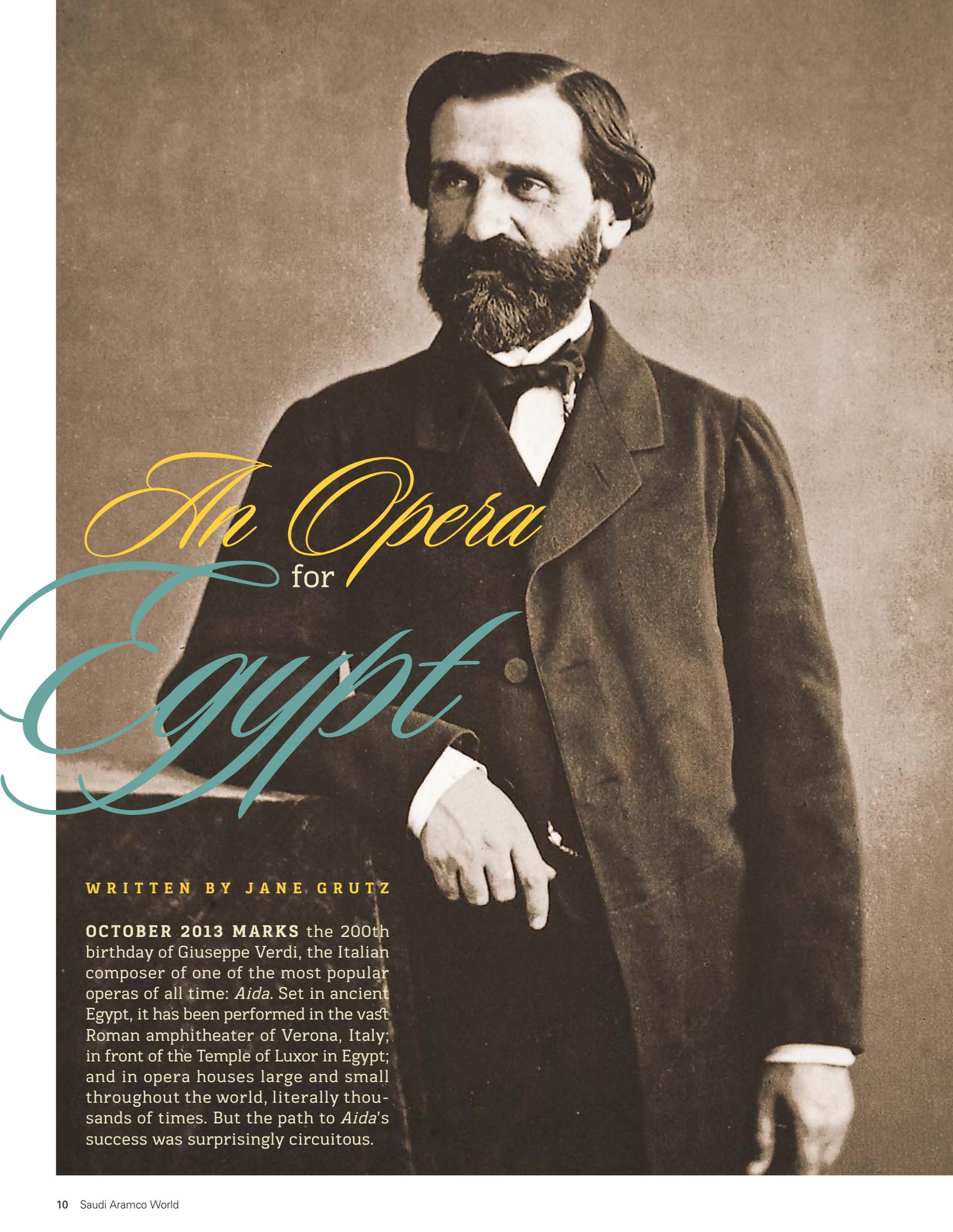
For centuries, Spain was the world’s largest and most reputed producer, with La Mancha, on the country’s high central plateau, producing what many cooks considered the best saffron in the world. But today little of it is actually Spanish. Spain’s *El País* newspaper reported that the country exported 190,000 kilos (418,000 lbs) in 2010, yet Spanish fields that year yielded just 1500 kilos (3300 lbs). This means that less than one percent of “Spanish” saffron sold was actually grown in Spain. The country imports the rest from Iran, Morocco and Greece, repackages it and then re-exports it.

True Spanish saffron is, of course, available. Read the fine print on the packaging or look for the official Denominación de Origen logo, a pen and ink drawing of Don Quixote on his horse in front of a lilac-colored flower rimmed on one side in red and yellow. The seal is a guarantee of authenticity—and quality.



**Jeff Koehler** ([www.jeff-koehler.com](http://www.jeff-koehler.com)) is a writer, traveler, photographer and cook. His work has appeared in many newspapers and magazines, and was selected for *The Best Food Writing 2010*. He is the author of four cookbooks, including *Morocco: A Culinary Journey with Recipes*. His new book is *Spain: Recipes and Traditions*.

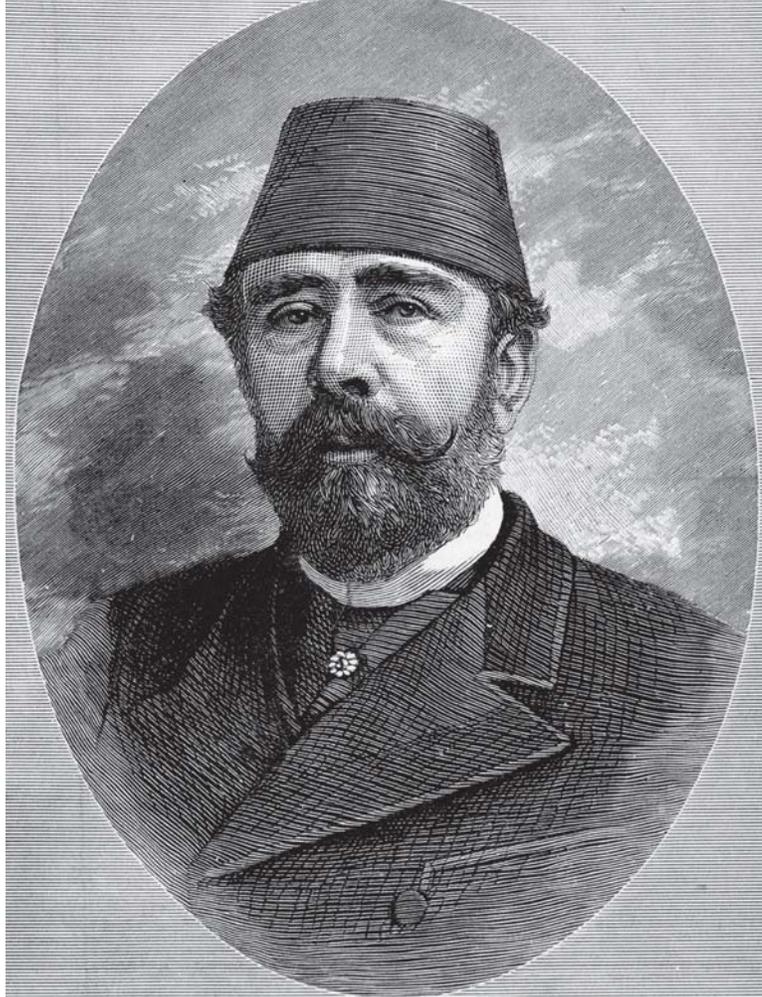
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 Atlas Mountains: M/A 93, M/A 08



*An Opera*  
for  
*Egypt*

**WRITTEN BY JANE GRUTZ**

**OCTOBER 2013 MARKS** the 200th birthday of Giuseppe Verdi, the Italian composer of one of the most popular operas of all time: *Aida*. Set in ancient Egypt, it has been performed in the vast Roman amphitheater of Verona, Italy; in front of the Temple of Luxor in Egypt; and in opera houses large and small throughout the world, literally thousands of times. But the path to *Aida's* success was surprisingly circuitous.



**“My country is no longer in Africa; we are now part of Europe,”** said Egyptian Khedive Ismail Pasha, left, who opened the Suez Canal, rebuilt part of Cairo and constructed an epitome of high culture: an opera house modeled on the famous La Scala of Milan, which he inaugurated in 1869 with *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi, opposite. Despite that honor, Verdi initially rebuffed Ismail’s commission, and later, his fear of the sea kept him from attending the opening.

success. So too was the opera house itself. Ismail’s sumptuously appointed building seemed to delight the Empress Eugénie and the other crowned heads who attended almost as much as the performance. With its gilded boxes and sparkling chandeliers, it was clearly a building fit for an empress. Or a king. Or a khedive. Or Ismail may well have wished for the premiere of the first opera ever to pay tribute to the glories of Egypt: a new grand opera composed by none other than the great Verdi himself.

Unlikely as it seemed, Ismail’s wish would soon come true. On Christmas Eve 1871, the curtain of the Khedival Opera House rose to reveal a breathtaking scene of ancient Egypt in all its glory. *Aida*, the most spectacular opera of the age, premiered in Cairo.

How did this come about? Why did Verdi, who could not be bothered to write a mere ode, suddenly commit himself to writing a full-scale grand opera for Egypt?

There were several reasons, but the primary one was almost certainly that, in the outline of *Aida*, Verdi found what he valued most: a great story.

*Aida* had everything: the beautiful captive princess (the title role); the ambitious soldier, Radamès, who loved her; and fatefully, *Aida*’s father, Amonasro, who bargained that his daughter’s love of country would outweigh her love for Radamès. There was also Amneris, the powerful and jealous princess who vied with *Aida* for the love of Radamès—and, supporting it all, there was the incredible pomp and splendor of ancient Egypt adapted for the 19th-century stage.

To fully understand how *Aida* came to be, however, we must go back to 1867, when the khedive visited Paris to inaugurate the Egyptian exhibition at the Exposition Universelle. Ismail had attended the French General Staff College in Paris in the 1840’s, but the city had changed utterly since then. At the behest of Emperor Napoleon III, Baron Haussmann, prefect of the Seine, had replaced the winding medieval alleyways with long, straight gaslit boulevards and constructed handsome new edifices at the principal



**Impressed by the story of an Ethiopian slave girl written by Auguste Mariette, right, archeologist and director of Egyptian antiquities, Verdi began to change his mind.**

As the ruler of Egypt since 1863, Khedive Ismail was determined not to stint on the celebrations marking the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Yes, it was expensive to host a thousand official guests in style.

It was certainly expensive to construct the new Gezira Palace specifically to house his most illustrious visitor, the Empress Eugénie of France. And it was incredibly expensive to build a whole new quarter of Cairo for the occasion—especially one that resembled Baron Georges Haussmann’s redesigned Paris, complete with gaslit boulevards, landscaped gardens and Cairo’s first opera house. But the khedive believed that “my country is no longer in Africa; we are now part of Europe,” and that the Suez Canal would change the course of world history or, at the very least, the course of world trade.

So the celebrations at the opening of the canal had to be the most magnificent they could possibly be. And what could be more impressive than to commission the famous Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi, whose work reverberated throughout the world, to create a celebratory ode to mark the opening?

Alas, Verdi was less than enthusiastic. Although his reply was polite, it was also unequivocal: “I regret that I must decline this honor, because of the number of my current activities and because it is not my custom to compose occasional pieces.”

Verdi was not forgotten, however. In early November 1869, Ismail inaugurated his new opera house—decorated in crimson, white and gold—with a production of one of the composer’s most popular operas, *Rigoletto*. Performed by an outstanding Italian cast and featuring 61 La Scala musicians conducted by Verdi’s former pupil and close friend Emanuele Muzio, *Rigoletto* was a resounding

crossroads. Perhaps the most beautiful of these—certainly the most expensive—was the monumental beaux-arts Opéra Garnier. Though still under construction in 1867, the building was far enough along that its handsome façade could be seen and admired.

With the Opéra Garnier not yet completed, Parisian theatergoers continued to flock to the more familiar Opéra Le Peletier. Among them was the khedive, who, on August 19, attended a performance of Verdi's newest opera, *Don Carlos*. It was a performance he would never forget. Whether it was Verdi's powerful music, the sumptuous sets and costumes, or sympathy for a doomed young prince, Ismail suddenly became a devotee of opera, and especially of the operas of Verdi.

By the time the khedive returned to Cairo, his mind was spinning with plans to recreate Cairo as Haussmann had recreated Paris. He would lay out the streets in wide boulevards, and where the new quarter of Isma'ilyah met the Ezbekiya Gardens of the old quarter, he would erect the first opera house ever constructed in Egypt—or anywhere in the Middle East.

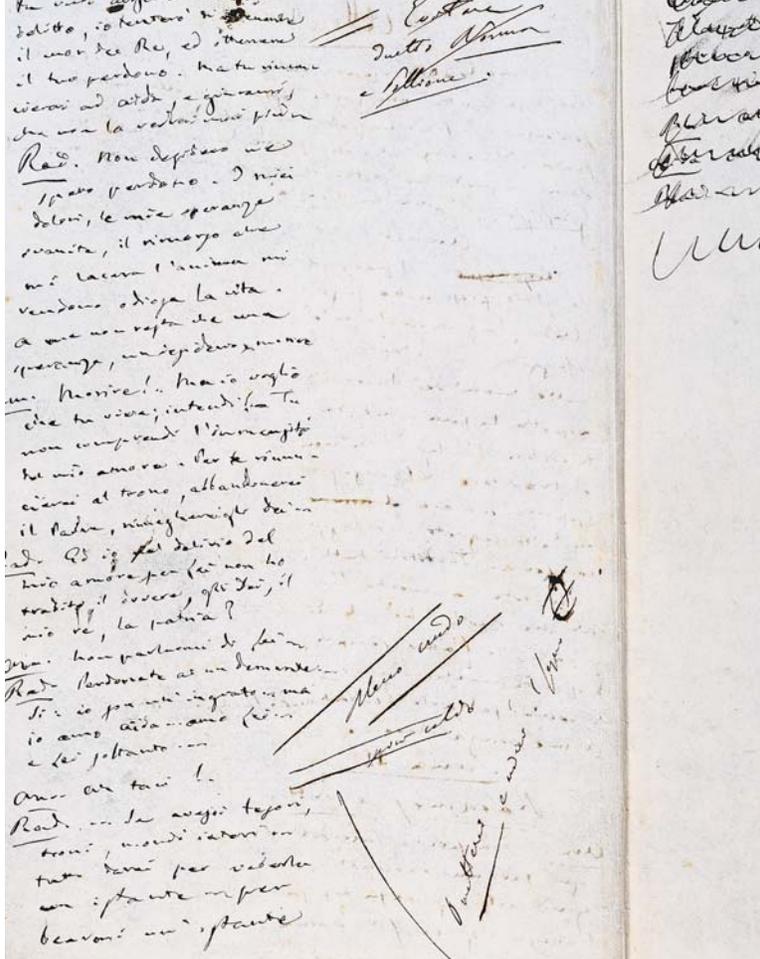
To Ismail, newly returned from Paris, an opera house represented the cultural icon of the age. Only with an opera house could Cairo hope to be counted among the great capitals of Europe. And what better than one that resembled La Scala, the great Milan edifice where so many Verdi operas had premiered?

The Italian firm of Avosani and Rossi was happy to comply, and even managed to complete the building in time to host the Empress Eugénie and others at the opening night of *Rigoletto*.

As anticipated, the Cairo production delighted everyone who attended. No one, however, was more delighted than Ismail, who was now more determined than ever to realize his dream of an Egyptian opera.

There was but one problem. Before there could be an opera, there had to be a story.

The source could hardly have been less likely.



In June 1870, Verdi and theater director Camille du Locle collaborated on the libretto, in French. This page from Act IV shows margin notes written by Verdi's wife, Giuseppina.

years of outstanding work as an archeologist. As supervisor of some 35 excavations, spokesman for conservation of the monuments and keeper of the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities, he and his imagination were dominated by the glories of ancient Egypt. Mariette had even written a story about ancient Egypt—a story about an Ethiopian slave girl, an Egyptian princess and the Egyptian captain they both loved. To Mariette, and many others, the story of *Aida* seemed the perfect vehicle on which to base the Egyptian opera so desired by the khedive.

## Worried that Verdi might lose the opportunity to another composer—perhaps Wagner or Gounod—du Locle sent him Mariette's story.

Whether Mariette showed his story to the French librettist and theater director Camille du Locle when he guided his friend through Egypt in 1868 is not certain. What is certain is that

Mariette's plan to adapt his story to opera form was prominent in du Locle's mind when the librettist visited Verdi in Geneva in December 1869.

Du Locle and Verdi had collaborated with great success on *Don Carlos* and, hoping to work with Verdi on a new opera, du Locle

often sent Verdi possible subjects to consider. That December he suggested an opera set in ancient Egypt, to be commissioned by the khedive of Egypt himself. But Verdi was involved in other projects at the time and was not interested. Nor

was he interested the following March when du Locle broached the subject once again.

By this time more than a year had passed since the Cairo production of *Rigoletto* and Ismail was becoming anxious. It was time to begin work on his new national opera. He instructed du Locle and Mariette to wait no longer. If Verdi could not be bothered, perhaps someone else could compose it; he mentioned Charles Gounod and Richard Wagner.

Mariette quickly passed this information on to du Locle who, worried that Verdi might lose this opportunity to another composer, asked Mariette for a copy of the *Aida* scenario. In response, Mariette had four copies of a 23-page proposal printed and sent one to du

Auguste Mariette, known as Mariette Bey in Egypt, never claimed to be a composer. Nor was he a playwright. He was the director of Egyptian antiquities, a post to which he had been appointed in 1858 after several

To translate the libretto into Italian verse, Verdi turned to Antonio Ghislanzoni, right.

Locle. Du Locle forwarded it to Verdi on May 14.

The idea of an opera set in ancient Egypt was one thing. An actual scenario, complete with strong characters and high drama, was another. This time Verdi was impressed.

“It is well done,” he wrote du Locle on May 26. “It offers a splendid *mise-en-scène*, and there are two or three situations which, if not very new, are certainly very beautiful. But who did it? There is a very expert hand in it, one accustomed to writing and one who knows the theater very well.”

Du Locle quickly replied that the scenario was the work of Mariette and the khedive. (In fact, certain sequences may have come from du Locle or even from Temistocle Solera, an Italian librettist employed by the khedive at that time.) But it was the drama inherent in the scenario, rather than its writers, that attracted Verdi. And on June 2 the composer finally wrote du Locle to say that Mariette’s Egyptian story would indeed be a project of interest, assuming his conditions were accepted: Verdi would have the libretto done at his own expense and, as he dreaded travel by sea, would send someone to Cairo to conduct and direct the opera in his place, again at his expense. When the score and libretto were completed, he would send a copy to the khedive, but for use only within Egypt, as the composer wished to retain the rights in all other parts of the world. Finally, Verdi requested payment of 150,000 francs, and further stipulated that he would have the right to have *Aida* performed at opera houses outside Egypt following the Cairo premiere.

Ten days later, du Locle received a telegram from Mariette. The khedive accepted Verdi’s terms, with one condition: The opera would have to be completed by January 1871 (only six months away), to be ready to premiere at the Khedival Opera House in February 1871.

On June 19, du Locle arrived at Verdi’s home in Sant’Agata, Italy, where, for the next few days, the two men worked to create a detailed scenario in French, du Locle’s native tongue. However, as *Aida* was to be premiered by an Italian company at what most Egyptians came to know as “the Italian opera house,” a libretto in Italian was required. So on June 25, Verdi wrote to his music publisher and agent, Giulio Ricordi, to ask if the renowned Italian poet and librettist Antonio Ghislanzoni would be prepared to turn the French scenario into Italian verse. Shortly thereafter, Ghislanzoni, Ricordi and Verdi met at Verdi’s home to establish the scope of the work, and in mid-July Ghislanzoni sent Verdi the libretto for the first act of *Aida*.

Verdi was now 56 years old, a master of the opera form and a man used to having his own way. Ghislanzoni was a poet, capable of creating remarkably lyrical verse. On the whole, their different



talents complemented one another. But Verdi had definite ideas about how to propel the action forward, and when he felt the poetry interfered with the dramatic moment, he was quick to say so. He was also quite capable of changing his mind—which necessarily meant changes in Ghislanzoni’s verses.

For the most part, Ghislanzoni made Verdi’s requested alterations with equanimity. He understood the composer’s working methods and respected Verdi’s judgment. But when Verdi wished to alter Radamès’ words to Aida, “No, you shall not die... You are too beautiful,” on the grounds that the soprano portraying Aida might not in fact be beautiful, Ghislanzoni objected so strongly that, for once, the poet’s phrases stood.

At the same time, Verdi bombarded du Locle with a constant stream of questions for Mariette to answer: Did the Egyptians believe in immortality? Were there priestesses of Isis or of another divinity? Please describe the ritual dances and the music that accompanied them....

As the acknowledged expert on ancient Egyptian manners and customs, Mariette was delighted to respond, but from Paris, where he had been sent by the khedive to ensure that the costumes, jewels, props and sets—all being fashioned by designers of the Paris Opera—were as authentic and spectacular as possible.

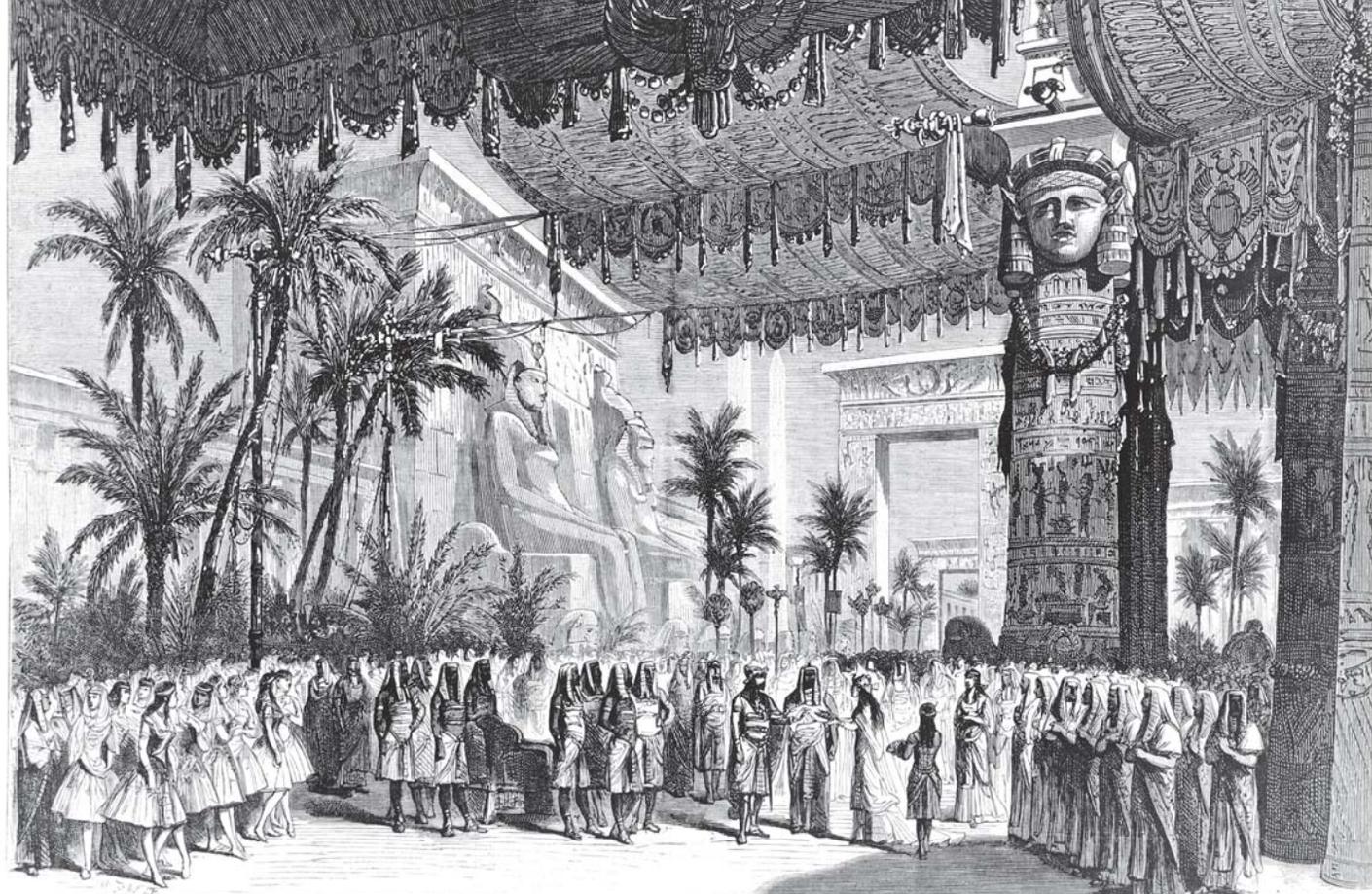
“What the viceroy [i.e., the khedive] wants,” Mariette explained to du Locle, “is a purely ancient and Egyptian opera. The sets will be based on historical accounts; the costumes will be designed after the bas-reliefs of Upper Egypt. No effort will be spared in this respect, and the *mise-en-scène* will be as splendid as one can imagine. You know the viceroy does things in a grand style.”

Mariette, it seemed, meant to follow the khedive’s instructions to the letter. The Giza pyramids were featured in one act; the Temple of Karnak in another. The archeologist also made detailed sketches of the costumes, finishing them in brilliant watercolor. In the hands of the master designers of Paris, there was every reason to expect that the Cairo designs would outshine even the glories of ancient Egypt itself.

When Paris came under siege by the Prussian army in September 1870, du Locle and Mariette were trapped, and so were all the costumes and sets.

When, almost without warning, everything changed. On July 19, 1870, Emperor Napoleon III declared war on Prussia. Most Parisians thought the French would crush the Germans in a week or two. But on September 1, the Prussians defeated the French at Sedan, captured the bulk of the French army, and took the emperor himself prisoner. By mid-September the Prussians had reached Versailles, and on September 20 they surrounded and blockaded the capital. The siege of Paris had begun.

For a brief time it appeared that, in addition to cutting off food and other supplies, the Prussians had also cut off all communications,



"As splendid as one can imagine," instructed Mariette, whose set of the Temple of Karnak in Act II of the premiere was adapted and reinterpreted in later years by other companies for performances such as this one above.

but they had not counted on the resourcefulness of the Parisians. On September 23, the hot-air balloon *Neptune* floated out of Paris over the heads of the gaping Prussians and landed safely in Evreux, carrying 125 kilograms (275 lbs) of messages. Based on that success, the Minister of Posts in Paris established a regular balloon service, and for a time du Locle's messages to Verdi arrived fairly reliably. As the bitter siege continued, however, the letters became fewer and further apart.

In contrast, letters from Ricordi, Verdi's agent, were arriving at Sant'Agata at an ever-accelerating rate.

Shortly after Verdi had agreed to the Cairo contract, Ricordi had scheduled a performance of *Aida* in Milan. The proposed production date, February 1871, in no way infringed on the khedival contract, as the Milan production would follow the scheduled date of the Cairo premiere. But it was now November, and as Ricordi pointed out in every letter, La Scala's management was becoming anxious. Would it be possible to prepare the posters? Ricordi asked. Could the management request subscriptions? What about hiring the musicians?

As both Verdi and Ricordi knew well, the answers to those questions hinged on whether or not the sets and costumes could leave besieged Paris. If not, the Cairo premiere would certainly have to be postponed, and so would the Milan performance.

As November drew to a close, du Locle's long-awaited balloon message finally arrived.

"Mariette is confined to Paris, as I am," wrote du Locle. "All work on *Aida* has been suspended because there aren't enough workmen. We do only one thing in Paris at this time: Stand guard."

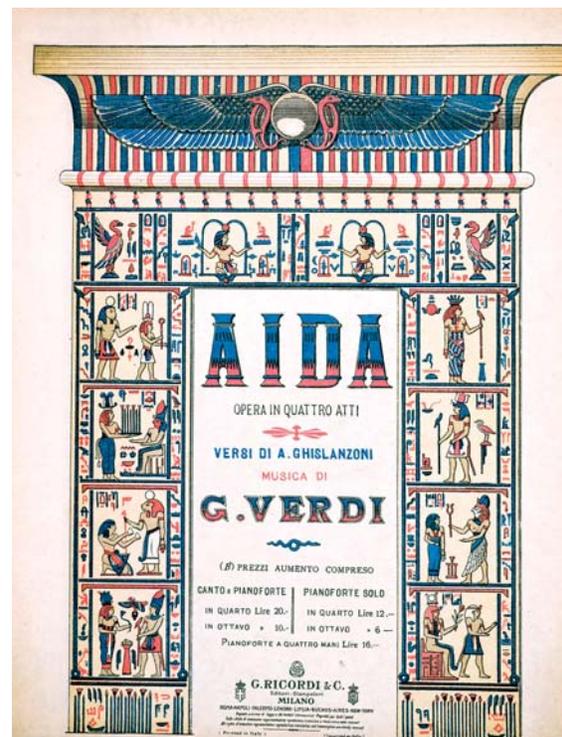
Barely had du Locle's message arrived when Verdi received a letter from the manager of the Cairo Opera, Paul Draneht. He was not happy. Like Verdi, he had just learned that the costumes and sets would not arrive in Cairo in time for the scheduled premiere,

and that Verdi apparently planned to present *Aida* at La Scala that February. Could it be that Verdi planned to premiere *Aida* in Milan, rather than Cairo?

Though Draneht did not wish to invoke the terms of the contract, he made his position clear. Should *Aida* be premiered anywhere other than Cairo, "...it would ever be a cause of genuine grief" to the khedive.

Verdi quickly assured Draneht that La Scala had already suspended preparations for the new opera, but added that the Milan opera house still intended to go ahead the following year. Fortunately for all concerned, the siege of Paris was lifted in January 1871. In short order, the costumes and sets were shipped to Cairo, and in September 1871 Verdi met

This edition of the score was published in 1938.



Draneh in Geneva to place the completed score into the hands of the Cairo Opera impresario.

After months of work, and worry, it seemed that final preparations for Ismail's beloved national opera were in their final stages.

Only one problem remained. Following the indefinite postponement of the Cairo premiere, many of the original cast had accepted other assignments, leaving Draneht and Verdi to replace them on short notice. Fortunately, they agreed on most of the new principal performers, and Verdi was genuinely delighted when the gifted Antonietta Pozzoni agreed to sing the role of Aida. The role of Amneris was a different matter, however, and it was only after the young conductor Franco Faccio assured Verdi that the little-known Eleonora Grossi would do justice to the role that Verdi agreed to her selection, much to Draneht's relief.

Mariette had his problems as well. "I consider it absolutely necessary that there be neither beards nor moustaches [on the performers]," he wrote to Draneht, explaining that the Egyptians had been clean-shaven as a matter of religion as well as custom. "Can you imagine the pharaoh with a turned-up moustache and a goatee?" he asked, worried that the performers' vanity might detract from the authenticity of the production

Draneh quickly assured Mariette that the performers would look Egyptian in every way, but even he became concerned when, the night before the opening, there appeared to be a problem with the machinery that moved the enormous *Aida* sets into place.

Yet on opening night, all was ready.

Verdi, not willing to overcome his dread of the sea, was not there, but the khedive was. And though he had sat through the entire opera at the dress rehearsal, he was as excited as anyone when the curtain rose to reveal an ancient Egypt more beautiful than even he had dreamed.

There was the handsome captain Radamès, equipped with a shield of solid silver. And there too was the vindictive Amneris, crowned with a tiara of real gold and precious stones. The Giza pyramids and the Temple of Karnak had shed their years to serve as the perfect background for the unfolding drama of two lovers doomed by the jealousy of a vindictive princess. And above all there was the music—Radamès musing of his love for the Ethiopian princess in the lyrical "Celeste Aida"; Aida's soulful aria, "Numi, pietà del mio soffrir," begging the gods to relieve her suffering; and finally the duet, "O terra, addio," as the lovers die in one another's arms.

The audience, which had bought up every ticket weeks before, sat mesmerized as Verdi's soaring music carried them through the tragic story of *Aida* one scene after another until, late in the evening, the final curtain descended, eclipsing Aida and Radamès in their dying



"The sets will be based on historical accounts; the costumes will be designed after the bas-reliefs of Upper Egypt. No effort will be spared in this respect," wrote Mariette, who produced detailed costume sketches for all of the main characters in the premiere.

embrace as Amneris decried her fate in the temple above.

For a moment there was silence. Then, suddenly, the applause began. Almost as one the theatergoers rose to their feet and, with shouts of "bravo, bravo," turned to face the khedive's box. "Long live the khedive," they cried again and again.

Slowly Ismail too stood up and nodded to the audience, but said nothing. There was no need. His bowed head and beaming face clearly reflected the immense relief he surely felt. The opera of ancient Egypt that Ismail had sought so hard to achieve was a phenomenal success.

It was a success that would soon be repeated. On February 8, 1872, *Aida* opened at La Scala. Verdi was there to enjoy the seemingly endless applause and 32 curtain calls. On April 20, Verdi conducted *Aida* in Parma, then in Naples. By 1878, *Aida* had been performed in more than 130 opera houses around the world, from Buenos Aires to Vienna. It continues to be a standard in the repertory of most opera houses today.

As one critic observed, "*Aida* is the only grand opera from which it is impossible to cut a single note."

Verdi saw it a different way. "Time," he said, "will give *Aida* the place it deserves."

And so it has. 🌐

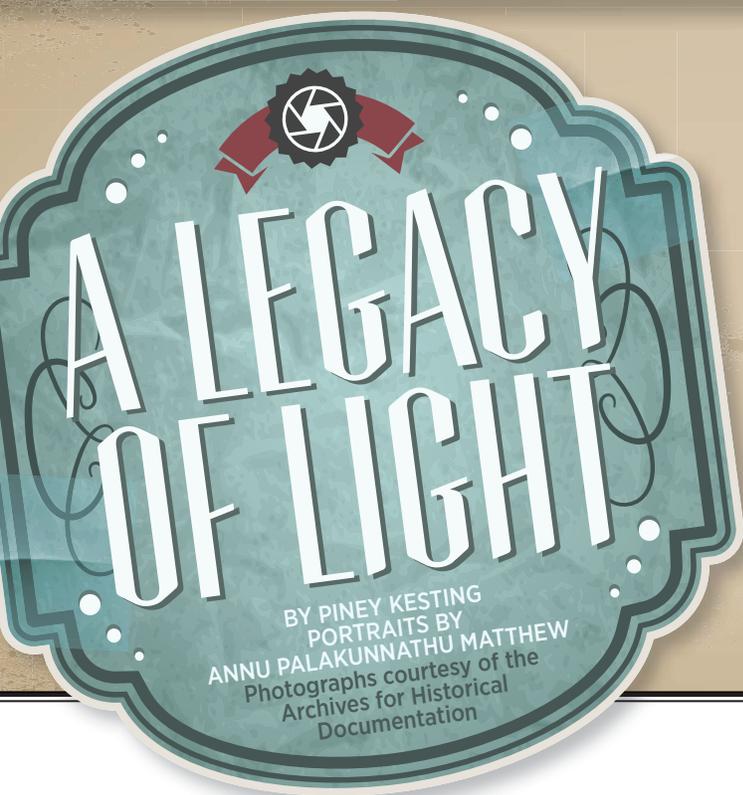
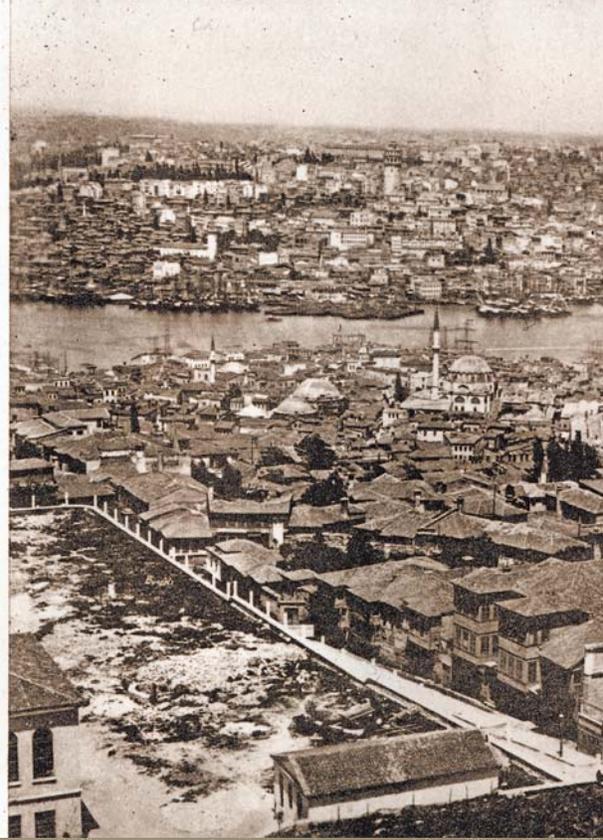


**Jane Waldron Grutz** (waldrongrutz@gmail.com) is a former staff writer for Saudi Aramco who now divides her time between Houston and London, when she's not on an archeological dig in the Middle East. Wherever she is, she always finds time to listen to Verdi's wonderful music or, when possible, attend a performance of one of his most beloved works—the Egyptian opera, *Aida*.

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*Aida* at Luxor: J/A 87

Suez Canal opening: S/O 75



Father Carney E. S. Gavin describes his task as “bringing back visions captured in sunlight”—in this case, 19th-century visions that are the earliest photographic records of people and places in the Middle East. Gavin is president of the Archives for Historical Documentation (AHD) in Brighton, Massachusetts, which he founded in 1994 to preserve, restore and share those records—though by that time Gavin and his crew had already logged thousands of kilometers of travel, tracking down long-lost and imperiled photos.

presented more than 60 exhibitions in a dozen countries and solved 19th-century mysteries with a tenacity and expertise rivaled only by Sherlock Holmes.

“As we investigated a 250-year-old ongoing detective story, we were following in the footsteps of centuries of great sleuths, savants and synthesizers,” explains Gavin, who happened to be in the right place at the right time when the event that launched AHD took place. Many stories begin with the spark of an idea; this one began with a bang—on October 1, 1970.

At 5:00 a.m. that day a bomb planted by two Vietnam War protesters blew a hole in the roof of the building that housed the Harvard Semitic Museum in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Police summoned Gavin, then assistant curator of the museum, to

**T**heir ambitious hunt began in the 1970’s when, armed with cameras, tripods and a handful of clues, they fanned out across the Middle East, Europe and the Far East in search of historical photographs. They found images in Jordan, Bahrain, Qatar, Lebanon, Italy and the Netherlands (where they also discovered wax cylinders of the oldest vocal and musical recordings from the Middle East, hidden away in the Oriental Institute in Leiden). In the Vatican Archives, they unearthed pictures of an Iraqi monastery. In addition, they inspired the first Middle Eastern photographic “search-and-rescue missions,”

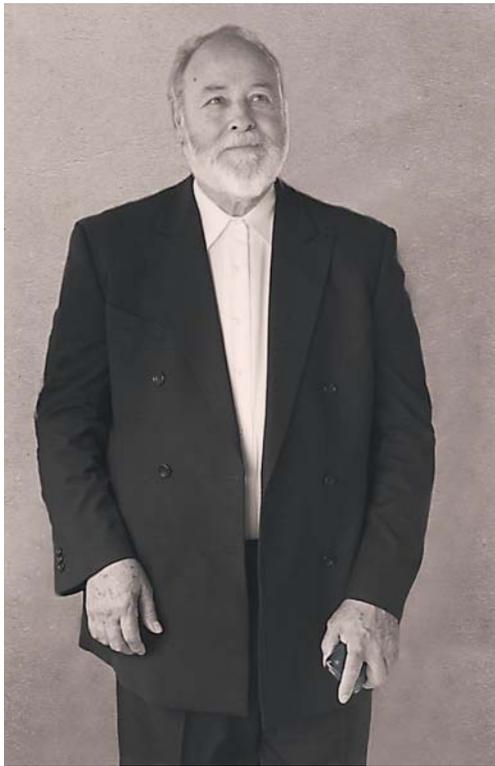
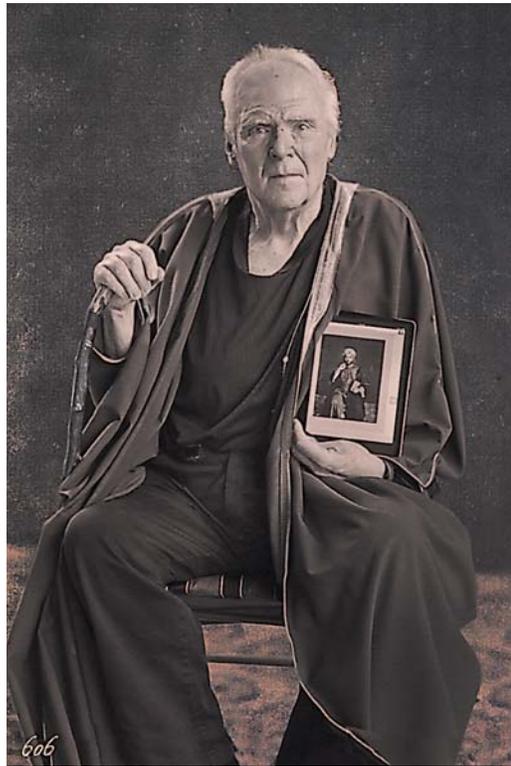


In the 1880's, one of the Bonfils family set up his camera on the Beyazit Tower to make this panorama of Constantinople (Istanbul) and the Golden Horn. It took conversations with grandchildren of Bonfils to understand that the thousands of images of the Middle East taken during the mid- and late 19th century under the Bonfils name were the work of several members of the same family.

examine the damage, which turned out to be minimal. However, under the eaves exposed by the blast was an astonishing find: old crates full of dust-covered crimson boxes containing 27,000 photographic prints, slides and stereoscopic views of the Middle East

taken in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This long-forgotten collection had been assembled beginning in the late 1800's by Professor David Gordon Lyon, the first curator of the museum, to teach undergraduates about the region.

From left: **Father Carney E.S. Gavin is founder and president of the Archives for Historical Documentation; William Corsetti is curator for educational design; Elizabeth Carella is curator of historic photography.** It was Gavin's archeological experience, says Corsetti, that led him to "look for clues in the photographs to what was happening at the time," thus leading him to the idea of "photo-archeology."



ANNU PALAKUNNATHU MATTHEW (3); TOP: THORNWILLOW PRESS / FOUAD C. DEBBAS COLLECTION



Made in about 1872 by an unknown photographer, “Cairo: Southwest View” shows the ruined palace and the intact mosque and minaret of Khair Bey, with the mosque of Sultan Hassan in the background.

“Carney became enthralled with these images,” says photographer William Corsetti, AHD’s curator for educational design, noting that his archeological training and participation in many digs in the Levant heightened Gavin’s interest in the rediscovered photos. “He could relate the images he saw in the photographs to places where he had been digging, and he was the first to look for clues in the photographs to what was happening at the time they were taken. This led him to the concept of ‘photo-archeology.’”

The team of volunteers and experts that Gavin assembled to tackle the herculean tasks of identifying, cataloging and archiving the Lyon prints later formed AHD’s core. Along with Corsetti, *New York Times* photographer Elizabeth Carella, historian and author Nitza Rosovsky, photoarchivists Mary Ellen Taylor and Ingeborg Endter O’Reilly and a small army of interns began working on the collection, which included pictures taken by Francis Frith and his assistant F. M. Good, as well as more than 800 prints made by Félix Bonfils.

This image of the Nawab Sikandar Begum of Bhopal, India shows her flanked by her prime minister and second minister. It was used to illustrate her book, *The Story of a Pilgrimage to Hijaz*, published in 1909.

“The photos opened a window to the past that adds so much to ... the visual history” of the region, says Rosovsky, AHD vice president and author of *Jerusalem Walks*, a guidebook to the city. “I felt like a detective, putting together clues from the past with what I knew from the present to try to date, name and sort the photographs.”

Identifying Bonfils was the first mystery that the team unraveled. *Souvenirs d’Orient*, an 1878 publication of Bonfils’s photographs, describes the collection of prints as “one of the most



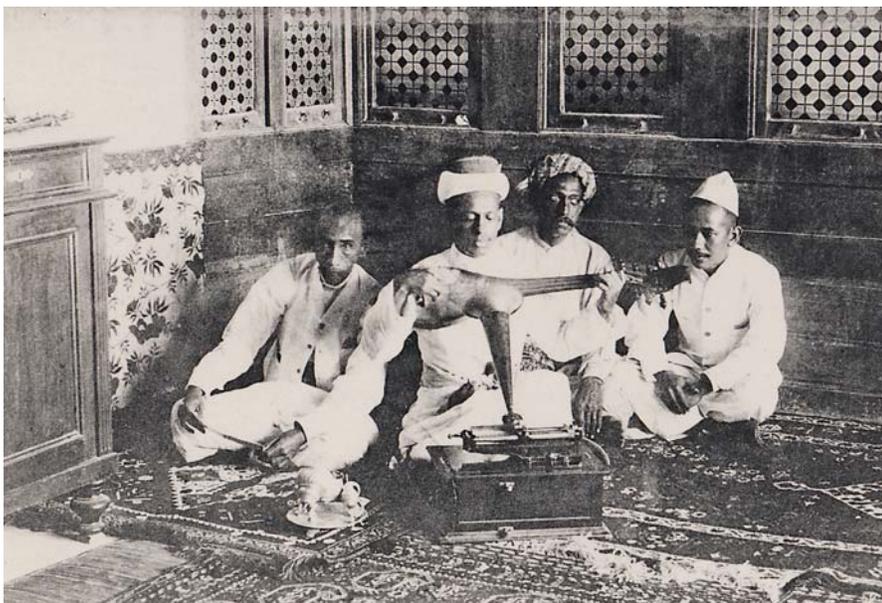


**The Port of Beirut, circa 1870, by Félix Bonfils. Images such as this offer much information about the extent of technologies and trade. Examining photos in this close way, says AHD researcher Paul Dunkel, is like “peeking through the knothole of history, and often you stumble on things no one else has seen.”**

considerable achievements—photographic, artistic and scientific—of our epoch.” Nonetheless, AHD curator Carella recalls that in the 1970’s, all the team could learn about Bonfils was that he was “a genius.” Over the course of 12 years, clues from a Bonfils collection found in a barn in New Hampshire and conversations with Bonfils’s elderly grandchildren in Paris revealed that he was one of several family members who produced over 15,000 images of Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Greece between 1863 and 1867.

Gavin credits much of AHD’s success in reconstructing the history of 19th-century photography in the Middle East to its “fortunate ability to connect with the descendants of the original photographers.” This was the case in the discovery of the Bonfils grandchildren as well as the great-grandchildren of Mendel John Diness, who moved from Odessa, in today’s Ukraine, to Jerusalem in 1848, becoming the city’s first resident photographer. Dr. Henry Berman, an independent film and video producer who joined Gavin’s team in the mid-1970’s, traveled to Paris to record the memories of the

**This image, photographed on February 20, 1909 at the Dutch Legation in Jiddah and titled “Recording of Sayyid Mohammed,” led AHD researchers to a forgotten collection of more than 200 wax cylinders—the oldest known recordings from the Arab world.**



## A MAN OF MANY TALENTS

Father Carney E. S. Gavin is a man of many talents and a master of each. A modern-day Indiana Jones, he is an accomplished archeologist, author and raconteur who has been dedicated to exploring and preserving the cultural heritage of the Middle East since 1963. An avid historian and scholar with a Ph.D. in Near Eastern languages and civilization from Harvard University, Gavin followed yet another calling in 1965 when he was ordained a Catholic priest.

“Given his pedigree, his archeological background, his understanding of religions and cultures, as well as being brilliant in his own right, I can’t imagine a person better suited to what he is doing at the Archives for Historical Documentation,” says Henry Berman, former AHD director of educational films.

Gavin has been “excavating” lost 19th-century photographic and phonographic documentation of the Middle East for more than four decades. “Even as a youngster, how things can tell us stories always fascinated me,” says Gavin, who loved discovering Civil War swords and World War I artifacts in the attic of his childhood home in Boston.

His youthful curiosity whetted his appetite for exploration and led to an impressive collection of academic degrees. In 1959 he graduated *summa cum laude* from Boston College as the school’s first presidential scholar. A two-time Fulbright Scholar, Gavin studied classics and archeology at Jesus College, Oxford University, from 1959 to 1961 and later participated in archeological digs in Europe and the Middle East. He earned a degree in theology from the University of Innsbruck in Austria in 1963, followed by a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1973.

A graduate-student assistant to the curator of the Harvard Semitic Museum in the mid-1960’s, Gavin became its curator and associate director from 1974 to 1993. During his tenure, he spearheaded the repatriation of 3500-year-old cuneiform tablets excavated in Iraq in 1928 to the National Museum in Baghdad.

Today, Gavin and his AHD team are busy researching and sharing recovered 19th-century photographs from the Middle East. “I am very proud of releasing to the pages of history and restoring to the sight of mankind the masterpieces made by these local photographers,” explains Gavin. “In doing so, we are shaping the consciousness of the future.”

## KEEPERS OF THE LIGHT

"AHD ... inspires average people to not only care about history but to become historians themselves," says videographer Erin Finicane, who began working as an intern for the organization during her summers as an undergraduate at Yale University, from 2004 to 2008. One of many interns inspired and trained by AHD over the years, she exemplifies its mission to encourage cultural exploration and create a new generation of global historiographers and photo-sleuths.

"Over the course of my work at AHD, I developed an enthusiastic interest in the Middle East, particularly the early photographs from the region," notes Finicane, who has since produced several videos showcasing AHD projects. "You can play historian and detective at the same time and learn more than you could have possibly imagined about the people and places associated with this rich cultural heritage. The prospect of excavating within a photograph to unearth the hidden secrets of the past is an exciting endeavor."

Meredith O'Hare began interning with AHD in high school. Now a senior majoring in Middle Eastern studies at Yale, she says that working with the AHD collections gave her "a new lens through which to view the Middle East." In particular, cataloging and archiving the photos of Jerusalem by Mendel John Diness taught her to appreciate the history behind the esthetics. "I was looking at photos of a functional, multi-faith cooperative society in the 1850's in a part of the world that for all my conscious memory has been in conflict," explains O'Hare. "This was illuminating and it seemed like a worthwhile thing to study..."

"Father Gavin and his team show people that history, even our own personal histories, needs to be preserved, valued and shared," says Meredith Baskes, a Northwestern University graduate. Baskes began interning with AHD in the eighth grade and quickly developed an appreciation for history. In 2009, she helped with a European exhibit of Diness's Jerusalem photos. Attended by a diverse group of decision-makers from the Middle East, and EU and UN representatives, the event showed Baskes how the photographs established a commonality among people. "AHD taught me that history links everyone," she says, "and that something as simple and yet as complicated as a photograph can potentially be part of a peace process."

Bonfils grandchildren, and these interviews are now a part of the AHD's collections. "Carney knew how important this was to preserving the history," says Berman.

Frith and Good were easier to trace. Frith was a renowned English photographer who made three trips to the Middle East, the first in 1856. He worked in Egypt, Palestine and Syria. Good was also from England. He went to Egypt with Frith and continued to travel to the Middle East through the 1870's. He is known for his stereoscopic images.

As an archeologist, Gavin had interests that extended far beyond archiving and preserving the newfound historic images. He knew how important they could be for identifying and restoring historic monuments in the region. Because of the Muslim and Jewish proscription of "graven images," regional historians and scholars had focused their attention on other kinds of records. In the 1970's, they were still largely unaware that photographic documentation in the Middle East actually dated back to the late 1830's. In fact, just weeks after François Arago, president of the Academy of Sciences in Paris, announced Louis Daguerre's method of metal-plate image-making in 1839, European travelers embarked on the first "photo-voyages" into the Levant and the Holy Land, recording what they saw on daguerreotypes.

The AHD team's quandary in the 1970's was how best to share the huge trove of photographs from Cambridge with colleagues in the Middle East. Given the volume of material, Gavin asked Berman to videotape selections of the prints as the most expedient, least expensive way to make the collection available to others.

"Carney was brilliant, and he was one of the first in his field to animate still photographs in videos. We felt we were pushing the technology as far as we could," comments Berman, who produced two films based on the collection: "Petra, Jerash and Damascus" and "The Holy Land and the Holy City."

There was, however, an even greater advantage to videotaping the collection. "[It] enhanced our ability to read details hidden in the prints and allowed us to dig even farther into the light rays," says Gavin.

"People had not utilized the photos the way that we did," explains Carella. "Carney's idea to use a video camera to explore details within the photographs was really eye-opening. Exploring inside the photos both with the video and with macro lenses, I was able to recover details that weren't apparent to the naked eye."

Being able to see long-observed inscriptions, vanished structures and architectural features later proved invaluable to Jordanian and Syrian archeologists involved in restoration projects in their countries. "While it's wonderful that museums collect, house and preserve photographs, our team has seen it as almost wasteful not to use the photos for their content, because they are so rich in what we can learn from them," Carella says.

**This detail from a larger photo made around 1870 shows photographer Félix Bonfils and his son Adrien seated to the right of hired porters and camel drivers. The location of their camp is unknown.**



**Credited simply “Bonfils,” this photo of a Druze bride from Mt. Lebanon, shown wearing a traditional silver *tantour*, was most likely taken by Félix Bonfils’ wife, Lydie Cabanis Bonfils, who made portraits of women in the family’s Beirut studio.**

In 1978, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Gavin and his team held a conference at Harvard called the “Finding, Organizing, Copying, Using and Sharing Endangered Early Visual Documentation for the Preservation of Middle East Cultural Heritage Conference,” abbreviated as FOCUS. Among those attending were high-level cultural representatives from Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey.

Between the first FOCUS conference and the second, held in 1981, the team attracted the support of two heads of state, helped establish the first regional network to support photographic search-and-rescue efforts, and launched a series of traveling exhibitions and conservation seminars. Gavin found an enthusiastic patron in King Hussein of Jordan, who commented, “I know of no work more important for the understanding of our past or for shaping our vision for the future.” In 1978, he placed Royal Jordanian Airlines at the team’s disposal to assist in photographic exploration in the region. After the second FOCUS conference, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia funded the King Fahd Archive to “find, save and safeguard endangered photographic collections.”



In 1980, AHD photo exhibitions were held at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris and at Oxford University, as well as in the capitals of Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria. That same year, the team helped launch the Museum of the History of Damascus in the newly restored Khaled al-Azm Palace by presenting it with a set of 50 prints of previously unknown historic photographs of the city. In Riyadh, it opened the city’s first public exhibition of historic photographs and cultural artifacts in Murabba’ Palace, residence of the late King Abdulaziz. Twenty-one years later, AHD celebrated the opening of the new National Museum in Riyadh with the return of the Barger Stele, one of the oldest Roman artifacts found in the kingdom.

Exhibitions in Manama, Bahrain, in 1980 encouraged the local population to search for family artifacts and photos, which later spurred the creation of the Bahrain National Heritage Center. Carella recalls that seeing images of the pearling trade between India and Bahrain led her, later that year, to search for additional photo archives in India—where she discovered photographs of the Hajj made by Indian pilgrims. During a visit to Doha, Qatar, curators from the team inspired colleagues at the National Museum to archive the amir’s collection of historic photographs.

In 1981, Gavin’s team brought an “eye-opening” exhibition of Bonfils photographs of Jerash, Amman and Petra to the National Gallery of Fine Arts in Jordan, recalls Suhail Bisharat, gallery director from 1981 to 1993. “The old photos really touched a chord, especially among the older generation of visitors. They lived during that period and could immediately recognize the images.”

**This undated portrait of Viceroy Ismail Pasha, Khedive of Egypt and Sudan, was produced as a *carte de visite* by the Abdullah Brothers, an Armenian trio who served as official photographers of Ottoman Sultan Abdulaziz I.**

## FOLLOWING IN AHD'S FOOTSTEPS

Some 40 years after Father Carney Gavin and his photo-sleuths pioneered the search for long-forgotten photodocumentation of the Middle East, several regional organizations are following in their footsteps:

**Middle East Photograph Preservation Initiative (MEPPI)**—launched in June 2011 as a three-year project to promote the preservation and awareness of photographic collections across North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula through

Western Asia. This initiative has as partners The Arab Image Foundation, the Art Conservation Department at the University of Delaware, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles. [meppi@fai.org.lb](mailto:meppi@fai.org.lb)

**Arab Image Foundation (AIF)**—established as a nonprofit organization in Beirut in 1997, AIF preserves, studies and exhibits photographs from the Middle East, North Africa and the Arab Diaspora. [www.fai.org.lb](http://www.fai.org.lb)

**Modern Heritage Observatory (MOHO)**—funded by the EU and the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Berlin, MOHO

advocates for the preservation of modern cultural heritage in the Middle East-North Africa region, emphasizing photography, music, architecture, video and films. MOHO held its second meeting in Beirut in 2012. [www.facebook.com/ModernHeritageObservatory](http://www.facebook.com/ModernHeritageObservatory)

**The Fouad Debbas Collection**—holding more than 45,000 images, this is the world's largest private collection of 19th-century postcards and photographs of Lebanon and the Middle East. A valued AHD colleague, Fouad Debbas was a renowned Lebanese collector, historian and author who died in 2001. The collection is in Beirut. [www.fouaddebbas.com](http://www.fouaddebbas.com)

“We owe a lot to Father Gavin,” he says. “He had a passion for the photographs. If not for him, we would have lost all of these documents that AHD discovered. We clearly underestimated [the importance of] photography. History will prove how these photographs will become valuable tools.”

Bisharat believes AHD's work will be a source of inspiration for future generations. “They have instilled awareness in many institutions around the world, and people are starting to appreciate this all the more because of the acceleration of change in the region,” he says. “Future historians and scholars will refer back to their work.”

Dr. Raouf Sa'd Abujaber, author and renowned historian of 19th-century Transjordan and Bilad al-Sham (Syria), participated in both FOCUS conferences and has collaborated on a number of book projects with AHD. “They drew the attention of leaders of cultural institutions in the region and made people aware of the

importance of these old photographic documents for the political, social and military history of the Arab world during the 19th and early 20th centuries,” he comments. As a result of the conferences, he recalls, Prince Ali Bin Nayef opened a center for old documents in the Royal Palace in Amman and the Jordan Library established a department for historic photographs and documents.

In the decade following the second FOCUS conference, the team was constantly on the move. Carella spent four months traveling through Turkey, Greece and most of the Middle East, consulting with conference participants about their archives. Her visit to the Bibliothèque Orientale at St. Joseph University in Beirut inspired Father Martin McDermott, the library director, to dig deeper into the archives, where in 1981 he uncovered more than 15,000 photographs taken primarily by French Jesuits, beginning in the 1840's.

Meanwhile, colleagues in Jordan's Department of Antiquities used 19th-century photographs compiled by the team to help with a UNESCO-supported restoration project in Jerash, as well as architectural restorations in Petra. AHD's photographic archives are “priceless,” says Karim Kawar, a former Jordanian ambassador to the US who interned with AHD during his undergraduate years at Boston College. “Father Gavin and his team have salvaged and restored photos that are of great value historically and culturally. These photographs of Jordan document our rich history and establish a reference point of where we were and how we have grown. This gives us pride in our culture and heritage.

“Many try to marginalize development in the Levant area in the 19th and 20th centuries, especially in Palestine,” he says, but the photographs “challenge the notion that this was a barren land that offered little until settlers from western civilizations immigrated and started building.... AHD's legacy will be protecting a piece of history and making it available to current and future generations.”

While the group's exhibitions and conferences in the Middle East continued to heighten regional awareness of the importance of historic photodocumentation, a 1982 grant from the King Fahd Archive enabled the team to pursue photo-archeology search-and-rescue missions in Europe and the United States. Thus the team members were able to spend several years inventorying 66 albums



Oral history accounts from Madame Marcelle Pinatton, center, daughter of photographer Adrien Bonfils, are now part of AHD's collections.

**In 1983, Gavin's interviews with Daniel van der Meulen, retired consul for the Netherlands in Jiddah, helped interpret the hundreds of photos sent from there.**

containing 1800 albumen prints that had been presented by Sultan Abdul Hamid II of Turkey to the Library of Congress in 1894, finally publishing *Imperial Self-Portrait—The Ottoman Empire as Revealed in Sultan Abdul Hamid II's Photography Albums* in 1989.

The work to rescue the photographs, stored away on dusty shelves for nearly a century, would no doubt have pleased the sultan, who once told his chief secretary, "Every picture is an idea. One picture can evoke political and psychological significance, which a hundred written pages could not convey."

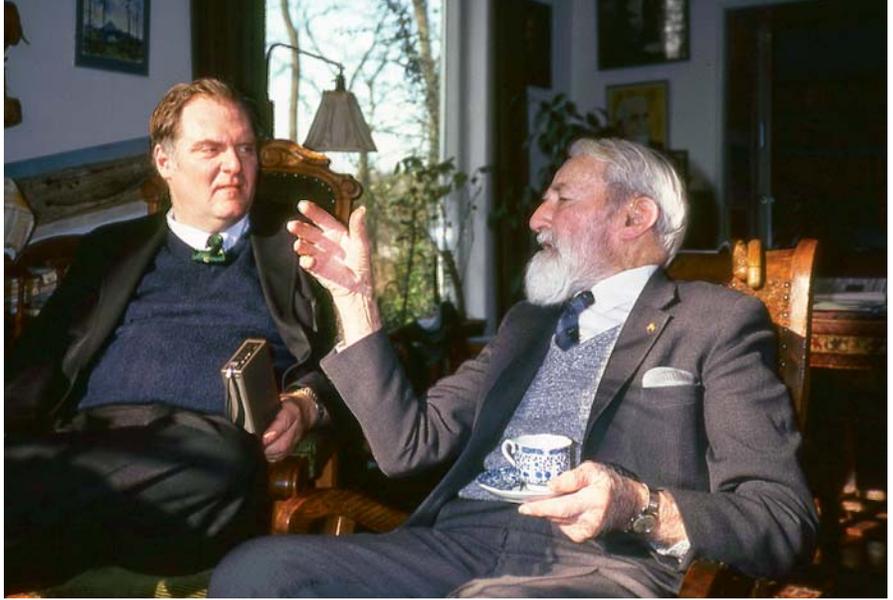
Concurrent with that project, research at the Oriental Institute in Leiden in 1983 uncovered hundreds of photos from Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, sent by consuls general of the Netherlands beginning in the late 1800's. One photo, labeled "The Recording of Sayyid Mohammed—February 20, 1909," launched what Gavin calls "phono-archeology."

The picture showed several musicians sitting in front of an Edison horn to make wax-cylinder recordings. Gavin, Corsetti and Carella searched farther through the institute's attic and discovered bags containing more than 200 wax cylinders, stored in old cardboard boxes covered with notations in Dutch, Arabic and Malay. One photo and three determined explorers led to the discovery of the oldest known recordings from the Arab world in Arabic, Urdu and five languages of present-day Indonesia.

Dietrich Schueller, emeritus director of the Phonogramm-archiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, recalls when the researchers arrived with suitcases packed full of cylinders. "We had just built a new machine to record old cylinders..." he says. "We discovered many unexpected things on these cylinders which are incredibly important. They are the oldest recordings from this part of the world." The discovery and restoration of the cylinders led to research efforts in the late 1980's by specialists at the Hajj Research Center in Jiddah and at the University of San'a in Yemen.

In 1989, the AHD team was asked to check whether a group of glass-plate negatives, found by photographer John Barnier at a Minnesota yard sale, could be the long-lost work of Mendel John Diness, who emigrated from Jerusalem to the US with his family in 1860. Gavin and his crew not only identified the photos as works by Diness, but also located his descendants.

Paul Dunkel worked with the team on the exhibition of the Diness photos, called "Jerusalem Re-Discovered," that opened at the Harvard Semitic Museum in 1993, showed at Boston College in 1996 and 1997, moved to Europe in 2004 and continues to travel internationally. "With high resolution you can find things in a photograph that you couldn't see in the original," explains Dunkel, who owns The Archival Image in Windsor, Vermont and has collaborated with AHD on numerous projects. "Sometimes you zoom in so far you forget where you are. When you do this, you are at an incredibly intimate level, peeking through the knothole of history, and often you stumble on things no one else has seen." In one Diness photo, for instance, he was able to bring out the domes of a mosque, identified by an architectural historian as an important



Hanbali center of learning, that once stood in the southeast corner of the Haram, Jerusalem's great sanctuary.

Today, AHD is recognized as the pioneer in the recovery, preservation and sharing of the photographic heritage of the Middle East. "Until [Gavin] started AHD, there was no other institution doing anything like it," says Luke Pontifel, owner of Thornwillow Press in Newburgh, New York, which this year plans to publish *Millennial Cities: A Portfolio of Photogravure Prints* using historic prints of Cairo, Makkah, Madinah and Istanbul from the AHD collections.

"Father Gavin has a passion for the photographs; he wanted to create an archive that would bring all these documents from many different institutions around the world together in one place," explains Pontifel. He notes that Gavin took AHD from "a flash of an idea to the actual execution of an enormous project that seemed almost impossible to achieve..." establishing "standards for recording, keeping and preserving the material and making it accessible, all through [AHD's archives]. That is a remarkable feat."

"I am very proud of having set free forgotten local photographic geniuses from the Middle East," says Gavin. "AHD has learned much from those whose visions, captured in sunlight, we are privileged to bring back. Some of that knowledge comes not out of the photos but out of the quest for understanding." ☺

**Piney Kesting** (pmkhandly@hotmail.com) is a Boston-based freelance writer and consultant who specializes in the Middle East. She is currently working on a book about women entrepreneurs in the Middle East, Pakistan and Turkey.



**Annu Palakunnathu Matthew** (www.annumatthew.com) is a photo-based artist in Providence, Rhode Island. She is represented by SepiaEYE, New York and Tasveer, India. She is also a professor of art specializing in photography and director of the Center for the Humanities at the University of Rhode Island.

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Arab Image Foundation: J/F 01  
Bonfils: N/D 83  
Diness: J/A 04  
Early recordings: S/O 93

 **Millennial Cities.** Carney Gavin. Thornwillow Press, forthcoming 2013.

# Between SALT and SEA

Written by LOUIS WERNER

Photographed by DAVID H. WELLS

It is India's largest island, yet most of the year it's connected to the mainland on its northern and eastern sides by wide salt pans called *ranns*—a term derived from the Sanskrit word for “waste.” During monsoon season, roughly from July to October, the ranns are often flooded, waist deep in places.

For a year after India's independence in 1947, Kutch, now a district of the state of Gujarat, kept its own currency, the kori; its own sovereign, the maharao; and its own time zone, a half-hour earlier than Delhi, India's capital. It takes its name from the local word for tortoise, *katchhua*, and it does resemble a tortoise floating upside down in the Arabian Sea. It is the sea, which links it more closely to East African and Arabian ports than overland routes have ever tied it to India's hinterlands, that best defines Kutch's history.

Though Kutch has been increasingly integrated into Gujarat for the past 60 years, it is still something of a place apart, not least for the unique geology that makes it an active earthquake zone in the ongoing slow-motion smash-up of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates. From yet another angle, it can be viewed as a cultural parallel to the theory of island biodiversity, which posits unique

evolutionary paths for the flora and fauna of isolated areas. For Kutch, this distinctiveness is most clearly expressed in the differently embroidered and dyed dress styles of its ethnic groups—Rabaris, Ahirs, Jats and others—each as unique as the gaudy plumage of different birds of paradise.

L. F. Rushbrook Williams, author of *The Black Hills: Kutch in History and Legend*, called Kutch a “strange, semi-island country” that presents “an epitome of the larger story of India—constant invasions, a fusion of cultures ... with a remarkable wealth of remembered history, little of which has been written down.” The 1880 edition of the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, a handbook for the British Raj, noted that the “national character” of Kutch was more distinct than any of the government's other dependencies.

This regional separation is personified in the lives of two legendary men from the 18th century who are still highly venerated today,





Visitors take in the view of Bhuj, capital of Kutch district, from the bell tower of the Prag Mahal, an Italianate palace completed in 1865 under Rao Pragmalji II, ancestor of Maharao Pragmalji III, right. His family's rule in Kutch dates from 1549, although his position as maharao became honorary when Kutch joined India in 1948.

and who were once regarded as the protectors of travelers venturing to and away from Kutch. Mekarana Dada, along with his dog, Motia, and his donkey, Lalia, was said to rescue those stranded in the Great Rann's salt flats, much as Swiss monks and their dogs rescued snow-bound travelers in the Great St. Bernard Pass in days gone by. Farther to the south and facing seaward, Murad Shah al-Bokhari, who came to Kutch from landlocked Central Asia and is buried in the port of Mundra, was said to protect sailors setting out across the Arabian Sea.

To arrive in Kutch from eastern Gujarat, one must cross a bridge over the Little Rann at the head of the Gulf of Kutch, home to the *khur*, or wild Indian ass (*Equus hemionus khur*). The khur's





Nearly destroyed in the 2001 Gujarat earthquake that cost Kutch some 20,000 lives was the mid-18th-century Aina Mahal, the former residence and offices of the maharaos in Bhuj.



Hard-hit also was Bhadli village, where 85 percent of the homes were lost. Umar Farouk, Pachanbhai Gharvar, Lavji Lakamshah and Jyotiben Gouswami organized collaboration among Muslim, Hindu and Jain residents to rebuild—and earned an Aga Khan Award for Architecture nomination.

cousins include related subspecies in Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Persia and Tibet—some on the endangered species list published by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. About 4000 khurs live in and around the 5000-square-kilometer (1930 sq mi) Wild Ass Sanctuary in the Little Rann.

The Moghul emperor Jahangir (1569–1627) wrote in his memoirs about hunting and eating wild asses that “most people eat it with relish, but it is repugnant to my nature.” A 19th-century Englishwoman said she could lasso a khur foal but never fully tame one, and because of this doubted Herodotus’s account that the Indians had trained them to pull chariots. Today the animals are so approachable that hunting them would be quite unsporting.



Often within sight of the khur are 40,000 salt workers who come to the Little Rann in the fall months, after the monsoon’s flood has dried, to pump groundwater into hand-dug evaporation pans. The harsh sun dries the saline water, finally resulting in salt crystals—a staple made famous around the world by



Mohandas Gandhi's march to the sea from Gujarat's capital, Ahmedabad, in 1930 to protest Britain's monopolistic salt tax. Because the Little Rann produces almost half of

“our dynasty dates back to the founding of the House of Tudor,” an arch reminder that Kutch's royal line stretches back more than 400 years, further than that of Henry VIII, and is still counting.

Maharao Pragmalji III, 77 years old and ramrod straight, is the 19th in that line. His title is now strictly honorific, the family's sovereignty having been surrendered when Kutch joined the Indian Union in 1948. Yet he still wields moral authority.

**Native to the land surrounding the salt flats of the Little Rann, some 4000 *khur* or Indian wild asses live in sanctuary.**

India's salt, it is fair to say that something of Kutch and its nearby districts is on every Indian table.

Dotted throughout the Little Rann and Great Rann are the *bets*, inhabited islands rising above the salt-pan floors. They are just “offshore” from what might be called “mainland Kutch,” at whose center is the town of Bhuj, chosen by the ruling family as their seat of power in 1549. In Bhuj's walled city center is the royal precinct, placed on the World Monuments Fund's endangered-sites list after an earthquake measuring 7.9 devastated the area in 2001.

Here is the 18th-century Aina Mahal, or Palace of Mirrors, its central room encrusted floor to ceiling with reflective glass, gilded stucco and Delft tiles. The tiles are a tribute to Holland by Ramsingh Malam, a local sailor saved from shipwreck off the African coast by a homeward-bound Dutch vessel. In Holland, he learned the European decorative arts before returning to Kutch as the maharao's personal architect.

One of the room's highlights is an ivory-inlaid door, which some years ago the Victoria and Albert Museum asked to borrow for an exhibition in London. On display beside it is a letter from the maharao's secretary declining the request, citing the significance of his family's long uninterrupted rule. “As you know,” the letter explains,





During religious riots in 2002 that tore eastern Gujarat apart, he made sure that Kutch remained calm. “I am not much for using the telephone,” he says, speaking in his palace garden, “but in one day I made more calls than I’ve ever made in my life, touching base with religious leaders all over the district, making sure they kept a lid on trouble. I told them we are all Kutchis first.

“Sindh [in Pakistan] is closer to us by sea than [the Gujarati capital of] Ahmedabad is by land,” he continues. “Arabia was always our best trading partner, because our sailors could catch every breath of wind to get there.” Nonetheless, the maharao has high praise for two modes of land travel—a local breed of horse, its bloodline now sadly lost, similar to the famed “Kattywar” cross of Arabians and Indian ponies, and, more surprisingly perhaps, imported American cars. Snapshots of the maharao on horseback and behind the wheels of his beloved Corvettes and Studebakers hang on the palace walls.

**K**utch is firmly on the Indian textile tourism trail these days, and much credit for that goes to the Shrujan Foundation, named for the Sanskrit word meaning “creativity.” Chanda Shroff founded Shrujan in 1968 amid a long drought in the region, during which women in a village she knew were forced to sell off their finely embroidered clothes to put food on the table.

“These women were desperate,” says Shroff, winner of the 2006 Rolex Award for Enterprise in cultural heritage. “They had already

The maharao touched base with religious leaders all over the district, making sure they kept a lid on trouble. “We are all Kutchis first,” he told them.

sold off their jewelry and even their animals. Their prized embroidery was the last to go.”

She helped them sell their family pieces at good prices in Mumbai, but decided it would be better to assist them to produce directly for the market. Now working in 120 villages, Shrujan promotes textiles as a steady source of income for women, organizing production teams around a “pattern library” of 1000 embroidered panels. Each panel represents a different technique, ethnic design or material, and the panels are used as teaching tools when the foundation’s bus visits villages where such fine handiwork might otherwise be forgotten.

**O**ne local textile tradition strictly in the domain of men is *ajrakh*, a block-printed and resist-dyed cloth used for shawls and turbans. The word comes from the Arabic for blue, *azraq*, after its primarily indigo hues. Dr. Ismail Mohmed Khatri, who holds an honorary

**Systematically collected from evaporation pans by some 40,000 workers, salt from Kutch’s Little Rann represents nearly half of all the salt consumed throughout India. In the 1930’s, Mohandas Gandhi made the staple symbolic of independence with his famous “Salt March” from the nearby Gujarati capital of Ahmedabad to the sea, in protest against a British salt tax.**





Kutch has been known for more than 500 years for *ajrakh*—block-printed and resist-dyed cloth used for shawls and turbans. The word comes from the Arabic for blue, *azraq*, after its famous indigo-based hues, lower.

doctorate of arts from England's De Montfort University, counts back 11 generations to the year 1634, when his family came from Sindh at the invitation of the third maharao, who wanted to promote local crafts. He gave the family its choice of lands with the



best quality groundwater, cloth-dyeing being an especially thirsty endeavor with a low tolerance for impurities.

After the 2001 earthquake increased the amount of dissolved iron in the well water, the family relocated to a place aptly named Ajrakhpur. A visitor to the family compound can see some of the 20-odd individual steps in producing the cloth—from double-sided printing with wooden blocks and pre-soaking the cloth in a mix of camel dung, soda ash and castor oil, to mixing the dye-resistant pastes from gum and millet flour and blending secondary dyes from an array of natural sources: yellow from turmeric, brown from rhubarb, orange from pomegranate skin, red from madder root and black from a boiled syrup of scrap iron, chickpea flour and sugar-cane molasses.

Small fragments of Kutch-made ajrakh more than 500 years old have been found at Fustat, Cairo's first Islamic settlement; the largest collection, some 1200 scraps, is at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, England.

Curators there think that the many tailoring and mending seams in the pieces indicate that ajrakh was a utilitarian garment cloth rather than a luxury good, and that it was desirable in Egypt because of the high quality of its colorfast dyes and the intricacy of its designs.

The fragments came to light early in the 20th century, offered for sale by Egyptian antiquities dealers. The scraps were identified as of Indian origin when their designs were compared to similar motifs from the ancient Indus Valley sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro and from Kutch's own Dholavira. Many designs appeared to have been made specifically for the Middle East trade, such as a circular pattern called the *riyal* by Kutchi dyers, after the Arab coin.

The earthquake that prompted the Ismail Khatri family's move to Ajrakhpur devastated wide swaths of the district, killing some 20,000 people. Bhadali village, with a population of 1200 Hindus, Muslims and Jains, was hit particularly hard: 85 percent of its 325 houses were flattened. But under the direction of a Mumbai architectural team, the villagers helped to design three types of modular homes that they could construct economically.

In a recent tour, town elders Umar Farouk, head of a textile-dyeing family, and Lavji Lakamshah, a Jain, were accompanied by council president Jyotiben Gouswami, a female priest at the local Hindu temple. A visitor was curious to know why their village was nominated for an Aga Khan Award for Architecture and received honorable mentions from the International Union of Architects and



**Ismail Mohmed Khatri, left, discusses samples of hand-printed cloth in his office. He counts back 11 generations to the year 1634 when his family came from Sindh (now in Pakistan) at the invitation of Kutch's third maharao to promote crafts—especially textiles. His efforts have earned him an honorary doctoral degree from England's De Montfort University.**

the Social Economic Environmental Design Network, which sponsors projects worldwide.

“We had not one squabble over access to funds or materials,” says Gouswami. “We always worked side-by-side here, neighbor helping neighbor, so our village was rebuilt before any others nearby.” The fact that Bhadali’s temple and mosque were each repaired with help from the other’s religious community underscores this spirit of cooperation.

A Kutchi town hard-hit by an earlier earthquake, this one in 1819, was Lakhpat, a fort site on the Kori Creek’s tidal flat facing the Pakistan border. The tremor was named the Allah Bund, or “Dam of God,” after a 100-kilometer-long (66-mi), six-meter-high (20') wall of sand and clay it threw up along the fault. In Ahmedabad, nearly 500 kilometers (300 mi) distant, the quake toppled the main mosque’s minarets and gave the so-called shaking minarets of the Sidi Bashir mosque, situated just behind the railroad

station, a harder rattling than the loudest train whistle ever did.

Lakhpat was once an important tax-collection port for Kutch’s sea trade. The 1819 earthquake blocked the port, however, and caused the population within its walls to dwindle to today’s paltry few resident fishermen, among them 22-year-old Rajjak Nur Muhammad, at home nursing a stingray wound in his foot. A group of Sikh pilgrims is here, too, visiting to honor their religion’s founder, Guru Nanak (1469–1539), who is said to have rested in Lakhpat en route to Makkah.

Soldiers from India’s Border Security Force climb Lakhpat Fort’s creek-side towers daily to scan the northern horizon, and weekly they make the difficult trip by boat and on foot across the flats to sign the

register at the Pakistan boundary post 35 kilometers (22 mi) away. At the fort’s main gateway on the opposite side, however, an old wooden door studded with sharp iron bosses lies askew: Apparently the Indian military has no fear of invasion by land.

The fact that Bhadali’s temple and mosque were both repaired with help from each other’s religious community underscores Kutch’s historic spirit of cooperation.

A Kutchi legend holds that the world is built upon the head of a snake whose tail is not firmly nailed down, so its constant writhing produces tremors in the earth. Professor M. G. Thakkar, the foremost expert on Kutch's seismology, does not subscribe to that theory, of course, but recently a fuzzy shape on a satellite photo of the area did catch his attention. A field trip to its location on a mudflat revealed the outline of a long-forgotten five-sided fort that had been nearly swallowed by the Allah Bund earthquake, as if that mythical snake had regurgitated its meal.

Thakkar is intrigued by yet another buried legend: the exact location of the Saraswati, a semi-mythical river that flowed from the Himalayas, according to passing references in ancient Indian texts. The Saraswati is thought to have followed the bed of the Ghaggar River in its upper course, but, in the words of the *Mahabharata*, it then "disappeared and reappeared" several times—as monsoonal-flow rivers are prone to do—before "jumping into the sea" somewhere in the Great Rann. Thakkar would like to find evidence of the

## Kutch is firmly on the Indian textile tourism trail these days.

river's high-mountain origin, such as a continuous line of alluvium rich in mica sand in the underground strata.

It is quite likely that Alexander the Great set foot not far from Lakhpat in 325 BCE, when his chronicler Arrian says he descended the easternmost branch of the Indus in search of access to the sea to send his fleet home under the admiral Nearchus. Arrian wrote of this Indus branch forming a lake just before it reached the sea, "spreading wide over a flat country," which sounds much like the Great Rann when it floods.

Strabo the geographer quoted Onesicritus, one of Alexander's helmsmen, as saying that the coast here "abounded in swamps, particularly at the mouths of the river, owing to the mud, the tides, and the want of land breezes." British writer Michael Wood visited Lakhpat 10 years ago to research his book *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great*, choosing to come ashore there because it is

**Near Bhuj, in the village of Dhaneti, a women's embroidery co-op is one of 120 groups organized by the nonprofit Shrujan ("Creativity") Foundation, which has compiled a "pattern library" of some 1000 embroidery panels from throughout Kutch.**





Left: **Bhadali village's textile trade is built on a "tie-and-dye" technique. Here, clamps prevent dye from penetrating the compressed parts of the bundled or folded fabric, resulting in brilliant patterns now familiar worldwide, lower.**



the first place downstream that is underlain by rock, not mud, thus providing a dry landing.

Onesicritus, meet Baba Malam, an 83-year-old navigator and ship captain far more widely traveled in the Arabian Sea than any Greek in Alexander's navy, and now a pensioner in the port town of Mandvi, not far east along the coast from Lakhpat. *Baba* is an honorific title, while *malam* comes from the Arabic word *mu'allim*, meaning "teacher" or "one learned in a trade," and understood here as "master of the sea."

Baba Malam's 60 years of experience—as often sailing to South India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka as to ports in East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula—were fraught with danger. His father drowned in a typhoon off Mangalore in 1964. A storm on May 20, 1963 struck Salalah, Oman, on the Indian Ocean, while he was ashore, swamping his ship and drowning 12 of his crew. The exact dates of such storms, at least in the minds of Kutchi sailors, are as firmly remembered as the dates of earthquakes are in the minds of Kutchi villagers.

Today, with his carefully folded harbor charts to Karachi, Colombo and Goa, alongside a well-oiled Kelvin and Wilfrid White Co. sextant and a much thumbled edition of *Norie's Nautical Tables*, Baba Malam is still ready to ship out at a moment's notice.

The words of Mandvi historian Manubhai Pandhi, "Our culture is wet with the sea," seem most apt when standing at the town's dhow-lined creek as the tide flows in. The Englishwoman Marianna Postans came ashore at Mandvi in 1830. In her book *Cutch: Or, Random Sketches*, based on several years of residence, she wrote that the local mariners were a "most fearless and enterprising race" and that "the malams were singularly intelligent and well informed."

All about are boatyards with new ships being built and old ships under repair, skeletal hulks waiting to be broken up for parts and some simply abandoned at the water's edge. The sounds of hammers and drills fill the air, as do the heady fragrances of mutton tallow and groundnut oils, used as preservatives, and freshly sawn, hardwood ship lumber—Burmese teak for decking, Malaysian sal for below-waterline planking and naturally bent Kutchi babool (acacia) for the curved ribs.

The iconic sailing vessel of the Arabian Sea, the transom-stern oceangoing dhow, has been replaced here by speedier boats with V-shaped hulls, built in the style of those from the south Indian port of Tuticorin. But even their construction relies on the skills of traditional Gujarati artisans, in the form of handmade iron nails from Rajkot and cotton sails sewn in Porbandar,

**This embroidery is for sale at a typical roadside crafts shop in Khavadi, in northern Kutch.**



**Great-grandson of a shipwright who built for the Zanzibar trade, Ibrahim Mistry of Mandvi now builds handcrafted, luxury wooden boats for an international clientele.**

the seaside birthplace of Mohandas Gandhi.

An even wider array of hull designs can be seen in the miniature fleet of 86-year-old model-ship-builder Shivji Budah Fofini. His workshop sign identifies him as “Ex-gunner of Mandvi port,” but he tells stories of an earlier life from the age of eight, visiting harbors from East Africa’s Beira, Zanzibar, Lamu and Mogadishu, to the nearer Baluchi ports of Gwadar, Pasni and Ras Ormara, with Abu Dhabi, Bandar Abbas and Basra in the Arabian Gulf in between.

Fofini’s models include local *machvo* fishing skiffs, Indus River creek boats called *hourros* and that workhorse of Kutchi cargo ships, the *vaban*. “It was nearly always 42 days outbound, around the time of the Hindu Holi festival, carrying mostly Malabar coir [coconut fiber], and 32 days inbound at the time of the Diwali festival, carrying mostly Zanzibari cloves,” he remembers, his mind stirred by the thought that this year’s Diwali is soon to start.

Cargoes in earlier centuries were far more varied. As historian Rushbrook Williams put it in one of the more exotic shopping lists ever written, “Mandvi argosies brought bullion, grain, timber, rhinoceros hides, cardamoms, pepper, ginger, silks, and drugs from Malabar, Mocha, Muscat, and the African coast, taking in return the cotton, cloth, sugar, oil, butter, and alum of Kutch and its hinterland.”

**“Our culture is wet with the sea,” wrote Mandvi historian Manubhai Pandhi, and few today know this as well as Baba Malam, left, who after 60 years at sea has earned his name. It comes from the Arabic *mu’allim*, “one learned in his trade.”**





Though wooden *dhow*s long ago lost dominance of Kutch's sea trade with East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and Persia, the port of Mandvi's 400-year-old wooden-boat industry continues.

Local handiwork made from that rhino hide can still be seen in the Kutch Museum's collection of royal shields, some studded with semiprecious stones.

With a slowdown in business from cargo carriers, shipwright Ibrahim Mistry has recently taken on a new kind of client: eccentric sea-loving owners of luxury craft built to exacting, hand-hewn standards. Not long ago, his boatyard completed a transom-stern, two-masted sailing dhow with carved fittings for an American who wanted to sail the Arabian Sea in the most historically correct manner possible in this century.

Mistry will soon be undertaking a big job for an expatriate Gujarati—a 33.5-meter (110'), three-masted schooner fitted with 10 sails, designed by a top American marine architect who personally chose him as his builder. "My great-grandfather was a simple farmer who came to work in the yards here, making dhows for the Zanzibar trade," says Mistry, unrolling the new boat's computer-generated blueprints. "What would he say if he could see me now, building passenger schooners and dhows

for wealthy foreigners? Not much has changed in all these years. After all, Kutch does face the sea." 🌐



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PART 5:

# A Portrait Gallery

WRITTEN BY TIM MACKINTOSH-SMITH

TITLE CALLIGRAPHY BY SORAYA SYED

This is the fifth 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



**BELONGING AS THEY DO TO A CULTURE** IN which drawing, painting and the other figurative arts have usually played a minor role, Arabic speakers and writers have long been masters of the word-portrait. From strange and striking pictures of the beloved and the dead in pre-Islamic poetry, through formal portraits in heavyweight biographical dictionaries, to the more impressionistic sketches that “illustrate” the pages of almost every Arabic book, a lot of the literature of the Arabs has to do with people.

Most of the passages translated below are at the impressionistic end of the scale. The first, though, gives a short but detailed physical likeness—and shows why, until quite recently, such descriptions were necessary as records of a subject's appearance. Seventy-five years ago, but only half a mile from where I'm writing this, Nazih al-Mu'ayyad al-'Azm, a Syrian traveler from a distinguished Damascus family, has just entered a room in the palace of the Imam of Yemen:

**T**here sat a man with a countenance grave yet luminous, of medium build and brown complexion. His round face was somewhat marked by smallpox, and he had a high forehead, a small mouth, a large head and dark eyes that sparkled with magnetism and light. His nose was short and broad, his beard black and round, and his hands and feet small.

*Imam Yahya Hamid al-Din, born in 1869, led the resistance against the Ottoman Turkish rulers of Yemen, eventually shared power with them and was sole ruler of Yemen from 1918 until his assassination in 1948.*

Nazih assumed the man was a court functionary. He took a seat and waited while the official dealt with some papers.

He was stamping them with a personal seal. Out of the corner of my eye, I managed to get a glimpse of the wording on one of the impressions—and saw that it was made by the seal of His Majesty the Imam. I realized immediately that I was in the royal presence, and sat up straight.

After a short conversation, the imam asked if the traveler had any requests. Knowing that the mountain realm was highly

conservative, Nazih asked the ruler for permission to take photographs.

“You may photograph whatever and whomever you wish,” he said, “except me....” Never in his entire life has the imam permitted anyone to make an image of him. The pictures of him that have appeared in various magazines and newspapers are purely imaginary.

*This may be a dig at the famous Lebanese-American writer Ameen Rihani, who in 1924 published a pen drawing of the imam, subsequently much reproduced. The French filmmaker René Clément tried to get a shot of the imam riding in a covered carriage for his 1937 film of Yemen. Only the potentates' beard is visible, by now a ghostly white....*

Of course, there's more to most word-portraits than physical features. The next, a miniature of Salah al-Din's (Saladin) multitasking chief minister al-Qadi al-Fadil, manages to combine a brief physical

likeness with a few deft touches of character—and, somehow, to catch the spirit of a whole cultural setting.

**I** saw a thin old man, all head and heart, simultaneously writing and dictating to two secretaries. The force of concentration needed to produce the words caused every possible shade of movement to play across his face and lips. Indeed, it was as if he was writing with every part of his body.

The minister questioned his visitor on some abstruse points of Qur'anic syntax,

and not once during this did he interrupt his writing and dictation.

Sometimes, the briefest anecdote throws a memorable spotlight on some aspect of character. Here is the 13th-century biographer Ibn

Khallikan on another bookish man, the early Muslim scholar al-Zuhri, and—just as importantly—his long-suffering wife:

When he sat at home, he would surround himself with books, and would become so absorbed in them that he would forget all other worldly concerns. One day his wife said to him, "I swear by God that these books are more trouble to me than three co-wives!"

Writer and reader might not always agree on what a certain characteristic is. In the next extract, the biographer wants to illustrate his subject's naïveté.

**O**ne day, Ibn 'Abd al-Nur stuck his hand in the outlet of a cistern and happened to find an enormous toad sitting in it—at which he called out to his friends, "Come over here! I've found a squashy stone!"

Naïveté? Or is it what you might call a surreal take on things? No one, however, could disagree that the following sketch of a

scholar of Khurasan province in eastern Iran, Hatim al-Asamm ("the Deaf"), portrays anything less than the perfect gentleman:

*By the 13th-century cosmographer al-Qazwini.*

He was not in reality deaf, but got his name from having once pretended to be so. The reason was that a woman who had come to ask his opinion on some matter or other happened involuntarily to break wind. In order that she would not feel embarrassed (and much to her relief), he said to her, "I'm hard of hearing and I can't catch what you're saying, so please speak up."

Arabic lends itself to painting "group portraits" in big, broad strokes. Here is the 11th-century author Ibn Hazm on the Muslim

inhabitants of his native Spain (and, indirectly, on quite a lot of the rest of humanity):

*The fame of the ancient Nabataeans as agriculturalists went back to an early 10th-century book on the subject, "translated from the Chaldaean"—but later unmasked as a forgery.*

They are Arabs in their ancestry, nobility, haughtiness, eloquence of speech, blitheness of spirit, opposition to injustice, refusal to submit to humiliation and freedom from subservience; Indians in their extraordinary attention to and love of the sciences; Baghdadis in their fondness for novelty, the care they take over their cleanliness, the delicacy of their character, the sharpness and subtlety of their intelligence and the copiousness of their ideas; Nabataeans in their ability to locate sources of water and in the diligence with which they apply themselves to the planting of seedlings and trees and to agriculture in general; Chinese in the perfection of their various crafts of manufacture and the excellence of their pictorial arts; and Turks in their waging of wars, in their development of the weapons of war and their close attention to all the duties incumbent on warriors.

*Here by their compatriot al-Qazwini.*

Sometimes a portrait, and particularly a group portrait, can home in on a single feature, exaggerate it and end up as caricature. The

unfortunate townspeople of Isfahan in Iran, for example, have always had a particular characteristic enlarged:

*The piece comes from an autobiographical sketch by the Iraqi physician 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi (died 1231). It was said that al-Qadi al-Fadil's short treatises, alone, if bound together, would have filled a hundred volumes. (And we complain about information overload!)*

*Although very few have more than one, Muslim men are permitted to have up to four wives at a time.*

*The 14th-century Spanish scholar and politician Ibn al-Khatib. Here, in one of those heavyweight biographical dictionaries (nearly 2000 printed pages, listing anyone of any interest who ever had anything to do with Granada), he is writing about a 13th-century scholar of Malaga called Ibn 'Abd al-Mur. "There are morals to be drawn from the universe of God Almighty," Ibn al-Khatib says after this anecdote, "and the strangest part of that universe is the world of man."*

*The allegation struck. Six centuries later, the English Persianist E. G. Broune said that misers in Persia were said proverbially to be "as mean as the merchants of Isfahan, who put their cheese in a bottle and rub their bread on the outside to give it a flavor."*

**I**t has been said that the people of Isfahan are characterized by stinginess.... The story is told of a visitor to the city who gave a loaf of bread as alms to a blind man. On receiving it, the blind man exclaimed, "May God make your stay in Isfahan a happy one!" Hearing this, the visitor said, "How do you know I'm not a local?" And the blind man said, "Because I've been sitting here for 30 years and not a single Isfahani has ever given me a whole loaf of bread!"

But when the caricature is by a native of the place, we might be more inclined to take it at face value.

*Al-Khansa flourished in the last decades before the Islamic era.*

Returning from mass observation to individuals, some of the earliest Arabic literature focuses on people. In the following verses, the woman poet al-Khansa mourns her brother Sakhr, killed in

*Another more recent echo—this time from Laurence Binjori's 1914 poem "For the Fallen":*

*"At the going down of the sun and in the morning/We will remember them." Grief crosses centuries; so does poetry.*

Several of al-Khansa's elegies to Sakhr have survived, at least in part. Here, from another, are probably her most famous lines,

*Al-Mujahid had fallen out with the Mamluk rulers of Egypt and was, effectively, kidnapped by them while in Mekeah and taken to Cairo for this period.*

Indirectly, al-Khansa reveals much of herself in her elegies. But Arabic literature is also rich in "full-face" images of women. The

*The finest odes by seven celebrated pre-Islamic poets were given this title, supposedly because they were inscribed and hung up in the sacred enclosure at Makkah. (Sad to say, this may be a later legend.) Imru' al-Qays's ode is the oldest of the seven. A son of the king of the Arabian confederation of Kindah, he led a mobile and eventful life, and died of poison at Ankara in about 540.*

Hamadhan's my hometown and of all towns it's the best; In some ways though, I have to say, it's worse than all the rest: In looks, its youngsters seem like wizened oldsters and, in truth, Its older generation is as brainless as its youth.

Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani wasn't afraid to be blunt about his fellow-townsmen:

*Badi' al-Zaman, "the Wonder of the Age," earned his nickname from his brilliant Maqamat—tales in rhyming prose about a fictional vagabond and master of disguise, Abu'l-Fath of Alexandria.*

inter-tribal fighting. Such an elegy was for public recitation—but, powered by the intensity of love and loss, no less personal for that:

Sakhr it was who led when they rode out,  
Sakhr it was who when they hungered was their remedy,  
Sakhr it was from whom the other leaders took their lead,  
As if he were a beacon-fire upon a mountain-top.  
Patient under pressure, handsome, self-controlled, a perfect man—  
And when the day of battle dawned, a brand ablaze with war!

*Sakhr embodies here all the components of muru'ah—the manly virtue of the ancient Arabs. Such dirges by women poets have a long history in many cultures. The late Patrick Leigh Fermor quoted a Greek example, "unspeakably sad and beautiful," extemporized at the burial of an English airman shot down in the 1940s: "He shone among thousands," it begins, "like the sun...."*

beautiful in their spareness:

The rising of the sun brings Sakhr to mind,  
And I remember him with every setting sun.

more formal ones tend to be of the great and good, like this portrait of Jihat Salah, mother of a 14th-century sultan:

*From al-Khazraji's Pearl-Strings, a history of the Rasulid dynasty of Yemen. "Jihat Salah," literally "the direction of Salah"—Salah being the high-ranking eunuch in charge of the lady's household—is a polite way of referring to her without mentioning her name.*

**S**he was a happy woman, intelligent, right-guided, resolute, forbearing, bountiful, generous, blessed with political acumen and the qualities of leadership, noble of soul and lofty of mind. During the absence in Egypt for 14 months of her son, Sultan al-Malik al-Mujahid, when she acted as regent in the land, she kept the country in order and united the soldiery. And never in all that goodly age did the land enjoy greater fertility, security, equity and general beneficence than it did in that year. She left behind works that benefited religion, and was fond of religious scholars and pious people, conferring favors on them and showing them great honor. She would also do the rounds of the people's houses, inquiring into their conditions and liberally distributing gifts.

*These included a number of schools and mosques, built and endowed at her expense.*

Seldom does history produce a woman like her, or one more worthy of the lines of Abu 'l-Tayyib al-Mutanabbi:

*"Sun," shams, and "moon," here hital, are in Arabic grammar respectively feminine and masculine—the opposites of their genders in many other languages.*

If all the women in the world were like her, then In excellence, for sure, they'd far surpass the men. The fact that "sun" is feminine is not a slight, Nor does the gender of the moon add to his light.

*The great 10th-century poet. The lines come from an elegy on the mother of his friend and patron Sayf al-Dawlah, ruler of Aleppo.*

Of course, the most intimate portraits of women are to be found not in court panegyrics, but in the odes of love-struck poets. One of the oldest pieces of Arabic we have, Imru' al-Qays's "Suspended Ode," contains a description of the poet-prince's beloved from which the lines below are taken.

No translation, it has to be said, could ever catch the wild and thrilling strangeness of this poem; any attempt is like trying to tie down "the weaving of the winds," as a phrase near the beginning of the ode puts it. Many Arab poetry-lovers would say it has never been bettered. They may be right.

Slender, white of skin, her belly flat and taut,  
 her breastbone burnished like a looking-glass,  
 She looks askance, reveals a shapely profile; then a guarding  
 glance, as of a wild gazelle of Wajrah with her young;  
 Reveals a neck as graceful as an oryx's  
 when high she arches it, not unadorned,  
 And hair cascading black to grace her back, intensely black  
 and hanging dense and tangled as the bunches of the  
 palm-tree fruit,  
 The tresses at her crown piled high in plaits—  
 a maze of straight and twisted ways where hairpins stray;  
 Reveals a waist as slim and pliant as a plaited rein,  
 a leg as limber as a reed-stem bending to the breeze . . .

*Wajrah is the name of a region two or three days' journey from Makkah on the route to al-Basrah. It was famous in early times for its rich supply of game.*

My favorite female prose-portrait is of a very different woman—the aged Lu'lu'ah, nanny to three generations of the Ibn Munqidh family in 12th-century Syria. Below, the memoirist 'Usamah ibn Munqidh—one of her second-generation charges—looks back on her at the end of his own long life.

For me, the portrait's candor, and the way it opens a glimpse into the sort of domestic space that is always closed to outsiders and thus eventually, inevitably, lost to time, makes it the literary equivalent of those intimate interiors by 17th-century Dutch painters like Vermeer.

"Pearl"

**L**u'lu'ah, God have mercy on her, was one of the best of women, much given to fasting, and upright in character. Time and again, however, she suffered from colic, and one day she had such a violent attack that she passed out. She remained unconscious for two days and two nights, during which we all gave up hope that she would ever recover. But she suddenly regained consciousness and exclaimed, "There is no god but God! What a strange time I've had of it! I met all our loved ones who have died, and they told me such strange things. And one of the things they told me was that I'd never have the colic again!" She lived on long after this incident—to nearly a hundred, in fact—and, indeed, never again suffered from colic.

Lu'lu'ah, God have mercy on her, was always scrupulous in performing her prayers. One day I went into the apartment I had set aside for her in my house, and found her sitting in front of a basin, washing a mantle she used for her prayers. I said, "Mother, what are you doing?" and she replied, "My boy, people with cheesy hands must have got hold of this mantle, because whenever I wash it, it smells of cheese." I said, "Let me have a look at the soap you're using." She took the soap out—and I saw that what she thought was soap was in fact a lump of cheese! She'd been scrubbing the kerchief with it all this time, and it was this that had been giving off the smell. So I said, "Mother, this isn't soap—it is cheese." And she had a look at it and said, "You're right, my boy. And there was me thinking it was soap."

*Muslim women often keep a special set of clothes for their devotions. "Mantle" and the Arabic word it translates, mandil, are etymological cousins; perhaps "kerchief" or "headscarf"—as in the Spanish mantilla—might be more accurate.*

*'Usamah calls his old nanny "Mother" out of endearment and respect, regardless of any social difference. In the next sentence, regardless of age, he is still burayy to Lu'lu'ah—literally "my little boy."*

Fearing that he's slipped too far into his own anecdote, 'Usamah then quotes a rhyming proverb, "*Al-italah tajlib al-malalah*"—which means something like, "A drawn-out tale will soon go

stale." Personally, I could never have enough of such tales, such portraits. In them the people of the past live on.



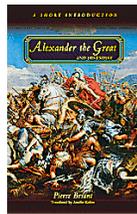
*Even the best efforts at translation often entail some loss. However, the pleasing sound of the original Arabic title of this series, *Tarjuman al-Kunuz*, makes up for some of the literary shortfall when it becomes the syntactically accurate but less euphonious English "Interpreter of Treasures." *Tarjuman* 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 Battutah, 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.

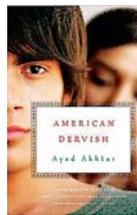
**Soraya Syed** (www.artofthepen.com) is a calligrapher and graphic designer in London.

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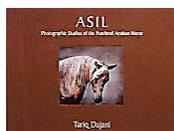
**Alexander the Great and His Empire: A Short Introduction.** Pierre Briant. Amélie Kuhrt, tr. 2010, Princeton, 978-0-69114-194-7, \$39.95 hb. The Achaemenid Persian empire, founded by Cyrus the Great and conquered by Macedonia’s Alexander the Great, was one of

the world’s most impressive political and cultural entities prior to the Roman Empire. Many scholars now argue it had a major impact on the formation of Greek identity and the western tradition, and thus substantially influenced the West. Briant has dedicated his work to promoting this understanding. He has updated his book, which appeared in French in 1974, in light of new scholarship, added an appendix showing new developments in the field and included an introductory bibliography. The main text focuses on how Alexander endeavored to become an Achaemenid ruler, maintaining the political and economic structures of the conquered empire, offering favors to local Iranian political figures and encouraging his new subjects to view him as the successor to the fugitive King Darius. Alexander’s success in building his empire was due largely to the fact that he changed little in the lands he conquered. —ROBERT W. LEBLING



**American Dervish.** Ayad Akhtar. 2012, Little, Brown, 978-0-31618-331-4, \$24.99 hb. Ayad Akhtar’s *American Dervish* is a bittersweet coming-of-age story about a Pakistani–American boy in 1980’s America whose life is colored by conflicts between identity and religion.

Akhtar won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his play *Disgraced*, which deals with similar societal tensions. Hayat, the protagonist in *Dervish*, lives with immigrant parents—a physician father and a housewife mother. Born in the US, he has assimilated for the most part, but his home life is stressful. To put it mildly, his parents bicker. Then Mina, a charismatic and headstrong Pakistani woman, arrives with her young son to live with Hayat’s family and make a new life in America. At first, all goes well. But Hayat falls for Mina when she teaches him about the Qur’an. When a rival enters her life, he acts to force the couple apart, propelling Mina toward a cruel marriage with another man. Akhtar’s portrayal of Hayat’s maturation amid his travails makes a compelling read. —BRIAN CLARK



**Asil: Photographic Studies of the Purebred Arabian Horse.** Tariq Dajani, photog. 2013, Medina Publishing, 978-0-95702-338-3, £75 hb. In Arabic, *asil* signifies

purity, nobility and authenticity and, without question, the Arabian horses shown in these evocative photographs display all those qualities. A thoughtful photographer, Tariq Dajani concentrates his focus on the expressive eyes and picturesque stances of his subjects. In so doing, he captures the essence of the Arabian: its high spirits, delightful personality and quick intelligence. Most of the animals portrayed are highly bred show horses from the US, Europe and the Middle East. A few, however, are flat-racing or endurance horses, while

others are the pride of stables in the Gulf region, where ancient bloodlines are carefully preserved. The text, by photographer and poet John Wood, is minimal, but the effect of *Asil* is enormous. This is a book to be paged through again and again with ever-growing admiration for the talent of Dajani, and the unforgettable spirit and beauty of the Arabian horse. —JANE WALDRON GRUTZ



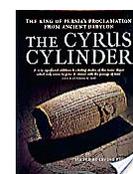
**Becoming American? The Forging of Arab and Muslim Identity in Pluralist America.** Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad. 2011, Baylor, 978-1-60258-406-8, \$24.95 hb.

Yvonne Haddad has added to her outstanding portfolio of American–Muslim studies with this well-written and fascinating book that is partially based on her 2004 lecture “Not Quite American? The Shaping of Arab and Muslim Identity in the United States.” She parlays the book’s title question into three parts: how Arab and Muslim identity was shaped; the approach to pluralism; and Islam in North America, primarily focusing on American Muslims’ arrival in politics. No one but Haddad could accessibly synchronize so many cited sources and map such a wealth of generational and ethnic information—all in less than 100 pages. That this veteran scholar is still so adept that any reader, even one knowing little about Islam or American studies, can come away from the book with attuned knowledge of the subject shows that Haddad’s sobriquet as the “mother” of the scholarly study of American Muslims is well founded. —ASMA HASAN



**Bye Bye Babylon: Beirut 1975–1979.** Lamia Ziade. Olivia Snajje, tr. 2012, Interlink Graphic, 978-1-56656-877-7, \$24.95 pb.

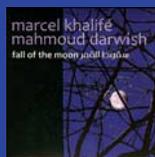
Lamia Ziade remembers the exact moment her carefree childhood in Beirut came to an end: April 13, 1975. That day, coming home from an afternoon in the countryside, she and her family stumbled across a sectarian battle that would ignite the Lebanese Civil War. “That lunch ... marks in time the last moment of innocence,” recalls Ziade in her memoir chronicling the first five years of the conflict. The often childlike simplicity of her illustrations heightens the sense of helplessness and terror she experienced as a young girl caught in the turmoil of war. Colorful images of favorite childhood treats—Bazooka gum, Kellogg’s Smacks cereal, marshmallows—are juxtaposed against a graphically illustrated list of weapons used by the many different factions. “My childhood was regulated by a pattern of dreadful events,” Ziade writes. “At the age of eight, I entered a complex world filled with contradictions and nuances, Lebanon being one of the best examples on the planet of this.” —PINEY KESTING



**The Cyrus Cylinder: The King of Persia’s Proclamation from Ancient Babylon.** Irving Finkel, ed. 2013, I.B. Tauris, 978-1-78076-063-6, \$35, hb.

The football-sized Cyrus Cylinder was found in Iraq in 1879 and taken to the British Museum (BM). Translated, it was the Achaemenid king Cyrus the Great’s proclamation as liberator of Baby-

# Suggestions **for** Listening



**Fall of the Moon.** Marcel Khalifé, Mahmoud Darwish (Nagam)

Marcel Khalifé, a legend of Lebanese music, spans the roles of folk

troubadour, classical orchestral composer, oud virtuoso and jazz experimenter with a gift for cinematic flourishes. This double CD set covers all that ground and more, while extending Khalifé's artistic collaboration with the late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. The first volume presents solo and small ensemble performances, soulful and virtuosic. The second volume is orchestral, often with a rich chorus of voices, but it is in the more spare performances on CDI that the intimacy between these two great artists resonates most deeply.



**TeraKaft.**

Kel Tamasheq (World Village)

The moody, swinging, hypnotic, guitar-driven folk rock of the Tuareg people of the Sahara has

proven a surprise hit with global rock fans in recent years. This group is younger than the genre's standard bearers. They are polished, but not too polished, for this music's appeal depends on a certain raw, almost amateur, esthetic. Some songs rock and drive with the

ambiance of a plugged-in village party; others feel more like the comforting musical fare you'd want hear around a desert campfire. All the songs purvey the poetry of a passionate nomadic people, beset by hard physical conditions and in political limbo in Northwest Africa.



**Radio Baghdad.** Fawzy Al-Aiedy (Institut du Monde Arabe)

Classically trained and musically adventurous, this vocalist, oud and oboe player left his native Iraq as a young man in 1971 to launch a maverick career in France. All these years, and some 10 CDs later, he has produced a fresh and vibrant set of songs that defy classification. Al-Aiedy's voice can be as supple as a classical singer's or as gruff as a *sha'abi* bard's. He blends Arab tradition with elements of rock, folk and pop as deftly as he blends ancient poetry with his own lyrics of love and longing for his homeland. Terrific band as well!



**Ô Houria (Liberty).**

Souad Massi (Wrasse)

This Algerian singer/songwriter has forged her own road, leaving behind the restrictions of Algeria in the late '90s to create a career in

France, merging western and Arab popular music forms with unmatched grace and ease. On her fifth CD, she creates chiming, gently

muscular folk rock, with her supple, lyrical voice at the center. That voice conveys openness, vulnerability and thistle-like toughness. In Massi's artful lyrics, the personal becomes political and nuance is everything. She longs for freedom from traditional society, even as she feels nostalgic for it, and her pleas for greater freedom in her country also play as love songs.



**Egyptian Project.**

Jerome Ettinger (Six Degrees)

French producer/vocalist Jerome Ettinger is smitten with North African music.

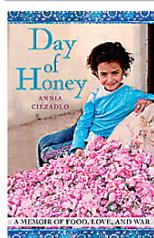
Here he collaborates with a

core ensemble of Egyptian traditional musicians and vocalists, and other guests, to create a merger of music from the Nile Delta and Cairo with contemporary electronic esthetics. The instrumental and vocal prowess (especially Sayed Emam's) on display is superb, and the fusion tasteful, if unadventurous. The beats are a bit square and lugubrious, but strong vocals and a rich sound palette—the lyrical flutter of the *kawala* flute, the buzzing of a double-reed horn, the crisp thump of frame drums, street sounds and the melodious swell of a small orchestra—make for an evocative sonic excursion.

**Banning Eyre** is a writer and broadcaster and Senior Editor at [www.afropop.org](http://www.afropop.org).

lon in 539 BCE. The text was thought to be unique until 140 years later when corroborative tablets were found in the museum, prompting a fresh evaluation and a 2010 conference, which resulted in this book. Five researchers contributed a chapter each, starting with the complete translation of the cuneiform text—which some have called the world's first declaration of human rights, partly because it freed Babylon's Jews, held by its ruler Nabonidus, to return to Palestine. The only book dedicated to this artifact, which is on a five-city tour of the US, it is a valuable scholarly source as well as a serious layman's description—including an exposé of the state of archaeological research in the late 19th century.

—GRAHAM CHANDLER



**Day of Honey: A Memoir of Food, Love, and War.** Annia Ciezadlo. 2011, Free Press, 978-1-41658-394-3, \$26 hb, \$15 pb.

There are many ways to save civilization and one of the simplest is with food, writes Annia Ciezadlo. Her touching, often humorous "food-centric" memoir of her years reporting

on the conflicts in Iraq and Lebanon as a new bride in a new culture is a surprising feast for a war story. Ciezadlo's portraits of the baker who keeps his communal oven going between bombings so that his neighborhood can have bread, or the restaurateur who turns his café into a refugee center, are among

the many stories she tells to reveal the courageous and human fabric of everyday life behind these conflicts. From 2003 to 2009, Ciezadlo shared ceremonial dinners with tribal *shaykhs* in Baghdad, ate *kubbet hamudh* with Iraqi women from Fallujah, dined on boiled turkey with a *peshmerga* warlord in Kurdistan and learned how to make *yaknet kusa* from her new Lebanese mother-in-law in Beirut. "Other people saw more, did more, risked more," she said. "But I ate more." The book's 29 pages of recipes are an added treat.

—PINEY KESTING



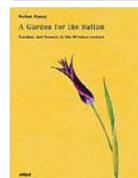
**Domes, Arches and Minarets: A History of Islamic-Inspired Buildings in America.** Phil Pasquini.

2012, Flypaper Press, 978-0-96700-161-6, \$200 hb, \$45 pb.

This visually rich compendium by photojournalist Phil Pasquini showcases the Islamic motifs and designs found across the American architectural landscape. The coverage is sweeping and features a range of structures, from the city hall and private residences in the Arabian Nights-themed community of Opa Locka, Florida, to the Ali Baba Motel in Costa Mesa, California. Commercial and apartment buildings, factories, railroad stations, cinemas, museums, mausoleums, Shriner temples, synagogues and mosques are part of the mix. Some were designed by America's foremost architects, including Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, whose

creations stand witness to the power of minarets, domes and arches as archetypal symbols (and stereotypes), embellished and imbedded in the US for more than a century. The colorful photographs highlight a plethora of Middle Eastern influences that migrated to America and sank roots in the built environment and popular culture. The images, devoid of human context, depict the striking exteriors of buildings and structures. One can only imagine what lay within.

—JONATHAN FRIEDLANDER



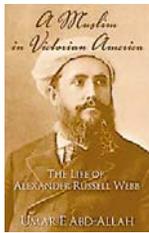
**A Garden for the Sultan: Gardens and Flowers in the Ottoman Culture.** Nurhan Atasoy. Gül İreopoglu,

ed.; Mary İsin, English ed.; Robert Bragner and Angela Roome, tr. 2011, Kitap Yayınevi, 978-9-75771-010-3, £60/\$90 hb.

*A Garden for a Sultan*, first published in Turkish in 2002, is a treat on several levels. Not surprisingly, given previous works by Nurhan Atasoy, it is beautifully produced and filled with wonderful and novel illustrations from Topkapı Palace in Istanbul and other collections in Turkey. They include textiles and ceramics, besides numerous paintings and drawings of flowers and gardens and ceremonies involving both. The book considers the classic Islamic idea of the garden and then discusses how it was developed in the context of the Ottoman court. Its social importance is considered, along with the significance of the flowers themselves, which were selectively bred from the 16th century,

triggering a similar interest when they were imported to Europe. Descriptions from contemporary sources and from the numerous handbooks on favorite Ottoman flowers—tulips, hyacinths, narcissi, carnations and roses—are particularly valuable. The book will appeal to art lovers and social historians, as well as those interested in flowers, garden design and plant transmission.

—CAROLINE STONE

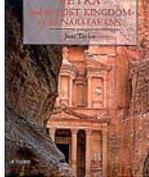


**A Muslim in Victorian America: The Life of Alexander Russell Webb.** Umar F. Abd-Allah. 2006, Oxford, 978-0-19518-728-1, \$50 hb.

This book is the first biography of Alexander Russell Webb, a journalist and diplomat who converted to Islam in 1887 and led an early effort to educate

Americans about the faith. Abd-Allah, a former professor of Islamic studies and Arabic and student of the esteemed Fazlur Rahman, uses sources ranging from contemporary newspaper articles to Webb's own writings to portray an enterprising journeyman who exemplified, in a unique way, both American individualism and Muslim collectivism. Abd-Allah frames Webb's story within the context of the 1893 Chicago's World Fair, where Webb was apparently the sole Muslim representative at the first meeting of the World's Parliament of Religions. Webb confronted many of the same issues American Muslims still face today: funding, organization and unity within the community.

—ASMA HASAN

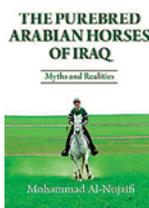


**Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans.** Jane Taylor. 2012, I.B. Tauris, 978-1-84885-020-0, \$30 pb.

Amman-based writer and photographer Jane Taylor has clearly spent considerable time researching this book, which includes some

updates—such as findings from the first phase of the Brown University excavations of Petra's Great Temple—to her original 2001 hardback. Covering the Nabataeans' nomadic origins, progressing through their mastery of water storage and trade control, she effectively explores their entire history including strengths and successes far beyond Petra. She calls the Nabataean capital "an interplay between nature and art," and her prose matches that throughout this volume. Whether you've seen Petra firsthand or not, this book will take you there with ample color photographs. It extends right up to the Islamic conquest in the seventh century CE and concludes with an epilogue on the Nabataeans in the Islamic world.

—GRAHAM CHANDLER



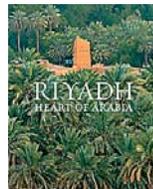
**The Purebred Arabian Horses of Iraq: Myths and Realities.** Mohammad Al-Nujaifi. 2012, Medina Publishing, 978-1-90933-901-9, £35 hb.

The Arabian horse of Iraq has been known for its great power and speed since pre-Islamic times. Brought north from central Arabia (Najd)

with successive tribal migrations, the horse of Iraq

thrived in the more sanguine climate and in time developed into a slighter, taller, more muscular and faster animal than its more beautiful Najdi brother. Its qualities were enhanced through careful breeding, creating a horse perfect for military use, and later for racing. Indeed, when the British established the great racing circuits of India and Iraq in the 19th century, it was the Iraqi horse that excelled. In *The Purebred Arabian Horse of Iraq*, Mohammad Al-Nujaifi traces the history of the Iraqi Arabian from its years of racing glory, though the horrors of the Gulf wars, to what he believes to be a renewed recognition of the qualities of this magnificent animal, and of the Iraqi people who loved and cared for such horses, even through the most difficult times.

—JANE WALDRON GRUTZ

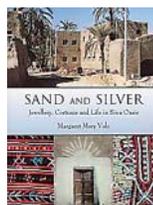


**Riyadh, Heart of Arabia.** Mohsen al-Dajani and Brian Salter. 2012, Al-Dajani, 978-6-03010-376-8, SAR 180/\$48 hb.

The "Riyadh" in the title of this book of color photography refers not just to Saudi Arabia's capital, but also to

the 412,000-square-kilometer (159,000-sq-mi) province surrounding it. Author/photographer Mohsen al-Dajani is a Bedouin-born pilot in the Royal Saudi Air Force; British co-author Brian Salter is a print and broadcast journalist. Together they tell the story of the Riyadh and its surroundings through the eyes of a native who nurtures his love of the countryside and an expatriate resident seeing it anew. The 176 photographs are presented in four sections, the first depicting life in the city of mud palaces and glass skyscrapers, indoor malls and outdoor markets, crafts and craftsmen. The other sections focus on the province's archeological sites and antiquities, the sheer cliffs and wildlife of the rocky Tuwaiq Escarpment west of the city, and the wildflowers and red dunes of the Dahna Desert on its east. Accompanying the photographs are 32 pages of text, dense with historic and geographical detail.

—WILLIAM TRACY



**Sand and Silver: Jewellery, Costume and Life in Siwa Oasis.**

Margaret Mary Vale. 2011, Kelim Press, 978-0-95699-630-5, £14.99 pb.

This book will appeal to anyone interested in Middle Eastern village life and crafts and the impact of the modern

world on traditional society. Located in the Egyptian desert near the border with Libya, Siwa Oasis was isolated for millennia and developed a very individual version of North African culture, especially with regard to silverwork and embroidery. Not until the 1980's, after the construction of a road linking it to the Mediterranean coast, was this seal broken. M. M. Vale gives a very vivid picture of life in Siwa—largely, of course, from the women's point of view—as well as descriptions of its crafts, with numerous photographs and drawings. She carefully relates the objects she describes to their social context. *Sand and Silver* belongs to the very valuable category of informed accounts written by someone who knows her subject well, but is not a professional sociologist. It is therefore enjoyable for the non-specialist and free of jargon.

—CAROLINE STONE



**Selections from the Art of Party-Crashing in Medieval Iraq.** Emily Selove, tr. and illus. 2012, Syracuse UP, 978-0-81563-298-6, \$24.95 hb.

Is anyone more ingenious and ingratiating than the party-crasher? Accused of eating "what is forbidden," one such

medieval Baghdadi interloper defended himself by explaining that when he attends a party (uninvited), he heads for the women's quarters. When his hosts cry out, "No, not there! Here! Here!" he explains, "Their saying 'Here!' is the invitation, so therefore I don't eat anything that isn't allowed." Harvested from the 11th-century oeuvre of al-Khatib al-Baghdadi—better known as a serious historian of that fabled Iraqi capital city—this thoroughly enjoyable little volume is rife with the advice of rascals, rogues and raconteurs, all focused on one objective: the free lunch. That the pious and scholarly al-Khatib took the time to compile these anecdotes supports the observation of one eighth-century *qadi* (judge) featured in the text: "Even high-minded and intelligent people like a good joke!"

—TOM VERDE



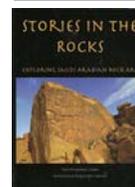
**The Silk Road: A New History.**

Valerie Hansen. 2012, Oxford UP, 978-0-19515-931-8, \$34.95 hb.

The Silk Road transformed cultures both East and West—transmitting ideas, technology and artistic motifs, not simply trade goods. Unlike many books on the Silk Road, largely based upon art,

this one is based upon documents from 200–1000 CE discovered along the route. They were written on recycled scrap paper, wood, silk, leather and other materials, in languages including classical Chinese and Sanskrit. Given the impact of paper on western civilization, the author calls it the most important trade good on the Silk Road. The Silk Road (a term created by a scholar in 1877) was in fact a metaphor for the complex system of cultural contacts between China and the peoples to the west, covering a network of unmarked paths across vast expanses of territory. Although not primarily a trade route, trade was done locally along its paths, and silk was an important commercial product, used by China as a medium of payment for its troops in frontier areas. Many traders who traveled between Central Asia and China spoke Sogdian, an Iranian tongue from around Samarkand, a major node of the network. The author studies the archeological findings in seven such nodes.

—ROBERT W. LEBLING



**Stories in the Rocks, Exploring Saudi Arabian Rock Art.** Sandra L. Olsen. Richard T. Bryant, photog. 2013, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, 978-0-98949-851-7, \$45 hb, \$35 pb.

Richly illustrated with more than 170 stunning photographs, this work results from the Arabian Rock Art Heritage Project (<http://saudi-archaeology.com/>) and is the first book to cover comprehensively the remarkable corpus of rock art that proliferates in western Saudi Arabia. The study of rock art presents numerous challenges. Accurate scientific dating and interpretation are elusive, and incised petroglyphs are notoriously difficult to record. Olsen examines these

# Suggestions for Cooking



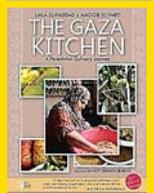
## Delights from the Garden of Eden: A Cookbook and History of the Iraqi Cuisine.

Nawal Nasrallah. 2013, Equinox Publishing, 978-1-84553-457-8, \$49.95 hb.

This second edition of Nawal Nasrallah's 2003 self-published title is more than

simply an updated version—it is an altogether different book in design, organization and, to some degree, content. With the look and feel of a textbook, this richly illustrated volume is a serious, scholarly exploration of the foods of the Fertile Crescent from Mesopotamian times through the Middle Ages to the present. Adding significant heft to the 400 recipes are its 73-page introduction, extensive headnotes and intriguing sidebars featuring folkloric tales, poems and historical narratives of visitors to the region, focused on its food and hospitality. We learn about street foods in medieval Baghdad, the origins of *lavash* (thin flatbread) and favorite Abbasid sandwiches. Already respected among food historians for her translation of the 10th-century Baghdadi cookbook *Annals of the Caliph's Kitchen*, Nasrallah is sure to gain more acclaim with this significant contribution to the culinary history of the Middle East.

—TOM VERDE



## The Gaza Kitchen: A Palestinian Culinary Journey.

Laila El-Haddad and Maggie Schmitt. 2012, Just World Books, 978-1-93598-223-4, \$43 hb, \$29 pb.

Equal parts cookery and cultural insight, this

remarkable book creates a portrait of Gaza through recipes, for "... to talk about food and cooking is to talk about the dignity of daily life, about history and heritage in a place where these very things have often been disparaged or actively erased," say the authors. With a tone at once authoritative and warm, almost every recipe imparts a lesson about Gazan life. Adding flavor are sidebars ranging from portraits of the cooks, to fastidiousness, the community *qidra* oven, foraging for wild greens and the "liberated lands" Gazan agricultural reform. *Gaza Kitchen's* distinctive recipes are accessible to the non-Arab cook, and often give urban and rural variations. Winner of the "World Cuisine: Arab" Gourmand Award in 2013, this beautifully wrought cookbook's only downside is the poor quality of the paper in the paperback version.

—ANN WALTON SIEBER



## The Lebanese Kitchen.

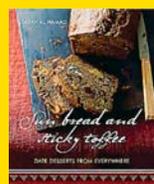
Salma Hage. 2012, Phaidon, 978-0-71486-480-8, \$49.95 hb.

A well-trodden crossroad since Neolithic times, Lebanon has been inhabited over the centuries by Phoenicians, Assyrians, Persians, Romans, Arabs,

Turks and Europeans. Among the legacies of these (often uninvited) guests is a rich and diverse culinary heritage that, like the country itself, resists taxonomy. Yet Salma Hage's ambitious effort comes close. If Hage's biographical note isn't enough to convince you that she is the real deal—"a Lebanese housewife from Mazarat Tiffah (Apple Hamlet) in the moun-

tains of the Kadisha Valley"—thumbing through the pages of her beautifully illustrated, impressively inclusive cookbook should help. From lamb *kibbeh* (five varieties) to grilled frogs' legs, and from mousakka to Turkish delight, the weighty volume includes 500 recipes reflecting the broad range of Lebanon's culinary past and present. This is a must for any collector of Middle Eastern cookbooks.

—TOM VERDE



## Sun Bread and Sticky Toffee: Date Desserts from Everywhere.

Sarah Al-Hamad. 2013, Interlink, 978-1-56656-921-7, \$26.95 hb.

The humble date has sustained humanity for six millennia. So why has it

taken so long for a cookbook dedicated to that intensely sweet and versatile fruit to appear? For Kuwaiti-born Sarah Al-Hamad, it was personal. "[W]hat grabbed me most and excited my taste buds and soul, was the story behind our love of dates," she writes. That story evokes a historical reverence for dates, with tempting culinary nods toward nearly every compass point on the planet where dates are grown, from North Africa and southern Spain to the Gulf, Australia, South America and the American Southwest. Recipes range from standard Levantine *ma'moul* to the enticingly unexpected: "Date, Sesame and Espresso Milkshake" and "Date and Ricotta Fritters." *Sun Bread and Sticky Toffee* is a delightful and delicious homage to this "[q]uasi-miraculous, revered, and adored ... ancient, old-world fruit."

—TOM VERDE

issues in early chapters and introduces readers to the latest advanced photographic techniques used in this project. She presents and describes numerous friezes at sites in the provinces of Tabuk and Ha'il in the north, Najran in the south and a single site west of Riyadh. Then she examines what the rock art tells us about ancient peoples and their activities, and how it informs us of the flora and fauna around them, along with the implications of climate change on the Arabian Peninsula. This book breaks new ground and lays the path for future findings in this significant and fascinating field.

—PETER HARRIGAN



## The Travels of Marco Polo: The Illustrated Edition.

Morris Rassabi, ed. 2012, Sterling, 978-1-40279-630-2, \$40 hb.

What if Marco Polo had carried a camera on his epic journey from Italy to China and back?

This handsome copy of one of literature's most famous travelogues delivers perhaps the next best thing. The oversized volume is lavishly illustrated with images from a wide variety of sources: medieval European illuminated manuscripts, Chinese scroll paintings and tapestries, Japanese woodcuts and Persian miniatures from Mongolian court documents, plus photographs of statuary and locations along Polo's 1271–1295 journey, in addition to maps detailing

his route. The text is the respected Yule–Cordier translation, with footnotes based on Cordier's revised 1903 edition, enhanced with sidebars by modern scholars, as well as period sources (e.g. Flemish monk William of Rubruck, the first known westerner to visit the Mongol capital Khara Khorum, in the mid-13th century). Well worth more than a casual glance, the colorful content and design of this gorgeous coffee-table book will mesmerize readers, drawing them perhaps closer to Polo's elbow than ever before.

—TOM VERDE



## Walking Palestine: 25 Journeys into the West Bank.

Stefan Szepesi. 2012, Interlink Publishing, 978-1-90849-361-3, \$22.95 pb.

At a time when most images associated with the West Bank are those linked to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, *Walking Palestine*–

*25 Journeys into the West Bank* is a welcome breath of fresh air. With the aid of maps and detailed route descriptions, Stefan Szepesi takes the reader on tours using back roads, dirt trails and footpaths. Besides describing the landscape and historical sites, he offers recommendations on local guides, out-of-the-way restaurants and places to overnight. *Walking Palestine* is more than just a guidebook; with beautiful photos and entertaining anecdotes,

it is a read suitable for both the seasoned hiker and armchair adventurer. If Mark Twain had carried a copy of Szepesi's volume during his 1867 visit to the Holy Land, he would not have been so cynical in his own account, *The Innocents Abroad*, in which he diminishes the grandeur of this historic region.

—NORBERT SCHILLER



## Writing Egypt: History, Literature, and Culture.

Aleya Serour, ed. 2012, AUC Press, ISBN 978-9-77416-378-4, free download.

While well-intentioned, commemorative volumes sometimes serve no greater purpose than reception-room decor or promotional tote-bag fodder, the AUC

Press and Aleya Serour avoid such fates, producing a rich harvest of writing from the publisher's first 50 years and making it available online for free. Here are selections from books by insiders (Qasim Amin, Zahi Hawass, Taha Hussein) and outsiders turned insiders by their long association with the country (Kent Weeks, Max Rodenbeck, Bernard O'Kane) on a wide variety of subjects, including architecture, literature and Egypt's kinetic and frenetic social history. This is a true showcase, as Serour writes, "of the AUC Press's finest publishing achievements."

—TOM VERDE



## 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).

**Julie Weiss** is an education consultant based in Eliot, Maine. She holds a Ph.D. in American studies. Her company, Unlimited Horizons, develops social studies, media literacy, and English as a Second Language curricula, and produces textbook materials.

## CLASS ACTIVITIES

This edition of the Classroom Guide is organized according to two topics and one skills section. The topics, *Photographs* and *Portraits*, relate closely to visual images, so the Visual Analysis section of the Classroom Guide is woven into these topics' activities. The skills, under the broad rubric *Understanding More of What You Read*, aim to enhance reading comprehension by equipping students with skills they can use again and again.

### Theme: Photographs

#### Why do you take photographs?

Before you delve into 150-year-old photographs, start by thinking about your own experiences with photographs. Do you take pictures? Whether you use a mobile phone or a camera, it's likely that you do, and that you do so regularly. Look at some of your most recent photos and answer the following questions, sharing your answers with a partner. What are the subjects of your photos—people? places? events? Why did you take each of them? What did you do with them? Did you share them? How? Texts? Facebook? How did they make you feel when you took them? How do they make you feel when you look at them now? (If you haven't taken any photos, work with someone who has or use the photos on a friend's Facebook page, and adapt the questions accordingly.) After you and your partner have shared your answers with each other, step back. Having analyzed your photos, what generalizations can you make about them? These might include generalizations about why you take photos (for example, "I take pictures of things that make me laugh"); the subject matter in your photos (for example, "I take pictures of my friends,"); and/or what you do with them once they're taken ("I post them on Facebook so everyone can see them"). Write your general statement, and hold onto it as you think about old photographs in the following activities.

#### What makes old photographs valuable?

Turn your attention to "A Legacy of Light," which describes the discovery of large collections of very early photographs of the Middle East. Read the article, keeping in mind what

you've learned about yourself and your photographs. As you read, underline or highlight the parts of the article that answer these questions: What made the discoveries of the photos so exciting? What is the subject matter of the photos? (In addition to the text of the article, examine the photos that accompany it to answer this question.) For what purposes have people been using the photos since their discovery? Compare what you're learning about old photos with what you have learned about your own photos. Write a statement that explains how they are similar and how they differ.

Now focus specifically on some of the photos that accompany the article. Look first at the set of photos at the top of pages 16-17. Discuss them with your partner. Here are some questions to guide you. What do you notice about the photos themselves? How would you describe the place they show? What do you imagine, based on the images, motivated someone to take these photos? What makes these photos valuable today to a historian or "photo-archeologist"? Here is an exercise that will help with your answer: With your partner, write down three questions for which answers can be seen in the photographs. (For example, "What were most buildings made of?") Finally, look online for a recent photo of the same location. How does it compare to these photos? Pay attention to both the content of the images and to the photographic form.

### Theme: Portraits

#### What's in a portrait?

So far you've looked at photos of places. What about people? Look at the spread at the bottom of page 17. Answer the following questions about these three photos: What do you notice about the photos? About the people in the photos? When do you think they were taken? (If you aren't sure, read the caption.) What do you think motivated the photographer to take the photos in this style? What do you think the photos reveal about the people? What makes you think so?

To help with these last questions, find a recent photo—one that you took, or that you found on a friend's Facebook page or elsewhere on the Internet—that shows one



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

Zero in on improving your reading comprehension by focusing on "An Opera for Egypt." Read the article. It tells a story, for the most part in chronological order. An important component of understanding such a story is being able to follow the order of the story. To help you do so, make a timeline, or list the events in order so that you have a summary of how *Aida* came to be written and performed in Cairo in 1871. Be as detailed as you can.



person. Compare that photo to the photos on page 17. How is it similar? How is it different? For example, is the recent photo you chose a posed photograph like the ones in the magazine, or is it a candid, unplanned shot? What about what the people are wearing and their expressions? How would you compare the overall “feel” of the two photos? What influences your sense of the “feel”?

Portraits, however, are not always *visual* images. “Interpreter of Treasures” focuses on portraits of a different kind, what author Tim Mackintosh-Smith calls “word-portraits.” Read the first of these word-portraits in the article. Then choose one of the photos on page 17, or the photo you took or found of a person, and create a “word-portrait” of the person in the photo. Have volunteers share their photos and word-portraits. Choose one or two to talk about. Did the word-portraits focus solely on what the person looks like, or did they also include descriptions of the person’s personality traits? Add to your word-portrait what Mackintosh-Smith calls “a few deft touches of character.” Then think about something a bit more difficult for a writer to accomplish: How can you “catch the spirit of a whole cultural setting”? Try a fairly straightforward example. Look at the group photo on page 20. What can you determine about the time and place where the photo was taken? How can you tell? Now return to your modern-day photo. What can you tell about the time and place where it was taken? For example, if the person in the photo is wearing a school uniform, that would tell you something. If, on the other hand, the person is wearing ski goggles and standing on a mountain, that would tell you something else. Once you’ve got a sense of it, add the context to your word-portrait. Display students’ photos and word-portraits, and examine each others’ work.

Compare the two types of portrait you’ve been analyzing: the visual portrait and the word-portrait. As the creator of the portraits, did you prefer one over the other? What about as reader/viewer? If so, which one, and why? What benefits do you see in both types of portrait? What drawbacks? Write your answers to these questions in a compare-and-contrast paragraph.

### Skills: Understanding More of What You Read

When you read, whether you’re aware of it or not, you are organizing in your head the ideas derived from what you’ve read, finding ways to understand them so that they make sense to you. Becoming aware of how you do that—and developing skills to do it better—will make you a better reader. The following activities focus on “Morocco’s Threads of Red Gold.” By completing them, you will both improve your understanding of the topic and practice some strategies that will help you increase your comprehension of other things you read.

For starters, read the article. Then, working alone or with a partner, go through the article again, this time segment by segment. (You can identify the segments because each starts with a large capital letter.) Write a one- or two-sentence summary of each segment. When you read the sentences, you will have a brief summary of the article.

Now you’ve read about Taliouine and its saffron production—but where exactly is Taliouine? It’s easy when you’re reading something like this article to take it at face value without bothering to locate the place. But finding the place on a map will change your understanding of what you’ve read. Find Taliouine on a map. Why does it matter that you as a reader know where it is? To answer the question, think about how your connection to the article changes—or doesn’t change—when you’ve found Taliouine’s location.

Try this location exercise in relation to the community where you live. Write a short description (one paragraph should do) of the place, similar to the description of Taliouine on pages 3-4. Imagine that you don’t know where your community is located—either in relation to physical features, such as mountains or rivers, or in relation to other places. Find a map to accompany your description. Your map will likely reveal something important about your community’s location. Say, for example, it’s a coastal town. It would be helpful to know that in terms of the area’s climate, economic base and residents’ lifestyles. Add to your written description what-

ever you think is most important about your community’s physical location.

Now return to Taliouine. The article explains the qualities that make its location ideal for growing saffron. Circle those qualities in the article. How can you record the qualities in a way that will help you remember them? Make a list? A web? A sentence to put in the appropriate section of your outline? Use whatever tool will help you integrate that piece of information about saffron-growing into your knowledge base.

On a world map, find the places where evidence reveals that saffron was used at different times in the past. Then, on a map that you can write on, identify where saffron is grown today. Find a way to distinguish today’s large-scale producer(s) and the small-scale producer(s). You might, for example, use different colors. Or, if you’re really adventurous, you can try making a cartogram. (If you’re not sure what a cartogram is, find out! Making one can be challenging and eye-opening!) Study your map as you read the last section of the article, which is about Taliouine’s efforts to promote its saffron outside of Morocco. Based on the information in your map, what would you advise Morocco’s saffron producers to do? Write your advice in an email memo, explaining how your evidence led you to draw the conclusions you have drawn.

In two different places, the article identifies different uses to which saffron has been put—both in the past and today. Find those places, and underline the uses. As you did with the qualities that make Taliouine ideal for growing saffron, find a way to organize for yourself saffron’s different uses. You might try a web, with “Uses of Saffron” in the center, from which you spin out past and present uses.

Look back at the different skills that you used to improve your understanding of “Morocco’s Threads of Red Gold.” List them. Next to each, write the benefits of using it. Then put an asterisk next to the skill or skills that you found most useful. Make some notes about what made them useful so that you can use them again when you’re reading other things.

## Divine Felines: Cats of Ancient Egypt

explores the role of cats, lions and other felines in Egyptian mythology, kingship and everyday life through nearly 30 different representations of cats from the museum's Egyptian collection. Though probably first domesticated in Mesopotamia, cats were revered in ancient Egypt for their fertility, valued for their ability to protect homes and granaries from vermin, and associated with royalty and a number of deities. On public view for the first time is a gilded "Leonine Goddess" from the middle of the first millennium BCE—a lion-headed female crouching on a papyrus-shaped base—that entered the Brooklyn collection in 1937 and was conserved specially for this installation. The exhibition's cats and feline divinities range from a large limestone sculpture of a recumbent lion (305–30 BCE) to a diminutive bronze sphinx of King Sheshenq (945–718 BCE) and a cast-bronze figurine of a cat nursing four kittens (664–30 BCE). Also included are furniture and luxury items decorated with feline features. **Brooklyn Museum**, through December 2014.



From Egypt's Roman period, a bronze cat's head adorned with gold earrings.

### Current **September**

**The London Design Festival 2013** is a nine-day display of contemporary design that celebrates London as the creative capital of the world. Included in the museum's range of specially commissioned installations is "The Wind Portal," a dramatic gateway of 5000 paper windmills turning in the breeze. This walk-through artwork by Lebanese designer Najla El Zein creates a playful airway, drawing wind and light into the galleries beyond. Victoria and Albert Museum, **London**, through September 22.

**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**, through September 22.

**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. Asian Art Museum, **San Francisco**, through September 22; Getty Museum, **Los Angeles**, October 2 through December 2.

**Caravan:** *In Peace and with Compassion* is a group show of Egyptian and western artists at St. Paul's Cathedral, **London**, through September 23.

**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 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. Museum of Modern Art, **New York**, through September 23.

**Terraces:** *Kader Attia* is an architectural sculpture consisting of three small clusters of concrete blocks, painted white, on the lower Sainte-Marie section of Marseille's seven-kilometer seawall, one of the city's most symbolic sites that has, however, been closed to the public for years. The Franco-Algerian artist states, "Each of the terraces is a different height, creating places where visitors can view the open sea and the city, sit, relax, lie down and watch the bay." La Digue du Large, **Marseille**, through September 29.

### Current **October**

**Africa Wrapped, Robed and Beaded** highlights six forms of status dress from Africa. Each example features a lavish use of materials that emphasize status through dazzling display. Dress is among the most personal forms of visual expression, creating a buffer and a bridge between the private and the public self and acting as a visible indicator of an individual's current position or future aspirations. All of the status-related aspects of personal dress—the plentiful use of sumptuous materials, the showcasing of labor-intensive details and the sacrifice of comfort for a display of luxury—play a part in the conspicuous

presentation of social identity. Art Institute of **Chicago**, through October 6.

**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 preserve the traditional arts even as they interpret them in innovative ways. This is the last exhibition before the museum moves to a new building in Foggy Bottom. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, through October 13.

**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.**, through October 18.

**Al-Fann:** *Art of the Islamic Civilization from the Al-Sabah Collection*, Kuwait showcases 367 treasures made of pottery, glass, metal, textile, stone or wood and including jewelry and miniature painting from across the time and space of Islamic civilization. The exhibition is divided into two parts, the first focused on the characteristic elements of Islamic art, arranged chronologically from the eighth to the 18th century. The second part guides viewers to some of the quintessential elements of Islamic art expressed in calligraphy and geometrical and arabesque patterns, as well as a selection of luxurious jewelry. National Museum of **Korea, Yongsan-gu, Seoul**, through October 20.

**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 aesthetics. 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. Tate Modern, **London**, through October 20.

**Close Quarters** features contemporary Turkish photography by 18 artists under a loose theme of new personal documentary. **Istanbul Modern**, through October 27.

**Majazz (Metaphor)** is a solo exhibition by Faisal Samra. Ayyam Gallery, **Jiddah**, through October 31.

**The Face of the Stranger: The Coins of the Huns and Western Turks in Central Asia and India** offers a new look at a little-known civilization. The Huns, more than any other people, symbolize the menace of migrating nomadic hordes from the steppes. Contemporary historians called the Huns "two-legged beasts"; Indians claimed they had destroyed monasteries and other religious institutions. This reputation was undeserved: Hunnish coinage documents the willingness of the new masters of Central Asia and northern India to conflate and amalgamate the many cultural and religious influences to which they were exposed, creating a unique culture both touchingly strange and familiar to the modern eye. Kunsthistorisches Museum, **Vienna**, through October 21.

#### Current **November**

**Visions of Mughal India: The Collection of Howard Hodgkin** brings together a selection of outstanding paintings and drawings, including illustrations of epics and myths, royal portraits and scenes of court life and hunting. The exhibition represents most of the main types of Indian court painting that flourished during the Mughal period (ca. 1550–1850), including the refined naturalistic works of the imperial Mughal court, the poetic and subtly colored paintings of the Deccani Sultanates and the boldly drawn and vibrantly colored styles of the Rajput kingdoms of Rajasthan and the Punjab Hills. Some of the works in the collection vividly evoke the urban or daily life of India; there is also a large and spectacular group of elephant portraits. National Museum **Cardiff, Wales**, UK, through November 3.

**Roads of Arabia: Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.** An eye-opening look at the largely unknown ancient past of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, this exhibition draws on recently discovered archeological material never before seen in the United States. **Roads of Arabia** features objects excavated from several sites throughout the Arabian Peninsula, tracing the impact of

ancient trade routes and pilgrimage roads stretching from Yemen in the south to Iraq, Syria and Mediterranean cultures in the north. Elegant alabaster bowls and fragile glassware, heavy gold earrings and Hellenistic bronze statues testify to a lively mercantile and cultural interchange among distant civilizations. The exhibition, organized as a series of points along trade and pilgrimage routes, focuses on the region's rich history as a major center of commercial and cultural exchange, provides both chronological and geographical information about the discoveries made during recent excavations and emphasizes the important role played by this region as a trading center during the past 6000 years. Carnegie Museum of Natural History, **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**, through November 3; Museum of Fine Arts **Houston**, December 22 through March 9; Nelson-Atkins Museum, **Kansas City**, April through July; Asian Art Museum of **San Francisco**, October 17, 2014 through January 18, 2015.

**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" aesthetic, integrating motifs and techniques of traditional miniature painting with contemporary themes. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through November 3.

**A Silk Road Saga: The Sarcophagus of Yu Hong.** In 1999 a white marble sarcophagus, unlike any previous discovery, was excavated in China's Shanxi province. It belonged to a Turkic-speaking Central Asian man, Yu Hong, and his wife, who had been interred in 592 and 598 CE respectively. This magnificent object in many ways portrays life along the Silk Roads, with the multi-ethnic mix of traders, pilgrims, monks and envoys. From afar, it looks like a model of a Chinese building, but closer inspection reveals detailed carved or painted scenes of hunting, entertaining and religious worship totally foreign to Chinese traditions. The panels of the sarcophagus are the focus of the exhibition, which also includes 16 other sculptures, figurines and ceramics from the tomb or from burials of the same period and province. Art Gallery of New South Wales, **Sydney, Australia**, through November 10.

**Made for Eternity** highlights everyday functional objects that once belonged to the upper and middle classes of ancient Egypt, with the more finely made and thus more desirable works owned by those of higher status. While the names of the artisans are no longer known, the materials they used and the techniques they employed convey much about artistic practices that endured for many centuries. The quality of the craftsmanship also attests to the care and attention that the artisans lavished on these varied objects, all of which functioned as important components of a complex system of Egyptian religious beliefs and ritual practices, giving us a glimpse into life—and death—in ancient Egypt. RISD Museum, **Providence, Rhode Island**, through November 17.

**Al Hajj: The Malaysian Experience** provides stories of Malaysian pilgrims to Makkah and their experiences as they travel, unfolding their devotion and determination as they take steps toward Makkah. The exhibition also lays out the key rituals of the Hajj and presents information about the biggest pilgrimage on earth. Catalog. Islamic Arts Museum **Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur**, through November 20.

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

#### Current **December**

**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**, through December.

**Vantage Point Sharjah** is a photographic exhibition capturing the emirate. **Sharjah [UAE]** Art Museum, through December 7.

**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**, through December 14.

#### Current **January**

**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.

**Moroccan Carpets and Modern Art** exhibits one of the world's finest collections of carpets made by Moroccan nomads. In the early 20th century, Moroccan carpets fascinated such artists as Vassily Kandinsky and Le Corbusier and today bring to mind images of Mark Rothko or Cy Twombly. Indeed, an inquiry into the Islamic culture of North Africa in general and carpets from Morocco in particular brings us to the roots of European avant-garde art. Restrictions on depictions of humans led Berbers of the Maghreb to what seems, to western eyes, radical abstraction and a completely free and very modern approach to color and shape. In the age of globalization and the increasing dominance of purely western notions, it is important to focus on the intellectual linkages and cultural interchange between

East and West. Pinakothek der Moderne, **Munich**, through January 5.

**Mesopotamia: Inventing Our World: Extraordinary Treasures of Sumer, Assyria and Babylon.** The world we live in was born in Mesopotamia more than 3000 years ago. Home to the world's first great cities, the land "between the rivers" is the birthplace of writing, codified laws, urban planning, long-distance trade and empire-building. The exhibition explores this legacy through an array of artifacts including a cuneiform tablet of part of the Epic of Gilgamesh, bas-reliefs from Nineveh, jewelry from Ur and one of King Nebuchadnezzar's striding lions. A complementary exhibition reveals what happened during the looting of Baghdad's Iraq Museum in April 2003, an event that shocked the world and devastated one of the most important museums of ancient culture. Royal Ontario Museum, **Toronto**, through January 5.

**Afritecture: Building Social Change.** Contemporary architecture in Africa presents many innovative approaches in the field of public buildings and communal spaces, such as schools, marketplaces, hospitals, cultural centers, sports facilities and assembly halls. In many cases, the future users are directly involved in design and construction; in addition, many of the projects are developed with local materials and utilize dormant local building traditions. The exhibition spotlights those projects, with particular emphasis on those that incorporate global relationships in addition to those with local culture and individual social groups. It comprises 28 projects from 10 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and South Africa. Bilingual catalog. Pinakothek der Moderne, **Munich**, through January 12.

**She Who Tells a Story: Women Photographers from Iran and the Arab World** introduces the pioneering work of 12 leading women photographers. They tackle the very notion of representation with passion and power, questioning tradition and challenging perceptions of Middle Eastern identity. Their work ranges from fine art to photojournalism and provides insights into political and social issues, including questions of personal identity, and explores the political and social landscapes of their homelands in images of sophistication, expressiveness and beauty. Museum of Fine Arts, **Boston**, through January 12.

#### Current / **February**

**Emperor Charles v Captures Tunis: Documenting a Campaign.** In 1535, Emperor Charles v set sail with a fleet of 400 ships and more than 30,000 soldiers to reconquer the Kingdom of Tunis from the Ottomans. To document the campaign and his expected victory, he brought along historians, poets and also his court painter, Jan Cornelisz. Vermeyen. In 1543, the Flemish artist was commissioned to paint the cartoons for 12 monumental tapestries celebrating the campaign. His designs were informed by the countless drawings and sketches he had brought back from North Africa. The cartoons—full-size paintings in charcoal and watercolor or gouache, intended to guide tapestry-makers—are appreciated as autonomous artworks; their topographically exact rendering of locations and their detailed depictions bring the turbulent events of 1535 to life. Kunsthistorisches Museum, **Vienna**, through February 2.

**Sacred Pages:** *Conversations About the Qur'an* offers visitors a way to broaden their understanding of the Qur'an, Islam and Islamic art. Drawing on the museum's collection of loose pages from copies of the Qur'an, the exhibition showcases 25 examples, illustrating their significance as masterful and sacred works of art but also exploring how they are understood by individual Muslims living in the Boston area today. These beautiful works of Arabic calligraphy, made as early as the eighth and as recently as the 20th century, were created in Egypt, Morocco, Iran and Turkey, and the diversity of time and place of production is mirrored by the manner in which they are displayed, as the exhibition pairs curatorial interpretation about developments in Islamic art with personal statements by members of Boston's Islamic communities who were invited to share their comments and reactions to the pages. Museum of Fine Arts, **Boston**, through February 23.

**Our Work: Modern Jobs—Ancient Origins**, an exhibition of photographic portraits, explores how cultural achievements of the ancient Middle East have created or contributed to much of modern life. To show the connections between the past and today, artifacts that document the origins or development of such professions as baker, farmer, manicurist, brewer, writer, clock maker, or judge in the ancient world are paired with a person who is the modern "face" of that profession. The resulting photographic portraits by Jason Reblando represent the diversity of Chicago residents, ranging from ordinary workers to local luminaries. They are accompanied by information on the specific contribution of the ancient world and remarks from the modern representative, resulting in fascinating new insights into how members of the public view their relationship to the past. Oriental Institute Museum, **Chicago**, through February 23.

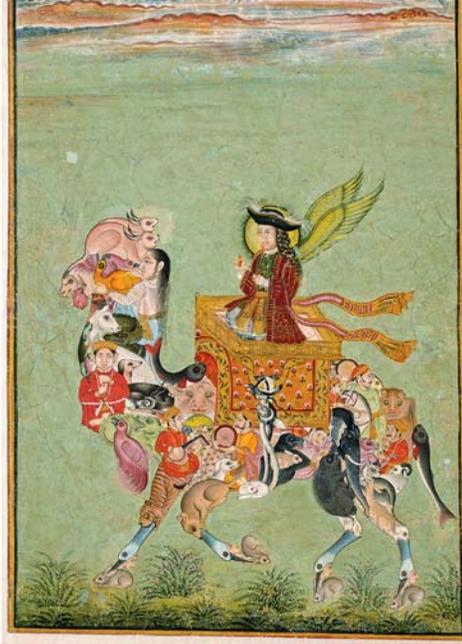
Current **March and later Silver from the Malay World** explores the rich traditions of silver in the Malay world. Intricate ornament drawn from geometry and nature decorates dining vessels, clothing accessories and ceremonial regalia. The exhibition features rarely seen collections acquired by three prominent colonial administrators in British Malaya at the turn of the 20th century. Victoria and Albert Museum, **London**, through March 16.

**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

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In this Mughal miniature from about 1725, the camel is made up entirely of human and animal figures, almost all different, that fully tile the plane, much as Escher's unvarying tessellated Persian-looking horsemen do.

## Escher Meets Islamic Art:

*An Inspirational Encounter between Two Cultures* offers a new perspective on world-famous Dutch graphic artist M. C. Escher and how he was inspired by Islamic art. It shows how Escher applied the geometric patterns and mathematical principles of Islamic art in his designs. Masterpieces from the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag are displayed alongside examples of Escher's tessellations and his constructions with a self-contradictory illusion of depth. His fascination with geometric patterns grew when he visited the Alhambra, in southern Spain, in 1922 and 1936. He was intrigued by the infinite repetition and regularity with which the patterns filled complete walls. Using recognizable animal and human figures, he later created his own variations on the patterns he discovered in Spain. He investigated mathematical publications on the formation of patterns, grids and symmetry and used his research in his art, creating what is now commonly referred to as Escherian "mathematical art." Tropenmuseum, **Amsterdam**, and Escher in Het Palais, **The Hague**, through November 3.

or semiprecious 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**, through March 24.

**Echoes: Islamic Art & Contemporary Artists** explores how contemporary artists respond to Islamic art and culture in their own work, through a series of visual conversations that make connections across cultures, geography and time. The installation juxtaposes historical objects and architecture with contemporary works that draw on traditional Islamic styles, materials and subject matter. The achievements of traditional Islamic art are represented by works in the museum's collection dating from the ninth to the 21st century from Islamic cultures across the globe, including examples of calligraphy, ceramics, paintings, carpets and architecture. Contemporary works include sculpture, video, photography, paintings, ceramics and digital collage by internationally recognized artists such as Shahzia Sikander and Rashid Rana. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, **Kansas City, Missouri**, through March 30.

Coming **September**  
**Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500–1800** highlights an

important design story that has never been told from a global perspective. Beginning in the 16th century, European exploration in search of spice routes to the East brought about the flowering of the international textile trade. Textiles often acted as direct payment for spices, as well as other luxury goods. Textiles and textile designs traveled from India and Asia to Europe, between India and Asia and Southeast Asia, from Europe to the East, and eventually west to the American colonies. Trade textiles blended the traditional designs, skills and tastes of all of the cultures that produced them, resulting in objects that are both beautiful and historically fascinating. The exhibition is supplemented by *An "Industrial Museum": John Forbes Watson's Indian Textile Collection*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, September 16 through January 5.

**Pearls** is a wide-ranging exhibition organized by the Qatar Museums Authority and the V&A Museum that covers all aspects of the subject, from the myths and legends surrounding pearls, their symbolic associations, their structure and development, the Gulf pearl fisheries, the worldwide pearl trade and the use of pearls in magnificent jewelry. Victoria and Albert Museum, **London**, September 21 through January 19.

**Fifty Years of Collecting Islamic Art.** In 1963 the museum's department of Islamic art was established as a separate entity. Since then, the collection has grown through gifts, bequests and purchases. The works of art in the exhibition are grouped by decade of acquisition to highlight the trends and broadening focus in collecting Islamic art at the Met. From ceramics, glass and metalwork to carpets and contemporary art, this exhibition celebrates the 50th anniversary of the department and its collections. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, September 24 through January 6.

Coming / **October**  
**Egypt's Mysterious Book of the Faiyum** is an exquisitely illustrated papyrus from Greco-Roman Egypt, one of the most intriguing ancient representations of a place ever found. The papyrus depicts the Faiyum Oasis, located to the west of the Nile, as a center of prosperity and ritual. For the first time in over 150 years, major sections owned by the Walters Art Museum and the Morgan Library & Museum, separated since the manuscript was divided and sold in the 19th century, will be reunited. Egyptian jewelry, papyri, statues, reliefs and ritual objects will illuminate the religious context that gave rise to this enigmatic text, which celebrates the crocodile god Sobek and his

special relationship with the Faiyum. Walters Museum of Art, **Baltimore**, October 6 through January 5. The exhibition will travel to the Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum in **Hildesheim, Germany**.

**Haji: The Journey Through Art** celebrates and illuminates the Hajj pilgrimage and explores its history through the centuries, focusing on the routes taken by pilgrims, the rituals of Hajj as depicted in art and the experiences of pilgrims after they have completed the Hajj. It includes a special section dedicated to the oral histories and souvenirs brought back by Qatari pilgrims. The majority of the items on display are from the museum's own collections and many have never before been publicly shown. An outdoor photography exhibition parallel to the main exhibition features the works of five international photographers who offer unique visions of the Hajj. Museum of Islamic Art, **Doha, Qatar**, October 9 through January 5.

**Abdulnasser Gharem**, one of the most influential Saudi artists, presents his first major solo show outside the Middle East. A pioneering conceptual artist as well as a lieutenant colonel in the Saudi army, Gharem has consistently challenged artistic practice in the often isolated and rapidly changing Saudi cultural landscape. This immersive exhibition draws together the different strands of his practice—photography, video, painting, sculpture and performance, demonstrating how Gharem negotiates between paving a way for artistic and social progress and maintaining a connection with Saudi heritage. His desire to preserve and build on traditional art forms rather than break with them is a radical gesture in the context of the recent history of western contemporary art. Though frequently reflecting on and questioning sensitive issues, his work maintains a respect for history, and the influence of his military role can be felt with references to authority and use of established symbols of power and bureaucracy. Gharem's role in developing an audience for conceptual art within Saudi Arabia has been pivotal: When he started out, there were no art schools and only a handful of contemporary galleries to display his work. His response was to take it to the streets, and these early performances helped inspire a new generation of Saudi artists to move their practices from their studios to their own streets. Edge of Arabia, **London**, October 9 through November 8.

**The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination** provides a visual narrative of the history of Zoroastrianism, largely displaced in its Persian homeland by the advent of Islam. One of the world's oldest religions, Zoroastrianism inspired texts and paintings from around the world, more than 300 of which in this exhibition take visitors on a journey beginning in the religion's earliest days. The exhibition transforms areas of the gallery with spectacular installations, including a walk-in fire temple, consisting of a prayer room and inner sanctum. Brunei Gallery, SOAS, **London**, October 11 through December 14.

**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.

**The Lightning Testimonies** is a disturbing eight-channel video installation exploring the often repressed, always sensitive and newly urgent subject of sexual violence against women on the Indian subcontinent. The work is a complex montage of simultaneous accounts, with stories ranging from wide-scale abduction and rape during the partition of India in 1947 to the powerful anti-rape protests in Manipur in 2004. Throughout the piece, Kanwar explores the many ways in which narratives of sexual violence are enmeshed within Indian social and political conflicts. Art Institute of **Chicago**, October 14 through January 12.

**The Life and Afterlife of David Livingstone: Exploring Missionary Archives** brings together archives, photographs, maps and artifacts relating to one of the best known British explorers and humanitarian campaigners of the 19th century. He is famed for his extensive travels through Africa, his campaign against the slave trade and the rich archival legacy he left behind. A controversial figure, Livingstone was criticized for failing to make converts on his travels, and ultimately he died evangelizing. Brunei Gallery, SOAS, **London**, October 22 through March 22.

**Fabric of a Nation—Deja Vue Series 2: Mixed Media Photography** by Amr Mounib. Photographer Amr Mounib has deep roots in Egypt and in film, extending back to the first silent films produced in Egypt by his grandfather Fawzi Mounib.

Here he combines painting, collage, photography and a touch of surrealism to produce images of the Egypt in his heart. In the face of the present-day chaos and uncertainty, the noise, the pollution and the plastic, he creates photographs of real people, and real places, overlaid with magical images that illustrate a reality that lies in the dreams of its people. Jerusalem Fund Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, October 25 through December 6.

**Mobile Museum Exhibition** of the Centre Pompidou opens at the King Abdulaziz Center for World Cultures, **Dhahran, Saudi Arabia**, October 30 through November 27.

**When the Greeks Ruled: Egypt after Alexander the Great** displays the artwork produced for Egypt's upper classes—Egyptians, Greeks and Romans—during the cultural confluence that characterized the rule of the Ptolemaic Dynasty. Formerly present in Egypt as tourists, traders, diplomats and soldiers, Greeks became rulers after Alexander's conquest of the Persian Empire. The exhibition includes more than 75 artworks, including gilded mummy masks, luxury glass, magical amulets and portraits in stone and precious metals, that demonstrate the integration of foreign styles but also pay tribute to ancient Egypt's distinctive visual culture. Art Institute of **Chicago**, October 31 through July 27.

#### PERMANENT / INDEFINITE

**Muslim Worlds.** In four showrooms totaling 850 square meters (9150 sq ft), this exhibition broaches subjects that continue to play an important role in contemporary Muslims' perception of themselves and others: Using the example of the richly decorated wall of a guest house from Afghanistan,

the gender-specific use of space is addressed, as well as the pronounced association of women with private space and men with the public sphere—attributions that have become the subject of controversial debates. Using the museum's outstanding collection from Turkestan, the exhibition explores such questions as, what can historical objects reveal about the identity and self-perception of their source communities? What is the significance and meaning of such objects in these societies today? The complexity and many facets of Islam in both its orthodox and mystic dimensions, as well as phenomena related to everyday religious practice are illustrated by objects of very diverse Muslim provenance. Ethnologisches Museum, **Berlin**.

**The Museum at the Arabian Coffee Tree** occupies the upper floors of a building that in 1711 became one of Germany's first coffeehouses. The museum provides information about the modern-day coffee trade, but also about coffee's beginnings as a cultivated crop and its advance from Arabia into Europe. Besides a replica of an Ottoman kitchen, it boasts coffee-roasting, -grinding and -brewing implements from different eras and places, and photographs of early Leipzig coffeehouses. Museum zum Arabischen Coffe Baum, **Leipzig, Germany**.

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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