

# SAUDI ARAMCO world

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**JORDAN** LONG  
BEFORE  
PETRA





Along the new Neolithic Heritage Trail south of Wadi Faynan, Jordan, hikers and drivers can connect four top archeological sites and Petra. Along the way, the wind-sculpted narrows called Siq' al-Ba'ja is a highlight. Photo by George Azar.

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The "moon-watching tower" of a wooden mosque in Xunhau, China, rises between the town and the mountains. Though not built as a minaret for calling prayers, this pagoda-like tower is, today, outfitted with loudspeakers. Photo by Jonathan Bloom.

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Saudi Aramco, the energy company born as an international enterprise more than 80 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.



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Written by Gail Simmons

Photography by George Azar

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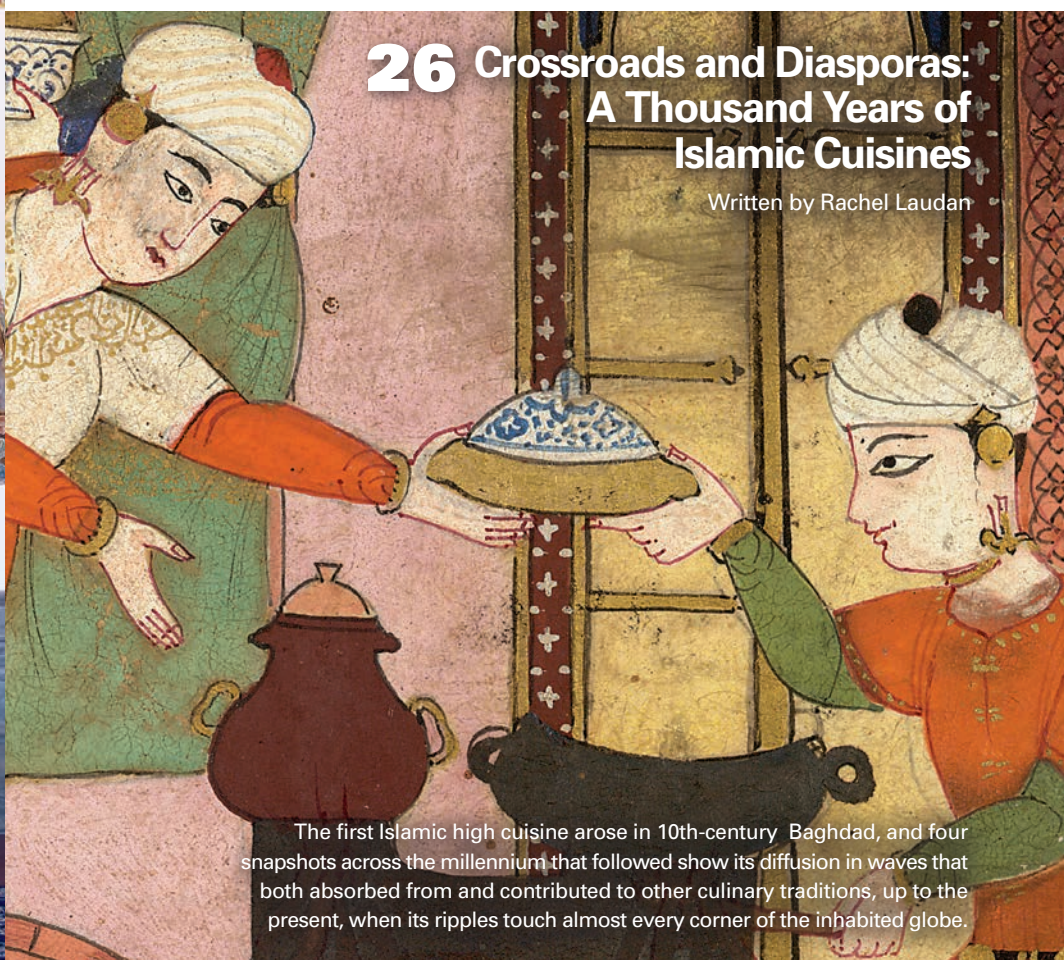
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Dozens of increasingly scarce, wood-built mosques, visited over a 2500-kilometer itinerary, show deep roots in traditional Chinese architecture, decorative principles and craftsmanship, in addition to uniquely Islamic adaptations.

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**SPECIAL INSERT**



# JORDAN

LONG  
BEFORE  
PETRA

WRITTEN *by* GAIL SIMMONS | PHOTOGRAPHY *by* GEORGE AZAR

## IT IS LATE AFTERNOON

in Wadi Faynan, an arid, tributary valley that opens into Wadi Araba, the long, broad segment of the Great Rift Valley that links the Dead Sea to the north with the Gulf of Aqaba to the south. I'm crouching inside an oval-shaped, mostly underground hut. It's a cozy place, one that would provide some shelter from rain, sun and cold—though add a few more people, and it would quickly feel cramped. It is roofed with mud-covered branches. Through window-like openings near the low ceiling, I can see the sun begin its descent behind the serrated silhouette of the surrounding Sharah Mountains as it rakes the sky with rose and apricot.



Outside I hear only wind and bird-song, but in my imagination I can travel back nearly 12,000 years to when this was a small but thriving community, occupied most likely for only parts of each year. Then, there would have been voices, people calling out to each other, the patter of children running about; perhaps the rasp of flint against bone as animal carcasses were cleaned; and—most significantly to archeologists today—the thumps and scrapes of pestles against mortars

as cereals were ground into a rough flour.

It's not only my imagination that has conjured this scene. On this spot, one of just a few identified to date in southwestern Asia, archeologists have evidence of what were likely some of the first experiments in communal living and farming. Here, discoveries of plant remains indicate that Neolithic ("New Stone Age") people gathered and processed wild barley, and then they possibly began sowing, nurturing and harvesting it, a practice that in time domesticated the plant and transformed history.



Looking out over the nearly 12,000-year-old Neolithic site in southern Jordan called WF16, it is hard to imagine that the people who lived here—some in partly subterranean huts like this reconstructed one—were likely on the cutting edge of an agricultural revolution.





Excavated remains of stone-wall structures dating to 8500-6250 BCE—before the development of pottery—lie along Wadi Ghuwayr, uphill about 15 minutes' walk from the older site of WF16. These show evolution in architecture from WF16's mud walls, and here archeologists have also uncovered evidence of the cultivation of cereals.

The landscape near my shelter is littered with fragments of knapped flint—remnants of the former inhabitants' hand tools—as well as lumps of hollowed-out stone that were used to laboriously pulverize grain by the handful. A few meters away are the telltale bumps and contours of at least 30 round structures that may have been storage buildings, with floors aboveground and with multiple chambers, some like the one I am sitting in now.

Although radiocarbon dating of charcoal deposits suggest that this place was inhabited first more than 100 centuries ago, my hut is a replica, constructed a few years back on the one-hectare (2-ac) site that archeologists have been excavating on and off for nearly 20 years.

It's beginning to grow dark outside. Mohammed De-fallah, a local Bedouin goat herder turned travel guide, calls. I emerge from the shelter and my reverie. He's brought me here from nearby Faynan village. Earlier, he'd also baked some bread for lunch here, mixing a ball of flour with water, then kneading the lump of dough and forming it into a perfect flatbread on an ancient mortar stone he found nearby. Sweeping aside the embers of an acacia-wood fire, he placed the dough under the fire-hot sand, and minutes later it was some of the freshest bread I'd ever tasted. It struck me that I had just witnessed a scene that may have been little changed since bread was first baked here thousands of years ago.

**T**his site at Faynan is just one of the dozens of Neolithic settlements discovered in the southern Levant, but it is proving one of the most significant. Faynan shows evidence that the great shift from hunting and gathering to crop-raising—the “agricultural revolution”—took place not only widely across the region, but also much farther south than previously believed, and it offers clues to how that change took place.

Dating to between 10,000 and 8500 BCE, Faynan is one of the earliest of the Neolithic sites discovered in the entire Middle East, which in turn means “it's one of the earliest in the whole world,” says Steven Mithen, an archeologist from University of Reading, UK. An expert in the origins and spread of farming, Mithen first visited Faynan in 1996, and he has been working here since 1997 alongside both Bill Finlayson, regional director of the London-based Council for British Research in the Levant (CBRL), and Mohammed Najjar, former director of excavations at Jordan's Department of Antiquities. “It's an especially well-preserved site, probably used by people who were just experimenting with the cultivating of plants,” Mithen says.

Beyond this, one particular discovery makes Faynan even more significant: In 2010, the archeological team, which included university students and local Bedouin, unearthed—to their astonishment—an amphitheater-like structure measuring 22 by 19 meters (70 x 61'), or roughly the size of two tennis





**In 2010, the team working at WF16 unearthed remains of what is now Wadi Faynan's most astonishing discovery: an amphitheater-like building that dates to 9700 BCE, prior to known agriculture. It calls into question the assumption that agriculture brought on higher social organization: Was it the other way around? The structure has been covered over to protect it against weathering until it can be studied further.**

courts. It dates to about 9700 BCE—before any known agriculture. It is the largest known building of its era.

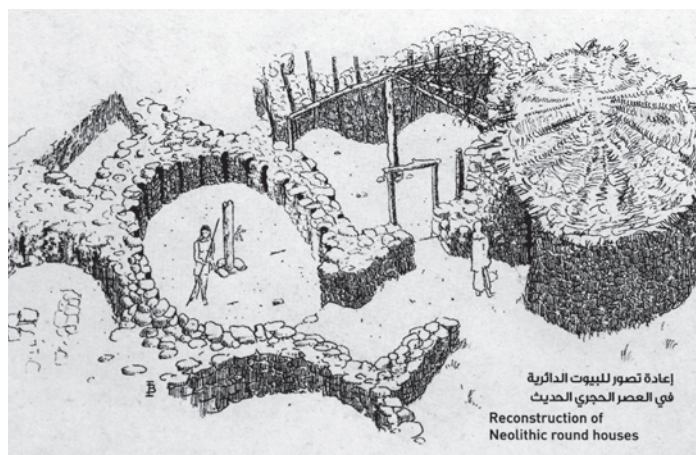
A meter-wide bench runs around about half its circumference, decorated with a wave pattern like that found on stone artifacts from the site and partly backed by another tier of seats. A 1.2-meter-deep (4') channel runs its length, flanked at one end by two stone platforms containing cup-shaped mortars. Close by, archaeologists uncovered broken pieces of stone bowls. There are also postholes in the floor that they say are likely to have held wooden pillars.

“Whether [the structure] was used for a functional activity like grinding grain, or some ceremonial purpose such as feasting or sacrifice, we don’t yet understand,” says Mithen. “But what is really striking is its age, representing the very earliest period of the Neolithic.” Although now backfilled for protection from the elements, the building is still discernible from the depressions just beneath the surface of the ground where I stand.

“When we first came here hoping to find a prehistoric site, ideally of the Neolithic period, other archaeologists told us there was no chance,” Mithen recalls. “They said this region of the Levant, at the very southern tip of the Fertile Crescent, was a backwater. They argued that it was all happening in the Mediterranean lands in the other side of the Jordan Valley near Jericho, or hundreds of kilometers north in Turkey where Göbekli Tepe had just been discovered.”

Jericho and Göbekli Tepe are two of the most important previously known early Neolithic sites in the wider region.

Jericho, 125 kilometers (75 mi) north of Faynan in the West Bank, was excavated first in the 1950s by British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon. Discoveries there include an 8.5-meter (28') tower, a massive stone wall and a number of round structures similar to those now known at Wadi Faynan. Göbekli Tepe, in southeastern Turkey, is unique for its elaborately decorated, rectangular stone pillars—some standing three meters (10') tall—excavated beginning in the 1990s by the late German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt.



**This artist's depiction of the round, stone houses at Wadi Faynan in its Neolithic heyday appears on a sign at the site.**



Pink oleanders track the trickle of water in Wadi Faynan, which today runs much drier than in Neolithic and earlier times. Indeed, discoveries in the vicinity trace human history back a million years, almost without a break.

“What we see now is that in the Levant, human development was not happening in just one place,” says Mithen. “There were contemporary developments in many different areas.”

**T**he early Neolithic site at Wadi Faynan now carries the prosaic name WF16, which distinguishes it by number from other nearby sites that together, along this mostly desiccated watercourse, comprise a million years of human records. It starts with the discovery of Lower Paleolithic (“early Old Stone Age”) hand axes, and it shows a nearly continuous progression to the present.

Half a kilometer east (1/3 mi) of WF16, at the entrance to Wadi Ghuwayr, is a site dating to 8500-6250 BCE, a later Neolithic period, before the development of pottery. Five kilometers (3 mi) down Wadi Faynan, a large tell, or mounded former habitation site, shows signs both of farming and of copper mining and smelting. It dates to 5500 years ago—around the beginning of the Bronze Age.

And then there are Roman, Byzantine and Islamic sites: Faynan was the greatest copper mine in the Roman Empire, and later, during the Byzantine era, it was known as Phaenon, home to the bishopric of Palaestina Tertia. Islamic ruins include a Mamluk-era caravanserai. This immense timescale prompts archeologists working at Wadi Faynan to contend that few, if any, places in the world can claim such a long record of continuous human activity.

But it is WF16, with its mysteriously ancient amphitheater



and the questions it raises about the story of mankind’s development, that excites Neolithic experts like Mithen. “It may not look as spectacular as Göbekli Tepe,” he tells me, explaining that the postholes at WF16 “may well have held [wooden] totem poles which haven’t survived,” or maybe they held up a roof. “If there was ever a roof over that structure, it would have been a very spectacular one,” he says.

Whatever the purpose of the building, it was apparently a focal point for the community. Archeologists still don’t yet know how sedentary the people who gathered here actually were: They may have assembled only at certain times of the year, perhaps to process or celebrate the harvest of wild plants. And because the structure predates farming, which began around 8000 BCE, some 10,000 years ago, it raises a compelling question of human social development: Did gathering for communal activity help people launch agriculture? To date, archeology generally has assumed that it worked the other way around: The rise of agriculture facilitated communal, sedentary living. But now, maybe not.

The hypothesis that WF16 was a seasonal rather than a permanent meeting place has the support of Gary Rollefson, an archeologist from Whitman College in Washington state who has worked on Neolithic projects in Jordan’s Eastern Desert for many years. WF16 appears to be a place “for temporary social activities centered around possible harvest and hunting,” he says. Marriages, gift exchanges and communal work at those same times would have fostered “social identity and solidarity,” he adds. This could have been helpful in organizing early plantings and harvests.

Similar questions of purpose have arisen from Göbekli Tepe, although no apparent storage or workshop structures have been located there. “Göbekli Tepe is not as representative of the ‘normal’ Neolithic world as somewhere like Faynan,” Mithen says, adding that, in addition, Faynan’s architectural remains are more precisely dated and better preserved than those at Jericho.

WF16 is also currently among the region’s most accessible



**A desert lark sits atop a stone at Wadi Faynan, where communal life may have set in motion the first steps toward the domestication of wild plants—and civilization as we know it.**





Neolithic sites. Jerf el-Ahmar, in northern Syria, disappeared in 1999 under waters retained by the Tishrin Dam, says Finlayson, who discovered WF16 and has spent many seasons working in southern Jordan. He notes that political upheaval has curtailed access in northern Iraq, and that sites in Iran excavated in the 1950s and '60s have been hard to reach since the 1979 revolution.

Here in Wadi Faynan, the climate, too, favored its preservation. Situated at the southern tip of the area in which cereals could grow wild, it was always a marginal place subject to less intensive agricultural and urban development than the better-watered areas to the north and west—activities that tend to degrade and erase delicate Neolithic remains.

**S**tanding on a mound at WF16 today, it's hard to see how this waterless, rock-strewn terrain could have supported an otherwise unassuming community that happened to be on the cutting edge of an agricultural revolution. But then, the climate was wetter, and both hunter-gatherers and early farmers would have been within easy reach of the nearby upland plateau rich with woodlands of oak, fig and pistachio. Today, only a few patches of evergreen oak forest remain there, along with some protected woodland at the southern end of the Dead Sea, to hint at the far more verdant, Neolithic world.

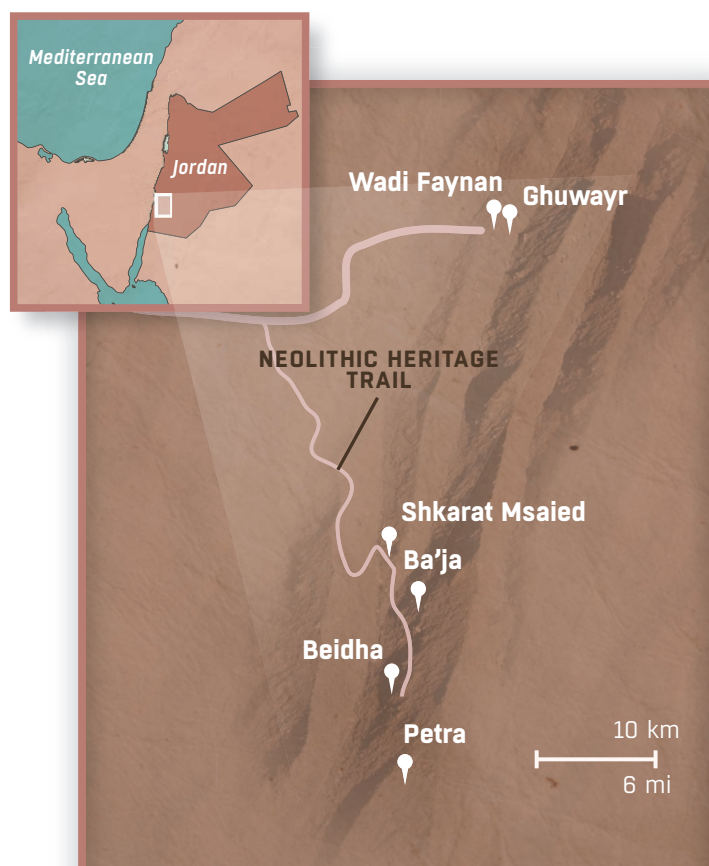
Mithen hopes that new work at WF16, scheduled for 2017, may reveal evidence of “when it actually started, and whether we see a long-term transition from very mobile hunter-gatherers to more sedentary hunter-gatherers to completely sedentary farmers.”

What the archeologists do know is that WF16 was abandoned around 10,500 years ago. Its most likely successor site is the nearby, 1.2-hectare (3 ac) area on a steep hillside at the entrance to Wadi Ghuwayr, which was excavated in the 1980s. Its small, rectangular buildings, with interior plastered walls and adjacent passageways, date to the period when villages were

**Before the discovery of WF16 in the mid-1990s, Beidha was the best-known Neolithic site in Jordan. It lies on the route of the Neolithic Heritage Trail, south of Wadi Faynan and just a few kilometers north of world-renowned Petra, the monumental Nabataean trading city built around the beginning of the fourth century BCE.**

known to be forming, and farming was well under way.

What impresses a visitor to Ghuwayr is the sense of shared purpose, visible even in the ruins, represented by the walls, stairs and windows visible in these more complex buildings. People were making big advances living together, forming long-lasting communities and organizing large-scale cooperative projects here, the archeologists explain. And they were probably cooperating





# A TRAIL RUNS THROUGH IT

With a million years of human history, Wadi Faynan today is home to Bedouin goat herders and farmers, and it is also a destination for visitors to the Faynan Ec lodge, who come mainly to enjoy rugged mountain scenery and profound desert silence.

“Local people, many of whom have worked on past excavations, have fragments of information about their particular dig,” explains Paul Burtenshaw, a research fellow at the Council for British Research in the Levant (CBRL). “But they don’t have any context for that information, or know about the lives of the people who lived here.”

“It’s the same with the tourists,” he adds. “Although some have heard of the archeology, it’s like a backdrop. People don’t come specifically to visit the sites.”

This is something archeologists at the CBRL are working to change by developing a 50-kilometer (31 mi) Neolithic Heritage Trail between Faynan and Beidha. The route largely follows the ancient road through Wadi Namla, and it takes in a handful of smaller sites as it winds through the majestic Sharah Mountains. While the trail has not yet been fully way-marked or signed for self-guided hikers, you can go on one of the guided hikes offered by local tour operators, or you can drive.

The first stop out of Faynan is Shkarat Msaied, set on a windswept hilltop 20 kilometers (12 mi) south. Unlike the scattered burial pits at Faynan, those discovered here are concentrated in a single building dating between 7300 and 5900 BCE, which suggests a special role as a mausoleum, and thus a shift in ritual practice.

Farther south is Ba’ja, the hardest to reach of all the trail sites, accessible only by hiking for around an hour along the dramatic Siq’ al-Ba’ja, where access is at times hampered by rocks washed down the gorge by flash floods. No other early community seems to have chosen such a hidden site, and the carved sandstone rings and pendants found here reveal Neolithic experimentation with art.

Beidha lies a few kilometers farther south. Situated next to the Nabataean caravanserai of Little Petra and fitted with new interpretive signs, Beidha is perhaps the best-presented site in the Neolithic story that Burtenshaw hopes the trail will begin to tell.

“The trail is more than the sum of its parts,” he says. “Taking it, you can follow the narrative through a variety of sites, and see the social experiment that was taking place in the Neolithic period. People might only spend a little time at each place, but the collective experience is that you see these sites, and the landscape they’re in, in a new way.”



For nearly a million years until relatively recent times, Wadi Faynan and environs were attractive places for making a living and trading. With several Neolithic sites, its importance as a commercial thoroughfare is shown by finds of seashells from the Mediterranean and the Red seas as well as bitumen, used to cover baskets, from the Dead Sea to the north.

not only internally, but also with others throughout this region and the wider Levant, in areas such as Jericho.

From Ghuwayr, I can see far down Wadi Faynan to the flat haze of Wadi Araba, which served as an obstacle-free, north-south thoroughfare enabling hardy people to share trade, technologies, ideas and discoveries. Finds at Wadi Faynan include seashells from the Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts (some made into beads) and raw materials such as bitumen from the Dead Sea (probably used to cover baskets). These and other finds help archeologists believe that there is now enough evidence to begin to piece together patterns of the region’s earliest commerce.

“There’s obviously contact—though not necessarily everyday contact,” says Finlayson. “We now realize this was a massively networked world, with no one place acting as the ‘origin point’ of agriculture. It’s as if people were all exploring



Posing amid the dig site in Beidha, from left, are archeologists Mohammed Najjar, former director of excavations at Jordan’s Department of Antiquities, Cheryl Makarewicz of Kiel University in Germany, and Bill Finlayson, regional director of the Council for British Research in the Levant.





the same idea, but expressing it differently.”

Or, as Rollefson puts it, “religion, ritual, and social interaction were not genetically programmed in these populations; instead, such activities were very different, locally developed variable solutions to problems that affected all human societies in that revolutionary period.”

In addition to Wadi Araba, there was also Wadi Namla, which links Faynan to the world-famous site of Petra, 50 kilometers (30 mi) to the south. That famous trading city was established by the Nabataeans around the fourth century BCE, but millennia before Petra there was a road linking Neolithic sites along it, including Shkarat Msaied, Ba’ja and Beidha, excavated in the 1950s and, until Faynan, the most prominent Neolithic site in southern Jordan.

I am heading to Beidha now, along the Wadi Namla road, which winds through the granite and sandstone of the Sharah Mountains. As it descends toward Beidha, the rugged scenery gives way to valleys planted with barley, temporarily lush after spring rains. Unlike at parched Faynan, here it’s not hard to imagine the region as it may have been in the Neolithic period.

What’s visible of Beidha dates mostly from the later pre-pottery Neolithic, after Faynan. I rendezvous with Finlayson and his colleagues Mohammed Najjar and Cheryl Makarewicz, an archeologist from Kiel University in Germany. Finlayson, who arrived at Beidha in 2000 and has been digging here intermittently ever since, shows me around its complex of circular and rectangular houses. Two buildings have been reconstructed nearby, partly so archeologists can test hypotheses about building techniques, and partly to give curious visitors from Petra, just a few kilometers to the south, something to see, much as with the reconstruction at WF16.

Unlike Wadi Faynan, where there is evidence stretching almost seamlessly back to the early Neolithic and before, here the archeological record shows that the immediate area lay abandoned from around 6500 BCE until the early Nabataean period some 6000 years later.

**Ba’ja, the second-to-last stop on the 50-kilometer (31 mi) Neolithic Heritage Trail, under development and linking Wadi Faynan to Beidha, is reached through the spectacular, rock-strewn obstacle course called Siq’ al-Ba’ja. While drivers can traverse the trail in a single day, hikers can savor it over four or five days with a local guide.**

“There’s something that happens at the end of this early Neolithic period when people begin to gather together in a large scale,” says Finlayson. “Beidha may have been too small to be part of that process, and may have been absorbed into a much bigger community. Or maybe they just exhausted the soil, or the local springs dried up.”

Beidha and its great Nabataean neighbor Petra flourished in a far more water-rich environment than today. Indeed, much of what’s known about Petra’s extensive and sophisticated water-management system probably applied to Beidha. But Finlayson is wary of too many analogies to Petra.

“Beidha is definitely not a ‘pre-Petra,’” he says. “The problem is, every site around Petra tends to be seen through a Nabataean lens.”

Now, as Finlayson resumes his work on the excavation beneath the unrelenting sun, I cast my mind back to Faynan, pondering how long it might be until people begin to see the rest of southern Jordan through a Neolithic lens, too. ☺



Historian and travel writer **Gail Simmons** ([www.travelscribe.co.uk](http://www.travelscribe.co.uk)) surveyed historic buildings and led hikes in Italy and the Middle East before becoming a full-time travel writer for uk and international publications. She holds a master’s degree in medieval history from the University of York and is currently earning her Ph.D. She lives in Oxford, England. Photojournalist and filmmaker **George Azar** ([george\\_azar@me.com](mailto:george_azar@me.com)) is co-author of *Palestine: A Guide* (Interlink, 2005), author of *Palestine: A Photographic Journey* (University of California, 1991) and director of the film *Gaza Fixer* (2007). He lives in Jordan.



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# RECORD-BREAKING

WRITTEN BY GERALD ZARR



**THESE DAYS, GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS SEEM TO COME IN RECORD NUMBERS OF SHAPES AND SIZES. SOME SEEM LIKE PUBLICITY-HOUNDING—MOST CLOTHESPIN CLIPPED ON A FACE (159), LARGEST GROUP HUG (10,554 PEOPLE) AND SO ON—WHILE OTHERS, SUCH AS THE ONE SET IN 2010 BY UNITED ARAB EMIRATES INVENTOR AND RENEWABLE-ENERGY ENTHUSIAST HAIDAR TALEB ERABEH, CARRY SOCIAL WEIGHT.**

**D**iagnosed with polio at age four, Erabeh, now 51, designed a solar-powered wheelchair that he rode non-stop for 14 hours and 28 seconds from Masdar City north to the Sharjah al-Thiqa Club for the Handicapped, a distance of 141.7 kilometers (88.05 mi). This earned him both a Guinness record and national celebrity status. His eco-friendly wheelchair is powered by four batteries charged by overhead solar panels that also provide shade for Erabeh himself. He says two goals motivated him: innovation in renewable energy and higher awareness of the power of people with disabilities. “Give disabled people a chance and they

**Seated under the solar-panel canopy of his wheelchair and surrounded by supporters, Haidar Taleb Erabeh holds his certificate presented by Guinness World Records.**





Dubai welcomed 2014 with the World's Largest Fireworks Display, which was launched from stations across the World, which is the name of the World's Largest Artificial Archipelago, left, as well as the nearby Palm Jumeirah.

can perform miracles,” Erabeh said to the Abu Dhabi-based newspaper *The National*.

Erabeh's is one of dozens of Guinness records set over the past few years throughout the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent and South Asia, which have become one of the world's top record-setting regions. According to Talal Omar, who directs the office Guinness opened in 2013 in Dubai, record applications from these regions have ballooned by as much as 300 to 400 percent. “We have only scratched the surface in the region's talents,” he enthused to Guinness's own *World Records News*.

As home to the World's Tallest Building (Burj Khalifa), Largest Man-made Archipelago (World Islands) and Biggest Shopping Mall (Dubai Mall)—not to mention the Fastest Roller-Coaster—Dubai itself holds more than 100 Guinness records, including one of the world's most spectacular: World's Largest Fireworks Display. Mounted over a mere six minutes on New Year's Eve 2013, it burst 479,651 fireworks—about 80,000 per minute—across both of the emirate's artificial archipelagos, the World and the Palm Jumeirah. The old record, set in 2012

by Kuwait, was blown away within the first minute. The spectacle was timed by more than 100 computers, and it took more than 10 months to plan at a cost of nearly \$6.7 million.

Although Omar calls the fireworks record “iconic” among the more than 300 record attempts he has judged as an official “adjudicator” for Guinness World Records, one stands out, he says. In April 2012, Hebah Alwafi of Jiddah, on Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast, teamed up with the charitable organization Ayoun Jeddah to set a new record for the Largest Donation Of School Supplies in 24 Hours. In that one day, Alwafi and volunteers solicited and collected 4019 kilograms (8860 lb) of school supplies from individuals and wholesale suppliers, all for the benefit of children in need. “It's really inspiring to see people attempting to set records as well as doing good deeds for society,” said Omar to Shiva Kumar Thekkepat of UAE-based *Friday Magazine*.

Earlier that year on the east coast of Saudi Arabia, in Dammam, a very different record supported community welfare

## THE STORY OF GUINNESS

The story of Guinness World Records began in 1951 in Ireland when the managing director of Guinness breweries, Sir Hugh Beaver, found himself in an argument about whether the grouse or the golden plover was Europe's fastest game bird. He looked for a book that would give him an authoritative answer. Unable to find one, he decided to produce it himself. Today, his *Guinness Book of World Records* itself holds the world's record as the world's all-time best-selling non-religious book. And as for Sir Hugh's argument, the record went neither to the grouse nor the golden plover, but to the wood pigeon.

when Almajdouie Logistics Company moved the Heaviest Object Transported by Road. A single-piece, 4.9 million kilogram (10.8 million lb) evaporator unit for a seawater-desalination plant, which will help make fresh water more abundant for more than 3 million people, arrived on a custom-made ship from Korea, and rolling it two kilometers (1.2 mi) to the plant's

site earned it the record. Yet Almajdouie, like other Guinness record holders, knows well the old adage that “records are made to be broken.” In April this year, Abu Dhabi-based transporter ALE moved an offshore oil platform whose 13,191 tons put Almajdouie in its rearview mirror.

Gigantism endures as one of Guinness's most popular categories worldwide, especially when connected with edibles. Big-food records appeared in the *Guinness Book of World Records* early on, and now, to avoid charges that it may encourage food waste, Guinness requires that food submitted for a record be entirely consumed

after measurement. This produces events, such as that in July 2012, when 10 chefs at the Landmark Hotel in Amman, Jordan, made the World's Largest Falafel Ball: 74.75 kilograms (165 lb). It was weighed and then served to 600 people as part of the Ramadan *iftar*, or evening meal. (Food-record organizers have to be careful, though, to make sure Guinness officials measure the dish before the eating begins: In October 2008 in Tehran, Iran, 1000 cooks whipped up a 1500-meter-long (0.93 mi) ostrich-meat sandwich as a promotion for the lean, low-cholesterol poultry,



**Setting a record that stood for two years, Almajdouie of Dammam, Saudi Arabia, moved the Heaviest Object Transported by Road—a single-piece, 4.9-million kilogram (10.8 million lb) evaporator for a desalination plant.**





Left: A line of volunteers unfurls the World's Largest Hand-Printed Painting last year in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia.

## A VERY LARGE, VERY GREEN RECORD

Businesswoman and environmentalist Dina Al-Nahdi of Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, wanted not only to set a record, but also to do so in a way that would bring people together and send a meaningful message. Through ENTEC Environmental Technology, which she founded in 1995, she enlisted artists to help lead the creation of the World's Largest Hand-Printed Painting: a 10,235-square-meter (110,168-sq-ft) map of Saudi Arabia, which was created between March and September 2013 with public participation that resulted in 1.2 million handprints applied to canvas sheets that were assembled into a stadium-sized final work. (The feat nearly doubled the previous record, held in Kuwait.) On Saudi National Day, September 23, Al-Nahdi and artists Ashwaq Dali, Nabil Tahir, Ahmad Najar and Taghreed Wazna gifted the map to Saudi King Abdullah in a ceremony at Jiddah's Red Sea Mall.

The green handprints not only echoed the green field of the Kingdom's green flag, but they also sent an environmental message: "Hand in hand, we can keep our country clean," said Al-Nahdi.

To her point, the canvas was all natural cotton, and leftover supplies were donated to charitable agencies that support ... what else? Handicrafts.

—RAWAN NASSER

but the over-eager crowd began gobbling it from the other end before it could be officially measured.) Outside the Gulf region, one of the top record-producing cities is Lahore, Pakistan's second-largest city and site since 2012 of the annual Punjab Youth Festival, which has produced to date 32 individual and group records. Last year, Karachi resident Mohammad Rashid kicked 50 coconuts off the heads of (standing, helmeted) people in one minute, and 1450 young men and women sat across from one another in pairs at long tables to break a 2012 UK-held record for the Number of People Simultaneously Arm Wrestling. The year before, 12-year-old Mehre Gul set a world record for One-Handed Chessboard Setup (45.48 seconds). And not all the participants are young: Sadi Ahmed, a farmer from Faisalabad, set a record by pulling a Hyundai truck weighing 1700 kilograms (3748 lb) over a 63-meter (206') course—with his beard.

Usman Anwar, director of the



Guinness has honored claims of 32 records by the three-year-old Punjab Youth Festival in Lahore, Pakistan. Top: 1450 participants break the record for the Largest Number of People Simultaneously Arm Wrestling; bottom: Mohammad Rashid of Karachi kicks 50 coconuts off the heads of four courageous assistants.



festival, explained to Michele Langevine Leiby of *The Washington Post* that young people from 55,200 neighborhood and village councils had been training for eight months for a chance to compete in the games. “Our main objective was to inculcate interest for sports in the public,” Anwar said.

Other records are unabashed appeals to national pride, and at times this sets off rivalries, such as those currently running hot among India, Pakistan and Bangladesh for Most People Singing a National Anthem. On August 14, 2011 (Pakistan’s Independence Day), 5885 Pakistani singers set a record that held until January 25, 2012, when 15,243 Indian singers claimed it, only to fall later that year at the first Punjab Youth Festival, where 42,813 Pakistani singers gathered. In May 2013, 121,653 employees of one of India’s largest conglomerates broke the record in a lavish, open-air show in Lucknow, India, only to be bested on March 26 of this year when Bangladeshi singers numbering 254,537 filled the national parade ground in Dhaka and sang for what is, for now, the record.

Similarly, the same countries are vying over World’s Largest Human Flag: Pakistan took this record with 24,200 during the 2012 Punjab Youth Festival, and Bangladesh mustered 27,117 on December 16, 2013, to celebrate its 1971 independence—from Pakistan—which countered two months later with a flag comprised of 28,957 students. But then in August, Nepal entered the contest, fielding 35,000. Who’s next?

Returning to individuals, Haider Taleb Erabeh did not stop with his record. He used the fame it won him to help publicize an even more demanding, solar-wheelchair-powered trip, though not a record-setting one—320 kilometers (200 mi) across the UAE. For 11 days, he visited schools, malls and social clubs in all seven emirates to talk up renewable energy. On December 2, 2010, UAE national day, he rolled into Masdar City—which helped sponsor him, and which itself earned a record in 2013 as Most Environmentally Friendly City. It’s a city whose power comes entirely from renewable resources; it recycles all waste and



**Top: Setting a record that lasted only two months, 27,117 Bangladeshis formed their flag by holding colored placards. Both Pakistan and Nepal bested Bangladesh this year. Above: During Ramadan 2012, chefs in Amman produced The World’s Largest Falafel, which Guinness certified at 74.75 kilograms (165 lb).**

uses driverless electric transport. It also holds a record for a rare, low number: For its projected population of 50,000, it holds the record for Lowest Carbon Footprint: zero. Now that’s one for the record book! ☺



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**Link:**  
[www.guinnessworldrecords.com](http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com)



# *The* **BACK-ROAD HISTORIC MOSQUES** *of* **CHINA**

*2500 kilometers, 14 days, 7 provinces and 2  
autonomous regions, 6 cars and 1 overnight train:  
47 of China's oldest mosques.*

WRITTEN BY SHEILA BLAIR | JONATHAN BLOOM | NANCY STEINHARDT | PHOTOGRAPHED BY JONATHAN BLOOM







*In a country* KNOWN FOR LARGE NUMBERS, IT WAS A MODEST, ROUND NUMBER THAT GRABBED OUR ATTENTION: 100. THAT IS THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF MOSQUES BUILT BEFORE 1700 THAT ARE ESTIMATED TO REMAIN THROUGHOUT CENTRAL AND NORTHERN CHINA—OUT OF SOME 30,000 MOSQUES OVER AN AREA LARGER THAN EITHER TEXAS OR FRANCE. WE SET OUT, TRAVELING HIGHWAYS AND BACK ROADS, IN SEARCH OF THE OLDEST, LEAST WELL KNOWN AMONG THEM.



Top left: Offering both an entry and a frame for the view beyond it, a circular opening in a wall is known in China as a moon gate. A common feature in gardens, it was also used in religious architecture and, as we see here, in the wall at the Great Mosque of Xian. Top right: The first mosque we visited, the Xuanhua North Mosque in northwest Hebei province, shows much that typifies not only the historic mosques we saw, but also other traditional secular and religious complexes in this part of China: A central courtyard surrounded by low halls and rooms; timber framing; a slightly raised main prayer hall; and perimeter walls of stone or brick. Above: Many historic mosques have undergone renovation in recent years, such as the Beiguan Mosque in Tianshui in Gansu province, where Arabic calligraphy has been left intact above the *mihrab* or prayer niche, background center.

**T**o prepare, we briefed ourselves with more numbers. Of China's more than 1.3 billion citizens, some 1.8 percent, or 23 million, are Muslims. This Muslim population

Paint on wood decorates the entrance to the Great East Mosque at Kaifeng, in Henan province, where Arabic calligraphy appears amid Chinese motifs including dragons, fish, birds, peony and lotus flowers, and symbols for good luck; a string of LED lights winds around the rafters that support the tile roof.

comprises 10 major ethnic and language groups including 10 million Chinese-speaking Hui and 8.4 million Turkic-speaking Uighurs. The rest are Kazaks, Kyrgyz, Salars, Tatars and Uzbeks, who all speak Turkic languages, as well as Mongolian-speaking Dongxiang and Bao'an, and Farsi-speaking Tajiks.

We did not want to cover, in the short time available to us, China's well-known historic mosques. These include Beijing's Ox Street Mosque, so named for its Muslim neighborhood where





Minarets of a recently built and stylistically non-Chinese mosque appear down the street, visible at the left, in Linxia, which once thrived on trans-Asian Silk Road trade, and which today hosts the largest number of mosques of any city in China—more than 70, both old and new.

The burial sites of men who did much to introduce Islam to central China in the 18th century are marked by pagoda-like structures, such as this one at left, surrounded by buildings for worship and teaching, in Linxia, Gansu province. Little on the exteriors indicates they are historic centers of learning and scholarship. Above: A bas-relief fresco depicts the traditional central Chinese walled building complex.

oxen—not pigs—were butchered, and the Great Mosque of Xian, both of which are whistle-stops on tourist itineraries. We also avoided tourist favorites in the old port cities along China's south-eastern coast, including the "Cherishing the Sage" Mosque in Guangzhou (formerly Canton); the "Sacred Friendship" Mosque in Quanzhou; the "Phoenix" Mosque in Hangzhou; and the "Transcendent Crane" Mosque in Yangzhou. All of these were bestowed Chinese names that reflected Chinese tenets and myths by their Muslim founders, who arrived in China via the maritime Silk Road. Finally, we excluded a third group of well-known mosques, which serve the Uighur population



Reflected in plate-glass windows retrofitted onto the porch of the traditional Chinese-style mosque in Xining, capital of Qinghai province and the largest city on the Tibetan Plateau, are the domes and minarets of the nearby, much newer mosque built in "International Islamic" style.

of Kashgar and other cities of far-western China and whose architecture has much in common with mosques in nearby Uzbekistan and other countries to the west.

Far more intriguing to us were the less-well-known, off-the-beaten-track historic mosques of central and northern China that adopted, adapted and built upon traditional Chinese building designs to meet Islamic needs.

Soon after we met in Beijing, a driver whisked us off for the western Hebei prov-



The gateway to the complex at Guyuan in Ningxia Autonomous Region combines typical features of Islamic and Chinese architectural decoration: The exterior ornamentation juxtaposes Arabic and Chinese texts and motifs, incorporating flowers, fruit, birds and real and mythical animals, topped with traditionally Chinese, green-tiled roofs with curling finials shaped as fantastic beasts.

ince, northwest of Beijing. Along the three-hour trip, we caught a passing glimpse of the Great Wall before stopping in the city of Zhangjiakou (jang-jea-koo) to visit the Xuanhua (shwen-hwua) North Mosque. There, outside a nearby bookshop, a casual greeting of "*as salamu alaykum*"—"Peace be with you" in Arabic—was understood with a smile, and it led to an invitation inside: The place was filled with Qur'ans, books and calligraphic inscriptions, in Arabic and Chinese, penned by our host. It was clear this would be a richly fascinating trip.

Indeed, traveling exclusively overland for the next two weeks, we exhausted six different drivers and cars, and rode one overnight train to climb up through the Yellow River Valley from Guyuan to Xining (shee-ning) on the Tibetan Plateau. (See map, p. 19.) In all, we traversed the seven provinces of Hebei, Shanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Hubei and Henan as well as the two autonomous regions of Inner Mongolia and Ningxia—all areas in central, north and northwestern China with significant Hui populations.

Many of China's mosques are said to have long histories, but it is often difficult to ascertain just how old the edifices are. Nobody likes to talk about what transpired during the Cultural Revolution, which lasted the decade until the 1976 death of Chairman Mao Zedong. During that time, the practice of religion was curtailed, and many religious buildings were appropriated and repurposed. In some places, inscribed stele (upright flat stones), often inscribed in Arabic on one side and Chinese on the other, tell the stories of mosques back through the centuries, but much of what remains dates back no further than the 1700s, and it is often overlaid with modern reconstructions, repairs and repainting, all of greatly varying fidelity to older designs. Indeed, in Tianshui in Gansu province the Beiguan Mosque was in the midst of just such a renovation.

It was soon after the rise of Islam in the seventh century that Muslims came to China, mainly as ambassadors or merchants. They came both by land, along the Silk Roads through Central Asia, and by sea, over the Indian Ocean via the Straits of Malacca. Historical sources claim that in 651, an envoy representing the third caliph, Uthman, came to the





The Na Family Mosque at Yongning in the Ningxia Autonomous Region reflects traditional Chinese architecture with its balconies and upturned tile roofs, but the recently restored arched gateway and the two flanking, gray brick towers evoke the later influence of Middle-Eastern mosques with the symmetry of a main entrance flanked by minarets. The mosque's stepped *minbar*, or pulpit, is another Chinese adaptation of a traditional Islamic form. Behind it, the wall is painted with a medallion similarly combining Chinese motifs and Arabic calligraphy.



The gateway to the new Hui Culture Park, above, stands only a short distance from the Na Family Mosque (top), but is 3000 kilometers (1865 mi) and four centuries from its architectural model, the Taj Mahal, built in Agra, India, by the Mughal emperor Jahangir in the 17th century. This cultural park reflects both new wealth in China and the globalization of Islamic culture.

Tang court at Chang'an in central China. With the spread of Islam into Central Asia and the conversion of the Turks to Islam, cities in the western province of Xinjiang (sheen-jee-ahn) became important centers of Muslim culture as early as the 10th century. Apart from some 12th-century tombstones found in coastal cities, however, the first physical evidence for the presence of Muslims in China dates to several 14th-century mosques in the southeast that today are much reconstructed.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, followers of Afak Khoja, who was buried in 1693 or 1694 outside Kashgar in Xinjiang province, brought a wave of Islam east into Gansu, Ningxia and other regions of central China. The disciples' tombs became the centers of religious complexes that also included rooms for worship and teaching. These buildings adapted traditional Chinese forms and motifs to meet the needs of Islam, but they did so in ways that might surprise visitors from western Islamic lands. For example, many are decorated not only with Arabic calligraphy, but also with traditional Chinese figural and representational scenes. The city of Linxia (lin-shee-a) in Gansu province is home to



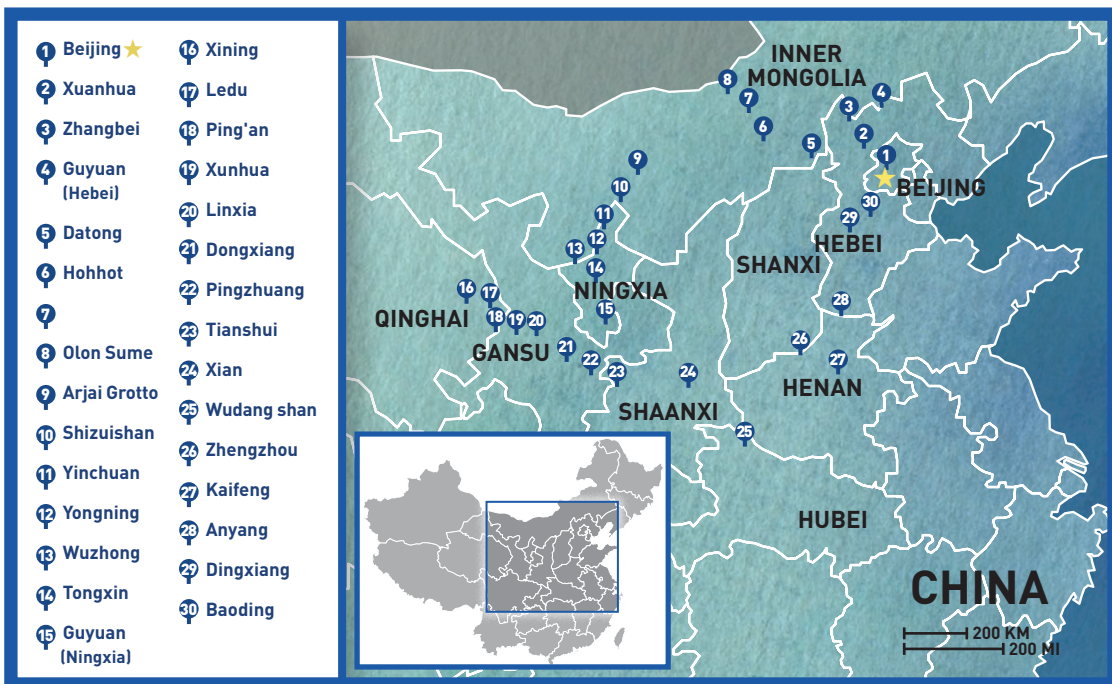
many such complexes, which serve not only as centers of Muslim scholarship, but as oases of quiet amid urban life.

Along with the old, we also discovered much that is new. In earlier centuries, it was particularly arduous for Muslims in China to make the long journeys to centers of Muslim learning to the west, most notably the Hajj, or pilgrimage, to Makkah, which might have taken as long as two years. Today, China's Muslims, with the rest of the nation, are more connected to the rest of the world than ever, and the architectural consequences of this are increasingly apparent: Many old mosques are now paired with gleaming new ones, often funded from abroad and often designed in what may be called "International Islamic" style marked by pointed green domes and slender, tall minarets—neither of which have any roots in China. We saw one particularly striking example of such indigenous-Chinese and imported design juxtaposition in Yongning in Ningxia, where the traditional Na Family Mosque (also called Naijahu Mosque) stands near the Hui Culture Park, whose designers appear to have been inspired mostly by India's Taj Mahal.

These new mosques using non-Chinese designs are dramatic examples of change within a deeply traditional architectural culture that has applied common design principles consistently to all kinds of secular and religious buildings over several millennia. The palaces of rulers and other elites, which are really just very big houses, served as models first for Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian temples and later for mosques. As a



A rectangular, wooden post-and-beam structure raised on a platform with outer walls of brick and a tile roof, the Zhuxian Mosque in Kaifeng, Henan province, above, differs little from the worship hall at the Buddhist monastery at Ledu, on the Tibetan Plateau near Xining, left. At the mosque, the two small pavilions on either side of the path—which in a Buddhist setting might be drum and bell towers—here contain stelae, or upright stone slabs, chronicling the history of the mosque.





result, a surprising number of Chinese buildings resemble one another closely. For example, a ninth-century Buddhist temple, a 13th-century Daoist temple, a 15th-century mosque, a 16th-century funerary hall, a 17th-century Confucian hall and a 19th-century residence may all exhibit unmistakable similarities. Why Chinese architecture has so many shared features among such varied purposes, across so many geographic and ecological regions, over millennia, was a question that framed our journey from city to city, mosque to mosque. While the size of the buildings and the quality of the materials showed differences in the status and patronage of the structure, they did not often point to any difference in purpose.

One simple answer to the question, which is exemplified by mosque architecture from the 14th to the 20th centuries, is flexibility. They were all built using timber framing braced by sets of wooden brackets; roofed in ceramic tile; grouped in complexes arranged symmetrically along hori-

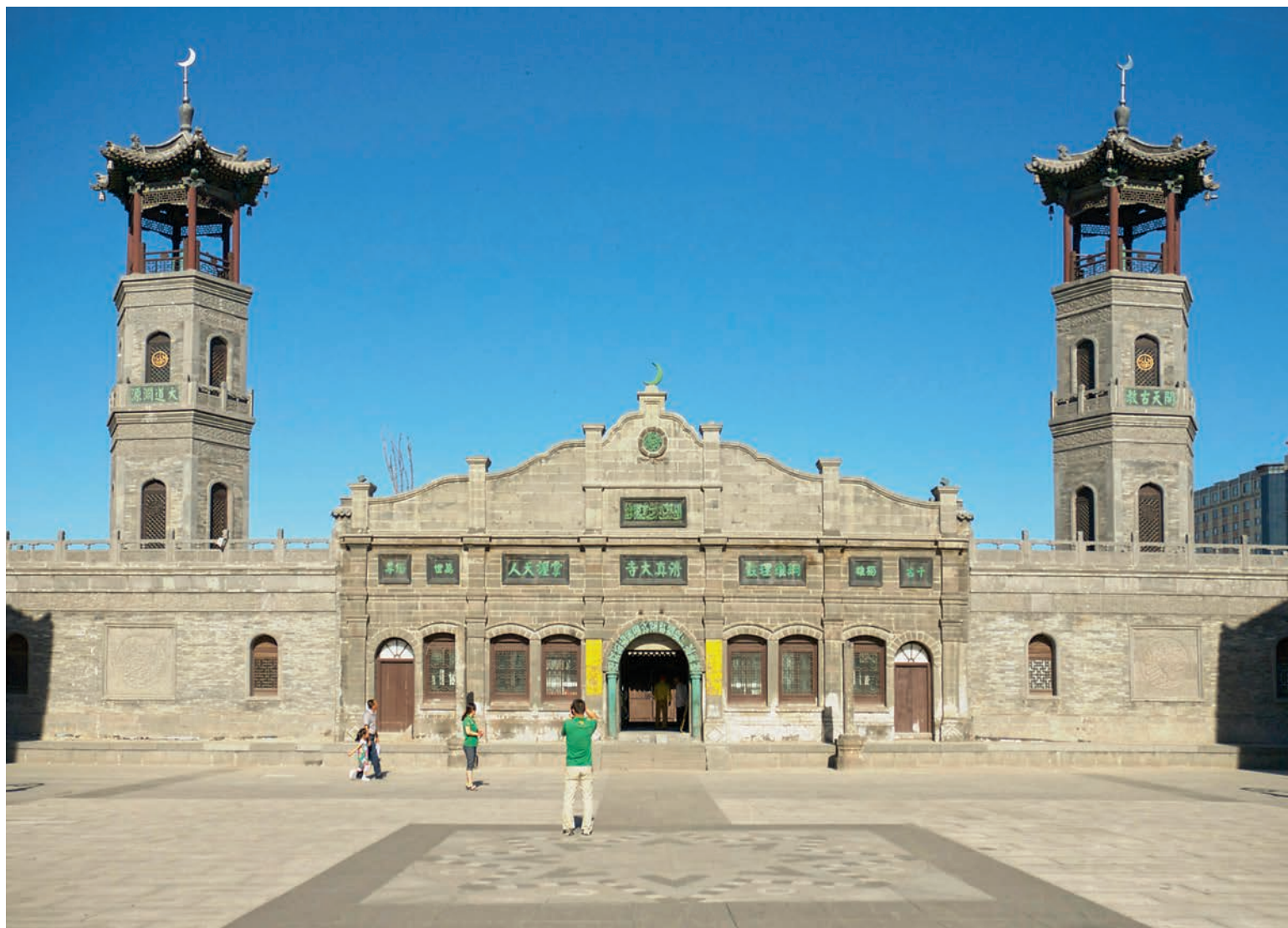
zontal axes around rectangular courtyards; and set behind walls, usually of brick, with a main gate to the south.

Therefore, to turn a traditional Chinese palace or temple plan into a mosque was often as straightforward as orienting the complex to face Makkah, which in China was long understood to be due west. The prayer hall is generally the main building, and it sits in the center of the complex on a platform

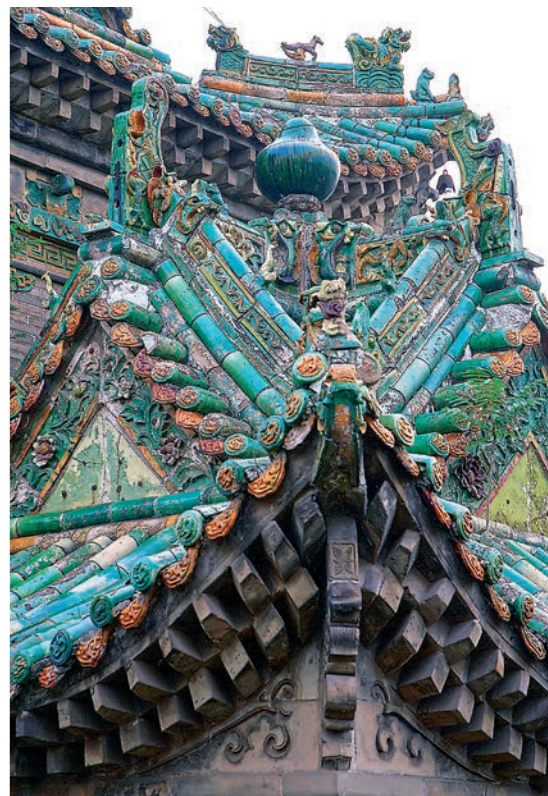
or plinth as a show of its importance—a practice unique to China. Along the courtyard walls gather auxiliary structures for classrooms, offices and ablutions, as well as residences for the staff, students and travelers—all functions that in some

*Why Chinese architecture shares so many features across so many geographic and ecological regions, over millennia, was a question that framed our journey.*

Islamic lands are frequently accommodated in separate or adjacent buildings such as the *madrassah* (religious school), *kuttab* (elementary school), *khanaqah* (hospice), *imaret* (soup kitchen) and the like. Most of these functions—education, administration, living quarters for religious leaders and visitors—appear no less in Chinese Buddhist and Taoist complexes.







Set within a traditional Chinese frame, Arabic calligraphy, above left, is often used to decorate the walls of mosques, as here at the entrance to the Great East Mosque at Kaifeng. The fluid line is typical of Chinese calligraphy, which is normally executed with a brush, rather than the reed pen used elsewhere in Islamic lands. Center: Usually located in the middle of a mosque's courtyard, the pagoda-like *wangyuelou*, or "moon-watching tower," is not a minaret, although today loudspeakers mounted on this one at Xunhua in Qinghai province show that it has been adapted to that purpose. Right: The roofs of traditional buildings in China are normally covered with glazed ceramic tiles, some of which are decorated along the ends and ridge lines with vegetal and floral motifs as well as with fantastic beasts, such as dragons and phoenixes. The ends of some of the cylindrical tiles are molded with Arabic inscriptions, while others are stamped with dragons. All of these features combine here on the roof of the Great Northern Mosque in Qinyang, Henan province.

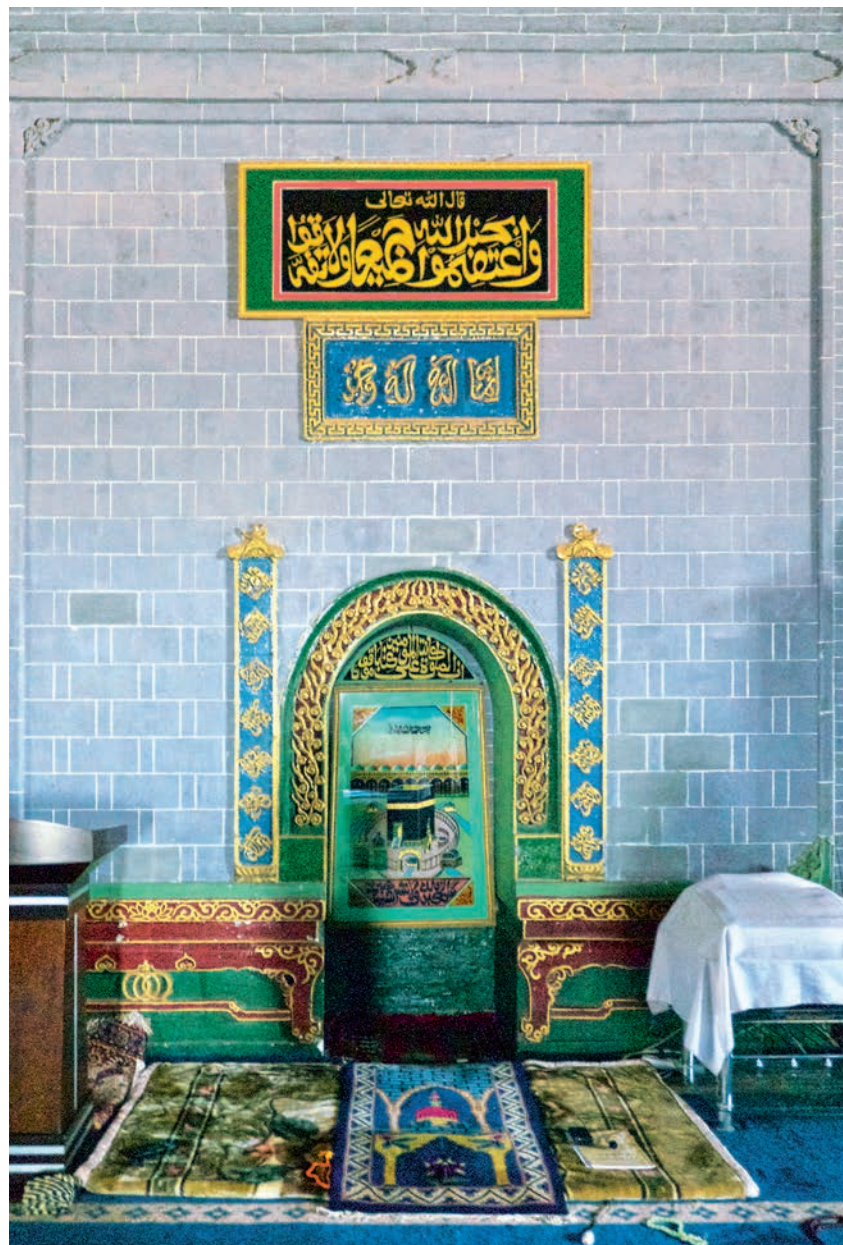
This traditional Chinese architectural system is furthermore generally low in profile, apart from the pagoda, which is the Chinese version of the Indian Buddhist stupa, a symbolic mountain containing Buddhist relics. The minaret, the tower adjacent to a mosque from which the call to prayer is given, was not necessarily part of the traditional Chinese mosque, although in some places Chi-

nese builders transformed the pagoda into the *wangyuelou*, or "moon-watching tower," which was located in the middle of the mosque's courtyard. It was not used for the call to prayer; that function was, and still often is, performed from the doorway of the mosque, now with electronic amplification.

Right: At a sweet shop outside the mosque at Hohhot, capital of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, the signs are mainly in Chinese characters, but the Arabic in the small oval shows that the food is halal, or permissible for Muslims. However, the Arabic letters in the oval are written incorrectly as separate characters, like Chinese. Opposite: The two three-story towers flanking the portal to the recently restored 18th-century mosque at Datong in northern Shanxi province are local interpretations of a recently universalized, non-Chinese symbol of Islam. The crescent finials at the top of the towers are complemented by Chinese bells hanging from the eaves.







Chinese traditional architecture is generally based on timber posts and beams, and it does not normally use arches. An exception is the long association of the arch with the *mihrab*, the niche in the Makkah-facing wall of a mosque, which introduced this otherwise novel shape into Chinese mosques. Left to right: Mihrabs in Linxia (Old Wang Mosque), Tongxin and Dingxiang. Far right: Painted timber beams in Dingxiang. Opposite, lower right and far right: Baoding and Kaifeng (Zhuxian Mosque).

While in most of the dry-climate Muslim world, builders favored brick and stone due to the scarcity of wood, in China timber has always been abundantly available. Traditional Chinese timber-frame construction, whether for palaces, temples or mosques, relied on wooden posts to hold horizontal beams that in turn supported the rafters and roof. These elements were joined using a pegged mortise-and-tenon system with braces, known as bracket sets: No nails, no screws.

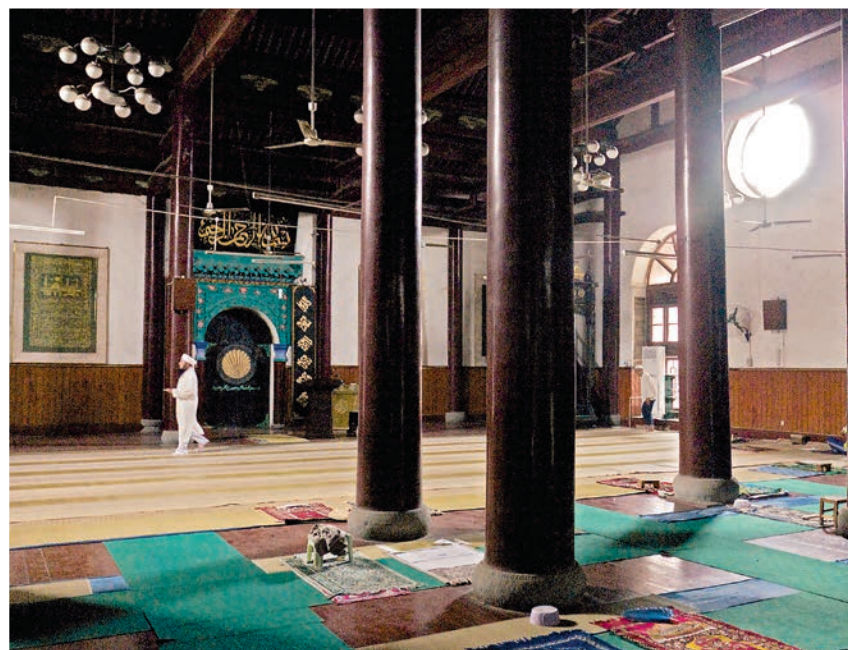
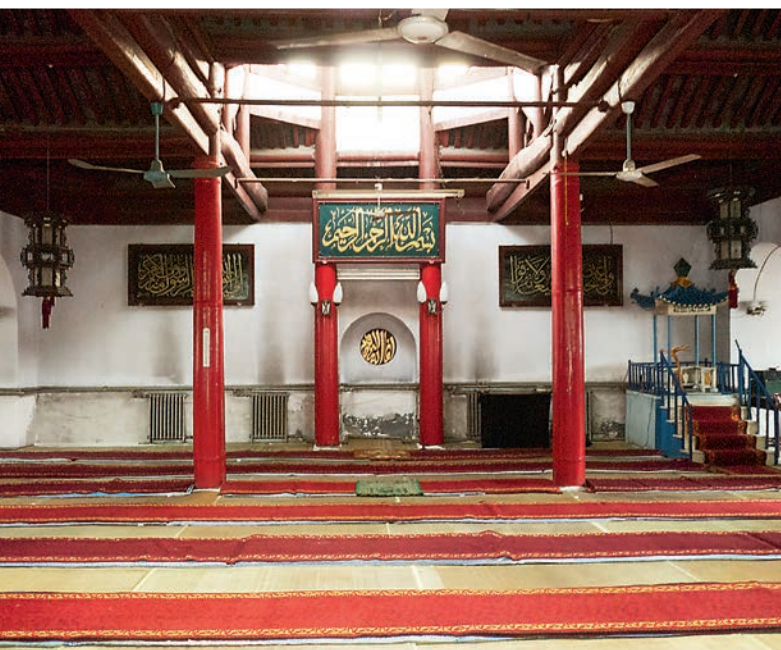
This craftsmanship grew in complexity from the 14th to the 17th centuries. Simple bracket sets with two or three layers of “arms” in 14th-century buildings become bracket sets that clustered in five to seven layers, along nine different angles, by the 17th century. Eventually, the brackets came so

close together that it can be seen as a Chinese equivalent of *muqarnas*, the kaleidoscopic, stalactite-like motif that graces Islamic architecture from Bukhara to Granada.

While wood was the most important material for construction, brick was characteristically used for the outer, dividing walls of buildings, and ceramic tile was used for roofing. Although traditional Chinese builders did know and use both arches and vaults, they did so mostly for underground tombs, not for aboveground architecture.

For Muslims, however, the arch has a particularly religious significance: Since its introduction in early Islamic times, the *mihrab*, or niche in the Makkah-facing wall of a mosque (*qibla*), has invariably taken an arched form that appears, with variations, to this day. Again owing to the dearth of timber in North









On the upper reaches of the Yellow River, in Qinghai, the Hongshuiquan mosque is one of the best-preserved, most evocative mosques in central China. Its entrance hall, left, displays an extraordinarily clear example of a traditional Chinese timber-frame construction, in which all the posts, beams and supporting brackets are slotted together with mortise-and-tenon joints that use no metal nails or screws.

Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, the common technique for covering a space became the vault of brick or stone—vaults being no more than arches rotated and, for length, extended in space. Chinese Muslims, too, seem to have at times associated vaults with Islam, since some of the timber-frame mosques we saw showed arched and vaulted spaces made of brick in the most important part of the building: the bays in front of the mihrab. This kind of construction is known in Chinese as a “beam-less hall.” And at other times, the wood construction actually imitated a domed space without relinquishing its structural reliance on posts and beams.

The decoration of the mosques we saw similarly combined traditional Islamic motifs of calligraphy, and geometric and vegetal ornament with traditional Chinese ones of peonies, lotus flowers, dragons and phoenixes. The use of Arabic script is the most obvious difference between Muslims and others in China, whether in the mosque or in the marketplace.

Arabic calligraphy in China often displays an exceptionally fluid line that reflects the long Chinese tradition of writing with brushes rather than the reed pens of other Islamic lands. In the case of veg-

Opposite: The custodian of the Hongshuiquan mosque welcomed us. The unusual absence of paint emphasizes the purity of its preservation.







Because Chinese architecture has been so consistent over millennia, one way of dating a building is to look at the complexity of the “bracket sets,” the wooden braces that support the roof: The more complicated the bracket sets, the later the building. These at the Hongshuiquan mosque point toward the 18th or 19th centuries. Right: At the Hongshuiquan mosque, the *mihrab* stands in this small square room covered by exquisite carved paneling and this elaborate wooden ceiling that evokes a dome.

etal and floral ornament, there is much overlap between the two traditions, but it is uniquely Chinese to depict mythical beasts in Islamic religious settings, where figural representation is normally avoided. Sometimes these beasts are set like guardian figures flanking doorways or decorating roofs; at other times they integrate into the carved and painted decoration. In a similar way, in some mosques Muslims adopted the traditional Chinese use of incense, and in some courtyards one can find large bronze or ceramic vessels, inscribed in Arabic and Chinese, filled with sand that holds smoldering sticks of incense.

Perhaps the greatest surprise of our trip was the charming

Hongshuiquan (hung-shwee-chew-ahn) or “Vast Spring” mosque at Ping’an, which we reached after several hours’ drive from the city of Xining, high on the loess plateau in Qinghai province, along the upper reaches of the Yellow River. We didn’t quite know what

to expect as we wended our way through small agricultural villages built atop millennia of loess deposited by the winds off the deserts of Central Asia.

To our surprise, this remote mosque showed little evidence of restoration, yet its condition was good. As we closed our eyes and listened to a cuckoo serenade

us in the stillness so rare in modern China, we were transported back into the 18th or 19th century, when this exquisitely elaborate wooden mosque was constructed. ☯

*By the 17th century, wooden brackets came so close together that they can be seen as a Chinese equivalent of muqarnas, the kaleidoscopic, stalactite-like motif that graces Islamic architecture from Bukhara to Granada.*



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# CROSSROADS *and* DIASPORAS

## *a* THOUSAND YEARS *of* ISLAMIC CUISINES



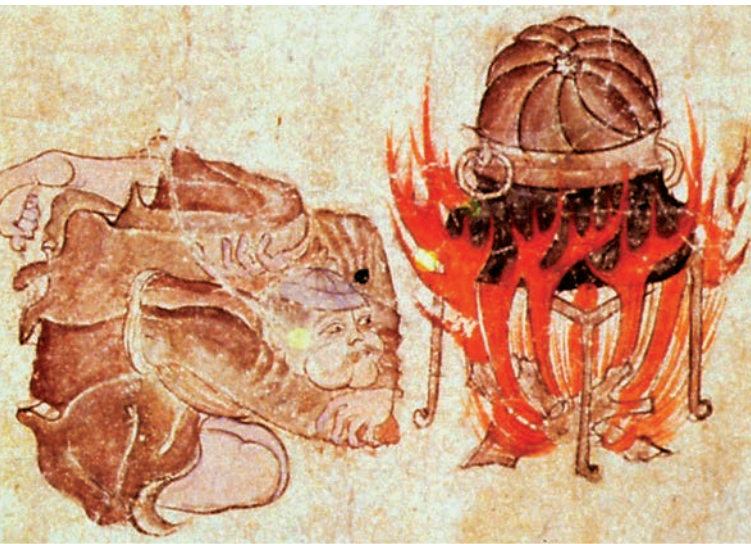
WRITTEN BY RACHEL LAUDAN

Baghdad was the "crossroads of the universe," said the first caliph of the Abbasid Empire when he founded a circular city in 762. And so it was at the time: 5000 kilometers (3000 mi) to the borders of China in the east and another 5000 to the Pillars of Gibraltar at the entrance to the Atlantic in the west. By a couple of hundred years later, a single high cuisine had been created in Baghdad, and following the intertwined Silk Roads and the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, conquerors, merchants, pilgrims, religious orders and cooks had spread it across this hemispheric space. Everywhere the cuisine rested on advances in farming and food preparation and was enjoyed by the elite in prosperous cities. Never static, never homogeneous, always absorbing from and contributing to other culinary traditions, the earliest Islamic high cuisine was given coherence by a culinary philosophy that integrated religious belief with political and dietary theory. **Four snapshots of the globalization of the cuisine over the past thousand years show how it spread in waves from its heartland, gaining from and giving to other cuisines of city dwellers, nomads and those of different faiths until today, when its ripples have touched almost every corner of the inhabited globe.**

One of many dishes that evoke the historic reach of Islamic cuisine is *tharid*, or bread moistened with broth, right (shown here in a modern variant with potatoes). By tradition a dish favored by the Prophet Muhammad, it became part of the first Islamic high cuisine in Baghdad, and also in Muslim Iberia (al-Andalus), where Christians replaced the broth with syrup and carried the dish they called *capirotada* to the New World, where it remains popular today in Mexico, far right. Opposite: An illustrated chronicle of recipes called the *Book of Delights* from the late 1400s from Mandu, India, shows Sultan Ghiyath al-Din receiving dishes prepared by his royal kitchen. Later, the Mughals created their cuisine from a confluence of Persian, Turkic and Indian elements.







## 1000 CE: THE HIGH CUISINE OF THE ABBASID CALIPHATE

The first Islamic high cuisine, the high cuisine of the caliphate, was well established by 1000. To refine the simple cuisine of the Arabs, based on dates, milk and barley, the cooks of the court in Baghdad profited from a continuous tradition of high cuisines stretching back through a succession of Persian imperial kitchens to those of ancient Mesopotamia. Its physicians drew on the most advanced dietary theories, those of Galen in the Roman Empire and Caraka and Susruta in India. Healthful eating was one and the same as delicious eating. High cuisines were right and proper for rulers who cared for their realms as gardeners cared for their domains. Food, like the other worldly pleasures, drink, clothes, sex, scent and sound, was believed to be a foreshadowing of Paradise. It was the greatest of them all, said the author who at the end of the 13th century compiled the collection of recipes now known as the Baghdad cookbook, because, he asserted, without food none of the other pleasures could be enjoyed.

The high cuisine was enjoyed in Damascus, Aleppo, Cairo, Palermo in Sicily, and Córdoba, Seville and Granada in Spain—all Muslim by 1000. At the end of the 10th century, the first surviving cookbook in Arabic, the *Kitab al-Tabikh* (*Book of Dishes*), had been compiled by Ibn Sayyan al-Warraq as a record of the cuisine of the Caliph of Baghdad and his courtiers. Five others remain from the 13th century, and yet others are attested to, more cookbooks than anywhere else in the world at that time.

In the cities, watermills ground wheat into flour. Sugar refineries evaporated the juice of sugarcane, a plant introduced from India, to make several grades of sugar. New methods of distillation created aromatic essences of rose petals and orange blossoms. Oil was pressed from olives, as well as from sesame and poppy seeds. Egg production, sausage and preserved meat preparation, butter (*samn*), cheese, bread and confectionery were all in the hands of skilled specialists.

In the geometrically laid-out irrigated gardens, herbs such as mint, cilantro, parsley, basil and tarragon; fruits including dates, pomegranates, grapes and several varieties of citrus; nuts such as pistachios and almonds; and vegetables including carrots, spinach, turnips and eggplant were cultivated. Farther off, farmers toiled in fields of wheat and cane. Where they did not already flourish, dates and pomegranates, rice and sugar were introduced as climates allowed, along with irrigation systems and techniques to process them.

Exotic goods were brought in by camel or by ship. Honey from northern forests was carried south by Vikings who returned with spices. Spices such as cinnamon, fenugreek seeds, turmeric, asafetida and black pepper came from India and Southeast Asia. Going beyond earlier limits, merchants sailed down the east coast of Africa as far as Madagascar, settling in the islands of Pemba and Zanzibar.

Left, from top: A detail from a 15th-century page of sketches of a nomadic Mongol encampment shows a man cooking; Mongol rulers adopted much in Muslim cuisine, creating a kind of pragmatic—and tasty—“culinary diplomacy” in the lands they overtook. Three details from Sultan Ghiyath al-Din’s *Book of Delights* illustrate other kitchen scenes: male cooks mincing meat, and female cooks using a variety of cookware and serving food onto a platter.



The staple of Islamic cuisine was wheat bread baked in a pottery oven, above or below ground, called *tannur*, best known now by the cognate name “tandoori.” By tradition, *tharid*—bread moistened with broth and layered with meat—was the favorite dish of the Prophet. Flour was used in multiple other ways: mixed with water and used fresh or dried as pasta; rolled into dough to stuff with meat; mixed with water to make a soothing drink; or, in North Africa and al-Andalus, in coarse form rolled into tiny balls that became known as couscous.

Rich sauces accompanied roasts or bathed stews of lamb, mutton, goat, game and poultry, or, in al-Andalus, rabbit. Often these were sour or sweet-sour. Usually they were aromatized with spices, herbs and essences, seasoned with *murri* (a condiment made of fermented barley), colored with turmeric and saffron, pomegranate seeds and spinach, or strewn with sugar crystals that sparkled in the light. *Sikbaj*, which appears in all the cookbooks, was meat of some kind (and later fish) soured with vinegar; *harisa* (not to be confused with the Moroccan spice mix) was a puree of grains and meat; and in al-Andalus, meatballs and stews of mixed meats were popular. Most prestigious was chicken roasted over a pudding that caught the rich drippings.

Sweet dishes were made with honey where its flavor added to the dish. Where its aroma and color were not required, sugar was used, retaining the taste of fruit preserves, letting the rose, green or orange tints of fruit sherbets shine, keeping sweet starch or ground-nut drinks dazzling white. All could be scented with rose petals and orange blossoms. Confectioners discovered that when boiled for varying lengths of time and then cooled, sugar became successively clear and pliable, then transparent and hard, and then brown aromatic caramel, opening a myriad of culinary possibilities. Al-Warraq’s cookbook included recipes for 50 sweets, including pulled sugar, marzipan in a pastry shell (*lanzina*), syrup-soaked pastry fritters or fine white noodles, and pancakes filled with nuts and clotted cream. Jams, jellies, boiled-down fruit juices (*rub*) and syrups (*julab*) straddled the boundary between cuisine and medicine, as did cooling drinks of sweetened diluted fruit juices (*sherbet*) and ground starches or nuts suspended in water (*sawiq*), later called *horchata* in Spanish. Prepared in extensive kitchens, the elegant meals were taken by caliphs and other dignitaries in shaded gardens where channels of water irrigated trees, flowers, fruits and vegetables.

### 1300: TO THE FAR REACHES OF EURASIA

In 1258, the Mongols conquered Baghdad and toppled the Abbasid Dynasty while in Iberia Christians pushed back the Muslim realm to the southern region of al-Andalus. Yet Islamic cuisines continued to expand their spheres of influence. By 1300, they were established in Central Asian cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara and Merv, as well as in the Delhi Sultanates in India, and they had made their mark in the Mongol Empire in China as well as in Christian Europe.

In central India, the illustrated *Book of Delights*, written in the late 15th century, shows Ghiyath al-Din, the Sultan of Mandu, in gardens with his female cooks. Recipes for stuffed pastries (*samosa*), skewered meats, tender meatballs and refreshing sherbets jostle with others for perfumes and aromatics, aphrodisiacs and medicines.



The fine, somewhat fanciful “Eastern” dress of the man on the left side of this 14th-century Italian illustration of sugarcane cultivation suggests the extent Europeans, up through the 1600s, experienced sugar as a luxury product of Islamic lands.

## HIGH, LOW *and* MIDDLING CUISINES

By cuisine, I simply mean a style of cooking. This includes a culinary philosophy or way of thinking about how food fits into religious or moral, political, economic, health and environmental beliefs, as well as specific ways of dining and of preparing food. Any cuisine has an associated set of trading and agricultural practices.

“High” cuisines are those of an elite, traditionally perhaps as much as 10 percent of a population. High cuisines were prepared by male professionals and served in special spaces with elaborate equipment; they were rich in meat, fat and sweeteners, and featured sauces and sweets.

Most people, however, ate humble or “low” cuisines based on local ingredients, primarily grains of one kind or another, eked out with a few vegetables and the occasional scrap of meat. These meals were prepared by women of the house, eaten when and where possible, often from a communal bowl. They were both more local, in that they depended on local ingredients, and more universal, in that scarcity meant that they were restricted to a few basic techniques.

In the past hundred years, this sharp division has been largely replaced by “middling” cuisines, which show many of the features of high cuisines but remain accessible to entire populations: The American hamburger, with its previously elite meat and white bread accessorized with sauces, condiments and vegetables, is perhaps one of the most common examples. That the proliferation of middling cuisines is a historically new global phenomenon often makes it difficult for us today to understand the cuisines and food economies of the past.





**By the 1600s, Ottoman cuisine in Turkey contributed its partiality for grilled lamb and mutton as well as the novel, ultra-thin dough *phyllo*, while drawing also on the older traditions of meat dumplings or pastries. This produced the savory *borek*, which remains popular, in many varieties, in Turkish cuisine today.**

In China, a handsomely illustrated cookbook and dietary manual, *Proper and Essential Things for the Emperor's Food and Drink*, compiled in 1330 by Hu Szu-hui, the emperor's physician in the Bureau of Imperial Household Provisioning, reveals how the Mongols adopted elements of the high cuisines of their vast empire as a form of culinary diplomacy. Cooks added an Islamic touch to traditional Mongol soups, thickening them with aromatic rice or chickpeas, or seasoning them with cinnamon, fenugreek seeds, saffron, turmeric, asafetida, attar of roses or black pepper, and finishing them with a touch of vinegar. They prepared noodle dishes in a creamy yogurt garlic sauce, similar to those still prepared in Turkey, and stuffed dumplings like the *borek* still found in the Middle East. They made Islamic-style sweets and drinks, including fruit punches, jams, jellies, julabs and rubbs.

To create this cuisine, the Mongols drafted Muslims (among others) to supply the court with everything necessary. Muslims milled wheat flour and oil, ran sugar refineries, prepared sweet drinks and sherbets, and (in the Persian khanate) worked in the kitchens and experimented with new varieties of rice. Blue-and-white porcelain became an export, setting off a craze for the product across the Old World.

Diplomats and cooks moved among the series of khanates in China, Central Asia, Persia and Russia interconnecting the cuisines. Then in 1368, their Chinese empire threatened by unrest that rebels had been fomenting for several decades and plague in the southwest, the Mongols went back to the steppes. In China, the new Ming Dynasty retained little of high Mongol cuisine ex-

cept techniques for candying and sugaring foods, though Muslims, particularly in northwest China, continued to prepare a humbler Islamic cuisine. Yet round the fringes of the Mongol empires, from Russia in the west in a great sweep through to Iran and Central Asia, steamed stuffed dumplings still tell of the convergence of Islamic and Chinese cuisine in Mongol times.

To the west, Europe was prospering, cities were flourishing, and great cathedrals were pointing their spires into the sky. Dietary theory incorporating Islamic advances reentered Europe in the late 10th century in Salerno, a small town outside Naples with a famed medical school, when Constantine the African, a convert from Islam, translated Arabic versions of Galen. The *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum* (*Salernitan Health Regimen*), a translation

into doggerel verses of an 11th-century Arabic medical treatise by Ibn Butl of Baghdad, became widely disseminated. The Crusades of the 11th century offered Europeans glimpses of the glories of Islamic cuisine. Traders in Genoa, Barcelona and Venice made fortunes trading with Muslims and

*Christian merchants from Genoa, Barcelona and Venice traded with Islamic lands and opened another path by which the scented, colored and spiced cuisine became known to the nobility of Europe.*

further disseminated their dishes. Merchants bought cooking pots in North Africa and sold them in southern Europe.

The nobility hankered after the scented, colored and spiced cuisine. Unsure where spices originated, they believed they hinted of Paradise itself. Although Christians distinguished their cuisine by the use of pork and the introduction of meatless dishes for the many fast days, they also adapted much of Islamic high cuisine. In Spain, the meat-and-broth dish tharid became *capirotada*, and in Sicily,



dried pasta was prepared and traded around the Genoa-Barcelona network, while couscous remained on the menu in both Sicily and Spain. The pottage of mixed meats, grains and beans became the *olla podrida* (literally “rotten pot”) of Spain. Sikbaj took one of two forms: either fried fish, often subsequently bathed in vinegar, or poached fish (or chicken, rabbit or pork) in an acid marinade of vinegar or orange (*eschebe* and *ceviche*). Deep-fried doughs drenched in honey or sprinkled with sugar became the family of *buñuelos*, *beignets* and doughnuts eaten on Catholic festive days, particularly before the Lenten fast. Marzipan became so popular that it was claimed by several cities, including Toledo and Lübeck.

## 1600: TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE HEARTLANDS AND THE NEW WORLD

By 1600, the culinary scene had changed once more. In the Middle East and India, Turkic peoples of steppe origin created the cuisines of the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires, based respectively in Anatolia, Persia and India. Much of South-east Asia was now Islamic, as were the great cities of the African Sahel—Timbuktu, Gao and Djenné—on the southern border of the Sahara. The Spanish and Portuguese sailed across the Atlantic and the Pacific, establishing empires in the Americas and trading posts in the Indian Ocean, respectively, where they introduced their cuisine with its many Islamic elements.

In 1453, the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II took Constantinople from the Byzantine Christians. By the following century it had a million people, more than any European city, and the empire stretched across North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, Greece and the Balkans. In the kitchens of Topkapı Palace, a staff of as many as 1500 included specialists in baking, desserts, halvah, pickles and yogurt.

The Turkic heritage contributed a complex array of breads, a fondness for soups, a partiality to lamb and mutton that was often skewered and grilled, meats marinated in yogurt, stuffed vegetables and yogurt drinks. From the older tradition were meat dumplings or pastries, ground meat with spices, sugar confections in wide variety and sherbets. Salt and sour tastes were now separate from sweet ones; fewer fruits, less sugar and less vinegar appeared in savory dishes; spices were reduced and murri disappeared. Pilau rice, perhaps foreshadowed in the Mongol period, was not a staple like Asian steamed rice but an elaborate dish in its own right. Rice was washed, soaked, often sautéed, then boiled, drained and steamed so that the grains remained separate. Meat, nuts, dried fruits, vegetables and colorings were frequently added before steaming, and the steaming liquid was likely to be a broth enriched with fat. Other novelties included paper-thin, layered pastry now known as *phyllo*, and its associated savory and sweet dishes borek, *baklava* and *kunafa*, as well as sponge cakes made from semolina (coarse ground wheat) soaked



**Top: From the 1600s on, both Ottoman elements and New World vegetables entered Europe through the Balkans and Hungary and began to trickle down the social scale. Right: In Istanbul, the center of Ottoman high cuisine was the kitchen complex at Topkapı Palace, which employed as many as 1500 specialists.**





The sweet, cooling drink sherbet, shown served to the Sultan in this *Book of Delights* detail, left, was made with ice brought from distant mountains. Below: *Agua fresca*s, popular today in Latin America, are among its close descendants. Lower: Islamic nut and grain drinks became sweet *horchata*, widely enjoyed in Spain and Nigeria and, made with rice, in Mexico.



in syrup. Extravagantly large, brightly colored sugar-candy figures of exotic animals such as giraffes and elephants or structures such as castles and fountains were carried by bearers or by wheeled carts on public occasions, tangible symbols of the vast wealth commanded by the Sultan.

In the 16th century, coffeehouses became a place where the literati played chess and talked politics, in spite of the efforts of the authorities to suppress what they feared were centers of sedition. Coffee became the drink of the Arabic-speaking part of the Ottoman Empire: Egypt, Syria and Iraq in the east, Libya and Algeria in the West.

Islamic elements and New World plants entered Europe through the Balkans and Hungary. Rice pilau, pita bread (*lángos*), phyllo (*strudel*), honeyed drinks and stuffed vegetables all became common in Central Europe. Turkish Hungary quickly adopted the coffee shop. Bulgarian gardeners set up on the outskirts of European cities, introducing new vegetables such as green beans, onion, chiles, cucumbers and cabbage to the townsfolk.

To the east, in 1523 Babur, a soldier of fortune of Turkic descent, led his men from Central Asia to conquer the North India plain. At its height, the Mughal Dynasty ruled about one-seventh of the world's population. In the 16th century, Abu al-Fazl, advisor to the Emperor Akbar and steward of the imperial kitchens, described the high cuisine as part of imperial administration in the *Ain-i-Akbari* (*Constitution of Akbar*): Puffy *naan* flatbread was the staple, elaborate pilaws were garnished with nuts and pomegranate seeds, and meat was served grilled on skewers, in delicate meatballs and in delicately spiced stews such as lamb *korma* that became known collectively by the British term "curry." Typical Islamic sweets such as fine noodles cooked in sweetened milk and deep-fried dough sprinkled with rosewater were introduced, the latter being known as *gulab jamun*. Ice, harvested from distant mountains and kept in ingenious icehouses, served to cool sherbets or even turn them into slushes. Other Indian courts adopted Mughal cuisine, and some of it later seeped into British cookery.

To the west in Spain, cookbooks such as the late 15th-century *Libre del coch* by Ruperto de Nola included recipes and ingredients that derived from Islam such as thin noodles (now called *fideos*), bitter oranges, fried fish, escabeche, almond sauces and almond confections. The *Arte de Cocina, Pastelería, Bizcochería y Conservería* (*Art of Cooking, Cake Making, Biscuit Making, and Conserving*) produced in 1611 by Francisco Martínez Montañón, master cook to several kings of Spain, most notably Phillip III, contained several recipes for meatballs (*albóndigas*), and *capirotada*, and one for couscous.

The sugar cookery of Islam, introduced to Europe in the 12th century by a physician known in the literary record as Pseudo-Messue, was further developed in the mid-16th century by works such as *De Secreti* by Alexis of Piedmont and the *Traité des Fardemens et Confitures* (*Treatise on Cosmetics and Conserves*) of the French physician and astrologer Nostradamus. "Sherbet," "candy" and "syrup"—the last another way of translating "sherbet"—all have Arabic roots. Comfits (sugarcoated spices) and electuaries (pastes of spices and drugs) were the distant forerunners of modern candy. Nuns created Islamic-style confectionery to sell to eager customers. Islamic fruit pastes became the Portuguese quince paste and later evolved into citrus preserves such as marmalade.





English artist Thomas Allom depicted this Istanbul coffeehouse, left, in 1838, by which time coffee had grown popular throughout Europe, including Vienna, where today's Cafe Central, right, evokes a similar elegance.

In the Americas, the Spanish vice-regal courts consulted Martínez Montañó's cookbook. Couscous from his recipe was made at least until the 19th century in Mexico, as well as a substitute made by crumbling tamale-like steamed ground maize. A press for making thin noodles was carried to the Augustinian fortress monastery in Yuriria on what was then the frontier and is now central Mexico. Pilau rice and noodles cooked pilau style became known as dry soups (soups from which all the water had evaporated). Spicy stews and albóndigas remained popular while capirotada lost its meats and became a sweet Lenten dish. Local fruits, such as guavas, cherimoyas and mamey sapote were substituted in fruit pastes and sherbets. Housewives reproduced the soothing grain and nut drinks, now known as horchata, with rice or a variety of local alternatives.

From Mexico and from Portuguese Goa in India, nuns introduced confectionery techniques to the Philippines and South and Southeast Asia. When Jesuit missionaries entered Japan, they used the savory and many of the sweet dishes of southern Europe—and thus of Islam—as enticements to and evidence of conversion. In the *Southern Barbarian's Cookbook*, a Japanese manuscript compiled in the early 17th century, a recipe for fried fish appears that would eventually evolve to become tempura, as well as confections that became known in Japanese as *kompeito* from the Portuguese *comfeito* (comfit).

Back in Europe, cooks from the south, such as the Portuguese “chief counsellor” to ladies-in-waiting who wanted to make “delicate dishes” at the court of Queen Elizabeth I of England, introduced elaborate confectionery to

the north. Expensive sugar work, some of it designed to look like savory food, such as marzipan hams, sugar-paste bacon, and eggs of yellow and white jelly became fashionable, served in special “banqueting houses” on the grounds of noble mansions.

Other Islamic elements took on their own life. Fried fish preserved in vinegar appears in the 1796 edition of Hannah Glasse's *Art of Cookery*, popular in England and the U.S. As for the gelled juices that surrounded

The bustle of another Ottoman coffeehouse, left, echoes in today's global coffee franchises, right, which carry not only the beverage but also the original cultural associations with an urban, educated intelligentsia.







The Abbasid vinegared fish dish *sikbaj* continued to evolve through medieval Spain into modern times, where it appears in varieties as distinct as *cebiche*, left, the signature dish of Peru and also popular throughout Latin America, and fish and chips, center, the signature dish of working-class Britain. Both are examples of high cuisine that was adapted by local tastes and resources to become popular, commonly available, middling cuisine. Right: On the other hand, aspic maintains *haute cuisine* status. Its name probably evolved from the Arabic word for the jelly that sets around vinegared fish, and today it is a flavored gelatin used to coat either fish or meat in French cooking.

cold fish in vinegar, they entered European languages as aspic, still the word for a savory gelatin to encase cold dishes in high French cuisine. And julep, which the English had used for a medicinal syrup since the Middle Ages, became the “mint julep” of the American south.

More recent elements appeared too. In the 18th century, coffee vendors, often kitted out in Turkish garb, offered their wares, and coffeehouses became important centers of commerce and politics. Travelers to the Middle East returned with packages of the new starch-based sweet that they called Turkish delight.

## 2000: ISLAMIC CUISINES IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the expansion of the British, French and Russian empires, the contraction of the Ottoman and Mughal empires, and the subsequent breakup of the European empires rewrote political boundaries across Islamic lands more than once. The globalizations of high French cuisine among the international elite and of middling Anglo cuisine among the urban middle class—the latter much influenced by the new principles of home economics—were deeply felt.

As new nations were created, many households were acquiring gas or electric stoves and, later, electric gadgets that reduced the time and labor required for complex dishes. Although many still ate (and eat) humble cuisines that depend on bread for most of their calories, middling cuisines were on an unprecedented rise. Muslims continued to be united by Ramadan and by the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Makkah.

Newspapers, magazines and radio programs began to offer suggestions for dishes for Ramadan and other important festivals. Inexpensive air transport made Hajj easier. New cookbooks were written, earmarking dishes that once had been common across the broader region as more narrowly “national,” and introducing western dishes as well as the writing of recipes to reflect the scientific precision advocated by the home-economics movement, such as Ayşe Fahriye’s 1882 *Ev Kadini* (Housewife) in Turkey or the *Usul al-Tahi* (Principles of Cookery) of the early 1940s in Egypt by Nazira Nikola and Bahiya Othman, which published its 18th edition in 1988.

By the 1980s, the emphasis had shifted to the preservation of traditional dishes. In 1980 a group of professional cooks and housewives authored the *Qamus al-Tabkh al-Sahih*, offering traditional recipes of the region. Others followed, such as the 1990 *Dalil al-Tabkh wa’l-Aghdhiya* (Guide for Iraqi Cooking and Baghdadi Dishes) by Naziha

Adib and Firdaws al-Mukhtar, and the *Min Fann al-Tabkh al-Sa’di* by Zubayda Mawsi-li, Safiyya al-Sulayman and Samiyya al-Harakan, which was designed to preserve traditional Saudi cuisine in the face of an influx of

*Where once it had seemed that a tide of hamburger joints would sweep all before them, beginning in the 1980s new outlets appeared for traditional Islamic, Arab, Middle Eastern, Turkic, Persian and other foods with Islamic roots.*

foreign dishes. Similarly, where once it had seemed that a tide of hamburger joints would sweep all before them, new outlets for traditional foods appeared and elegant confectionery shops held their own.

Farther afield, Latin American cuisines still show signs of the cuisine of medieval al-Andalus in their rice, their fruit drinks, their sweets and their complex spicy stews such as *mole poblano*, now widely taken to be one of the national





Flavorful global Islamic influences appear also on tables as distant as those in Puebla, Mexico, famous for its mole sauce, left, and others in India—and restaurants worldwide—where chicken curry is one of India's most popular dishes derived from the Mughal-style cuisine that has roots reaching back to Persia and Baghdad.

dishes of Mexico. The similarities among Mexican rice, albondigas and mole poblano and Indian pilau, meatballs and curries are clear signs that point toward common roots.

Centuries-long influences continue in other parts of the world, often unrecognized. In the late 19th century, the distant descendant of the fried version of sikkaj became the fish and chips that sustained the British working classes and became regarded by the rest of the world as Britain's national dish. In the 20th century, the vinegared version of *cebiche* became the signature dish of Peru. The starch- or nut-thickened drink remains popular among Spaniards in *horchatérias* in Spain, is prepared in households in Nigeria and is popular across Latin America. Coffee shops, now often run as global brand franchises, continue to be places for economic and political discussion from Japan to Brazil, and everywhere they carry a connotation linking them to their roots among the intelligentsia.

Migrations at the turn of the 20th century and more recently have added newer Islamic dishes to the older medieval ones. Street stands selling meat from rotating spits served with bread and yogurt sauce are rife in Europe as *döner kebab* and are generally associated with the Middle East, while in Mexico, without the yogurt sauce, they have become assimilated as shepherd's tacos (*tacos al pastor*). Kebabs on a skewer and stuffed vegetables both carry the same message, as does Turkish Delight, baklava and the proliferation of the date industry. Couscous has become a staple in France; yogurt, in sweetened form, has become a standard breakfast or snack in Europe and across the Americas.

In Europe and the Americas, restaurants feature Lebanese, Persian, Mediterranean or "Indian" (where Indian should more properly be understood as referring to the subcontinent rather than the nation) food with dishes

from the Islamic tradition. In China, where Muslims, although found in all regions, are clustered in the northwest, migrants to other cities offer street stalls selling noodle dishes. Cookbooks in many languages, often written by migrants, teach readers how to prepare Middle Eastern, Turkish, Persian, Arabian, North African and Mughal cuisines—or at least a version the authors believe will appeal to their audience.

In the 1930s, Maxime Rodinson, Daub Chelebi and A. J. Arberry directed the first serious scholarly attention to medieval Islamic cuisines. Since then, scholars have traced the origins and development of Islamic cuisines, reprinted cookbooks in Arabic, translated them into English and Spanish and offered modern versions of recipes that date back to medieval times. It is thanks to these scholars, and evidence of the public interest that the long history of Islamic cuisines evokes, that it is now possible to write this brief overview of Islamic cuisines and their global role. And to recognize this: that the mint julep of the American south and the gulab jamun of India; the curries of Mughal India and the mole of Mexico; and the glittering aspic of French *haute cuisine*, the tart *cebiche* of Peru, and the humble fish and chips of England all share a thousand-year-old taproot. ☪



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This edition of *Saudi Aramco World* provides two excellent opportunities. First, with “Crossroads and Diasporas,” you can learn and practice some tricks to help improve your reading comprehension skills. Then, using that article and “The Back-road Historic Mosques of China,” you can explore the question: What happens when two cultures meet?

## FOR STUDENTS

We hope this guide will help sharpen your reading skills and deepen your understanding of this issue’s articles.

## FOR TEACHERS

We encourage reproduction and adaptation of these ideas, freely and without further permission from *Saudi Aramco World*, by teachers at any level, whether working in a classroom or through home study.

—THE EDITORS

## Curriculum Alignments

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

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## CLASS ACTIVITIES

### Improving Your Reading

“Crossroads and Diasporas” examines the globalization of Islamic cuisine—during more than 1000 years of history! How does an author organize information on such a huge topic? This article is a great example of one way to do so.

#### 1. The Introduction

Where’s the best place to begin your reading? How about the introduction? (No surprise there.) Nor is there any surprise about where it’s located: at the beginning of the article. Of course. But how far does it go? Where does the introduction end and the body of the article begin? In this case, the editors at *Saudi Aramco World* have made it easy for you: The introduction is written in a different font, and it has a page all its own.

Although you might be tempted to bolt ahead, skimming over the introduction to get at the “real” substance of the article, resist that urge! Spending a little extra time on an introduction—just about any introduction, not just this one—can save you loads of time and energy later on, and it can help you understand what you’re about to read. In this case, you’ll find that author Rachel Laudan gives you a key—like a key on a map—that tells you how to make sense of the article that follows.

**The Main Idea:** Within the introduction, find the main point of the article. It’s one sentence in the middle of the introductory paragraph. Underline it, or write it on a piece of paper. Everything that appears in the article will serve the purpose of elaborating on that main idea. If, as you’re reading, you find that you’re wondering why some piece of information is in the article, go back to the main idea and ask yourself how the information connects to it.

**Define Your Terms:** Are there important words in the introduction that you don’t know? If so, you’ll need to find out what they mean, or the rest of the article won’t make much sense to you. In this article, challenging words might include *diaspora*, *high cuisine*, *homogeneous* and *culinary*. (You can find the definition of high cuisine in the sidebar on page 29.)

**The Themes:** In this introduction, you will see that the author has stated several important themes that she will discuss in the rest of the article. Working on your own or with a partner, highlight these themes. Use a different color for each one.

**The Outline:** Finally, Laudan tells you how she will deal with the fact that the

article covers 1000 years of history. There will be four parts to the article; you can identify them by finding the subhead before each one. How is each part defined? Based on what you know so far, how do you think the four parts of the article will fit together to give you a picture of the cultural change Laudan chronicles?

#### 2. The Themes Play Out

Read each of the four segments of the article, one by one. Keep your highlighters with you. As you find parts of the first

## VISUAL ANALYSIS

The photographs that accompany “The Back-road Historic Mosques of China” serve the purpose of illustrating the main point of the article: The historic mosques blended elements of Chinese architecture with the needs of a Muslim religious community. You or you and your partner will be assigned one or two photos. Don’t read the caption of your assigned photo. Instead, use what you have learned from reading the article to describe what the photo shows. Write a caption for your photo. Display the photos and captions in the classroom, and view each others’ work.







## IF YOU ONLY HAVE 15 MINUTES...

Try one of these two exercises.

1. One of the questions you probably ask a lot at school is why a certain topic or piece of information is important. To put it bluntly, you've probably asked, more than once, "So what?" The question may sound insolent, but it's really an excellent question—and if you can answer it, it makes whatever you're studying become meaningful. If you only have 15 minutes, read "Jordan, Long Before Petra." Archeologists have uncovered evidence at Wadi Faynan that suggests that ancient history may be very different than they had thought before. In what two ways might it be different? Locate and underline the sentences in the article that state what the two ways are. Then ask the "so what" question. Talk with other students, or write your own thoughts about why these two insights are important. Share your thoughts with the rest of the class.

2. Read the sidebar article on page 29, "High, Low and Middling Cuisines." Make sure you understand what constitutes each type of cuisine. Think about your own culture's foods. Come up with examples of each type of cuisine that are part of your locale's foodways. Share your examples with the class. Be prepared to explain why you have identified each food item as part of the cuisine with which you have associated it. Make a menu based on one level of your cuisine, and compare it with menus that other students have made. Do you agree about what constitutes high, middling and low cuisines?

different place. Or you might prefer to make a flow chart that shows the acceptance of different types of food from place to place. Whatever method you choose, use your notes to make a statement about high Islamic cuisine over the past 1000 years. Compare your statement with those of other students. Have you understood the article in similar ways? If not, discuss discrepancies and be sure you've got a good understanding of what you've read.

Looking at your statements about architecture and food, what general statement can you make about what happens to a locality's food or architecture when it is touched by food or architecture from another part of the world? And what happens to food or architecture when it leaves the place it originated? What do you understand about cultural migration now that you didn't understand before?

segment that relate to each of the themes, highlight them in the appropriate color. When you're done, compare your highlights with another student's. Continue with the next three segments in the same way. By the time you're done, you should have a brightly colored version of the article, with the key themes identified in each of the four sections.

### 3. Owning What You've Read

Once you've read the article, how can you make sure you really know what it says,

the connection between high cuisine, religious belief, and political and dietary theory—and write it on a sheet of paper. Then go through the article and re-read what you've highlighted for that theme, making notes about it on the page where you've written the theme. What does each segment include on that theme? Looking over your notes, write a one-sentence summary of the material related to the theme. You can try this with the other themes—and then you've got another tool you can use to get more from other things you read.

### Global and Local

*Saudi Aramco World* often has articles about cultural migration and diffusion. These articles examine how elements of a culture—for example, language or religion—spread from one part of the world to another. How, for example, did Islam spread from the Arabian Peninsula to other parts of the world? What happens when that cultural element "goes global"? What happens as it reaches different locales? Both "Crossroads and Diasporas" and "The Back-road Historic Mosques of China" look at how elements of culture—in these cases, food and architecture—spread. Read the articles, or if you prefer, you can focus on just one article, or have half the class read one article and the other half read the other.

"The Back-road Historic Mosques of China" is based on three writers' search for little-known mosques. What did they find? As you read the article, make two lists. In one, write down what the authors found that was similar to mosques in other parts of the world. In the other, list what they found that was unique to China's mosques. What do you notice about the similarities and differences between Chinese mosques and mosques elsewhere in the world? Write a brief answer to the question.

If you haven't already read "Crossroads and Diasporas," do so now. For each of the four "snapshots," make notes about Islamic cuisine. Your notes can take whatever form you find most useful. You might want to make lists, as you did regarding China's mosques, only in this case you might list different versions of some common food and the places with which they are associated. Or you might make your notes on a map so that you can see the locations that the article identifies and how the foods changed as they entered the cuisine in each

that you "own" the content? One way is to write a summary of it. Your summary should include the main idea, the four time periods and a brief statement about how the themes play out over time.

Another way to own the material in the article is to reorganize it, to be sure you would understand it even if it were presented in a different way. If you can talk about the content from more than one perspective, you really must know it! Choose one of the article's themes—say,





## The 5th Riwaq Biennale

Riwaq, founded in 1991 in Ramallah to conserve and promote Palestinian architectural heritage, has since 2005 challenged what a biennale can be. The 5th Riwaq Biennale—"RB5"—will span the entire two years and address the traction of theory and the promises of sustainability in contemporary art and architecture, within Palestine and beyond. "Our curatorial premise is to think 'through' the structures at our disposal," wrote curators Khalil Rabah, Tirdad Zolghadr and Reem Shilleh. "Thinking through structures is not the same as thinking 'about' or 'against' them. This project does not see structures as topics, or as objects of critique necessarily. It aims to exemplify the agency of structures per se, and to help shape the audiences these structures produce." Unlike other biennales, RB5 asserts itself as "chronic," insofar as its programs will endure throughout the two-year period. This has, in part, much to do with context: This is a biennale produced by an institution, not a place; if biennales often produce tensions between autonomy and history, art and language, these tensions mean something unique in Palestine. Rather than rely on artistic representations of these issues, RB5 traces regional genealogies of cultural production and organizes itself around existing public events, in Ramallah and beyond, in collaboration with local and international art institutions. It does so while jointly developing its venues and other activities with artists, architects and students. This becomes a process of accumulation, filled with a succession of motifs and stories, highs and lows, that become public memory. Riwaq, **Ramallah, Palestine**, through July 1, 2016.



### Current **November**

**Cairottraces.** Susan Hefuna's works on paper, as well as a newly commissioned palm-wood installation, are influenced by the streets of a city that has been a recurring influence in her practice. At the core of Hefuna's art is her fascination with the networks and structures of connection that inhabit public spaces, particularly urban centers that serve as the intersection of politics, architecture and history—shaping the formation of different social identities and becoming the framework for peoples' interactions with each other. This interest stems from the artist's dual German-Egyptian heritage, which has allowed her to observe the towns and cities of two cultures that are simultaneously foreign and familiar to her, as well as her nomadic existence as an artist. Pi Artworks, **London**, through November 22.

**Places of Memory** at The Pavilion of Turkey at the 14th Venice International Architecture Biennale explores the biennale theme "Fundamentals" by departing from three areas of Istanbul that have acted as thresholds during different stages of curator Murat Tabanlıoğlu's life. The Arsenale, **Venice**, through November 23.

**Faith and Fortune:** *Visualizing the Divine on Byzantine and Early Islamic Coinage* reveals epochal moments in the early histories of two of the world's great religions—as illustrated by the currencies their followers created and circulated. The exhibition explores the origins, meanings and manufacturing processes of coinage in the neighboring Byzantine and early Muslim empires while also reflecting how attitudes to depicting religious subjects differ between Islam and Christianity. The relationship between these two empires was characterized by a constant dialogue of trade, intellectual exchange and military confrontation. This display examines how currency was used by each to assert cultural difference and promote its own concept of the divine. The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of **Birmingham, UK**, through November 30.

**Ancient Lives, New Discoveries** introduces visitors to eight people from ancient Egypt and Sudan whose bodies have been preserved, either naturally or by deliberate embalming. Using the latest technology, the exhibition builds up a rounded picture of their lives, their health, their occupations and how they died, all in the Nile Valley, over a span of 4000 years, from Egypt to Christian Sudan. The individuals on display include a priest's daughter, a temple singer, a middle-aged man, a young child, a temple door-keeper and a woman with a Christian tattoo. British Museum, **London**, through November 30.

**Nour Festival of Arts** celebrates its fifth annual festival, which shines a light on the very best in contemporary Middle Eastern and North African arts and culture each October and November in venues across the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Organized by the Council's Arts and Culture Service, Nour has grown from a pioneering arts-education program based at

Leighton House Museum to today's all-encompassing, 32-partner and 20-venue-strong cultural festival. It introduces ever-growing audiences to thought-provoking work that challenges stereotypes of this region of the world and its peoples through all types of cultural expression: from film and food, and drama and dance, to painting and poetry. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, **London**, through November 30.

**Vantage Point Sharjah** began with an invitation to photographers based in the UAE to explore the Emirate of Sharjah and produce works for review by the Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF). The result is a selection of photographs shown in a group exhibition in one of SAF's new art spaces. The exhibition presents work by professional photographers and artists with a passion for photography, representing the varied approaches to the landscape and life of Sharjah. SAF Art Spaces, **Sharjah, UAE**, through November 30.

### Current **December**

**Concentrations 57: Slavs and Tatars** is an art collective whose installations, lecture performances, sculptures and publications result from an unconventional, research-based approach. The group identifies the "area east of the former Berlin Wall and west of the Great Wall of China known as Eurasia" as the focus of its multidisciplinary practice. In this exhibition the group presents new work from its current series, "Long Legged Linguistics," an investigation of language as a source of political, meta-physical and even sexual emancipation, using its trademark mix of high and low culture to address the thorny issues of "alphabet politics": the attempts by nations, cultures and ideologies to ascribe a specific set of letters to a given language. The exhibition includes original works in Persian, Russian, Turkish, Georgian and English presented in a series of sculptures, installations, textiles and printed matter. Dallas Museum of Art, through December 14.

### The Future Is Not What It Used to Be:

*The 2nd Istanbul Design Biennial* considers "the manifesto" as a platform and a catalyst for critical thinking in design. It asks how 21st-century designers can use the manifesto not only in the production of texts but also through actions, services, provocations or objects with the goal of inciting inventive outcomes. Of 800 submissions from Turkish and international designers, curator Zoë Ryan selected 75 that imagine a new future and instigate change by building on and reinterpreting history. Galata Greek Primary School and other locations, **Istanbul**, through December 14.

**Pearls of Wisdom: The Arts of Islam** at the University of Michigan highlights the richness and diversity of Islamic art through a range of artworks in the collections of the University of Michigan. Objects include ceramics, glasswares, metalwares, woodwork, textiles, illustrated manuscripts and paintings. These items highlight how patrons, artists and other individuals have used expressive arts to promote social order and spiritual harmony in both secular and religious spheres in various Islamic cultures from the seventh century until the present day. Ann Arbor, **Michigan**, through December 21.

### Current **January**

**In Remembrance of Me: Feasting with the Dead in the Ancient Middle East** explores how the living and the dead interacted to commemorate ancestors in the ancient Middle East. More than 50 artifacts document how food and drink were regularly offered to nourish the dead in the afterlife and how two- or three-dimensional effigies preserved the memory of the deceased. The exhibition was motivated by the 2008 discovery of a stela in eastern Turkey that dates to about 735 BCE; it commemorates an official named Katumuwa. The lengthy text carved on it reveals that, in that region, the soul of the deceased was thought to dwell in the stela and needed to be cared for by the living. Other exhibits examine



commemoration of, and communication with, the dead and different conceptions of the soul in ancient Egypt, Iraq and Israel/Palestine. Oriental Institute Museum, **Chicago**, through January 4.

**Arts of Islamic Lands:** *Selections from the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait*, comes to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) as a part of a longer-term collaboration with the cultural institution *Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah*. Founded by Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah and his wife, Sheikh Hussah Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah, this is one of the greatest collections of Islamic art in the world. It contains spectacular Mughal jewelry, illuminated manuscripts, exquisite ceramics and decorated ceiling panels from the eighth to 18th century, from the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa to the Middle East and Central Asia. MFAH, **Houston**, through January 4.

**L'avenir (Looking Forward)** shows work by 50 artists and collectives from 22 countries as BNLMTL 2014—La Biennale de Montréal. It combines a multi-site venue, a series of performances, film screenings, talks, tours, publications, conferences and other special events at the Musée d'art contemporain and other cultural institutions and public spaces throughout the city to examine how contemporary artists give form to the question, "What is to come?" Multiple locations in **Montréal**, through January 4.

**Assyria to Iberia at the Dawn of the Classical Age.** At its height in the eighth to seventh century BCE, the Assyrian Empire was the dominant power of the ancient Near East and the largest empire the world had yet seen, reaching from Assyria (present-day northern Iraq) to the Mediterranean. This landmark exhibition traces—through some 260 works of art on loan—the deep roots of interaction between the ancient Near East and the lands along the shores of the Mediterranean and their impact on the artistic traditions that developed in the region. Parallels are also drawn between works in the exhibition and those in the museum's permanent collection of ancient Near Eastern art. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through January 4.

**Nach Ägypten!:** *Die Reisen von Max Slevogt und Paul Klee.* Although nearly 15 years separated the travels of impressionist Max Slevogt and painter Paul Klee to Egypt, with the former setting out in 1914 and the latter making his journey in 1928, Slevogt's impressions of Egypt motivated Klee's modern notion of painting. The exhibition, translated, "To Egypt: The Travels of Max Slevogt and Paul Klee," is the first to focus on the work of these two artists together—through the use of 130 paintings, watercolors and drawings arising out of the context of these trips and illustrating the breaks of transition from impressionism to classical modernism. Kunst Sammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, **Düsseldorf**, through January 4.

**Proposals on Monumentality.** In "Monumental Seduction" (1996), Andreas Huyssen suggested that historical, esthetic and national contexts, along with political and cultural effects, dominate our understanding of the monumental, articulating the issue of the monumental in relation to memory and modernity. Bringing together the works of Aslı Çavuşoğlu,

Iman Issa, Christian Jankowski, Amina Menia, Seher Shah and Santiago Sierra, "Proposals on Monumentality" attempts to twist and open up our perception of monumentality along with the complex dynamics of commemoration, space and power. Curated by İpek Ulusoy Akgül, the exhibition poses a set of questions: Can monuments go beyond representing the past and evoking collective memory? Is it possible for them to resist absorption into memorial narratives? How can monuments express fragmentation and forgetting? Green Art Gallery, **Dubai**, through January 4.

**Wael Shawky:** *Cabaret Crusades* marks the Egyptian artist's first major museum exhibition in Germany. Relying on themes used in three of his most recent films, "Cabaret Crusades" confronts the complex mechanisms driving the construction of history. The employment of 24 Italian-made marionettes with exaggerated features to reflect traditions passed down by Muslim storytellers of warring crusaders mixes the fantastic with the heartache of reality. The effect is a reminder to audiences that no one has a monopoly on historical perspective when memories, legends and myths are evoked through multiple voices. Kunst Sammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, **Düsseldorf**, through January 4.

**The Sacred Lute:** *The Art of Ostad Elahi* focuses on the renowned Persian musician, thinker and jurist (1895-1974) whose transformative work in the art of *tanbūr*—an ancient, long-necked lute—paralleled his innovative approach to the quest for truth and knowledge. It documents the interdependent, mutually transformative relationship between player and instrument through a presentation of nearly 40 rare instruments and works of art from the Elahi collection, the Musée de la Musique, Paris, and the Metropolitan Museum. It includes rare tanburs that belonged to Ostad Elahi and his father, who was also a great tanbur player; a number of his personal possessions, such as his judicial robes and a selection of manuscripts; and symbolic items that provide greater insights into his disciplined approach to life. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through January 11.

**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 U.S. "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. Asian Art Museum of **San Francisco**, through January 18.

**The Future of Fashion is Now** takes the visitor on a trip around the most innovative fashion from all over the world, with works by such designers as Viktor & Rolf (the Netherlands), Rejina Pyo (Korea) and Hussein Chalayan (Cyprus). The exhibition examines the critical stance that young fashion

designers worldwide are adopting with regard to "the fashion system" and the role of clothes in contemporary society. Designers with non-western backgrounds and from countries bordering Europe, where until recently there was little or no tradition of fashion, are actively seeking to transform the fashion system. The exhibition is the sequel to the successful exhibition "The Art of Fashion" staged in Rotterdam in 2009. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, **Rotterdam**, through January 18.

**Into India:** *South Asian Paintings from the San Diego Museum of Art* uses miniatures to explore art produced by Persian, Central Asian and European leaders and merchants who settled in India from the 12th to 19th centuries. The exhibition presents more than a hundred illuminations of Buddhist, Jain and Hindu manuscripts that illustrate sacred Indian texts, books of Persian poetry and albums documenting the life of the glittering Mughal court or the indigenous flora and fauna, revealing the remarkable ability of Indian artists to adapt their styles to satisfy the taste of the foreigners who dominated India while maintaining a specifically Indian quality. Musée national des beaux-arts du **Quebec**, through January 18.

**Medieval Morocco:** *An Empire from Africa to Spain.* From the 11th to the 15th centuries, a succession of dynasties—Almoravid, Almohad and Marinid—fashioned a political and civilizational space centered on Morocco and stretching to Andalusia. Their conquests took them from the southern edge of the Sahara (northern fringe of Mauritania) to the northern reaches of Algeria and Tunisia. This empire's influence, unifying for the first time the western Islamic world, was felt as far as the Near East. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, through January 19.

**Treasures from India:** *Jewels from the Al-Thani Collection* includes some 60 jeweled objects from the private collection formed by Sheikh Hamad bin Abdullah Al-Thani, offering a glimpse into the evolving styles of the jeweled arts in India from the Mughal period until the present day, with emphasis on later exchanges with the West. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through January 25.

**Current February**  
**Francesco Clemente:** *Inspired by India* examines the Indian influences in Clemente's work and how they relate to the artistic traditions and practices of various regions of India. In contrast to leading conceptual artists' practices of the 1970s, Clemente focused on representation, narrative and the figure and explored traditional artisanal materials and modes of working. The exhibition includes some 20 works, including paintings from the past 30 years and four new larger-than-life sculptures. Rubin Museum of Art, **New York**, through February 2.

**The Landscapes of India:** *Miniature Painting from the Mughal Era* reveals the scope of landscape tradition in Indian painting. At the same time, the miniatures in this display represent a cross-section of northern and central Indian schools of painting from the 16th through the 19th century. While abstract imagery—particularly with regard to nature and landscape—was visible in Rajput schools of painting into the 19th

century, the European influence on Mughal painting reveals an unmistakable naturalism, thereby affecting the Rajput schools in turn. Museum für Asiatische Kunst, **Berlin**, through February 8.

**Cairo to Constantinople:** *Early Photographs of the Middle East.* In 1862, the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) embarked on an educational tour of the Middle East, accompanied by the British photographer Francis Bedford. This exhibition documents the journey through the work of Bedford, the first photographer to join a royal tour, and explores the cultural and political significance Victorian Britain attached to the region. The display includes archeological material brought back by the prince, including an Egyptian papyrus inscribed with the *Amduat*, a memorial text that describes the journey through the underworld of Re, the Egyptian sun god. The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, **London**, through February 22.

**Current March**  
**The Lost Dhow:** *A Discovery from the Maritime Silk Route.* In 1998, an Arab ship carrying goods from China was discovered at the bottom of the Indian Ocean off Belitung Island, Indonesia. Dating from the ninth century (China's Tang Dynasty), the Belitung shipwreck is the earliest Arab vessel of this period to be found with a complete cargo, including silver ingots, bronze mirrors, spice-filled jars, intricately worked vessels of silver and gold and thousands of ceramic bowls, ewers and other vessels. Uncovering its mysterious origins reveals the interconnections between two great powers, the Tang and Abbasid empires. The exhibition provides the earliest evidence of a maritime silk route—and speaks to the vibrant exchange of ideas and technologies between peoples that occurred centuries before the Portuguese entered the region in the late 15th century. Aga Khan Museum, **Toronto**, through March 15.

**Mshatta in Focus:** *The Jordanian Desert Palace in Historical Photographs.* The richly decorated façade of the early Islamic desert palace of Mshatta was presented as a gift from the Ottoman sultan to the German emperor in 1903, when it was transported from the Jordanian desert to Berlin, where it now forms the centerpiece of the Museum für Islamische Kunst's collection, on show in the Pergamonmuseum. Its accession history began with a series of photographs of the façade, which circulated among European archeologists and art historians around the turn of the century and eventually landed in the hands of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Photographic records were made at several key moments in its recent history: before and during the façade's dismantling, after the structure was hit by a bomb during World War II and during its subsequent restoration in the 1950s. Pergamonmuseum, **Berlin**, through March 15.

**Grand Parade:** *A Unique Art Installation by Jompet Kuswidananto.* The Indonesian artist makes a unique presentation of his famous groups of parade figures. Rather than being retrospective of individual works, it serves as a new art installation, conceived as a dynamic whole. The assembly of life-size mechanical figures within the



installation is modeled on the groups found in the Indonesian public domain during festive, ceremonial or political parades—with each figure wearing costumes, carrying musical instruments and coming into action through movement of hands, clapping and instrument playing. Tropenmuseum, **Amsterdam**, through March 22.

**Nasta'liq:** *The Genius of Persian Calligraphy* is the first exhibition to focus on *nasta'liq*, a calligraphic script developed in 14th-century Iran that remains one of the most expressive forms of esthetic refinement in Persian culture to this day. More than 20 works ranging from 1400 to 1600, the height of *nasta'liq*'s development, tell the story of the script's transformation from a simple conveyer of the written word into an artistic form on its own. The narrative thread emphasizes the achievements of four of the greatest master calligraphers, whose manuscripts and individual folios were and still are appreciated, not only for their content but also for their technical virtuosity and visual quality. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through March 22.

**Emperor Charles v Captures Tunis:** *Documenting a Campaign*. In June 1535, Emperor Charles v set sail from Sardinia at the head of a fleet comprising 400 ships and more than 30,000 soldiers to reconquer the Kingdom of Tunis from the Ottomans. To document the campaign and his hoped-for victory, he was accompanied not only by historians and poets but also by his court painter, Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen. In 1543, the Flemish artist was commissioned to paint the cartoons for 12 monumental tapestries celebrating the campaign from the countless drawings and sketches he had brought back from North Africa. These unique cartoons are the focus of this exhibition, highlighting different aspects of the dramatic events of 1535. Kunsthistorisches Museum, **Vienna**, through March 31.

#### Current **May and later**

**Gold and the Gods:** *Jewels of Ancient Nubia* draws upon the world-class collection of jewelry from ancient Nubia (in what is now Sudan) accumulated by the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston. The Nubian adornments housed at MFA constitute the most comprehensive collection outside Khartoum. "Gold and the Gods" focuses on excavated ornaments from an early 20th-century expedition by

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## Serendipity Revealed:

*Contemporary Sri Lankan Art* is a contemplative view of peacetime Sri Lanka. Devastated by a 30-year civil war that only ended in 2009, the Land of Serendipity, as Sri Lanka is endearingly known, has just begun to hone in on its creative and artistic potential. Unlike other art scenes in many parts of Asia that have already gained international recognition, Sri Lanka has, in a sense, not been able to share its stories. The exhibition, the second installment following the one held at the China Art Project space in Hong Kong in December 2013, brings contemporary Sri Lanka to an international stage, highlighting the candid work of 14 local artists. Relying on works that play on imagery of violence and a sense of protest, "Serendipity Revealed" contrasts peacetime serendipitousness with the tension and chaos of a nation torn by war. The Brunei Gallery, SOAS, **London**, through December 20.

the MFA and Harvard University. Dating from 1700 BCE to 300 CE, the jewels include both uniquely Nubian and foreign imports, prized for their materials, craftsmanship, symbolism and rarity. MFA, **Boston**, through May 14, 2017.

**Unearthing Arabia:** *The Archaeological Adventures of Wendell Phillips*. Wendell Phillips headed the largest archaeological expedition to South Arabia (present-day Yemen) from 1949-1951. Accompanied by leading scholars, scientists and technicians, Phillips was on a quest to uncover two ancient cities—Tanna, the capital of the once-prosperous Qataban kingdom, and Marib, the reputed home of the legendary Queen of Sheba—that had flourished along the fabled incense road some 2500 years earlier. Through a selection of unearthed objects as well as film and photography shot by the exhibition team, the collection highlights Phillips's key finds, recreates his adventures and conveys the thrill of discovery on the last great archaeological frontier. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through June 7.

**India:** *Jewels That Enchanted the World* examines the legacy of 500 years of Indian jewelry, from the 17th century to the present. More than 300 pieces of jewelry and jeweled objects are brought together for the first time to showcase the beauty of Indian craftsmanship, the magnificence of gemstone setting and the refinement of Indian taste. Assembled from more than 30 museums, institutions and private collections, the exhibition is the most comprehensive ever staged on the subject. State Museums of **Moscow**, Kremlin, through July 27.

**Beyond Bollywood:** *Indian Americans Shape the Nation* elaborates on the history and contemporary experiences of Indian Americans as they have grown to be one of the more diverse and well-recognized communities in the US. Photographs, artifacts, videos and interactives trace their arrival and labor participation in the early 1900s; their achievements within various economic industries; and their many contributions in building the nation. The exhibition also reveals how they have kept and shared their culture and organized to meet the needs of the under-served. Asian Pacific American Center, **Washington, D.C.**, through August 26.

**Chief S.O. Alonge:** *Photographer to the Royal Court of Benin, Nigeria* showcases the photographs of Chief Solomon Osagie Alonge (1911-1994), one of Nigeria's premier photographers and the first official photographer to the Royal Courts of Benin. Alonge's historic photographs document the rituals, pageantry and regalia of the court for more than a half-century and provide rare insight into the early history and practice of studio photography in West Africa. National Museum of African Art, **Washington, D.C.**, through September 13.

Coming **November**  
**"The Invisible Hand,"** a work by the Pulitzer Prize-winning American playwright Ayad Akhtar, will be presented in the 2014-2015 season of the **New York Theatre Workshop**. The play is about an American stockbroker kidnapped by Islamic militants, and how his perspective on his captors evolves as he negotiates for his release. November and December.



Koralegedara Pushpakumara, "Barbed Wire" (2013), a 23.5-meter-long (77') installation comprised of illuminated barbed wire, LED rope lights and clear hose.

**Imran Qureshi:** *Deutsche Bank's "Artist of the Year"* comprises miniature paintings and site-specific installations. The exhibition is Qureshi's first major presentation in the UK. Born in 1972 in Pakistan, Qureshi studied in Lahore at the National College of Arts with a major in miniature painting—a traditional discipline he teaches there today. Considered one of the most important contemporary artists on the subcontinent, he credits in his work a unique synthesis of the genre's motifs and techniques with current issues and the formal language of contemporary abstract painting. Ikon Gallery, **Birmingham, UK**, November 19 through January 25.

**The Traveler's Eye:** *Scenes of Asia* features more than 100 works created over the past five centuries, providing glimpses of travels across Asia, from pilgrimages and research trips to expeditions for trade and tourism. The exhibition juxtaposes East Asian scrolls, Japanese woodblock prints and contemporary photography with maps, archaeological drawings and souvenirs, concluding with three vignettes on western travelers who recorded and remembered Asia during the last century: German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld in Central Asia, American collector and museum founder Charles Lang Freer in China, and the many travelers worldwide who shared memories with mass-produced, hand-colored postcards. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, November 22 through May 31.

Coming **January**  
**Marvels and Mirages of Orientalism:** *Benjamin-Constant in His Time* is the first major exhibition on Orientalism to



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## SWEETS

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# SWEETS

• Written by Rachel Laudan

The love of sweetness goes back deep into the mists of history. Humans found sweetness in the saps that ran in plants, in fruits such as the dates prized by the desert Arabs, and above all in honey. In Antiquity, doctors from the Mediterranean to India praised golden honey as a panacea. It neither soured nor putrefied, and it conveyed this magic to other foodstuffs, preserving even perishable fruits from rotting. They described it as warm and moist, a perfect match for the temperament of the human body in the humoral physiology that ruled from Antiquity until the 17th century. Used in salves, medications and sweet confections, honey was both food and medicine. Over the centuries, imperial cooks in Babylonia, Rome and the successive Persian Empires created sweets—honey and butter mixed with toasted flours, fruits, seeds or nuts; leavened doughs drenched in syrup; smooth, starch-thickened puddings—all of which were gastronomic triumphs, aids to moral and physical well-being, and status symbols for the powerful.

**"EAT OF THE GOOD THINGS THAT WE HAVE PROVIDED FOR YOU, AND BE GRATEFUL TO GOD, IF IT IS HIM YE WORSHIP."**

—Qur'an 2:172 (English by Yusuf Ali)

Islamic times, sugarcane was grown in Persia and Central Asia, then in Egypt, and then as far afield as al-Andalus (southern Iberia) and Zanzibar—wherever the climate permitted. The processes from sugar refining to confectionery were among the most advanced technologies of the day, requiring abundant energy, elaborate equipment and great skill. The cane was crushed by millstones and pressed, the viscous green sap was concentrated by boiling, and the crystallizing syrup was poured into conical pots where hard sugar formed as the moisture dripped out.

Of the several grades, crystalline white sugar was the finest, and the most expensive. Rock candy sparkled like diamonds; smaller crystals glinted in the light when sprinkled over food. Unlike honey, sugar added neither aroma nor color, and thus preserves of fruit retained their flavor, fruit sherbets took on tints of rose, green or orange, and sweet drinks of starch or ground nuts stayed dazzling white. All could be scented with rose petals and orange blossoms. Confectioners discovered that when boiled for varying lengths of time and then cooled, sugar became successively clear and pliable, then transparent and hard, and then brown aromatic caramel, opening a myriad of culinary possibilities. The *Kitab-al-Tabikh* (*Book of Dishes*), compiled by Ibn Sayyan al-Warraq at the end of the 10th century as a record of the cuisine of the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad and his courtiers, gave 90 recipes for sweets, including pulled sugar, a precursor of marzipan, syrup-soaked pastry fritters, pancakes filled with nuts and clotted cream, and a pudding enriched with the drippings that fell from a roasting chicken.

Sweets, far beyond the reach of ordinary people, were emulated in palaces and mansions in the Central Asian cities of Samarkand, Bukhara and Merv. They were enjoyed in the

# PATTERNS OF MOON, PATTERNS OF SUN

• Written by Paul Lunde

## THE HIJRI CALENDAR

In 638 CE, six years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Islam's second caliph, 'Umar, recognized the necessity of a calendar to govern the affairs of Muslims. This was first of all a practical matter. Correspondence with military and civilian officials in the newly conquered lands had to be dated. But Persia used a different calendar from Syria, where the caliphate was based; Egypt used yet another. Each of these calendars had a different starting point, or epoch. The Sasanids, the ruling dynasty of Persia, used June 16, 632 CE, the date of the accession of the last Sasanid monarch, Yazdagird III. Syria, which until the Muslim conquest was part of the Byzantine Empire, used a form of the Roman "Julian" calendar, with an epoch of October 1, 312 BCE. Egypt used the Coptic calendar, with an epoch of August 29, 284 CE. Although all were solar calendars, and hence geared to the seasons and containing 365 days, each also had a different system for periodically adding days to compensate for the fact that the true length of the solar year is not 365 but 365.2422 days.

**"IT IS HE WHO MADE THE SUN TO BE A SHINING GLORY, AND THE MOON TO BE A LIGHT (OF BEAUTY), AND MEASURED OUT STAGES FOR HER, THAT YE MIGHT KNOW THE NUMBER OF YEARS AND THE COUNT (OF TIME)."**

—Qur'an 10:5 (English by Yusuf Ali)

In pre-Islamic Arabia, various other systems of measuring time had been used. In South Arabia, some calendars apparently were lunar, while others were lunisolar, using months based on the phases of the moon but intercalating days outside the lunar cycle to synchronize the calendar with the seasons. On the eve of Islam, the Himyarites appear to have used a calendar based on the Julian form, but with an epoch of 110 BCE. In central Arabia, the course of the year was charted by the position of the stars relative to the horizon at sunset or sunrise, dividing the ecliptic into 28 equal parts corresponding to the location of the moon on each successive night of the month. The names of the months in that calendar have continued in the Islamic calendar to this day and would seem to indicate that, before Islam, some sort of lunisolar calendar was in use, though it is not known to have had an epoch other than memorable local events.

There were two other reasons 'Umar rejected existing solar calendars. The Qur'an, in Chapter 10, Verse 5, states that time should be reckoned by the moon. Not only that, calendars used by the Persians, Syrians and Egyptians were identified with other religions and cultures. He therefore decided to create a calendar specifically for the Muslim community. It would be lunar, and it would have 12 months, each with 29 or 30 days.

This gives the lunar year 354 days, 11 days fewer than the solar year. 'Umar chose as the epoch for the new Muslim calendar the *hijra*, the emigration of the Prophet Muhammad and 70 Muslims from Makkah to Madinah, where Muslims first attained religious and political autonomy. The hijra thus occurred on 1 Muharram of the year 1 according to the Islamic calendar, which was named "hijri" after its epoch. (This date corresponds to July 16, 622 CE, on



Indian sultanates, and the miniatures in the early 16th-century *Book of Delights*, commissioned by the ruler of the Islamic state of Malwa in central India, showed women preparing sherbets, halvah and rosewater. They were prepared in Islamic states in southern Italy, Sicily, Spain and Portugal (al-Andalus), whence they passed to Catholic nuns and confectioners' guilds that in the 16th and 17th centuries transferred the techniques through their networks in Europe and the Americas as well as east to Goa, Macao, Manila and even Japan.

A second creative burst in Islamic sweet-making came in the 16th through the 18th centuries with the Mughal, the Safavid and particularly the Ottoman Empires. Paper-thin crackling pastries were soaked in syrup or honey. Brightly colored sugar-candy figures of exotic animals, such as giraffes and elephants, or structures such as castles and fountains were carried by bearers or by wheeled carts on public occasions as tangible symbols of the vast wealth commanded by the sultan. In cafés in Istanbul and Cairo, men sipped sweetened coffee, from whence the practice spread to Vienna and to the rest of Europe. Ice cream and Turkish delight were added to the list of delicacies in the 18th century. Emigrants who left the region in the 19th and 20th centuries now prepare baklava in Mexico City, Berlin and London, and Turkish delight in San Francisco and Melbourne.

In the meantime, northern European sweets had taken a different direction. Northern Europeans who had got wind of these delicious, healthful luxuries from travelers established sugar plantations, first in Cyprus in the Middle Ages, and then in the Atlantic Islands and the Caribbean in the 16th and 17th centuries. They learned the tricks of preparing jams, jellies, marzipan and fritters from Portuguese and Spanish cooks and from the confectionery manuals published from the mid-16th century on. Between the 16th and the 19th centuries, sugar production soared as Europeans opened new plantations, introduced mass-production machinery and then learned how to extract sugar from a new source: beets. For the first time, sugar became widely affordable. What were once exotic confections became snacks and everyday candies for children. Sweetness was diffused through cakes instead of concentrated in jolts of deliciousness, and by the late 20th century, far from praising sugar, doctors condemned it, so it was gradually demoted to a mere bearer of empty calories.

Yet in Islamic lands sweets continue to be a source of enchantment and social ritual, served at birth, marriage and death, as well as at the great events of the religious year, the holy month of Ramadan, 'Id al-Fitr and 'Id al-Adha. As a sign of hospitality, a touchstone of culture, a path to well-being and a product of a long and proud tradition, sweets are cherished. 🌍

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On the cover: *Mamoul (karabij or kurabiye in Turkey; klaysha in Iraq) are date- or nut-stuffed pastries in a shortbread dough of wheat flour, sugar and fat (now usually butter). Descriptions date back to Arabic cookbooks of the Middle Ages, and mamoul are among the traditional sweet offerings for the Ramadan iftar (nighttime meal) in the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula. Made at home or commercially, they are decorated by hand or, here, by pressing into an incised wooden mold. Photo by Sawsan Abu Farha (chefindisguise.com).*

Credits: Captions by Rachel Laudan. Historical notes by Robert W.

Lebling and Alva Robinson. Photo research and editing by Mary Kathryn Flores. Edited by Richard Doughty. Design by Graphic Engine. Printed by RRDDonnelley/Wetmore.

the Gregorian calendar.) Today in the West, it is customary, when writing hijri dates, to use the abbreviation AH, which stands for the Latin *anno hegirae*, “year of the hijra.”

Because the Islamic lunar calendar is 11 days shorter than the solar, it is therefore not synchronized to the seasons. Its festivals, which fall on the same days of the same lunar months each year, make the round of the seasons every 33 solar years. This 11-day difference between the lunar and the solar year accounts for the difficulty of converting dates from one system to the other.

## THE GREGORIAN CALENDAR

The early calendar of the Roman Empire was lunisolar, containing 355 days divided into 12 months beginning on January 1. To keep it more or less in accord with the actual solar year, a month was added every two years. The system for doing so was complex, and cumulative errors gradually misaligned it with the seasons. By 46 BCE, it was some three months out of alignment, and Julius Caesar oversaw its reform. Consulting Greek astronomers in Alexandria, he created a solar calendar in which one day was added to February every fourth year, effectively compensating for the solar year's length of 365.2422 days. This Julian calendar was used throughout Europe until 1582 CE.

In the Middle Ages, the Christian liturgical calendar was grafted onto the Julian one, and the computation of lunar festivals like Easter, which falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox, exercised some of the best minds in Christendom. The use of the epoch 1 CE dates from the sixth century, but did not become common until the 10th.

The Julian year was nonetheless 11 minutes and 14 seconds too long. By the early 16th century, due to the accumulated error, the spring equinox was falling on March 11 rather than where it should, on March 21. Copernicus, Christophorus Clavius and the physician Aloysius Lilius provided the calculations, and in 1582 Pope Gregory XIII ordered that Thursday, October 4, 1582, would be followed by Friday, October 15, 1582. Most Catholic countries accepted the new “Gregorian” calendar, but it was not adopted in England and the Americas until the 18th century. Its use is now almost universal worldwide. The Gregorian year is nonetheless 25.96 seconds ahead of the solar year, which by the year 4909 will add up to an extra day. 🌍

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## CONVERTING DATES

The following equations convert roughly from Gregorian to *hijri* and vice versa. However, the results can be slightly misleading: They tell you only the year in which the other calendar's year begins. For example, 2015 Gregorian begins in Rabi al-Awwal, the third month of *hijri* 1436, and ends in that same month *hijri* 1437.

Gregorian year =

$[(32 \times \text{Hijri year}) \div 33] + 622$

Hijri year =

$[(\text{Gregorian year} - 622) \times 33] \div 32$

(Online calculators are available at several searchable sources including [www.rabiah.com/convert/](http://www.rabiah.com/convert/) and [www.ori.unizh.ch/hegira.html](http://www.ori.unizh.ch/hegira.html).)







RABI' I 1436 -  
RABI' II

# JANUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S									
NOTES:				10	1	11	2	12	3						
13	4	14	5	15	6	16	7	17	8	18	9	19	10		
<p>Tunisian cultural pioneer Ali Douagi born 1909</p>				<p>Vasily Radlov, Russian Turkologist, born 1837</p>				<p>Sultanate of Brunei independence 1983</p>				<p>8000-year-old cave paintings found in Egypt 1971</p>			
20	11	21	12	22	13	23	14	24	15	25	16	26	17		
<p>Cornerstone is laid at Washington, D.C., Islamic Center 1949</p>				<p>'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud, founder of Saudi Arabia, born 1876</p>				<p>'Abd al-Rahman III becomes caliph of al-Andalus 929</p>				<p>Egypt begins Aswan High Dam construction 1960</p>		<p>Ibn Saud declared King of Hijaz 1926</p>	
27	18	28	19	29	20	1	21	2	22	3	23	4	24		
<p>Al-Shafi'i, Islamic jurist, born 820</p>				<p>Afsharid Dynasty of Khorasan founded 1736</p>				<p>Caliph 'Umar introduces Islamic calendar 638</p>				<p>Prophet Muhammad born in Makkah 570</p>			
5	25	6	26	7	27	8	28	9	29	10	30	11	31		
<p>C. R. Ali coins the country name "Pakistan" 1933</p>															

RABI' II -  
JUMADA I

# FEBRUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S																					
12	1	13	2	14	3	15	4	16	5	17	6	18	7														
India's Mughal Empire enters classical age under Akbar 1556							Geographer Ibn Jubayr leaves Granada for Makkah 1183							Indonesian author Pramoedya Ananta Toer born 1925													
19	8	20	9	21	10	22	11	23	12	24	13	25	14														
Chagatai poet Ali-Shir Nava'i born in Herat 1441							Hadji Ali of us Army Camel Corps arrives in Texas 1856							King 'Abd al-'Aziz meets Pres. Roosevelt 1945													
26	15	27	16	28	17	29	18	30	19	1	20	2	21														
Existentialist Abdel Rah-man Badawi born 1917							First air crossing over the Sahara 1920							Al-Musta'sim, last Abbasid caliph, dies 1258							Bangladesh Language Day celebrates preservation of Bangla (Bengali)						
3	22	4	23	5	24	6	25	7	26	8	27	9	28														
Istiqlal Mosque opens in Jakarta, Indonesia 1978							Traveler Ibn Battuta born in Tangier 1304																				

NOTES:

In this modern version of *kanafah*, an unctuous filling of sweet clotted cream or soft, fresh cheese is enclosed in crisp-fried vermicelli pastry and soaked in syrup. The pastry, which requires great skill, dates back six or eight centuries. The first known recipe was added to the translation of the greatest of medieval Arabic cookbooks into Turkish by the Ottoman court physician Sirvani. It is made by pouring a thin flour batter through a sieve, or a container punctured with tiny holes, into a pan of hot oil.

Photo by Ozgur Coskun / Alamy.



هلوا من عجائبات ما زقناكم وشكروا الله

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
ما بنعمة ربك في



بابج  
ل.س ٢٢

بقلاوة فستق  
سعر الكيلو  
ل.س ٢٧٥

برمة شرحات  
سعر الكيلو  
ل.س ٤٥٠

بقلاوة حاجو  
سعر الكيلو  
ل.س ٢٥٠

بلور  
سعر الكيلو  
ل.س ٥



JUMADA I - MARCH  
JUMADA II

[illegible]

JUMADA II -  
RAJAB

S	M	T	W	T	F	S							
NOTES:			12	1	13	2	14	3	15	4			
						Willis (Sears) Tower engineer F. R. Khan born 1929		Arabian Nights translator Antoine Galland born 1646					
16	5	17	6	18	7	19	8	20	9	21	10	22	11
Easter			British scholar Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall born 1875			Heinrich Schliemann begins to dig for ancient Troy 1870		Actor Omar Sharif born in Egypt 1932					
23	12	24	13	25	14	26	15	27	16	28	17	29	18
				Philosopher Ibn Rushd born in Córdoba 1126		Moroccan Olympian Nawal El Moutawakel born 1962							
30	19	1	20	2	21	3	22	4	23	5	24	6	25
		Dinara Safina and Marat Safin become first brother-sister top tennis pair 2009					Kareem Abdul-Jabar plays his last LA Laker game 1989					Ground broken for Suez Canal 1859	
7	26	8	27	9	28	10	29	11	30				
Tatar literary icon Gabdulla Tuqay born in Kazan 1886							Babur begins reign as first Mughal Khan of India 1526						

By the height of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries, and probably long before that in the major cities of the Islamic lands, confectioners' guilds specialized in making particular kinds of sweets. In the 19th century, stylish and fashionable shops appeared, catering to upscale clientele. In this marble-lined shop in Syria, towering mountains of halvah-based and stuffed phyllo-dough pastries soar above boxes of stuffed dates and filled cookies.

Photo by Luis Dafos / Alamy.







# MAY

Photo by Tor Eigeland / SAWDIA.

# JUNE

ARAMCO  
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RAMADAN -  
SHAWWAL

JULY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S							
NOTES:			14	1	15	2	16	3	17	4			
			• Optics pioneer Ibn al-Haytham born 965	•	•	•							
18	5	19	6	20	7	21	8	22	9	23	10	24	11
Algerian independence 1962	•	•	•	Vasco de Gama sets sail on first direct European voyage to India 1497	•	•	•	Erden Eruc begins human- powered global circumnavigation 2007	•	•	Admiral Zheng He leads fleet on China's first "Treasure Voyage" 1405		
25	12	26	13	27	14	28	15	29	16	1	17	2	18
•	•	•	•	Tunisian Husainid Dynasty founded 1705	•	•	Id al-Fitr	•	•	•	•		
3	19	4	20	5	21	6	22	7	23	8	24	9	25
Hadith compiler Al-Bukhari born 810	•	•	•	Austrian, Venetian peace with Ottomans 1718	•	•	•	•	•	Great Fire of Istanbul 1660	•	•	Mystic philosopher Ibn Al-'Arabi born in Seville 1165
10	26	11	27	12	28	13	29	14	30	15	31		
Indonesian poet Chairil Anwar born 1922	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	Jurist Ahmad ibn Hanbal dies 855	•		







DHU AL-QA'DAH -  
DHU AL-HIJJAH

# SEPTEMBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		17 •	18 •  •	19 • Qatar independence 1971	20 •	21 • Jurist Abu Hanifah born in Kufa 699
22	6 •	23 • Abdul Ahad Mohmand, first Afghan astronaut, returns from Russian Mir space station 1988	24 •	25 • Prophet Muhammad begins Hijra 622	26 •	27 •
29	13 •	1 •	14 •	2 •	15 •	3 •
Arab-American filmmaker Nabil Abou-Harb born 1984			House of Wisdom patron Al-Ma'mun born 786			
7	20 •	8 •	21 •	9 • Id al-Adha	10 • Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is proclaimed 1932	11 • Minor planet named for astronomer Nasir al-Din al-Tusi 1979
14	27 •	15 •	28 •	16 •	29 •	30 •
		Marrakech International Film Festival opens 2001				
NOTES:						

The earliest recipes for **nougat**, the French name for Turkish *koz helvası*, a confection made by whitening sugar syrup with egg white (or sometimes with the dried halvah root, *Gypsophylia*), date back to medieval Arabic cookbooks. Often embedded with pistachios, almonds or walnuts, nougat may be soft and chewy or so hard that it verges on nut brittle. From the 16th century, Europeans adopted nougat with enthusiasm, and different cities developed their own special versions.

Photo by Eric Hansen.

DHU AL-HIJJAH -  
MUHARRAM 1437

# OCTOBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
NOTES:				18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
					Writer, dramatist Tawfiq al-Hakim born 1898	
28	29	30	1	2	3	4
	Albanian language society founded 1879		Mughal ruler Akbar the Great born 1542	Ilkhanate founder Hulagu Khan born 1218		
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
			us actress Melora Walters born in Dhahran 1959			Russia and Persia sign Treaty of Gulistan 1813
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Elif Shafak, Turkish novelist, born 1971			Rimsky-Korsakov's <i>Scheherazade</i> premiers in St. Petersburg 1888		Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen founded 1918	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	







MUHARRAM - NOVEMBER  
SAFAR

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
19	1	2	3	4	5	6
20	2	3	4	5	6	7
21	3	4	5	6	7	8
22	4	5	6	7	8	9
23	5	6	7	8	9	10
24	6	7	8	9	10	11
25	7	8	9	10	11	12
26	8	9	10	11	12	13
27	9	10	11	12	13	14
28	10	11	12	13	14	15
29	11	12	13	14	15	16
30	12	13	14	15	16	17
1	13	14	15	16	17	18
2	14	15	16	17	18	19
3	15	16	17	18	19	20
4	16	17	18	19	20	21
5	17	18	19	20	21	22
6	18	19	20	21	22	23
7	19	20	21	22	23	24
8	20	21	22	23	24	25
9	21	22	23	24	25	26
10	22	23	24	25	26	27
11	23	24	25	26	27	28
12	24	25	26	27	28	29
13	25	26	27	28	29	30
14	26	27	28	29	30	31
15	27	28	29	30	31	1
16	28	29	30	31	1	2
17	29	30	31	1	2	3
18	30	31	1	2	3	4
19	31	1	2	3	4	5
20	1	2	3	4	5	6
21	2	3	4	5	6	7
22	3	4	5	6	7	8
23	4	5	6	7	8	9
24	5	6	7	8	9	10
25	6	7	8	9	10	11
26	7	8	9	10	11	12
27	8	9	10	11	12	13
28	9	10	11	12	13	14
29	10	11	12	13	14	15
30	11	12	13	14	15	16
31	12	13	14	15	16	17
1	13	14	15	16	17	18
2	14	15	16	17	18	19
3	15	16	17	18	19	20
4	16	17	18	19	20	21
5	17	18	19	20	21	22
6	18	19	20	21	22	23
7	19	20	21	22	23	24
8	20	21	22	23	24	25
9	21	22	23	24	25	26
10	22	23	24	25	26	27
11	23	24	25	26	27	28
12	24	25	26	27	28	29
13	25	26	27	28	29	30
14	26	27	28	29	30	31
15	27	28	29	30	31	1
16	28	29	30	31	1	2
17	29	30	31	1	2	3
18	30	31	1	2	3	4
19	31	1	2	3	4	5
20	1	2	3	4	5	6
21	2	3	4	5	6	7
22	3	4	5	6	7	8
23	4	5	6	7	8	9
24	5	6	7	8	9	10
25	6	7	8	9	10	11
26	7	8	9	10	11	12
27	8	9	10	11	12	13
28	9	10	11	12	13	14
29	10	11	12	13	14	15
30	11	12	13	14	15	16
31	12	13	14	15	16	17
1	13	14	15	16	17	18
2	14	15	16	17	18	19
3	15	16	17	18	19	20
4	16	17	18	19	20	21
5	17	18	19	20	21	22
6	18	19	20	21		

Photo by PhotosIndia.com LLC / Alamy.

SAFAR -  
RABI' I **DECEMBER**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S							
19	1	20	2	21	3	22	4	23	5				
							United Arab Emirates declared 1971						
24	6	25	7	26	8	27	9	28	10	29	11	1	12
							us Pres. Jefferson hosts iftar for Tunisian guest 1805	Lebanese-American chemist E. J. Corey accepts Nobel Prize 1990		Kyrgyz author Chingiz Aitmatov born in Sheker 1928			
2	13	3	14	4	15	5	16	6	17	7	18	8	19
Top scientist and historian Al-Biruni dies 1048							Ibn al-Nafis, discoverer of blood's pulmonary circulation dies 1288						
9	20	10	21	11	22	12	23	13	24	14	25	15	26
Morocco becomes first country to recognize us independence 1777							Rock star Frank Zappa, son of a Greek-Arab Sicilian, born 1940		Zenobia, queen of Palmyra, born in Syria 1245		Christmas		
16	27	17	28	18	29	19	30	20	31	<b>NOTES:</b>			
							Bangladesh artist Zainul Abedin born 1914	All-India Muslim League is founded 1906					





1949

1986

1992

2014

IN NOVEMBER 1949, the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) published the first issue of an interoffice newsletter named *Aramco World*. Over the next two decades, as the number of Americans working with Saudi colleagues in Dhahran grew into the tens of thousands, *Aramco World* grew into a bimonthly educational magazine whose historical, geographical and cultural articles helped those American employees and their families appreciate an unfamiliar land.

Today, the magazine continues to be published online and in print by Aramco Services Company in

Houston, Texas, on behalf of Saudi Aramco, since 1988 the national energy company of Saudi Arabia. Although our mission remains education, the fostering of cooperation and the building of mutual appreciation among the increasingly interconnected cultures of East and West, for the last five decades, *Aramco World* and (2000-2014) *Saudi Aramco World* have been produced primarily for readers outside the company, worldwide, as well as for internal readers. Its articles continue to span the Arab and Muslim worlds, past and present, with special attention to their connections with the cultures of the West.

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be presented in Canada. Through this unusual retrospective, visitors will discover the dazzling color palette of an acclaimed painter of the *Belle Époque*, Jean Joseph Benjamin-Constant, who was influenced by his trips to Moorish Spain and the Morocco of the *cherifas*. His huge, spectacular canvases conjure up fantasies of a dreamlike orient, viewed through the prism of folklore, ethnographic pretext and pure imagination. **Montreal** Museum of Fine Arts, January 31 to May 31.

Coming **February**

**Sophie Calle:** *For the Last and First Time* consists of two recent projects by one of today's leading French artists. "The Last Image" (2010), a series of photographs accompanied by texts, and "Voi la mer" (2011), a series of digital films, take an incisive poetic look at the particular reality of the mental images of blind people and at the discovery of beauty and the sublime. Musée d'art contemporain de **Montréal**, February 5 through April 26.

**Southeast Asia: 800 CE—Present** enables students to explore the arts and material culture of Burma, Thailand, Vietnam and Laos and the island nations of Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia, all part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which represents a broad and complex sweep of landscapes, cultures and religions. Temple architecture, sculpture, painting and manuscripts highlight the distinctive regional characteristics of religious practice and belief. Victoria and Albert Museum, **London**, February 9 through March 23.

Coming **March**

**Abdelkader Benchamma:** *Representation of Dark Matter*. Abdelkader Benchamma creates an astrological vortex in his strikingly graphic, site-specific drawing, rendered in intensely black lines against a wall's white surface. The work depicts the solar system's complexity and its nearly imperceptible dark matter. The physically expansive image resembles scientific illustrations of the Big Bang and alludes to explosive cosmic forces. The installation gives form to that which is infinitely large and perpetually transforming. The Drawing Center, **New York**, March 1 through March 1, 2016.

**Sharjah Biennial 12: The Past, the Present, the Possible** began to take shape in a private conversation between Danh Vo and curator Eungie Joo in early 2013. They discussed the relevance of contemporary art; and the potential or artistic positions to imagine something beyond current states of social and political confinement; and the need for artists to play active roles in imagining the possible. "SB12" showcases more than 50 artists and cultural practitioners from approximately 25 countries who participate in the process of imagining Sharjah through education, culture, religion, heritage and science by introducing ideas of the possible through art and work. Sharjah Art Foundation, **Sharjah, UAE**, March 5 through June 5.

**Pearls on a String: Art and Biography in the Islamic World** presents the arts of Islamic cultures from the point of view of authors and artists from historical Muslim societies, offering an alternative to impersonal presentations of Islamic art. The exhibition focuses on specific people and relationships among cultural tastemakers threaded

together "as pearls on a string," a Persian metaphor for human connectedness—especially among painters, calligraphers, poets and their patrons. It highlights the exceptional art of the Islamic manuscript and underscores the book's unique ability to relate narratives about specific people. Through a series of vignettes, the visitor is introduced to the art inextricably linked to the men and women who shaped the Islamic past and contribute to its future. Asian Art Museum of **San Francisco**, Summer 2015; Museum of Islamic Art, **Doha**, Fall 2015; Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Spring 2016.

#### PERMANENT / INDEFINITE *Welten der Muslime* (Muslim Worlds)

is a new permanent exhibition spread over 850 square meters across four showrooms that broaches a range of subjects which continue to play an important role in contemporary Muslim perception of themselves and others, using examples of architecture, such as the richly decorated wall of a guest house from Afghanistan. What can historical objects reveal about the identity and self-perception of their respective source communities? And what is the significance and meaning of such objects in these societies today? The complexity and many facets of Islam, as well as phenomena related to everyday religious practice, are illustrated by objects of very diverse Muslim provenance. Ethnologisches Museum, **Berlin**.

**Europe Imagines the East** brings attention to *chinoiserie*, an enchanting decorative motif depicting imaginary and whimsical interpretations of life in Asia, through four tapestries from the museum's collection. The motifs of chinoiserie

an 18th-century European concept, typically reflect exotic figures clothed in flowing robes and elaborate headdresses, and situated in fantastical landscape settings. A blend of factual travel accounts, atlases, myth and fantasy, the scenes in these pieces capture the enthrallment of Europeans with visions of the Near and Far East, offering a wealth of iconographic images to study and explore. **Seattle** Art Museum.

**East-West/West-East** is a newly unveiled sculpture by Richard Serra, placed in a desert area. It consists of four steel plates, varying from 14.7 to 16.7 meters tall, that the artist says symbolize the connections between Qatar's two regions. Sixty kilometers from **Doha**.

**Contemporary Art Museum in Jiddah.** Abdul Latif Jameel Community Initiatives plans to construct a 7000-square-meter museum, to be called *Bayt Jameel*, which will include

spaces devoted to education, exhibitions of local artists' work and international temporary exhibitions, as well as a gallery where works that have received the Victoria and Albert Museum's Jameel Prize will be displayed. There will also be an open-air sculpture garden, lecture/training rooms, art laboratories, an events hall and cafeteria. Bayt Jameel will also offer international study scholarships to young Saudi artists. The master plan for the project is currently being designed.

Information is correct at press time, but please reconfirm dates and times before traveling. Most institutions listed have further information available at their websites. 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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