

JULY AUGUST 2016

# AramcoWorld





## 4 Running for the Royal Cup

Written by Matthew Teller  
Photos and video by Steve Shelton

An Arabian thoroughbred's track performance in 1989 in Tokyo spurred the creation of a two-nation symbol of friendly relations: Japan's annual Saudi Arabia Royal Cup, whose 18th trophy winner recently claimed victory by no more than a nose.

## 12 What's So Funny about Lucian the Syrian?

Written by Robert Lebling  
Illustrated by Ivy Johnson

Renowned and often notorious, Lucian wrote in Greek under the Roman Empire. Inspiring and famously satirizing, he conjured the source tale for "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," penned the first space-travel science fiction novel and coined a term that became a beloved modern superhero.

## 18 Beirut Sounds Like This

Written by Lina Mounzer  
Photos and video by George Azar

An alchemy of creativity and adversity, the Lebanese capital's indie/alt music scene feels ripe for global gold. Find some of our starter tracks on page 22 to listen to while reading and decide for yourself.

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# AramcoWorld

[aramcoworld.com](http://aramcoworld.com)

July/August 2016  
Vol. 67, No. 4



We distribute *AramcoWorld* in print and online to increase cross-cultural understanding by broadening knowledge of the histories, cultures and geography of the Arab and Muslim worlds and their global connections.

**Front Cover:** The Saudi Arabia Royal Cup caps a day stacked with a dozen races on the turf track at Tokyo Racecourse. On October 10, 2015, the Royal Cup race saw 12 two-year-old thoroughbreds, all Japanese owned and Japanese trained, run 1,600 flat meters for prestige, purse and trophy.

**Back Cover:** The first edition of our free biweekly e-newsletter, dated June 1, marks the latest in 15 years of digital growth at *AramcoWorld*. Subscribe at [www.aramcoworld.com](http://www.aramcoworld.com) → About → Newsletter Subscription.



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*Written by Ramin Vellotti*

Born in West Africa, fluent in Fula and Arabic, he endured 44 years as a slave. In 1800 he bought a house in Georgetown, on the edge of Washington, the United States' new capital, on a site where archeologists recently dug in hopes of adding to his remarkable American story.

## 32 **At Home with Harisa**

*Written, photographed and video produced by Deana Sidney*

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## 34 **Malika III: Shajarat al-Durr**

*Written by Tom Verde  
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The first woman to claim an Egyptian throne since Cleopatra, Shajarat al-Durr won an Ayyubid sultan and then a Crusader war; she founded a Mamluk dynasty and ruled as sultana *de facto* far longer than *de jure*—until her storied, violent end.

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Publisher: Aramco Services Company | President: Basil A. Abul-Hamayel | Director, Public Affairs: Jamal K. Khudair | Editor: Richard Doughty | Assistant Editors: Arthur P. Clark, Alva Robinson | Digital Media Editor: Johnny Hanson | Circulation: Melissa Altman | Administration: Sarah Miller | Print Design: Graphic Engine Design Studio | Printer: RR Donnelley Houston | Web Design: eSiteful Corporation | Tablet Design and Mobile App: Herring Design

Subscriptions: [www.aramcoworld.com](http://www.aramcoworld.com) | Editorial: [editor@aramcoservices.com](mailto:editor@aramcoservices.com)

Mail: *AramcoWorld*, Post Office Box 2106, Houston, Texas 77252-2106 USA

ISSN: 1530-5821

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# FIRSTLOOK

## *Kitab al-Filaha*

Photograph by Tariq Dajani

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### **"Of Planting the Quince Tree" (chapter 8, article 36)**

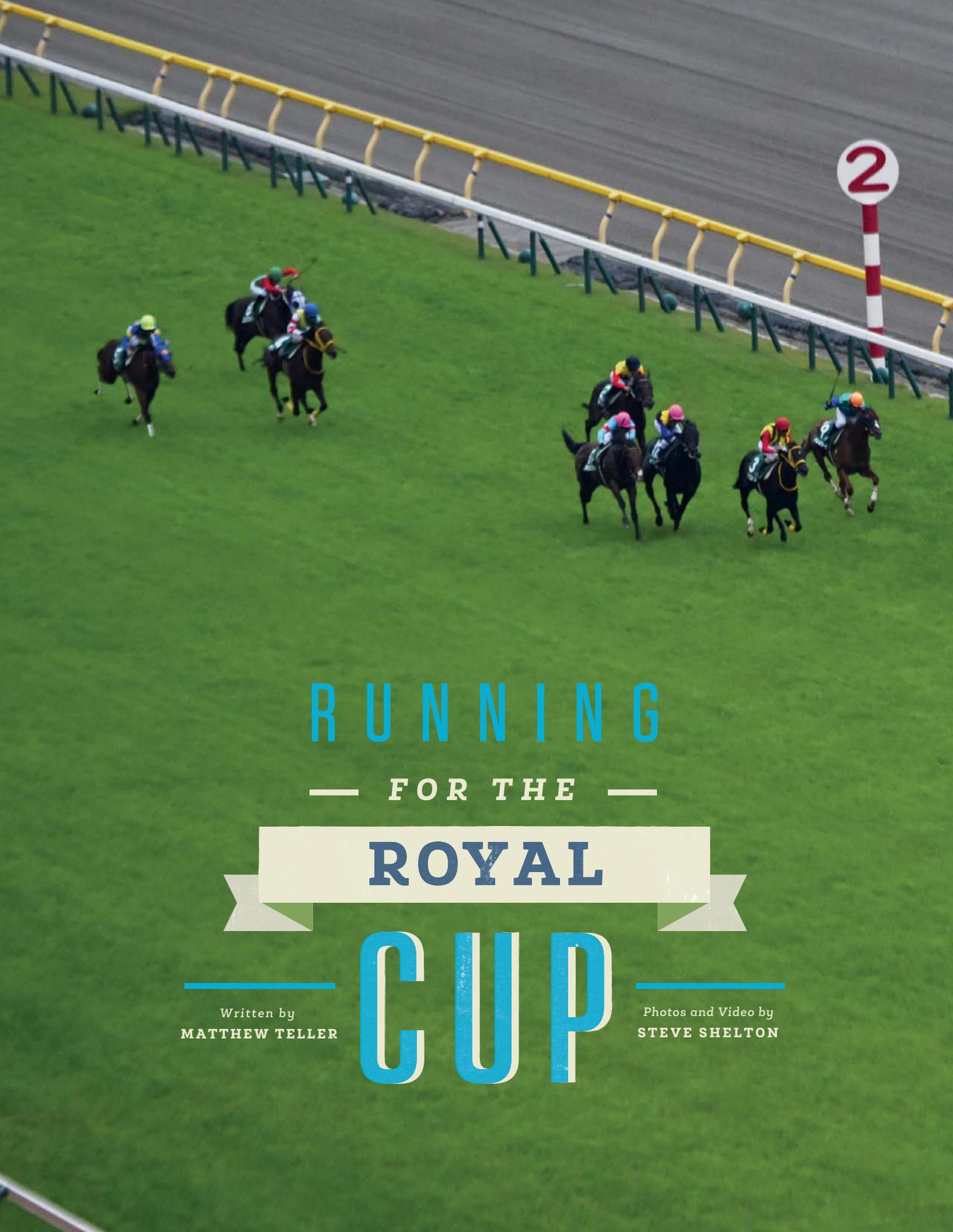
*It is said that the quince tree is called the Almond of India. One of the species casts a large round fruit, the other small, while another is long and is called a monhad. Of these there are both sweet and sour fruit. According to the book of Ibn Hajaj, place the quince tree in low ground where moisture and humidity lie. Labathio said sandy ground is suitable too, provided it is manured and watered regularly.*

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In 2012 I moved from the Middle East to Andalucía in southern Spain, where for some 800 years the Muslim civilization of Al-Andalus flourished. Al-Andalus became renowned for its architecture and scholarship in science, medicine and philosophy. Less known were its achievements in agriculture and animal husbandry, of which ancient knowledge was compiled with new techniques into a series of books. The most famous of these was the 12th-century *Kitab al-Filaha* (*Book of Agriculture*) by Ibn al-'Awwam al-Ishbili. Comprising more than 1,000 pages of text and drawings, it was the most comprehensive treatment of the subject in its time. Learning about this, coupled with exploring the Alpujarra Mountains and kindling a new admiration for the still-life paintings of the Spanish masters, inspired me to work on a new series of images printed using photogravure, an intaglio process dating back to 1879.

—Tariq Dajani  
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R U N N I N G

— F O R T H E —

ROYAL

C U P

Written by  
MATTHEW TELLER

Photos and Video by  
STEVE SHELTON



It's early on a weekend morning, and the gates are closed. But someone, somewhere, must have given a signal, because the uniformed officials end their milling and move into place. One tilts his peaked cap to scratch his forehead. Another laces her white-gloved fingers together as she walks, pulling wrinkles out of the fabric, heels clicking on the immaculate stone tiles. And in the corner, a stern supervisor watches, legs spread, creases sharp as knives, clenched right fist by his hip, narrowed eyes flicking to his raised left wrist in a model of alert timekeeping.

On the other side of the gates, those at the front are the keenest. Mr. Daisaku—"Call me Duke," he says, with a nod, from under

Coming up from third in the 2015 Saudi Arabia Royal Cup race at the Tokyo Racecourse, Brave Smash (6) shows a burst of speed that seconds later noses him first over the finish line. *Top*: Spectator gates open at precisely nine a.m., and fans have a race of their own to claim favored spots for viewing the day's lineup of a dozen races capped by the Royal Cup. *Above*: Trackside viewing secured, an early bird reads a program while groundskeepers check the turf track of the world's largest horse racing stadium.

a mop of wavy pepper-and-salt hair—got here at six a.m. to be sure of securing his favorite position when the gates open.

Was anyone else here at that time? I ask naively.

Duke points across to his neighbor. Mr. Sakura camped outside the gates all night, Duke says. Sakura looks a stolid type, not embarrassed by my attention exactly, but unwilling to give too much away. I wonder if he and Duke are rivals.

All night? I ask. Why?

stands, restaurant counters and information windows, and out onto the trackside. There, the roof of the six-tiered Fuji View grandstand looms more than 50 meters overhead like a sheltering canopy. Look out across a 80-hectare expanse of green, past one of the biggest video screens in the world, 11 meters high and more than 66 meters long, set up in center field opposite the prime seats. And, yes, sunny skies do indeed lend distant views of Mount Fuji, some 80 kilometers to the southwest.

*Left: Takanari Miyata keeps an eye on the track as races begin. Center: Horses finish one of the early races on October 10, 2015. The first time a thoroughbred from Saudi Arabia raced in Japan was in 1989. Named Ibn Bey (“Nobleman’s Son”), he and his strong showing inspired the ideas for both the Saudi Arabia Royal Cup and a sister race in Riyadh, the Japan Cup, now in its 14th year.*



“Just because I felt like it,” Sakura says, unsmiling. “I often do.”

I want to talk more, but something is happening. There’s an echoing announcement in bright but unmistakably steely tones, and all those outside the gates pick up their bags. Officials ready themselves. The man with the creases lifts his eyes from his watch. It’s precisely nine a.m. With a squeak and a rattle, the gates at Tokyo Racecourse begin to rise.

**T**okyo Racecourse boggles the mind. It dates from 1933, built about 30 kilometers west of downtown Tokyo in Fuchu, then a historic riverside town on an important commercial highway and today a comfortably upmarket dormitory suburb fed by multiple, crisscrossing train lines.

But the location isn’t the selling point. It’s the size of the place, particularly since a top-to-toe revamp in 2007.

As you enter, it’s not hard to believe this is the largest horse-racing venue in the world, capable of holding as many as 233,000 people. Make your way through the gilded halls, with their TV screens, betting machines, snack

The main turf course is a circuit of almost 2¼ kilometers—or, in racing parlance, slightly over one mile two and one-third furlongs. Running inside the turf course are a narrower dirt course and a steeplechase course.

But what sets apart the track are its undulations—a gentle downward slope and a sharp rise on the back stretch, followed by another gentle drop round the penultimate (third) corner. Then there’s a punishing climb as horses enter the dramatic home stretch, a seemingly never-ending run of 525 meters to the post. The grade only evens out halfway along.

Received wisdom has it that downward momentum around the third corner favors frontrunners. But in reality

that merely sets up a battle round the last corner. A jockey in front entering the home straight might be tempted to drive too hard up the hill, leaving the horse short approaching the post. But keeping something in reserve by taking it easy down the slope risks giving the horse too much to do on that long, long hill toward home.

It's all about the psychology of the last corner.

Driving from the front demands guts and raw power. Coming from behind needs a tactician, able to play an inch-perfect long game without losing cool. When the starting-gates open, who's got what it takes?



closer to the Japanese public, not just through our oil and gas trade. I thought it would be a good idea to use horse racing and to use the Arabian horse's bloodline.”

Modern racehorses are thoroughbreds, a term referring chiefly to a breed specifically developed for speed, stamina and athleticism. All thoroughbreds racing in the world today—somewhere around half a million animals—can trace their bloodline back to three stallions imported into England from the Middle East between the 1680s and 1729: the Byerley Turk (of unknown origin), the Darley Arabian (from Aleppo in Syria) and the Godolphin Arabian (foaled in Yemen, exported via Syria and Tunisia). As *New Scientist* reported in 2005, 95 percent of racehorses active today hold genetic material that can be traced back to the Darley Arabian alone.

That foundational link to Arabia, mixed with the enthusiasm for racing in Japan—the Japan Cup, run every November, is one of the world's richest horse races, with a purse of ¥624 million

On the grassy center of the track, fans picnic and enjoy cuisine from “kitchen-cars” parked in the infield. “The boys might be here for the horses, but the girls are here for the food!” says Shoko Otani, third from right. Tokyo author and racing fan Makoto Yoshikawa observes that at horse races in Japan today, “you see so many young people, and there just isn't the difference between income levels, which is great. People enjoy the culture equally.”



“I'm a big fan of horse racing.” Hideki Koike beams as he says this and urges me to take another slice—needless to say—the best sashimi this first-time visitor to Tokyo has ever tasted. A counselor at Aramco Asia Japan, Koike has had a distinguished career in the oil and gas industry. But he has also long nurtured a dream.

“I was part of a [Japanese] delegation that visited Saudi Arabia in 1973 to study conditions for establishing a joint venture. In 1984 they asked me to set up an office in Japan to represent the kingdom in Asia. I've been working [like this] for many years. But throughout that time I wanted to bring Saudi Arabia

(around \$5.5 million)—pointed the way forward. So did the appearance in the 1980s of a very special horse.

Ibn Bey (“Nobleman's Son” in Arabic) was a chestnut thoroughbred, trained in England and owned by Prince Fahd ibn Salman. After some success in European racing, he arrived in Tokyo in 1989 as a five-year-old to compete for the Japan Cup, gaining headlines as the first Saudi-related horse to race in Japan. Sensationally, he led the field for most of the way, but was overtaken in the home straight, eventually finishing sixth.

“Ibn Bey made very impressive running,” says Kiyohiko Kakita, international manager at the Japan Racing Association (JRA). “He was an impressive horse. Many Japanese loved him.”

“That was when the name ‘Saudi Arabia Royal Cup’ first came to me,” recalls Koike.

Efforts by Koike, the JRA and then-Saudi Ambassador Bashir Kurdi culminated in June 1999 with the first running of the Tokyo High Jump, a minor race to which the title “Saudi Arabia Royal Cup” was appended. Work at the Equestrian Club of Riyadh to compile a Saudi studbook, a register of thoroughbred bloodlines, led to the kingdom’s acceptance in 2002 into the Asian Racing Federation, and the same year saw the first running of the reciprocal Japan Cup at the Equestrian Club’s King Abdulaziz Racecourse in Janadriyah, outside Riyadh.

By 2007 the Saudi-promoted race in Tokyo had been upgraded to “international grade III,” run over the flat and retitled the Fuji Stakes, drawing wider attention and more prestigious runners.

“But always the name of our race was attached to other titles,” says Koike. “We needed a single, authentic name.”

Last year, before the 18th running, the JRA agreed: From 2015 onward the race would be known simply as the Saudi Arabia Royal Cup.

From a total purse in 2015 of ¥61.6 million (about \$540,000), the winner would receive ¥32.4 million (about \$280,000)—all of it, as with all races in Japan, supplied by the government-owned JRA through public funds and ticket receipts. It’s a project of shared goodwill: Saudi financial involvement takes the form of the original Royal Cup, a gift in 1999 from then-Crown Prince (later King) Abdullah ibn Abdulaziz.

The JRA also reinvented the race as one specifically for younger horses—two-year-olds—run over 1,600 meters (approximately one mile) and slotted into the racing calendar in October. Koike was delighted.

*Lower:* Businessmen and horse owners watch from a private section. *Center:* Straining at the finish, a jockey whips the shoulder of his thoroughbred mount. That all of today’s thoroughbreds worldwide descend from just three Middle Eastern stallions highlights the connection between modern racing and the Middle East—a connection Hideki Koike, a counselor with Aramco Asia Japan, *opposite, lower,* determined to make more tangible in Japan by working with the Equestrian Club of Riyadh and the Japan Racing Association to establish the Saudi Arabia Royal Cup. Koike explains that in addition to its purse and trophy, the Cup is also a “prestigious first stepping-stone” in the competition for the annual Japanese Derby.

“Our race is now the one and only race in Japan named directly after a foreign country, with the trophy from the head of state. And the JRA has also placed the Saudi Arabia Royal Cup as the prestigious first stepping-stone for these horses on their challenge towards the Japanese Derby, which is held in May each year. Internationally it will be even more recognized and, of course, Japanese horse racing fans will pay much more attention.”

**T**he last I see of Duke, he has squeezed under the gates as they rattle upward and is sprinting up the steps into the grandstand complex to claim his spot. Mr. Sakura, I guess, is already ahead of him. All along the length of the gates, crowds of men and women are following suit, rushing to claim favored locations trackside long before the action begins. And this is just one of multiple entrances all around the racecourse that are opening simultaneously.

The day’s card looks packed to me: 12 races, with the feature event, the Saudi Arabia Royal Cup, due for the off at 3:45 p.m. I head over to the stabling area, beyond the bustle of the track, where things are still quiet. A gentle wind rustles oaks that shade long, low barns where racehorses wait before their big moment.

Wild Dollar, a runner in the eighth race today, is being washed, grimacing as the spray rolls down his nose but allowing the stable hand to rub water carefully around his eyes.



Another stable hand is leading a more nervous horse round and round on a tight circuit under an avenue of oaks. There is much whinnying and snorting.

“This is Sugano Lambada,” says the stable hand, who gives his name as Mr. Ihara. “She’s a two-year-old filly, racing tomorrow. I’m just walking her around; she needs to let off a bit of energy.”

It could be a stable anywhere. But it’s when you go trackside that the Japanese difference becomes apparent. After intensive promotional campaigns by the JRA to reposition horse racing in popular culture, this has become a sociable day out for people from all walks of life. Roaming through the

## THE SAUDI ARABIA ROYAL CUP'S TROPHY IS THE ONLY ONE IN JAPAN THAT COMES OFFICIALLY FROM A HEAD OF STATE.

grandstand area and down to the grassy lawns beside the rail at the quiet first corner, I see and chat with middle-aged businesspeople, young professionals, students, even family groups with small children.

Yuto Sumi, 25, a student from Osaka who makes golf equipment, is here with a group of friends, picnicking together on a blue tarpaulin laid out on the grass. He’s examining the racing program closely as I ask about the Royal Cup.

“It’s a big race,” he says, distractedly. “Not huge, but a small big race.”

Sitting cross-legged across from him, Shoko Otani, a film student from Tokyo, rolls her eyes and laughs.

“The boys might be here for the horses, but the girls are here for the food!” she says with a grin, nudging her neighbors.

Farther along the grass, Takanari Miyata, 29, and Yosuke Ikubo, 32, pals from the Tokyo suburbs, are here together on their day off. They cheerfully pose for selfies while we chat. Beside them professional women with expensive cameras lean together to discuss racing forms and compare betting slips. Older men in baseball caps chew the fat.

In center field, beside the children’s playground, “kitchen-cars”—the Japanese version of food trucks—manufacture equal quantities of savory aroma and happy banter, creating an atmosphere all their own. Strollers are left parked haphazardly between temporarily discarded sneakers and picnic-ware

branded with the stylized wide-eyed figures of Japanese *manga* animation.

I drift over to the paddock, the enclosed ring where the horses for each race are paraded for observers to gauge their fitness, mood and readiness. It’s a world apart from the cheerful hubbub trackside. Rumpled men in plaid shirts are still discussing finer points of form, but here many of the watchers are quiet, serious insiders: owners, trainers and high-rollers in sharp suits and designer outfits. As the horses for the next race troop past—magnificent, tall, athletic animals, alert and powerful—there’s an unmistakable air of reverential respect, and I’m sure it’s not just about the money changing hands.

Down by the rail, watching one of the early race victors enter the winner’s enclosure, stands Hiroataka Yamagishi, 24, a communications-technology student at a local university. He tells me he’s a big fan of Vodka, one of the most successful Japanese thoroughbreds, winner of the Japan Cup and the first filly to win the Japanese Derby in more than six decades.

“I watch every week,” he says. “I’ve won some money, but it’s the racing. I love it. It’s so exciting.”

Back on an upper level of the grandstand, I sit down with distinguished Japanese author and horse-racing enthusiast Makoto Yoshikawa. He is





By a nose, Brave Smash crosses the photo-finish line to win the 1,600-meter Saudi Arabia Royal Cup and earn the two-year-old and owner ¥32.4 million (\$280,000). *Right:* In the winner's circle, victorious jockey Norihiro Yokoyama, far right, looks on as Adel ibn Abdullah Al Mazroa, general manager of the Equestrian Club of Riyadh, far left, presents owner Takaya Shimakawa the 2015 Saudi Arabia Royal Cup trophy.

dressed formally—dark suit, white shirt and sober tie, gray hair straggling over his collar—and he chooses his words carefully.

“It really struck me that in Europe, for major races at the big tracks, you don’t see many of the younger generation, and the crowd tends to be split between upper classes and ordinary people. Here, you see so many young people, and there just isn’t the difference between income levels, which is great. People enjoy the culture equally.”

I ask him what that culture really means here.

“Look at Japanese retail stores,” he says. “They’re disappearing. Things are getting larger and larger. Big business. It’s all so impersonal. But if someone comes to the race track, it’s still a human experience. Everybody is friendly, chatting together. The impression is that horse racing is all about gambling—but it’s not. People gather here to enjoy the community.”

I ask how he came to love racing. Yoshikawa lifts his head and looks out as horses gather for the start of one of the support races, amid bubbling excitement from the trackside announcer and the crowds watching.

“It was very mysterious for me,” he says. “You can’t touch the will of the horse. I used to go to a farm where thoroughbreds were being trained and raced, and I loved it. Nobody at that time was writing about horse culture. I found myself getting more and more deeply involved.”

**T**he afternoon is moving on, crowds are thickening, and anticipation is building. I hook up again with Hideki Koike, who is busy working the VIP room.

“We invite quite a few guests from the political, business and art communities, to help get them more interested in what’s going on between Japan and Saudi Arabia,” he explains. “It’s a useful role of this race, to build links like this.”

Business leader Hiromasa Yonekura concurs, sketching the developing background between Japan and Saudi Arabia that is extending beyond trade links. It’s a theme I pursue with Nobuhisa Degawa, a senior analyst with the Japan Broadcasting Corporation NHK.

“Over the last couple of decades, Japan has been widening its cooperation with Saudi Arabia, into academic exchanges, technology and so on,” Degawa tells me.

“Japanese film—and especially manga—is becoming popular among Saudi youth, and Saudi culture is becoming more familiar to Japanese people through student exchanges and tourism. Horse racing is a part of that. It’s important for bilateral relations, an example of civil diplomacy. People here have no real idea how popular horse racing is in the Middle East.”

As we talk, a trumpet over the public-address system announces the big race of the day—the Saudi Arabia Royal Cup. We watch as the 12 runners—all Japanese owned and trained—are led into the starting gates at the far side of the track.

Then it’s all over in less than two minutes, and it feels like a textbook Tokyo Racecourse upset.

Crown Sky leads along the back straight and holds that lead round those difficult corners keeping tight to the rail. Entering the home straight, he is flying and looks to be in a perfect position to storm up the slope for home. But he’s gone too soon. It’s the psychology of that final corner.

As Crown Sky reaches the top of that hill on the home straight, with 300 meters to go, he runs out of juice. In seconds he is out of the picture as an unfancied outsider, Brave Smash, comes powering through from sixth to fourth to first, successfully holding off desperate bids from two late challengers to win by a “nose”—racing parlance for a few centimeters.



After presenting the Royal Cup, Al Mazroa waves to horse-racing fans and media. Japanese news columnist Yuzo Waki calls the race "one of the most impressive examples of the fact that we share common ground."

The roar that echoes back off the six tiers of that grandstand as the runners flash past the post is a sound to remember.

Heaving and sweating, but, from the looks of him, ready to do it all again, Brave Smash takes the attention of the winner's enclosure in his stride. The general manager of the Equestrian Club of Riyadh, Adel ibn Abdullah Al Mazroa, resplendent in gold-trimmed robes, presents the Royal Cup trophy to the winning owner, Takaya Shimakawa, also congratulating trainer Michihiro Ogasa and veteran jockey Norihiro Yokoyama.

"All the time I say to Japanese people, please, don't think Japanese and Saudis live in different worlds," Yuzo Waki says to me, up in the grandstand. Waki is a columnist for the Japanese news organization Nikkei and has been reporting on the Middle East for 40 years.

"We have common ground. And this race is one of the most impressive examples of the fact we share common ground."

The days of token high-level cultural exchanges are giving way to something much more vibrant, he says.

"The Japanese government used to promote traditional culture: our embassies in the Middle East would focus on *ikebana* [formal flower arranging] or *kabuki* [classical drama]. But now people are growing fond of contemporary Japanese culture—film, animation. Lots of cultural figures have visited the region: The designer Hanae Mori is one example. Contemporary Arab culture is not so familiar to Japanese, but when the Iraqi-born architect Zaha Hadid competed to design the new national stadium in Tokyo, for instance, many Japanese discovered that there were contemporary architects in the Middle

East. This race is a new example of that interaction."

So what, I ask Hideki Koike, does the future hold?

"The ultimate goal is to bring the Saudi Arabia Royal Cup to Grade II level," he says.

"If we can keep attracting competitive horses, the international system will recognize this. The Saudi royal family and the Japanese imperial household have both traditionally shown strong interest in horse racing—what's been called the 'king of sports and the sport of kings.' It's a common legacy, shared by humankind over some 5,000 years of coexistence with horses. I hope this sharing, and celebration of horse culture, will continue." 🌐

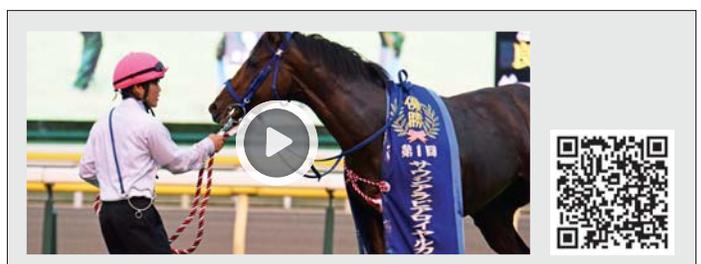


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WHAT'S SO  
**FUNNY**  
ABOUT



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*Lucian*  
THE SYRIAN?

written by ROBERT LEBLING

illustrated by IVY JOHNSON

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“DREAMS ARE GREAT MAGICIANS.”

—LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA

A world-renowned satirist who wrote in Greek in the second-century Roman Empire, he left an indelible mark on the literature of the West. He gave us “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” and what many call the first science fiction novel—a tale about a bizarre journey to the Moon. His works influenced countless writers and other artists of subsequent centuries, including Michelangelo, Erasmus, Thomas More, Goethe, Shakespeare, Kepler, Voltaire, Jonathan Swift, Jules Verne and more, up to today.

a ship carried by a water-spout to the Moon and back, is one. Another of his best-known works is *Philopseudes* (*Lover of Lies*), a comic dialogue and frame tale that uses parody to expose hypocrisy in the field of philosophy.

**L**ucian the Syrian, or Lucian of Samosata, is thought to have written about 70 surviving works, a majority of which are satirical. He used the Platonic dialogue as his principal format for satire, but he also composed satirical narratives that amount to early comedic novels. *A True Story*, describing a fantastical voyage of

Both writings reflect the long-standing influence Lucian’s works have had on Western thought and popular culture. It was a story in *Philopseudes* that helped spawn “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice,” best remembered as the Mickey Mouse segment in Walt Disney’s 1940 classic animated feature film *Fantasia*. That film was built around the stirring “symphonic poem” *L’apprenti sorcier* (*The Sorcerer’s*

*Apprentice*), composed by France's Paul Dukas in 1898, which was itself based on *Der Zauberlehrling*, a poem written a century earlier by German writer, statesman and Romanticist Johann von Goethe, based on Lucian's story.

In Disney's version, Mickey, as the apprentice, dons his master's magic hat while the sorcerer is away and casts a spell to create a walking, two-armed broom to carry buckets of water to help fill a large stone cauldron. But Mickey doesn't know how to end the spell, and the broom makes repeated trips, overflowing the cauldron. The panicked apprentice takes an axe and chops the broom to splinters, but each sliver becomes a new walking broom, and all the new brooms begin hauling buckets of water, flooding the chamber. It takes the return of the master to break the spell, end the chaos, drain the water and restore order.

Leopold Stokowski, who conducted *Fantasia*'s score, confirmed the animated tale was "a very old story, one that goes back almost 2,000 years" to Lucian's *Philopseudes*, in which the sorcerer is the renowned Greek-Egyptian magician Panocrates. While the use of animated brooms to carry water is mentioned, Lucian's original apprentice casts his spell on a wooden pestle.

As a satirist, Lucian was a rationalist and humanist. He emphasized the preposterous to mock the powerful and the pompous—especially the philosophers of his day, whom he regarded mostly as fools, hypocrites and frauds. He told a story in a dialogue called *The Fisherman* that summed up his view of the contemporary philosophers who mimicked the great minds of antiquity Lucian truly admired—Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the like:

There's a story that a king of Egypt once taught some apes to do a dance. The animals, excellent mimics of men, learned very quickly. Dressed in purple robes and wearing masks, they went through the steps and, for quite a while, put on a very good show. Then some jokester in the audience who had a handful of nuts in his pocket tossed it among them. One look and the apes forgot all about the dance, reverted to what they really were, apes and not ballet dancers, smashed the masks, ripped up the robes and started to scrap with each other over the nuts. The troop fell apart at the seams and the audience hooted. ... These people [contemporary philosophers] are like those apes.

Addressing the great philosophers of earlier days, Lucian said sneeringly of his contemporaries: "Just because they have long beards and long faces and claim to be philosophers, must this make them like you? I might have put up with it if they were at least convincing in their role. As things stand, however, a vulture could sooner play a nightingale than any of them a philosopher."

Though he wrote in flawless classical Greek, the literary language of the day, Lucian was a man of the Middle East. He was of Semitic Assyrian stock and his native tongue was Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic. Syriac, today largely a literary and liturgical language used by Assyrian Christians, was once spoken throughout Mesopotamia and in Eastern Arabia. Some of the greatest writers of the Roman Empire were not ethnic Italians, and most wrote in Greek rather than imperial Latin. Greek retained its status as the world's premier literary language for centuries after the decline of the Hellenistic powers and the rise of the Roman Empire. Classicist Lionel

Casson, a translator of Lucian, once described him as "the ancient equivalent of Joseph Conrad," the 19th-century Polish writer who rose to become one of the greatest novelists in English.

Lucian was born in the eastern reaches of the Roman Empire in about

125 CE. His hometown of Samosata, on the right bank of the Euphrates, is now the modern city of Samsat in southern Turkey. It was the capital of a small Hellenistic kingdom called Commagene until the Romans conquered it in 72 CE. Today the old city of Samosata lies submerged at the

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## A RATIONALIST AND HUMANIST, HE MOCKED THE POMPOUS BY EMPHASIZING THE PREPOSTEROUS.





MORE



GOETHE



SWIFT

bottom of Lake Atatürk, flooded in 1989 by the Atatürk Dam project.

What we know of Lucian’s life derives from clues and revelations left in his own writings, notably in *The Dream*, *The Doubly Indicted*, *The Fisherman* and *The Apology*. At 14 years of age, he began working as an apprentice sculptor in his uncle’s statue shop, but early in his apprenticeship, he broke a piece of marble by striking it too hard with his chisel. His uncle gave him a thrashing, causing the youth to storm out of the shop and wander the streets of the town, thinking hard about what he wanted to do with his life. As Lucian said later in an essay, that night he had a dream in which two women fought over him: one a rough workingwoman covered in stone dust who urged him to labor in the statue shop, the other an elegant lady in a smartly dressed mantle who spoke up for the benefits of a solid classical education. “Lady Education” won.

As Lucian said: “I have told you my dream, that by it I might persuade our young men to the study of literature.”

Lucian left home and traveled to Greek Ionia, on the west coast of present-day Turkey, where he managed to study Greek literature, rhetoric and oratory (public speaking). He was educated during a period called the Second Sophistic, when Greek education had regained its original popularity, and rhetoric was once again a favored course of study.

Eventually, Lucian learned enough about literature, rhetoric and oratory to begin a career as a lawyer. However, the legal profession didn’t suit his temperament or interests. He quoted himself as saying in *The Fisherman*, “You see, as soon as I realized the ugly things lawyers had to go in for—tricks,

lies, bluster, browbeating, throwing their weight around, and a thousand others—as you’d expect, I made my escape.”

Lucian now had portable skills with which he could make a decent living. He traveled to mainland Greece, spent time soaking up the culture of Athens, and also traveled to Italy and Gaul, earning his keep as a public speaker on what we would call today a lecture circuit. Translator Roger Pease describes Lucian’s career this way:

—  
“I HAVE TOLD YOU MY DREAM, THAT BY IT I MIGHT PERSUADE OUR YOUNG MEN TO THE STUDY OF LITERATURE.”

—LUCIAN

Theoretically the vocation of a rhetorician was to plead in court, to compose pleas for others and to teach the art of pleading; but in practice his vocation was far less important in his own eyes and those of the public than his avocation, which consisted in going about from place to place and

often from country to country displaying his ability as a speaker before the educated classes. In this way Lucian travelled through Ionia and Greece, to Italy and even to Gaul, and won much wealth and fame.

Some of Lucian’s early lectures survive to this day. But it was not long before he began focusing on the written word, particularly satirical dialogues, which he modeled on the Socratic dialogues but laced with sharp wit, comic exchanges and improbable situations.

By about age 40, he had given up the lecture tour and was devoting himself exclusively to writing dialogues, narratives and the like. Late in life, he accepted a salaried governmental post in Roman Egypt, where he worked until his death in about 185 CE.

**H**is writings include a memorable exposé called *Alexander the Quack Prophet*, which took on Alexander of Abonoteichus, a well-known Paphlagonian priest of Asclepius, Greek god of medicine. Alexander used a talking serpent named Glycon (read: “hand puppet”) to make prophecies for believers. Lucian knew Alexander personally, confronted him publicly and exposed his frauds with devastating humor. Very few of Lucian’s writings can be dated with accuracy, but this particular exposé, written at the urging of a friend, is believed to date from after 180 CE, near the end of his life and about 10 years after the death of Alexander.

A *True Story*, considered to be one of the earliest pieces of science fiction, is the first detailed narrative in the Western tradition about traveling through space to the Moon. In its introduction, the author carefully warns his readers that his subject matter is “what I have neither seen, experienced nor been told, what neither exists nor could conceivably do so.” Lucian takes the opportunity to ridicule pseudo-science and superstition, noting in the introduction: “Everything in my story is a more or less comical parody of one or another of the poets, historians and philosophers of old, who have written much that smacks of miracles and fables.”

The narrator and his crew of 50 sail beyond the Pillars of Hercules (the Strait of Gibraltar), seeking adventures in new lands. Their ship is lifted up by a powerful waterspout for hundreds of kilometers into the sky and carried for eight days until it reaches the Moon, which is inhabited by Moonmen who look and act very much like Greeks.

The Moonmen are at war with the Sunmen, and their respective armies are fighting over the planet Venus, “the Morning Star,” uninhabited at the time. Bizarre creatures are marshaled for combat: The warriors ride giant, three-headed vultures mounted like horses, as well as mammoth fleas the size of 12 elephants. Also arrayed for battle are thousands of troops riding salad-wings, or birds with wings of lettuce, plus vast numbers of millet-throwers, garlic-men, flea-archers, wind-courasers, ostrich-slingers and horse-cranes.

The Sunmen are not exactly defenseless—they have battalions of troops riding winged horse-ants, just as many mounted

on huge sky-gnats, light infantry known as sky-pirouetters who hurl monstrous radishes, not to mention thousands of stalk-fungi, dog-acorns and cloud-centaurs. We won’t play spoiler by revealing the victor in this cataclysmic confrontation, but suffice to say that a historic treaty is negotiated.

With the rise of Christianity in Europe in the centuries following Lucian’s death, the writings of the pagan Greeks and Romans fell out of favor. Well over a millennium passed before Lucian caught the imagination of European Renaissance writers. An early translator of Lucian was 15th-century Dutch Renaissance humanist Erasmus, who rendered some of Lucian’s best writings from Greek into Latin, then both academic languages of Europe. Erasmus’s contemporary and English friend Sir

Thomas More was also a dedicated translator of Lucian’s tales into Latin, and More’s own imaginary travel classic *Utopia* owes a debt to Lucian. Classics scholar R. Bracht Branham observes:

At a time when More’s *Utopia* is attentively studied as a masterpiece while Lucian remains largely an unknown quantity, it is a curious fact that in More’s lifetime he

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**ECHOES OF LUCIAN’S VOYAGE  
TO THE MOON CAN BE FOUND,  
FROM JULES VERNE’S 1865  
FROM THE EARTH TO THE  
MOON TO DOUGLAS ADAMS’S 1979  
CULT CLASSIC THE HITCHHIKER’S  
GUIDE TO THE GALAXY.**



was probably more widely read as the translator of Lucian than the author of *Utopia*.... Whether More or Erasmus first conceived the idea of publishing a collection of Latin translations of Lucian, the result of their efforts was to help initiate a fascination with his work that made him one of the most widely read Greek authors in sixteenth-century Europe.

A reevaluation of Thomas More's relationship to Lucian appears in Alistair Fox's *Thomas More: History and Providence* (Yale 1983), a study of the English lawyer-statesman's intellectual development.

Fox argues that More's "encounter with Lucian was absolutely crucial to the development of his mature vision and its literary and philosophical consequences were long lasting."

After More was executed for treason in 1535, the writers who came later continued to be fascinated by Lucian the Syrian. Indeed, as Lionel Casson observed, "all the Elizabethans felt his spell."

So much so that Lucian was a "vogue author" for Cambridge University students in 1580, the year Christopher Marlowe began his studies there, according to Gabriel Harvey, another English writer of the time. Renaissance scholar and historian William R. Elton writes in *King Lear and the Gods* (Huntington Library 1966):

More popular yet [than Cicero and Pliny] was Lucian, whose reputation in the sixteenth century was surpassed by that of few other ancient authors.... Notorious for his

scoffing tone toward the [Greek and Roman] gods, Lucian, a probable source for Shakespeare, bequeathed his name to Shakespeare's greatest English predecessor in the drama, Christopher Marlowe. Gabriel Harvey, after Marlowe's death, called him "a Lucian" or mocker of the gods.

When Marlowe famously refers to Helen of Troy as "the face that launched a thousand ships" in *Doctor Faustus*, he is quoting Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*. Likewise, Ben Jonson's early 17th-century stage comedy *Volpone* includes many reminiscences from that same work by Lucian; and

Shakespeare's celebrated grave scene in *Hamlet* echoes episodes from Lucian's *Dialogues*. Indeed, Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*, a play about a wealthy Athenian who turns his back on society after human parasites exploit his generosity, is inspired by Lucian's satirical dialogue *Timon, or the Misanthrope*.

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**IN PHILOSOPHY, LUCIAN  
IS CREDITED WITH THE  
WORD *HYPERANTHROPOS*—  
"MORE THAN MAN" IN GREEK,  
AND TODAY "SUPERMAN."**

Lucian's lunar excursion also influenced writers from other parts of Europe. French author Cyrano de Bergerac's early science fiction work, *L'Autre Monde ou les états et empires de la lune* (*The Other World or the States and Empires of the Moon*), published in 1657, was inspired by Lucian's *A True Story*. De Bergerac's novel, in turn, went on to influence other works, including Jonathan Swift's 1726 *Gulliver's Travels*, which also contains direct borrowings from Lucian. Echoes of Lucian's voyage to the Moon can also be found in Jules Verne's 1865 *From the Earth to the Moon* and indeed in Douglas Adams's 1979 cult classic *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

Even Renaissance scientists took note of the Syrian satirist. Johannes Kepler, the eminent German mathematician and astronomer, was inspired by Lucian's *A True Story*. In 1608 Kepler wrote a novel in Latin in the Lucianic style, entitled *Somnium* (*The Dream*), which among other things describes how the Earth would appear when viewed from the Moon. An early science-fiction novel hailed by Carl Sagan and Isaac Asimov, *Somnium* is also regarded as the first serious scientific treatise on lunar astronomy.

Today novelists writing about automatons or other human creations running amok, causing havoc or mounting outright rebellion, are employing what some scholars call "the sorcerer's apprentice syndrome,"



KEPLER



GILLIAM



according to Polish classics scholar Damian Kalitan. The ripples of this general theme can be seen throughout Western culture, especially since the Industrial Revolution, and perhaps never more so than in our own century. This theme has appeared in countless books and films, from Karel Čapek’s *R.U.R.* (Rossum’s Universal Robots) in 1920, to Isaac Asimov’s *I, Robot* anthology in 1950 that in 2004 starred Will Smith in the dystopian sci-fi movie of the same name, to 2015’s *Ex Machina*. (Arnold Schwarzenegger’s *Terminator* movies all fall into this category, too.) “The original concept of Lucian is still vivid in popular culture, e.g., rebelling robots, mutants, genetic engineering victims or viruses—albeit in a much altered form,” says Kalitan.

Another German link with Lucian appeared in 1785, when an English translation of fantastic tales called *Baron Münchhausen’s Narrative of his Marvellous Travels and Campaigns in Russia* was published at Oxford. No author’s name was given. Baron von Münchhausen, the protagonist of the stories, was an actual living person, but his adventures were total fiction. It was later revealed that the author was Rudolf Erich Raspe (1737-94), a German scientist of dubious reputation who had immigrated to Britain in 1775.

For his book, Raspe had borrowed from various German folktales, but some of his stories came from other sources—including Lucian of Samosata. In Raspe’s version, Münchhausen visits the Moon and an island of cheese, both of which echo *A True Story*, although Raspe’s Moonmen sport detachable heads and removable eyeballs.

Monte Python’s Terry Gilliam adapted the tales into his 1988 film version of *The Adventures of Baron Münchhausen*, piling on such Lucianic borrowings as three-headed birds and asparagus-stalk battle spears.

In philosophy—a field whose second-century practitioners were savaged by Lucian’s wit—the satirist’s writings also had at least one enduring impact. Steven Kotler, in his *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance* (New Harvest 2014), credits Lucian’s *Kataplous* (*Downward Journey*) with the invention of the term *hyperanthropos* (“more than man”)—“superman.” Although Lucian used his term to satirize the superficiality of the trappings of wealth and power, 16 centuries later German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, in his 1883 classic *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, used *übermensch* (“overman”) as a symbol for his vision of human evolution. Half a century after that, as German National Socialists were taking Nietzsche to political extremes, in 1938 American comics publisher DC Comics launched the clean-cut, crime-fighting hero Superman.

That, in a nutshell, is the story of Lucian of Samosata, satirist and enduring influencer of Western culture. If, as Lucian once said, “dreams are great magicians,” then Lucian himself might be considered the original sorcerer’s apprentice. ☹



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# BEIRUT

“WHEN I FIRST BEGAN MAKING ORIENTAL MUSIC AS A TEENAGER, IT WAS THE WAY FOREIGNERS FANTASIZE IT,” SAYS ZEID HAMDAN, LEANING BACK INTO THE COUCH WITH A CUP OF CHAMOMILE TEA. THOUGH IT IS NINE IN THE MORNING, HE HAS ALREADY WRAPPED UP ONE MEETING, AND IN AN HOUR HE HAS TO BE AT THE STUDIO WHERE HE IS SET TO PUT IN AN EIGHT-HOUR DAY PRODUCING MUSICIAN AND FILM COMPOSER KHALED MOUZANAR’S NEW ALBUM.

Hamdan, 40 this year, is one of Lebanon’s most prolific musicians and producers, and there is no one on the local independent music scene who doesn’t know his name or hasn’t worked with him. Originally half of the duo Soap Kills, which he and vocalist Yasmine Hamdan (no relation) formed in 1998, Hamdan has spent his entire

20-plus-year career in music both building on and attempting to break free of that legacy.

Soap Kills remains the seminal sound of postwar Beirut, a Beirut just emerging from the devastation and dust of a 15-year-long civil war. Hamdan’s trippy, minimalist beats, samples and orchestration underscore and elevate his counterpart’s misty,



Performing with alternative music pioneer Zeid Hamdan on guitar, locally born rapper RGB gets backing also from Tom Young on trombone on the stage of Station Beirut on April 28.

sensual vocals, giving them a rubbly landscape from which they rise, unfurling like smoke. The effect is that of an awakening, a sleepy materialization into an entirely new reality, where every link with the past will have to be reimagined and reforged. Melancholic, elegiac, even subdued, it is also a sound of possibility—that in recreating links with the past on one’s own terms,



At a free concert in Beirut’s Karantina neighborhood, Hamdan and Egyptian singer Maryam Saleh keep fans on their feet.

the future, too, might be made on those same terms.

There is no account of the contemporary Beirut alternative music scene that doesn’t begin with Soap Kills, with how it felt to turn on the radio, after years of nothing but news-report jingles, more traditional Arabic *tarab* music and the beloved and wholesome Lebanese diva Fairuz, and hear something that felt both entirely of now and of us. Though the son of Fairuz, musician and playwright Ziad Rahbani, did much in the 1980s to pave the way, mixing politically conscious lyrics delivered in Lebanese dialect with Oriental jazz orchestrations, Soap Kills was the postwar generation’s answer to what it meant to be at once both homegrown and contemporary, tearing down and stepping past the war-enforced contradiction between those two terms.

“Listening to Soap Kills as a kid changed everything for me,” says Hamed Sinno, lead singer of Mashrou’ Leila, inarguably the Arab world’s biggest pop-rock band right now, having premiered its latest album with a concert in London’s Barbican Theatre last November that was two-way live-streamed to Beirut, so important was it for the band to include Beirut in its debut.

Beirut today, says Hamed Sinno, lead vocalist of Mashrou’ Leila—currently the Arab world’s biggest pop-rock band—“is the experience of being in a place and yearning for it at the same time.”





Guitarist Tarek Khuluki, drummer Dani Shukri and lead vocalist Khaled Omran are Tanjaret Daghet (Pressure Cooker). The trio arrived in Beirut from Syria in 2011 and released 180°, its first album, in 2013.



“Yasmine’s vocals ... I’d never heard Arabic used and sung like that before.”

This, explains Hamdan, was a conscious decision on the part of Soap Kills and the crux of its local appeal.

Both Zeid and Yasmine had grown up abroad with parents who had fled the war to Europe. Despite, or perhaps because of, having grown up in a house where his parents never listened to Arabic music, never read Arabic books and rarely even spoke to him in Arabic, Zeid came back to Beirut “fantasizing about being an Arab and making Arabic music.”

But the first songs he wrote, with a band called Lombrix (through which he met Yasmine) dissatisfied him. “It was exotic Arabic music, using the cliché scales,” he says. He began listening to Arabic music in earnest, spurred on by Yasmine, who played him classics by Abdel Halim Hafez, Asmahan and

Um Kulthum, and when he sat back down to write, it was with the idea that it had to be something he wanted to listen to. Writing Arabic music, he came to see, was not so much about Arabic scales or quarter tones, but addressing an Arab audience, and so it had to be sung in Arabic.

This was where Soap Kills enacted its musical revolution. Arabic tarab music is all about the singing—and what singing it is: grand, emotive, impassioned and virtuosic, with sustained notes that leave both audience and singer breathless. To hear a woman’s voice singing like Yasmine’s—minimal, restrained, intimate, sometimes almost whispering—signaled a new kind of Arabic music that played with and responded seamlessly to the electronics



Bassist and beatmaker for the rap/hip hop crew Fareeq el Atrash, John Nasr explains that although they rap often in Arabic, “We don’t really use Arabic beats in our music. If we were to play with Arabic music or beats, we would have to do it in such a way that it would be as accomplished as the rapping.”



and samples layered behind the voice. It was not so much fusion music as music arising from immersion in and knowledge of two separate cultures, made by artists who were the hybrid children of a Beirut marked by immigration, separation, disjointedness and loss, but also postwar homecoming and tenuous aspirations for a future that might repair those ruptures.

“In my opinion, Soap Kills were the first,” says Ziad Nawfal, “but they weren’t the only ones.” Nawfal is a walking, talking archive of the Beirut alternative-music scene, having come of age right along with it, documenting it through a radio show he began hosting in the ’90s as a teenager and then later, in 2009, creating a record label, Ruptured, that grew out of the show and bears the same name. In addition to his roles as radio host and label owner, Nawfal is also a DJ, record producer and promoter, organizing concerts and performances. More than that, though, he is a huge music buff and a committed supporter of local musicians, showcasing both established talents and young newcomers who approach him with their demos on his radio show.

He cites the noise/punk/experimental rock group Scram-



After discovering and coproducing Mashrou’ Leila’s debut in 2008, Jana Saleh has worked as a popular DJ and producer for singer Aziza. Trained at Berklee College of Music in Boston, she credits the influx of Syrian musicians to Beirut for bringing “strong, academic musical know-how to the scene.”

bled Eggs and the rap duo Aks’ser (Wrong-way Traffic) as other major players on the emerging scene in the early 2000s. “Before that,” he says, “I played foreign music on the show, and then when these bands came along, I started playing local musicians. When I first started out, I would play one or two local bands during my show. Now, I can compose an entire DJ set out of only local musicians.”

The scene grew and thrived as artists played with music and sounds from hard rock to electro to experimental improvisation (a genre that has established such a devoted following, thanks to its yearly festival Irtijal, that it has gone from a single day of performances in 2001 to almost a full

week of some 20 concerts by both local veterans and international artists). At the end of 2002, a showcase concert was held at Beirut’s Music Hall, a shiny new venue built on the former no-man’s land that once divided the warring halves of Beirut, and in 2003 a compilation was put out by the alt-music store La CD-thèque, where Nawfal worked at the time. The compilation, *Beirut Incognito*, was a who’s who of the young Lebanese bands that had started in the late ’90s. It was an acoustic portrait of Beirut at the time: eclectic, all over the place, impossible to define, but above all exuberant, willing to experiment, try anything. “It was magnificent,” says Nawfal. “It blew up all expectations and preconceived ideas. For the first time, we had the feeling that something different was happening, that we were opening up and going places.”

It was the last time all the notables would be able to fit on a single record.

## DIY

As the scene developed, it broke off into little genre “spheres,” as Nawfal puts it, each with its own small, growing and dedicated legion of fans. The political upheaval of 2005 and 2006 in Lebanon, which saw both the shocking assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and a 33-day assault on the country by the Israeli army, also had reverberations in which the music scene, with some bands breaking up as their members left the country to seek more stable lives elsewhere, and different bands coming together around that time with a sense of urgency no doubt informed by the situation.

The alternative-music scene in Beirut is an alchemy of creativity and adversity. It’s not so much because of the fraught state of the region (though that certainly plays a role) but due also to the void of an industry or government-sponsored arts initiatives. While there is a giant regional music industry that supports traditional Arabic pop and tarab acts, it is slickly corporate, incredibly lucrative and tightly controlling, with composers, musicians and videographers associated with particular labels, like Rotana, for example, hired to create and manage a singer’s brand and sound from A to Z. By contrast, the alt scene is entirely DIY, with improvised venues, musicians exchanging favors, producers lending out their studios, bands paying out of pocket to print their own records, and friends and supporters offering their networks for distribution. It is much like everything in Beirut: a loose, self-made, often chaotic and collaborative solution to a structural problem.

It is precisely this chaos and collaboration, however, that some cite as the draw to working and creating in Beirut. Raed El-Khazen is a musician and producer who studied at the Berklee College of Music in Boston where he met Jana Saleh, a fellow Lebanese student, who happened to be the daughter of his favorite teacher. The two kept in touch over the years as they both moved to New York and worked in music and production—El-Khazen playing with bands and recording his own music, Saleh working in digital distribution and new project development at VP Records. After she moved back to Beirut in 2008, she gave El-Khazen a call: She had “discovered” a group of young musicians who had a rough but exciting sound and the talent and drive to grow into something really special. Moreover, they

## AN ESSENTIAL BEIRUT PLAYLIST

### SOAP KILLS

Tango

### MASHROU' LEILA

Aeode

### ZEID AND THE WINGS

Ocean

### POSTCARDS

Lakehouse

### FAREEQ EL ATRASH

Njoom 'Am Te'rab

### HELLO PSYCHALEPPO

Badawiya Lovin'

### EL RASS & MUNMA

Borkan Beirut

### CHYNO

Fight or Flight

### TANJARET DAGHET

Tanfeeseh

### WHO KILLED BRUCE LEE

ELVIS

### AZIZA

Ya Mazag

### MAII AND ZEID

Kalam el Leil

### THE WANTON BISHOPS

Sleep With the Lights On

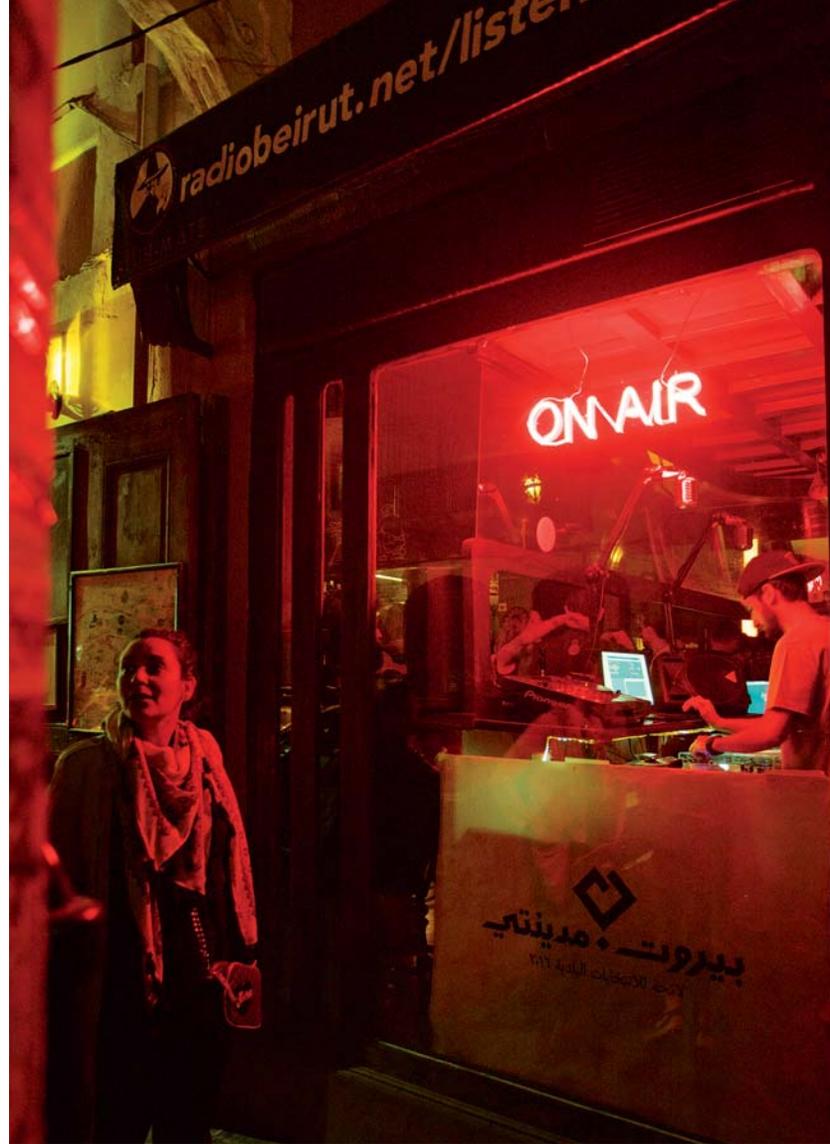
had something she hadn't encountered on the indie scene in Beirut in a long time: They sang in Arabic. Did he want to come to Beirut and work with her on producing them?

This was how the two of them came to set up their own studio, B-root, where they arranged, recorded and produced Mashrou' Leila's eponymous debut album.

While El-Khazen initially planned to be back and forth between New York and Beirut, "once I got here, I found I really wanted to just be here. I didn't want to be in New York anymore. It's much freer here, easier to be innovative, creative, to cross boundaries. There's no industry and hence a nonchalance. People are willing to try things because there's no consequences, no guy who's going to tell you, 'You can't do that because no one will play it on the radio.'"

After finishing the Mashrou' Leila album, El-Khazen and Saleh went separate ways, drawn to different projects and artists, though they often consult with one another and help each other out. In 2014, El-Khazen met Samer Saem Eldahra, aka Zimo, a young visual artist who'd moved to Beirut from his native Syria to escape the war. Zimo was also creating electronic music under a project entitled Hello Psychaleppo: dark, twitchy, psychedelic concoctions of bass-heavy beats and hallucinatory synths infused with keening Bedouin *mawwals* and filches of old tarab tracks, what Soundcloud has categorized as "electro-tarab," a subgenre that Hello Psychaleppo seems to single-handedly own. Very quickly, he took the underground scene by storm. "I heard this guy's stuff and I was just blown away," says El-Khazen. "I knew I wanted to work with him immediately."

Saleh, meanwhile, who is also a popular DJ on the Beirut scene, found her new muse in Aziza, a young Lebanese singer-songwriter who "combines classical Arab tarab rules of composition with pop." Saleh approached the Aziza project with relish and playfulness, eager to develop a sound, album and persona with a narrative modeled on the classic Lebanese and Egyptian musicals of the '50s and '60s. They recorded a studio



Broadcasting online, Radio Beirut also showcases live and DJ performances in the pulsating Mar Mikhail neighborhood. DJ, label owner and radio host Ziad Nawfal says that in the 1990s, "when I first started out, I would play one or two local bands during my show. Now, I can compose an entire DJ set out of only local musicians."

album followed by a live album.

"The approach to the studio album," says Saleh, "was how to take the traditional compositions of old Lebanese music and freshen them up, while the live album was how to take that freshening up and to deconstruct it." The live album, she says, actually achieved something unique thanks to the wave of Syrian musicians who came into the country around that time. "In Lebanon we have a more conceptual approach to things. The Syrian musicians brought strong, academic musical know-how to the scene. They have an education in Arabic music through their conservatory that we don't even have access to here, and they're also culturally more in touch with those roots."

One of those musicians was Tarek Khuluki, the wunderkind electric guitarist with the Syrian-origin rock band Tanjaret Daghet (Pressure Cooker), whose albums El-Khazen has gone on to produce. The rehearsal space used by Tanjaret Daghet—guitarist Khuluki, bassist and keyboardist Khaled Omran and drummer Dani Shukri—happened to be right next door to El-Khazen's underground Hamra Street studio. He was so impressed with what he heard—literally through the walls—that when they

approached him, he immediately agreed to work with them. Their second album, currently in the mixing stage, is a heady mix of hard-edged rock with ferocious guitar solos, raucous drums and vocalizations that veer eclectically between boisterous rock-n-roll and soulful mawwal-type chanting.

While several producers talked about the rich addition Syrian musicians have brought to the Beirut scene with their musicianship and relentless hard work, it would be remiss not to mention the difficulties they must navigate. A large part of their modest earnings must cover the fee for the annual residence permits that allow them to remain in the country, and each person must secure a local sponsor to renew that permit—not to mention that working at all requires additional, hard-to-get papers and permits. Not surprisingly, many found help within the music community, with Lebanese producers often stepping in to sponsor Syrian musicians—all adding yet another layer to what it means to be collaborative in Beirut.

## THE LANGUAGE OF THE “ARAB STREET”

John Nasr is the bassist and beatmaker for the rap/hip hop crew Fareeq el Atrash, which he describes in one breath as “a live hip hop band modeled after the classic funk bands from the ’60s and ’70s with musicians, rappers and a beat boxer taking a somewhat improvisational call-and-response approach.”

Tanjaret Daghet’s guitarist Khuluki relaxes while Omran practices in the apartment shared by the trio-in-exile: Each band member left a family and friends in Syria. They are now at work on their second album of ferocious guitar, raucous drums and vocals that veer eclectically between boisterous rock-n-roll and soulful *mawwal*-type chanting.

The band came together around 2006, when Nasr began working with rapper Edd Abbas and then later with whizz beatboxer FZ and the Syrian-Filipino rapper Chyno (who recently released a solo album, *Making Music to Feel at Home*, garnering international attention and securing a European tour). A third rapper, Qarar, has now joined their lineup. Abbas and Qarar rap in Arabic, each with his distinctive rhythm and style, while Chyno switches between Arabic and English. “Edd was one of the first rappers for me to really crack the code of making Lebanese dialect sound good in rapping,” says Nasr.

The band’s sound and beats are much influenced by Western and African American styles, and they often eschew samples in favor of jazzy, funky, melody-rich layers that create an expansive soundscape against which the rappers throw down their rhymes. Their approach is lively and humorous even when the subject matter is dark, sometimes playfully quoting rap classics with their own signature twist, such as the infamous hook from the 1979 hit “Rapper’s Delight” on their track “*Njoom ‘Am Te’rab*” (“The Stars Are Getting Closer”).

“We don’t really use Arabic beats in our music,” says the California-born Nasr, explaining that the band members prefer to rely on what they know and, more importantly, understand, in terms of sound. “We never want it to sound like a gimmick. If we were to play with Arabic music or beats, we would have to do it in such a way that it would be as accomplished as the rapping.”

This does not mean that the band, like many others, doesn’t proclaim and wear a staunchly regional, rather than local, identity. Besides the fact that they rap (predominantly) in Arabic, they also collaborate often across regional lines, both as a band and as individual producers and beatmakers with

rappers and emcees in Jordan, Palestine, Egypt and Syria.

There are also frequent collaborations between the rap scene and the electronic and indie scenes. Chyno collaborated with a number of musicians on his solo album, including Carl Ferneine from Loopstache, “an electro-indie project, mixing folk, swing, funk with electronic beats.” Jawad Nawfal, brother of Ziad, is an avant-garde electro artist who currently creates under the name Munma but began playing live in the early 2000s with other projects. Munma has released 10 albums, under his



own name and with different collaborators, including hip hop artist El Rass, who often raps in *fus'ha* (classical Arabic), recalling and then breaking the formal conventions of Arabic poetry.

A number of bands echo Hamdan's assertion that "making Arabic music is primarily about addressing an Arab audience," dismissing the need to work with traditional Arabic scales and compositional rules in favor of a lyrical approach that voices their ideas and concerns predominantly in Arabic.

"I grew up in a really 'Western bubble,'" says Hamed Sinno, "attending American schools and an American university." He describes the shock of the 2006 war and the ways in which doing volunteer relief work at the time really sharpened his gaze, bursting that bubble for good. "So when I started writing music, I knew I would only write in Arabic, even though I could barely manage it when I first started out. I still write mostly in English and then I look for the best translations. I have at least five translation tabs open on my computer at any given time."

It is no small feat, considering Mashrou' Leila's powerful lyrics and the way Greek myths are referenced with the same ease as old Egyptian pop songs (the song "Djin," off their latest album, *Ibn El Leil (Son of the Night)*, is a case in point). In fact, conscious lyrics are a distinctive characteristic of many bands on the scene. Mashrou' Leila, Fareeq el Atrash, El Rass, Tanjaret Daghet, the Arabic folk and experimental musician Youmna Saba, Edd Abbas (as a solo act) and Chyno all address the personal and collective challenges of navigating a landscape marked by shift and fracture, highlighting the ways in which the personal is political, but also how, in the Arab world, the political is highly personal, as regional events reverberate through individual lives.

Jamming, collaborating and mixing it up Beirut-style, Raed El-Khazen, center in red shirt on guitar, producer of Hello Psychaleppo and Mashrou' Leila, is backed by Tanjaret Daghet's Omran at far left and drummer Shukri while Khuluki plays keyboards. All joined Walid Sadek (white shirt) on trumpet at the Beirut Jazz Festival on May 1.



Chyno's verses, for example, in "Ballad of an Exodus," a track off of *Making Music to Feel at Home*, eloquently excavate all these multiple layers, positing "home" as a place where "you get out of your comfort zone." Written during a stint in Barcelona, questions of homeland, identity, responsibility and one's place in the world echo off of and inform one another, with exile laid atop exile: "My body on a bench in Barcelona's Paseo Picasso/Cuz this my Blue Period, my mind travels to Damascus corners/Tagging walls in Bab Tuma, manifesto for a New Syria." Later in that same verse, the situation in Syria, where Chyno grew up, becomes even more personal as the war and its dangers creep closer while his body remains in Barcelona: "Yeah I got mail last month, inbox filled up with texts/The old milkshake store we use to chill with our friends/the one in Shaa'an just got bombed/inshallah we won't be next."

## GIVING BACK

While there is no "Beirut sound," per se—at least not yet—according to Nawfal, Saleh and El-Khazen, who all seem to agree that the scene has not quite yet matured enough to yield something that can be wholly called its own, there is a Beirut ethos. Beyond the homegrown "industry" inside which all indie musicians and producers here operate, where people must help one another out by necessity, the idea of cooperation extends beyond the material and into something more abstract and idealistic.

"I need to succeed in such a way where I feel I've reached a place where I can benefit somebody else," says Chyno. He credits Fadi Tabbal, musician and founder of Tunefork Recording

Studios, as a major force in helping get his album made, not just for his musical knowhow, but also for his generosity. "He basically gave me the studio for free, handed me the keys and let me go mix there on my own when I needed to. It was above and beyond anything I expected."

Nawfal is motivated by the same sense of mutual responsibility. "I have a role," he says in reference to his support of local musicians. "It's my part, my duty."

Raed El-Khazen, likewise, expresses a sense of guilt at his recent decision to go back to New York to focus more on creating and performing his own music. Ironically and sadly, he blames the same sense of chaos that initially attracted him so much to the Beirut scene as that which now drives him away from it, emphasizing that the flipside of the disorderliness that can nurture creativity can also be a lack of a sense of discipline that spills over toward nihilism. Still, he's not done with the city yet. "I've given back enough," he says, and then,

An occasional duo since 2012, Egyptian hip hop singer Maryam Saleh and Zeid Hamdan play for free in the Karantina neighborhood.

pausing for a few beats, adds, grinning: “For now.”

Zeid Hamdan, in addition to his output with his bands The New Government and Zeid and the Wings, has also built a career based on collaborations with other musicians, giving workshops in Congo, Guinea and Algeria on how to produce albums with minimal production equipment and on a shoestring budget, and working with other musicians from the region, such as the Egyptian singers-songwriters Maii Waleed and Maryam Saleh, each of whom he has cut an album with.

“Sure, there are egos and competitiveness and all the usual things you’d find when there are a bunch of artists working in a small scene. Still, I don’t know of anyone who has had to pay another musician to get them to work with them,” says Nasr.

## THE MISGUIDED SEARCH FOR AN “AUTHENTIC” SOUND

It’s tempting to describe a lot of the music coming out of Beirut as a type of fusion between “Western” and “Arab/Oriental” sounds. But that’s a lazy shortcut more focused on maintaining binaries rather than acknowledging their utter meaninglessness, particularly for a postwar generation hyper-aware of its Arab roots and the Western influences that have long been part of the city’s urban fabric, and more importantly, a generation making conscious choices about how to mix elements from the various cultures it identifies with.

Almost equal to the number of artists making music that plays with and redefines concepts taken from Arab roots, there is also a considerable number who don’t think twice about that approach as they make music you’d be hard-pressed to identify by anything other than its pure musicianship and production value. That, too, indicates a creative freedom unconstrained by expectations of what one “ought to sound like.” Rock acts like Who Killed Bruce Lee and The Wanton Bishops, who recall LCD Soundsystem, Queens of the Stone Age and The Black Keys, or folk acts like Postcards and Charlie Rayne, who have echoes of Belle and Sebastian, Kings of Convenience and Bob Dylan: All write lyrics so competent in imagery and references you’d swear they’d just stepped off the streets of a small North American town.

“If I was forced to describe Beirut,” says Hamed Sinno,



“I’d say it’s the experience of being in a place and yearning for it at the same time.”

That’s a fitting characterization of a city marked today not so much by the destruction wrought by war but the rampant reconstruction that swallows up the past as wholesale as any bomb. Still, whatever corporate razing there has been, attempting to numb the soul of the perturbed city, these are musicians determined to never let Beirut forget where it came from and where its place is in the now and future worlds. Beirut, port city, always a mix of everything, stubbornly and proudly undefined and indefinable, also has its private yearning, for a sound, for an identity, for a persona it can call its own, even if that persona is just the ability to perfectly mimic something else, without a trace of “foreignness.” That interplay, ongoing and endless, is in perpetuity the sound of Beirut. 🌐



**Lina Mounzer** is a writer and translator living in Beirut. Her fiction and essays have appeared in *Bidouin*, *Warscapes*, *The Berlin Quarterly* and *Chimurenga*, as well as *Hikayat: An Anthology of Lebanese Women’s Writing*, published by Telegram Books. Her favorite way of listening to music is through earphones while walking in the city.

Photojournalist and filmmaker **George Azar** is author of *Palestine: A Photographic Journey* (University of California, 1991), coauthor of *Palestine: A Guide* (Interlink, 2005) and director of the films *Beirut Photographer* (2012) and *Gaza Fixer* (2007). He, too, lives in Beirut.



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# YARROW MAMOUT:

*FREEDMAN*

*Written by*

RAMIN  
VELLOTTI



Yarrow Mamout was 73 years old when artist Charles Willson Peale painted his portrait in Georgetown in 1819. Born in Guinea, Yarrow arrived in Maryland on a slave ship in 1752. He won his freedom in 1796 and four years later purchased property on today's Dent Place in Georgetown.

## *3324 Dent Place NW*

is a narrow lot in the middle of one of the many tony streets in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, D.C. It lies fallow, sandwiched and fronted by the state-ly brick-and-clapboard townhomes for which the area is known. Jackie and John F. Kennedy lived across the street as newlyweds. Donald Rumsfeld lived on the street and, for a short time, so did the New Zealand soprano Dame Kiri Te Kanawa.

Today, Secretary of State John Kerry makes his home just blocks away. In the early 1800s, lawyer Francis

Scott Key, author of the poem that would become America's national anthem, lived less than a kilometer away, near the banks of the Potomac.

But it is one of Dent Place's earliest residents—a man who bought his house here when it was one of only two homes on the street—who is perhaps the most interesting: Yarrow Mamout, a Muslim African who endured 44 years of slavery in Maryland and Virginia by the Beall family of Maryland before being manumitted in 1796 and buying a house in Georgetown in 1800.

Of the West African Fulani people, Mamout was a devout Muslim who spoke the Fula language and could read and write Arabic and rudimentary English. His actions

after securing his freedom are what make him remarkable. He went on not only to buy land in Georgetown, but also to invest in the Columbia Bank there and become a financier for both black and white local merchants.

Mamout was also unusual among his contemporaries—free and enslaved—because his portrait was done in 1819 by famed painter Charles Willson Peale. Peale had painted George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton and others made famous on the stage of the American Revolution and the early republic. It is this image, *Portrait of Yarrow Mamout*, that allows us a glimpse into the man himself.

When Mamout died in 1823, it was Peale who penned his obituary, leaving what remains the most intriguing clue to the man’s past. “He was interred in his garden, the spot where he usually resorted to pray,” Peale wrote.

Fueled by this knowledge, in 2015 the Washington, D.C., archeologist’s office mounted a six-month dig at 3324 Dent Place aimed at finding tangible clues to the life of Yarrow Mamout. The team turned up several thousand items, including two ceramic pipe stems and a few partial bowls, a number of which are now being analyzed to determine if they date to the early 1800s.

With or without artifacts, the legend of Mamout as a fixture of early Georgetown always remained a wispy memory to locals, but the details of his remarkable existence—including the Charles Willson Peale obituary—had largely been forgotten.

“We knew Yarrow’s house was somewhere in this vicinity, but the house that stood most recently on the site was from a much later time, so it was definitely not Yarrow’s,” says Dik Saalfeld whose home is next door to Mamout’s lot and whose property may once have been part of his original holding. “That house fell into serious disrepair until it was crushed by a falling tree in 2013.”

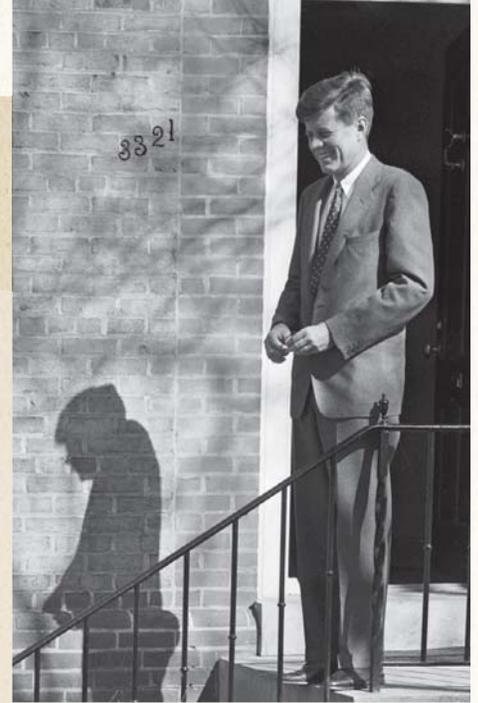
As a freshman senator in 1953, John F. Kennedy lived with his wife, Jackie, at 3321 Dent Place NW, across the street from the property that Yarrow Mamout had bought some 150 years before. The Kennedys lived on Dent Place for a year, while Yarrow resided there from 1800 until his death in 1823.

After the ruined house was cleared, new construction might have progressed on the site without a backward glance were it not for James H. Johnston, a lawyer and historical scholar who had become intrigued by an 1822 portrait of Mamout holding a long-stemmed pipe by local artist James Alexander Simpson—later an art professor at Georgetown University—that hangs in the Georgetown Public Library.

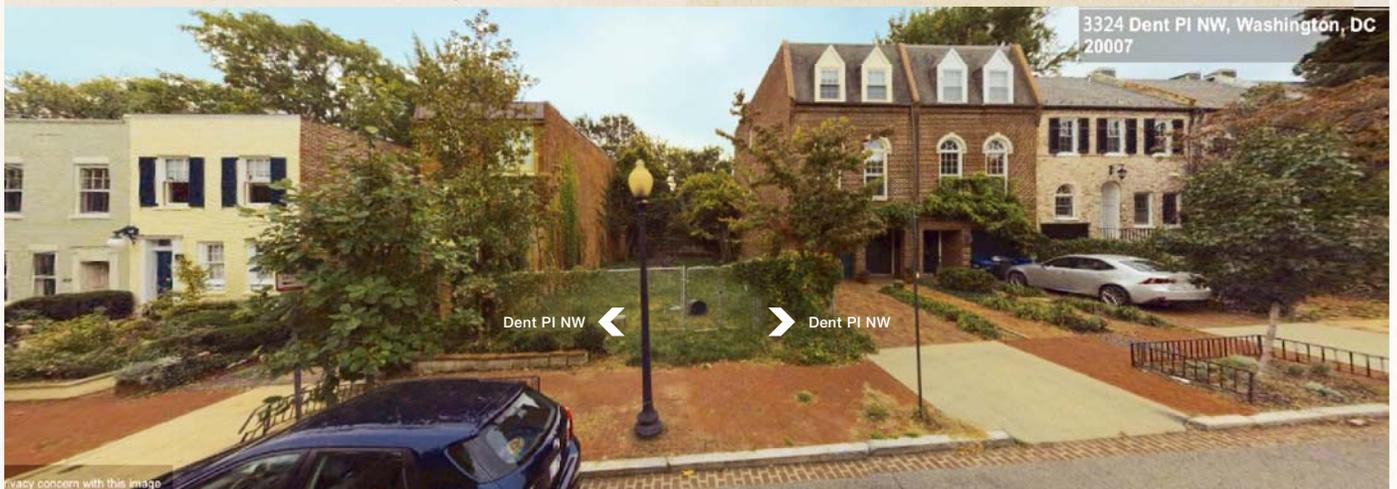
“I was surprised to see a portrait of a poor black man at the Georgetown library,” remembers Johnston. “After all, Georgetown’s whole image is rich and white.”

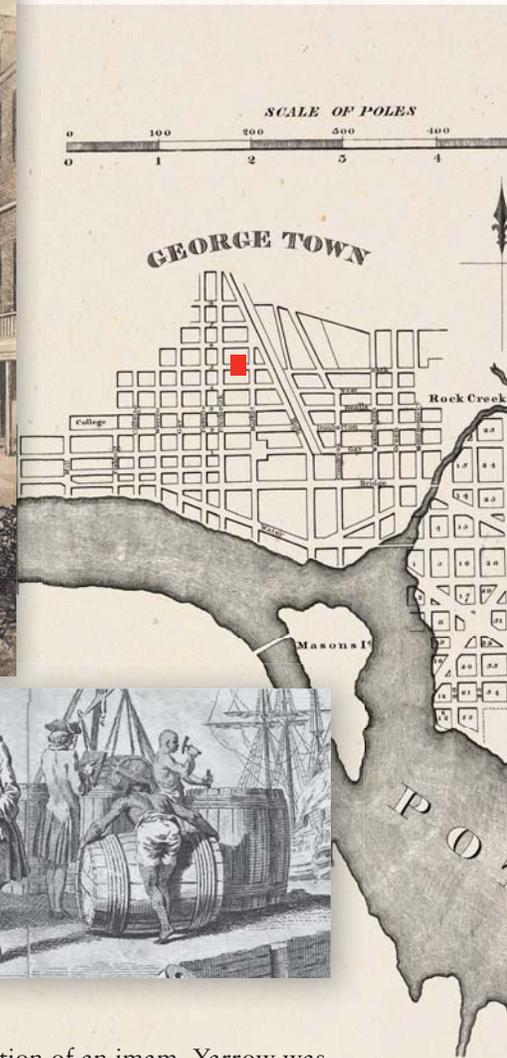
Johnston went on to spend eight years researching Mamout’s story, resulting in his book *From Slave Ship to Harvard: Yarrow Mamout and the History of an African American Family*, published in 2012 by Fordham University Press. It follows Mamout’s life and the lives of his descendants—one of whom, Robert Turner Ford, graduated from Harvard University in 1927.

It was Mamout’s leap from an enslaved person to landowner and entrepreneur that most stirred Johnston’s curi-



Today there is an empty space between townhouses in Georgetown where Yarrow Mamout’s home once stood. That house was replaced by another in the late 1800s. It was damaged in a storm and razed in 2013.





Yarrow Mamout would have been familiar with this wharf at Georgetown, portrayed *above* in an aquatint by George Isham Parkyns in 1795. In his youth Mamout was “the best swimmer ever seen on the Potomac River,” according to one shipowner. *Right*: Slaves load barrels of tobacco on board a ship in an illustration taken from a 1751 map of Virginia and the Province of Maryland.



osity. Even for white Americans of the laboring class at the time, that level of success was barely attainable. So how did Mamout do it? The main secret to his success seems to have lain in his faith and persistence.

“I think a remarkable part of this story is that he wasn’t freed until he was 60 and immediately has enough money to invest, which he loses. He starts over again and earns another \$100 and loses that too—both times because of the actions of the men holding the money for him,” says Johnston.

“He sets out to earn money again, but now he’s learned from his experience. He has enough savvy to know about corporations and puts his money into a bank to keep it safe. He goes on to loan money to white merchants, which would have been risky at the time but by then he understands the system and has the confidence to use it.”

Understanding the system was no small feat—an enslaved person couldn’t come by this knowledge easily. In Mamout’s case, it’s likely that his personal intellect combined with the Qur’anic education he received as a young man in Guinea prepared him a lifetime of learning. In short, he was able to recognize valuable information when he heard it.

Johnston’s detective work also tells us that according to Fulani child-naming traditions, which would have

been done with the consultation of an imam, Yarrow was his mother’s fourth child (Yero) and born on a Monday—Mamout, Mamadou and Mohammed being names traditionally chosen for that day. The teenage Mamout, Johnston writes, may have been taken prisoner in a war with a non-Muslim tribe.

Mamout’s literacy in Arabic as well as his native language likely put him in a category above other enslaved people forced into crossing the Atlantic on the *Elijah*, a ship owned by two colonial Marylanders, according to Johnston. This potentially even afforded him “privileges” like working as a crew member on a voyage lasting up to two months, rather than being constantly shackled in the ship’s putrid, inhumane below-decks area.

“He was only sixteen and looked younger,” writes Johnston. “He may have worked topside. Records of his life later in Georgetown show that he knew his way around a ship and water. His owner at the time rented him out to work on the oceangoing sailing ship the *Maryland* while it was in port. The *Maryland*’s owner said Mamout was the best swimmer ever seen on the Potomac River.”

When the *Elijah* arrived in America in June 1752, the prosperous Maryland tobacco farmer Samuel Beall bought Mamout directly from where the ship moored just off Annapolis.

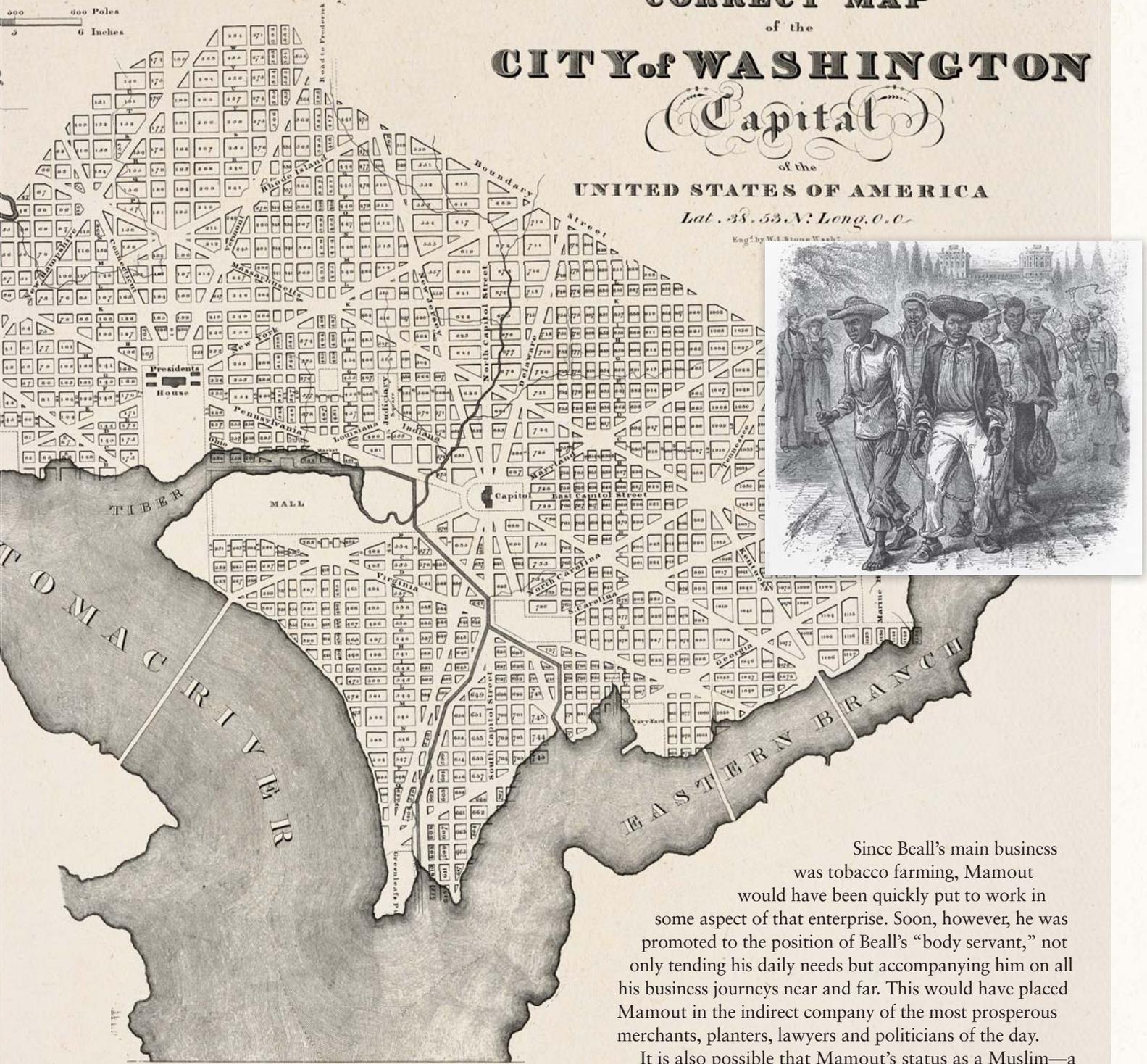
CORRECT MAP  
of the  
**CITY of WASHINGTON**  
*Capital*

of the  
**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Lat. 38. 53. N. Long. 0. 0.

Eng'd by W. L. Stone Wash.

300 600 Poles  
6 Inches



*Reproduced according to Act of Congress in the 21<sup>st</sup> day of January 1846 by Peter Force, of the District of Columbia.*

Since Beall's main business was tobacco farming, Mamout would have been quickly put to work in some aspect of that enterprise. Soon, however, he was promoted to the position of Beall's "body servant," not only tending his daily needs but accompanying him on all his business journeys near and far. This would have placed Mamout in the indirect company of the most prosperous merchants, planters, lawyers and politicians of the day.

It is also possible that Mamout's status as a Muslim—a member of an Abrahamic faith—led the Christian whites who enslaved him, and those who interacted with him at large, to extend him somewhat greater opportunities than they did to other enslaved people.

Among those opportunities would have been the chance to earn his own money. At the time it was common practice for slaves to be "lent out" to work. Most of their earnings went to the slave owner, but they kept

The location of Yarrow Mamout's home in Georgetown is marked in red above left on this 1820 map of Washington and its environs. Above right: Enslaved people pass in front of the us Capitol around 1815.

a small portion for themselves. Mamout often performed such work, using a variety of skills—brick-making among them—to earn the money that later enabled him to acquire the lot in Dent Place with a small frame house.

When Mamout bought his property in 1800, Georgetown had already made a name for itself as a key port on the Potomac River. Land developers built new streets and infrastructure around the time it was incorporated as a town in the 1780s. In 1791, when the new national capital was created, Georgetown was included. Indeed, the men who made the major property deals for the District of Columbia met in the Suter Tavern, only blocks from where Mamout's house would stand, and included George Washington, fellow Revolutionary War General Uriah Forest and Maryland statesman Benjamin Stoddert. All were major slaveholders of the era.

On the outskirts of town, where Dent Place lay, the land would have been cheap enough for Mamout to afford. And with only one other neighbor on the street, there were few to object to living near a former slave.

Nearly everything we know about Mamout's life in Georgetown is thanks to Charles Willson Peale who was in Washington in 1819 to paint President James Monroe. Peale had heard of the elderly Mamout, whom local lore wrongly touted as more than a hundred years old, and sought him out to learn the secret of his longevity. He recorded their meetings in his diary with entries like this:

Yarrow owns a house and lotts and is known by most of the Inhabitants of Georgetown and particularly by the Boys who are often teasing him which he takes in good humor. It appears to me that the good temper of the man has contributed considerably to longevity. Yarrow has been noted for sobriety and a chearfull conduct, he professes to be a mahometan, and is often seen and heard in the Streets singing Praises to God—and conversing with him he said man is no good unless his religion comes from the heart.

By 1800 Mamout's Georgetown hosted a small but thriving free African American community that remained until the 1950s. He would have likely also enjoyed the company of fellow Muslims who resided in the Rock Creek area, near where the National Zoo now sits, about a one and a half kilometers away. Often, they were considered trustworthy by contemporaries because of their faith and specifically its proscription against alcohol.

"My theory is that these men and women would have been the best of the best," says Muhammad Fraser Rahim,



Taib Shareef, imam at Masjid Muhammad in Washington, D.C., offers *salat al-janazah*—the traditional Muslim funeral prayer—for Yarrow Mamout on the site of his former home at Dent Place. Mamout was said to have been buried in the corner of the garden where he "resorted to pray" at the time of his death in 1823. *Right:* A poster for the dig at Yarrow Mamout's Dent Place home where the Washington, D.C., archeologist's office carried out the dig in 2015. The team found no human remains, but it discovered cultural artifacts that are now being studied at the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory.



who worked on the dig at Mamout's house and is a Ph.D. candidate at Howard University specializing in the histories of enslaved African Muslims.

"Arabic would have been their third or fourth language. Then they would have learned English. Their devotion and training would have equipped them to deal with the hardships of life as an enslaved person here," says Rahim, who is an officer for Africa programs at the us Institute for Peace and a former National Counterterrorism Center expert in the capital.

For Rahim, Yarrow and the small African Muslim communities of early America are part of the American immigrant narrative. They present an opportunity for

UPPER: NISA MUHAMMAD FOR MASJID MUHAMMAD; LOWER: MUHAMMAD FRASER RAHIM



James H. Johnston, author of *From Slave Ship to Harvard: Yarrow Mamout and the History of an African American Family*, stands, second from left, at the Dent Place dig site. He is flanked, left, by retired archeologist Charlie LeeDecker and, right, by Mia L. Carey, project field director, and Ruth Troccoli, city archeologist.

Muslim Americans at large to feel a greater connection to the earliest days of American history.

“There is a deep connection between Islam and America that most miss, and Yarrow is an embodiment of that,” says Rahim. “Thomas Jefferson owned Muslim slaves and studied Arabic at the College of William and Mary. Along with France, the Muslim nation of Morocco was the first to recognize American independence. I think the current interest in Yarrow speaks to the fact that we, as Americans, are realizing we’ve been getting it all wrong.”

For Dent Place resident Kelley Phillips, one ideal way to “get things right” would be to make Mamout’s former property a park or memorial garden.

“Turning the property into a place of peace and remembrance would be a lovely tribute to Yarrow,” she says. But since the land is privately owned, that is a lovely but unlikely dream.

Even though a new luxury home is soon likely to take up the spot where Yarrow Mamout lived and died, he and other enslaved Muslim Africans won’t soon be forgotten again. This fall the Smithsonian Institution will be borrowing the Simpson portrait of Mamout for three years to include in the American Origins galleries, where it will be used to explore the question of what it meant to be an American in the earliest days of the republic. Curators are planning educational

programs revolving around the portrait that will explore the stories of Muslim Americans since that time. 🌐



**Ramin Vellotti** is author of *Sweet Hands: Island Cooking from Trinidad & Tobago* (Hippocrene Books, 2010) and *FutureChefs: Recipes by Tomorrow’s Cooks Across the Nation and the World* (Rodale Books, 2014), and her work has appeared in publications including *The New York Times*, *Bon Appetit* and *National Geographic Traveler*.

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 **For Further Reading:**  
**From Slave Ship to Harvard: Yarrow Mamout and the History of an African American Family.** James H. Johnston. 2012, Fordham University Press, 978-0-82323-950-4. \$90 hb.



at HOME with

# Harisa

WRITTEN, PHOTOGRAPHED  
AND VIDEO PRODUCED

BY *Deana  
Sidney*

## *My first taste*

OF HARISA WASN'T IN A SPICE-SCENTED MARKET IN NORTH AFRICA. NO, IT WAS AT A FARM IN UPSTATE NEW YORK, IN THE DEAD OF WINTER. I USED A RECIPE IN A BOOK WHOSE TITLE I HAVE LONG FORGOTTEN. LOOKING LIKE A SIMPLE DARK PEPPER PASTE, IT WAS NOTHING LESS THAN TRANSPORTING—AN ACCOMPANIMENT WITH THE POWER TO ECLIPSE THE MAIN COURSE. IT CHANGED MY CULINARY LIFE. REALLY.

I barely noticed winter's chill that season as I began rubbing harisa's mahogany magic onto my roast chicken, spooning it over my fish and brightening my roasted vegetables. Spicy, sure, but dark and mysterious in flavor as well as color. Just preparing it filled the kitchen with an intoxicating fragrance that compelled me to make it over and over. (Friends demanded jars of the stuff.) I have been in love ever since.

Clifford Wright, scholar of history, food and culture and author of one of my favorite books, *A Mediterranean Feast*, explains that harisa (pr. ha-REE-sa) comes from the Arabic word for "to break into pieces." For harisa, this is done by pounding hot chilies (ancho are my favorites) in a mortar. "This famous hot chile paste is also found in the cooking of Algeria, Libya and even in western Sicily where *cùscusu* [couscous] is made. In Tunisia it would be prepared fresh in a spice shop," Wright observes. The simplest

recipe, he says, "is merely a paste of red chilies and salt that is covered in olive oil."

Today harisa is so woven into the cuisines of North Africa that you might assume it has always been there, but if there has ever been a great reason for immigration, free trade and porous borders, this is it. There would be no harisa if one of the New World's most famous vegetables hadn't turned up the heat on virtually all of the Old World's cuisines.

Before chilies came to the Old World, there were varieties of black pepper, Szechuan pepper, cloves, cinnamon, ginger, mustard and horseradish to warm palates from China to London. Ancient China and the Mideast had salty condiments like soy, which was originally a paste, and the equally salty *murri* in the Fertile Crescent. Black pepper, though both widespread and prized, was rarely a stand-alone condiment—unlike mustard, which has been on the menu

in China for at least 2,500 years and appears in medieval recipes from the Middle East, Africa and Andalusia as well as Europe since Roman times.

Soon after capsaicin-bearing New World peppers landed in North Africa, cooks began using local sweet spices like caraway and coriander to transform dried peppers into early variations of the harisa that now, some six centuries later, is enjoying a new global popularity. Walk through New York's West Village or along a few boulevards in Paris, and you find it spooned over falafels or heating up a tagine. From Spain to San Francisco, it's even showing up in non-traditional recipes like a grapefruit vinaigrette or a salad with wheatberries, carrots, dates and yogurt. I have been known to add it to mayonnaise to take a chicken sandwich to an unprecedented level; blend it with brown butter on Brussels sprouts; even dot it on pizzas. And why not? Its complex heat seems to bless everything it touches, and yet it is easy enough for anyone to make.

Wright suspects harisa—or at least the idea for it—may have come from the New World with the peppers themselves. “One could argue that the Peruvian *aji panca en pasta* is such a precursor,” he says, explaining that, like harisa, it is made with rehydrated chilies. “When you think about the way new food ingredients are sold in a market, one of the first questions any prospective customer will ask is, ‘What do you do with it?’ These dried fruits from a magical New World would be an easier sell if there were techniques, recipes or even a sample,” he adds.

My own favorite recipe, *right*, remains close to the harisa I fell in love with. Instead of reconstituting the dried chilies, I toast them to concentrate their flavor. Then I pulverize them, together with spices and garlic, and I stir in the oil at the end. It keeps at least a year in the fridge—if you can let it last that long. My very favorite way to have it is slathered with honey on a buttery flatbread such as a crepe-like Moroccan *m'semme*, sprinkled with black olives and sometimes a bit of goat cheese. This addictive combination of hot, sweet and salty is a popular street food in North Africa—edible evidence of why chilies spread through the world like wildfire with every bite. 🌍

**My favorite recipe remains close to the harisa I fell in love with. It has a dark color and a flavor you won't find in most of the bright red pastes now sold in tubes and jars in stores.**

- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 oz dried ancho chili peppers, or ancho and guajillo mixed (about 4 to 7 peppers—supple, not crackly dry—see photo below)
- 1 T Urfa biber, a smoky Turkish pepper
- 4 t caraway seeds
- 1 t cumin
- 1 t coriander, whole
- 1 t salt
- 1-2 T hot pepper sauce to taste (I like chipotle in adobo for its smoky heat, but any good hot sauce works.)
- 1 t rosewater (or a few small, dried rosebuds, optional)
- ¼ c virgin olive oil (approx.)



Remove the tops and seeds from the chilies. Put them in a hot skillet and toast for a few moments on each side: They will begin giving off a spicy perfume. Be careful not to burn them. Cool a bit and tear into pieces. Now put the caraway, coriander and cumin in the hot pan, and toast them for a few minutes until they give off a wisp of smoke; remove immediately.

Pound the garlic and chilies together. Place them in a blender or spice mill, add the spices and grind as finely as possible. Add the salt and hot pepper sauce. Grind enough to mix thoroughly. Put into a small mason jar and pour on enough olive oil to cover. Stir in the oil. Add a bit more to cover again. Seal and refrigerate; serve at room temperature.



**Deana Sidney** (deanasidney@gmail.com) is a New York film production designer who also writes about food, style and history and regularly attends the Oxford Food Symposium. Readers of her blog “Lost Past Remembered” often come for the recipes and stay for the stories.



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MALIKA

مَلِكَة

Written by TOM VERDE  
Art by LEONOR SOLANS

SHAJARAT AL-DURR

From Bangladesh to Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan to Nigeria, Senegal to Turkey, it is not particularly rare in our own times for women in Muslim-majority countries to be appointed and elected to high offices—including heads of state. Nor has it ever been.

Stretching back more than 14 centuries to the advent of Islam, women have held positions among many ruling elites, from *malikas*, or queens, to powerful advisors. Some ascended to rule in their own right; others rose as regents for incapacitated husbands or male successors yet too young for a throne. Some proved insightful administrators, courageous military commanders or both; others differed little from equally flawed, power-seeking male potentates, and they sowed the seeds of their own downfalls.

This series presents some of the most notable historical female leaders of Muslim dynasties and empires.

Our third story is that of Shajarat al-Durr, the first woman to sit upon an Egyptian throne since Cleopatra, nearly 1,300 years before.



**L**ittle is known about her origins, including her given name and her year of birth in the early 13th century. The name she was known by, “Shajarat al-Durr” (“Tree of Pearls”), is said to have been inspired by her fondness for the jewel of the sea. Legends say she came from royal Arab stock, but historians agree she was most likely born in present-day Armenia to a family of nomadic Kipchak Turks, known to Western medieval chroniclers as “the blonde ones” and among whom women often held high status. “I have witnessed in this country a remarkable thing, namely the respect in which women are held by them,” recalled 14th-century traveler Ibn Battuta.

Around the time of Shajarat al-Durr’s birth, Mongols were sweeping west across Asia, absorbing some Kipchak tribes and settlements while displacing and dispersing others. Some were taken captive and sold to other peoples—including the ruling Ayyubids of Egypt. Shajarat al-Durr’s first husband, Sultan Al-Malik al-Salih, in fact, was the first to bring large numbers of Kipchaks to Cairo. The men became military servants, known as Mamluks, while Shajarat al-Durr, like other women, entered the harem.

In his history of the Egyptian Mamluk sultanate, Cairo-born Al-Makrisi, a biographer, historian and poet of the 14th and 15th centuries, wrote that the sultan “loved her so desperately that he carried her with him to his wars, and never quitted her.” In 1239, she bore a son, Khalil, and in 1240, Shajarat al-Durr and the sultan were married. This freed the bride of servitude, but their son died in infancy, and she bore none further.

Al-Salih, however, had a son, Turan Shah, by his first wife, who at a young age had been sent to southeastern Turkey. As a result, al-Salih relied greatly on his wife, whose Kipchak roots aided the Ayyubid sultan in mobilizing Mamluk troops to task—first in maintaining his immediate domain, Egypt, and then in extending dominion into Syria. It was this, “her ability to counsel her husband on matters of the state, including military campaigns,” that has garnered Shajarat al-Durr the most attention from biographers today, says historian Mona Russell of East Carolina University and author of *Creating the New Egyptian Woman* (2004). Writing not long after Shajarat al-Durr’s own lifetime, one Syrian chronicler called her “the most cunning woman of her age.”

Her acumen became widely apparent in the spring of 1249. Sultan al-Salih, campaigning in Syria, learned that the armies of the Seventh Crusade, led by Louis IX of France, were sailing for Egypt, aiming to land 1,800 ships and 50,000 men in the Nile Delta city of Damietta. Shajarat al-Durr, acting as regent in Cairo, dispatched al-Salih’s top commander, Fakhr al-Din, to Damietta while she led the Mamluks in garrisoning Cairo.

Then came more bad news: The sultan had been wounded in battle. He was on his way back to Egypt by stretcher.

Louis landed at Damietta on June 6, 1249. Overwhelmed, the outnumbered Muslim troops abandoned the city, reported the 13th-century historian Ibn Wasil. They regrouped on the east bank of the Nile, about 100 kilometers northeast of Cairo, at al-Mansoura. There, the ailing al-Salih arrived, and he was joined at his bedside by Shajarat al-Durr. By late August, al-Salih’s health began to deteriorate with each passing day. Ibn Wasil described the situation as “a disaster without precedent ... there was great grief and amazement, and despair fell upon the whole of Egypt.”

In November, Sultan Al-Malik al-Salih passed away. Bereaved yet determined to ensure the continuity of her husband’s dynasty and avoid revealing weakness to the Crusaders, Shajarat al-Durr recalled Turan Shah from Turkey and, until his arrival, arranged to conceal the sultan’s death.

She summoned Fakhr al-Din and al-Salih’s head eunuch, Jamal al-Din, who was in charge of the Mamluks, “to inform them of the death of the sultan, and to request their assistance in supporting the weight of government at such a critical period,” wrote Al-Makrisi.

Their deception required an elaborate conspiracy. All orders from the sultan were in fact signed by Jamal al-Din, who forged his master’s signature. (Other sources say Shajarat al-Durr had al-Salih sign batches of blank documents before he died.) A doctor was also let in on the secret, and he was seen visiting the sultan’s chamber daily.

Meals were brought to the door and tasted while singers and musicians performed outside the chambers. Meanwhile,

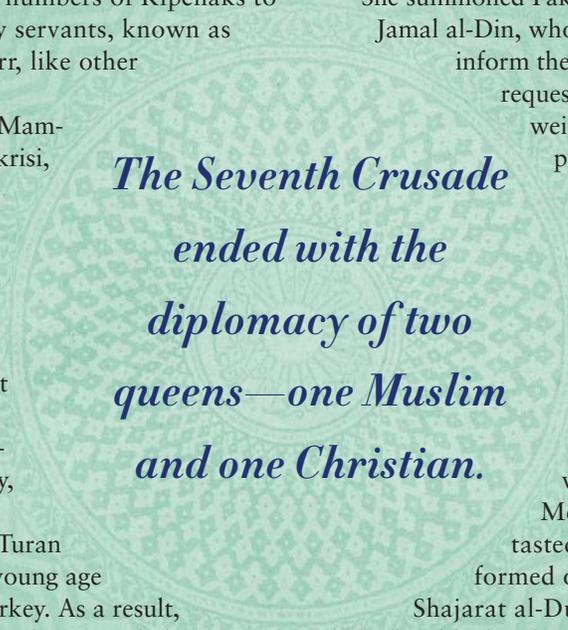
Shajarat al-Durr arranged for a boat and, disguised in black robes, she accompanied his body under cover of night up the Nile to Roda Island south of Cairo where the Mamluk troops were stationed. There, she hid the corpse and issued orders—also forged—for construction to begin on al-Salih’s mausoleum.

In this way, for nearly three months, Shajarat al-Durr secretly directed the sultanate. Although Fakhr al-Din fell in battle, his forces began to repulse the Crusaders, and Turan Shah arrived in time for the defeat and capture of Louis.

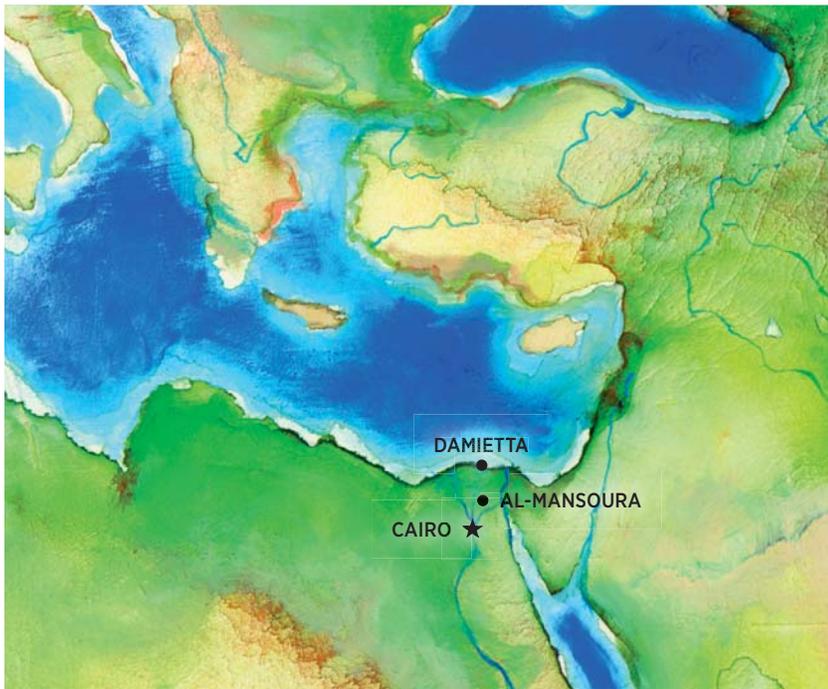
Yet as successor to his father, Turan Shah quickly began making missteps.

“He had no confidence but in a certain number of favourites, whom he had brought with him from [Syria],” Al-Makrisi recorded, and this sidelined the Mamluks.

He demanded that Shajarat al-Durr hand over both his father’s treasure and her own jewels and trademark pearls. “The sultana, in alarm, implored the protection of the Mamluks,” reported Al-Makrisi. They were only too glad to come to her aid, considering “the services she had done



*The Seventh Crusade  
ended with the  
diplomacy of two  
queens—one Muslim  
and one Christian.*



the state in very difficult times” and the fact that Turan Shah was “a prince universally detested,” and Turan Shah was slain on May 2, 1250.

The Mamluks decided that “the functions of Sultan and ruler [of Egypt] should be assumed by Shajarat al-Durr,” Ibn Wasil recorded, adding that “decrees were to be issued at her command and ... [from] that time she became titular head of the whole state; a royal stamp was issued in her name with the formula ‘mother of Khalil,’ and the *khutba* [Friday sermon] was pronounced in her name as Sultana of Cairo and all Egypt.”

Although—to recall Ibn Battuta’s observations—the Mamluks were not unaccustomed to female potentates, she was entirely up to the job, “endowed ... with great intelligence” and capacity for “the affairs of the kingdom,” noted Khayr al-Din al-Zirikli, a modern biographer and poet from Syria.

One of her first acts as sultana was to conclude a treaty with the Crusaders that returned to Damietta and ransomed Louis IX. These terms she negotiated with her French counterpart, Queen Margaret of Provence. Thus the Seventh Crusade ended with the diplomacy of two queens—one Muslim and one Christian.

Not all supported her. The most stinging objection came from Baghdad, where Caliph al-Musta’sim is said to have declared: “We’ve heard that you are governed by a woman now. If you’ve run out of men in Egypt, let us know so we can send you a man to rule over you.” Wary of the far reach of Abbasid influence, the sultana and her council knew they needed to capitulate if they were to ultimately endure.

So, after 80 days of titular rule, Shajarat al-Durr married and relinquished her title to a minor Mamluk officer, Izz al-Din Aybek, who “had nothing to say,” observed one contemporary. She insisted Aybek divorce his first wife, Umm ‘Ali. Although that command proved fateful, for the next

seven years “the power of decision and administration” remained in her hands, as contemporary historian Ibn ‘Abd al-Zahir noted. She signed all royal decrees, dispensed justice and issued commands.

She made her marks culturally, too. She is said to have instituted a nightly entertainment at the Citadel that featured acrobatics by torchlight to the rhythms of music. Popular legend also credits her with founding the tradition of the *mahmal*, a decorated palanquin on the back of the lead camel in Egypt’s annual pilgrimage caravan to Makkah—a tradition that survived into the mid-20th century.

By 1254 Aybek began to tire of his nominal role. He quashed a rebellion or two and fought bitterly with Shajarat al-Durr over al-Salih’s treasure, which she kept hidden. In 1257, seeking to increase his power, Aybek took a second wife, a daughter of a powerful prince. To Shajarat

al-Durr, this was treason against both queen and sultanate. Aybek moved into a pavilion by the polo fields.

On April 12 he received an apologetic summons from Shajarat al-Durr. Arriving at the palace fresh from a polo match, Aybek was greeted by the swords of the sultana’s eunuchs.

She claimed Aybek had died in his sleep, but this time the Mamluks refused to protect her. Accounts say she passed several days under arrest in the Citadel, grinding jewels and pearls to dust. Aybek’s 15-year-old son Al-Mansur Ali—son of the jilted Umm ‘Ali—succeeded as sultan. He offered Shajarat al-Durr up to the justice of his mother, who had her former rival “dragged by the feet and thrown from the top” of the Citadel, according to 15th-century historian Ibn Iyas. Her remains were interred in the tomb she had commissioned for herself, one of Cairo’s most exquisite. Its *mibrab*, or prayer niche, is decorated in Byzantine glass mosaics, the oldest in the city, and its centerpiece is a “tree of life,” adorned with pearls.

To this day she remains one of Egypt’s most popular historical figures and, as such, she has been many things to many people. To Western historians of the Crusades, she was incidental. To medieval Muslim chroniclers, she was a respected ruler who shrewdly negotiated an end to the Seventh Crusade and brokered the transition of two great dynasties—the end of the Ayyubids and the beginning of the Mamluks. With “outstanding talents ... realized through crisis, and frustrated by law, tradition, and brute force,” as American University of Cairo scholar Susan J. Staffa contended, her story remains today “a woman’s story from first to last.” 🌐

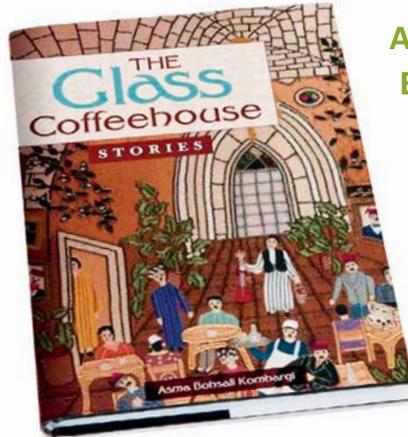
**Tom Verde** ([tomverde.pressfolios.com](http://tomverde.pressfolios.com)) is a freelance writer from Connecticut and a regular contributor to *AramcoWorld*. **Leonor Solans** ([www.leonorsolans.com](http://www.leonorsolans.com)) is an artist living in Granada, Spain. Art direction for the “Malika” series: Ana Carreño Leyva; calligraphy: Soraya Syed; logo graphics: Mukhtar Sanders ([www.inspiraldesign.com](http://www.inspiraldesign.com)).



# REVIEWS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Without endorsing the views of any of the authors, the editors encourage reading as a path to greater understanding.

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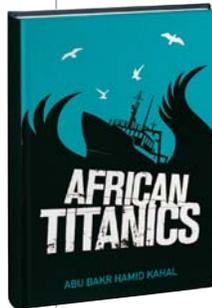
**At the funeral for businessman Hasan Bey in Beirut in 1960, “there were Christians, Jews, Druze, Sunnis, Shi’ias, priests, shaikhs, and rabbis; at least one representing the twenty-four sects living in that city.”**

### The Glass Coffeehouse: Stories.

Asma Bohsali Kombargi. 2016, Bright Sky Press, 978-1-94294-502-4, \$19.95 pb. Readers wishing for unvarnished glimpses into Arab culture in the Mediterranean Near East following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I will likely find this slim volume of

short stories especially interesting. The author draws her fictional tales from her family history. She grew up in Lebanon in the 1940s and early ‘50s and attended the American School for Girls in Beirut. After marrying, and later immigrating to Texas with her family, she taught Middle East politics at two Houston universities. The principal story, which gives the book its title, focuses on the regular meetings of five Sunni Muslim businessmen over tea and *narghiles*. They gossip and discuss the Arab revolt from the Turks and its complex aftermath. Meanwhile, in marked counterpoint to their café debates, normal life goes on: Dutiful wives manage their kitchens and homes, raise children and grandchildren, and arrange marriages for a stream of 16-year-old daughters from the neighborhood to young men from “good” families. Indeed, these six sensitively told “domestic” tales, with their intimate insights into what’s still a not-quite-vanished lifestyle, are what make *The Glass Coffeehouse* most fascinating.

—WILLIAM TRACY



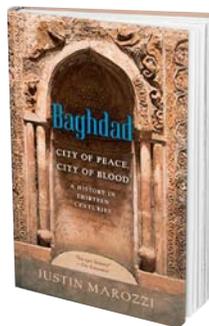
### African Titanics.

Abu Bakr Khaal. Charis Bredin, trans. 2014, Darf Publishers, 978-1-85077-273-6, £7.99 pb. Migration is nothing new; humans have been on the move for uncountable centuries. What makes the 20th and 21st centuries different are the huge numbers

of people involved. The reasons are the same: to escape from war, economic hardship and even starvation toward what is perceived as a more secure life. *African Titanics* chronicles the almost mythic journey of one man from Eritrea to Tunisia, via Khartoum, the Egyptian Desert and Libya. The majority of the people migrating with him are Africans heading toward Lampedusa, Italy, but similarities with the tragedy of Syrian, Iraqi and Afghani refugees are inescapable. The straightforward narrative of the journey is interspersed with folktales, poems

and encounters with local seers. The migrants meet generosity and kindness, as well as cruelty, disregard for human life and sometimes, tragically, death. The title suggests the doomed quality of the quest, but still the migrants journey on. While this is the story of particular locations, individuals and events, it could be an account of any migrant’s journey. Hope and despair exist next to moments of agony and laughter.

—MARGARET POWIS



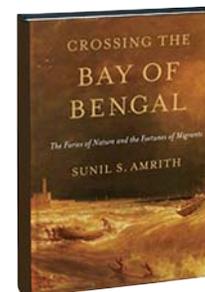
### Baghdad: City of Peace, City of Blood—A History in Thirteen Centuries.

Justin Marozzi. 2014, De Capo, 978-0-30682-398-5, \$32 hb. The site of bloody conflicts and Bayt al-Hikma

(House of Wisdom), Baghdad—that storied medieval center of scientific inquiry and cultural ecumenism—has long been one of the most violent yet vibrant

urban centers in the region. As Justin Marozzi concludes: “Despite all this devastation,” Baghdadis remain proud of their city’s “prodigious history of intellectual, cultural and Islamic preeminence.” Marozzi’s study covers every major epoch of Baghdad’s past, from its founding in 762 CE, when Caliph al-Mansur traced the boundaries of his imagined city “on the ground in lines of cinders,” to its heights under the Abbasids, to its subsequent falls to forces ranging from Mongol to American. For anyone seeking to understand Iraq’s complexity and resilience, this story of Baghdad’s ability to rise, literally, from the ashes time and again is worth reading.

—TOM VERDE



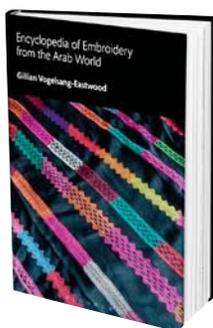
### Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants.

Sunil S. Amrith. 2013, Harvard UP, 078-0-67472-483-9, \$31.50 hb. To consider an ocean as a frame



of reference is not unusual. Think of Fernand Braudel's pioneering work on the Mediterranean, NATO's policy-building for the North Atlantic or new trade agreements along the Pacific Rim. Social historian Sunil Amrith has taken the Bay of Bengal, the mirror image of the Arabian Sea in its own eastern half of the Indian Ocean, as his unit of analysis. He examines a body of water that until 100 years ago functioned almost as an organic whole along its coastal arc from Ceylon to Sumatra, unified by trade, labor migration, and cultural and religious exchange. Post-colonial independence movements later divided it down the middle between South and Southeast Asia (to use relatively new, Western-inspired geographic terms), but the Bay has more recently been reunited—in both problem and in promise—by the emerging economic superpowers of India and China and their regionally integrating investments. Even as typhoons and tsunamis sometimes still wreak havoc upon the half billion people living on its littoral, today they are threatened by environmental challenges such as river pollution and sea-level rise, while at the same time they are shown a model future in Singapore (as Amrith shows, the city-state is a practical extension of the Bay proper) with its successfully fused multicultural identity, social stability and affluence.

—LOUIS WERNER



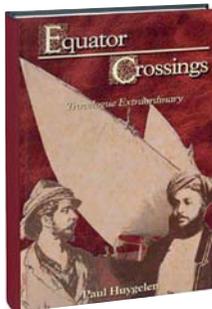
**Encyclopedia of Embroidery from the Arab World.**

Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood. 2016, Bloomsbury, 978-0-85785-397-4, £150 hb. This outstanding volume is the first to cover its colorful subject across the Arab

world in both space and time. Moved by upheavals in the region, Vogelsang-Eastwood, director of the Textile Research Centre at the University of Leiden, produced a record of a disappearing needlework heritage in such a way that it could also facilitate an eventual revival. The result is a reference work that is unlikely to be surpassed—one of great value to textile collectors, museum curators, embroiderers and designers, with many pages illustrating embroidery stitches and techniques, as well as diagrams of patterns. The author has also added

material on the social and economic importance of embroidery and included an excellent glossary of Arabic terms. The volume contains 850 illustrations, outstanding maps, a full bibliography and lists of textile collections around the world. The first section covers practical matters such as materials and techniques. The second provides historical background, linking—where relevant—the past to the present. The third section covers the Arab world's some 20 countries and includes chapters on tribal embroideries and embroideries from minority communities. Subjects of particular interest are treated in brief "snapshots": for example, "Colonel and Mrs. Dickson's Embroidered Garments from Kuwait" refers to the collection by longtime Gulf residents H. R. P. Dickson and Dame Violet Dickson.

—CAROLINE STONE



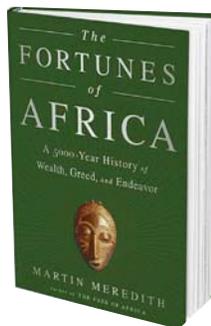
**Equator Crossings: Travelogue Extraordinary.**

Paul Huygelen. 2008, Motivate, 978-1-86063-250-1, \$49.95 hb. This novel is the author's way of "covering in one swoop" the wealth of material

he absorbed in dealing with the European explorers of Central Africa, particularly Henry Morton Stanley and the man he tracked down there in 1871, Dr. David Livingstone. The author takes a fresh approach to his subject, highlighting the key role played by the Omani Arabs—who ruled the island of Zanzibar and its mainland dependencies—in paving the way for the exploration of Central Africa. Huygelen's Stanley evolves from a wide-eyed journalist seeking out Livingstone to a grimly determined explorer leading an expedition to fulfill Livingstone's dream of locating the source of the Nile. That mission, focused on the Lualaba River, brought Stanley and his team to the mouth of the Congo and the Atlantic after 999 days, proving the Lualaba was not the source of the Nile. He returned to the Congo on behalf of Belgian King Leopold II, setting up stations along the river to facilitate development of the interior. He led an expedition up the Congo to rescue the governor of Sudanese Equatoria. Amid a tangle of European colonial intrigues, Stanley stayed loyal to his

Zanzibari connections, particularly to Princess Fathiyeh, sister of Sultan Bargash, who lent him support for his adventures.

—ROBERT LEBLING

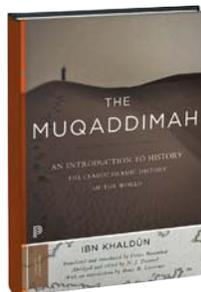


**The Fortunes of Africa: A 5000-Year History of Wealth, Greed, and Endeavor.**

Martin Meredith. 2014, Public Affairs, 978-1-61039-459-8, \$35 hb.

During the 19th century's Western imperialist "scramble for Africa," as Christian missionaries fanned out across the continent, potential converts along the coastal zones of western Africa tended to opt for an alternative faith: Islam. This was because, as journalist Martin Meredith observes in this sweeping history, Islam was viewed "as an African religion" while Christianity was "often seen as 'the white man's religion.'" Home to nearly one-third of the world's Muslim population, Africa was the first continent beyond Arabia where Islam spread during the early seventh century, along the trans-Saharan trade routes "of literacy and cosmopolitan knowledge." Meredith devotes respectable portions of his 746-page narrative to Islam's growth and obstacles to its expansion: from lingering pagan customs, to colonial oppression, to modern struggles between radicals and "moderate intellectuals" who aspire to "Islamic modernity," using Islamic law and institutions as the basis of government." This is a substantial, clearly written history.

—TOM VERDE



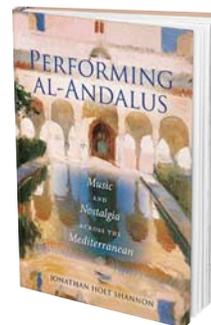
**The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History**

Ibn Khaldun. Franz Rosenthal, trans. 2015, Princeton Classics, 978-0-69116-628-5, \$24.95 pb.

*The Muqaddimah* is the Introduction to Ibn Khaldun's great history of the world, completed around 1400. It is one of the most important Arabic works on the philosophy of history and sets forth many of Ibn Khaldun's theories in the disciplines that would now be called politics, economics and sociology.

Even after 600 years, it remains relevant to understanding the dynamics of the Middle East. First translated into Turkish and later into French, the first full-length English translation, by Franz Rosenthal, appeared in three volumes in 1958. This version, excellently abridged by N. J. Dawood, a translator of the Qur'an, has been intermittently available, but it is extremely useful to have a single-volume paperback that makes many of Ibn Khaldun's most important ideas accessible to the non-specialist. This volume includes Rosenthal's original introduction and a more recent one by Bruce B. Lawrence to help orient the reader. *The Muqaddimah* is vital reading for anyone interested in the history of ideas, especially political theory, with particular reference to the Islamic world.

—CAROLINE STONE



**Performing al-Andalus: Music and Nostalgia across the Mediterranean.**

Jonathan Holt Shannon. 2015, Indiana UP, 978-0-25301-762-8, \$26 pb.

When the Arabs ruled Al-Andalus (southern Spain) from the early eighth to the late 15th century, their artists created a new type of poem, the *muwashshah*, and set songs to it. While no authenticated songs remain from the period, 500 years later this musical legacy of Al-Andalus remains a key factor in how many communities around the Mediterranean define themselves. Syrians, whose ancestors were in the first Arab armies to reach Spain, see its music as their authentic cultural legacy and ideal. Many Moroccans claim descent from the Arab families of Al-Andalus. Moroccan musicians play a style called *al-ala*, claiming it too is a direct descendant of Andalusian music. Modern-day Spaniards also have close ties to the musical heritage that is part of the *convivencia*. That rich, centuries-long period of cultural coexistence among Muslims, Christians and Jews under Arab rule inspires musical explorations as it challenges modern Spanish society, writes author Jonathan Holt Shannon. He posits that musicians who investigate the idea of the *convivencia* with "deep listening" to each other may create a model that brings the legacy of Al-Andalus to life in the 21st century.

—KAY CAMPBELL



# EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS

Our print edition now features global highlights from our full searchable listings at [aramcoworld.com](http://aramcoworld.com)



## CURRENT AUGUST

**An Oasis in Glass** showcases fourth-century CE mosaics, beads, flasks and other glass objects created during the Roman occupation of Syria and Egypt. Displayed in a space that replicates the desert's dunes and wide expanses, each object serves as a tiny experiential oasis where light boxes amplify the works' sparkle and transparency. The show also incorporates themes from classical Arabic poetry. Cantor Arts Center, **Stanford University, California**, through August 8.

**Respiration: Karen Chekerdjian: Objects and Design.** Starting with the premise that without breath there is no presence—no life—Lebanese designer and artist Karen Chekerdjian imbues her subjects with utility and form. An industrial designer at heart, her works include wood, ceramics, metal and glass

applied for living and exploration in ways that evoke the intimacy and urgency of the work of the objects around us and how they extend and survive beyond us. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, through August 28.

## CURRENT SEPTEMBER

**Little Syria, NY: An Immigrant Community's Life and Legacy.** Before the construction of the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel and the World Trade Center, Manhattan's Lower West Side was home to one of the largest and earliest communities of Arab Americans in the US. The exhibition tells the story of this neighborhood from its beginnings in the late 1800s to its legacy in Brooklyn and beyond. Researched, developed and produced by the Arab American National Museum. NYC Department of Records, **New York**, through September 16.

**From Alexandria to Abu Simbel: Egypt in Early Photographs 1849-1875** showcases some 60 vintage prints

that offer insights into the era of early photography. Soon after the invention of photography in 1839, the first photographers traveled to the Nile to make images of Egyptian monuments. Most were artists fascinated by this new medium who showed their work at exhibitions. In addition to Egypt, many also visited other sites throughout the Levant. In Egypt they traveled by boat to Abu Simbel in the far south, and some even continued up the Nile into Nubia and Sudan. Kunsthistorisches Museum, **Vienna**, through September 25.

## CURRENT OCTOBER

**Parallel Kingdom: Contemporary Art from Saudi Arabia** is a cross-generational survey of contemporary art from the kingdom, providing insights into Saudi culture through the creativity and vision of some of the most influential Saudi artists of the 21st century, alongside younger voices from the fields of art, comedy and film. The exhibition, organized by the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture and assisted by the Station Museum, explores complex issues faced by a new generation in



**10:52** features painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, video and installation work by some of the Arab Gulf's foremost names in art, highlighting all 52 artists who have had solo shows at Ayyam Gallery's different locations in the past decade. Since its inception, Ayyam Gallery has sought to support the region's creative talent through innovative projects such as the Shabab Ayyam incubator program for young artists, which launched the careers of featured painters Kais Salman and Mohammad Orabi. The roster of **10:52** reflects a timeline of initiatives that have distinguished the gallery from its launch in Damascus as a multiplatform space for Syrian art to its most recent programming in Beirut and Dubai, which includes retrospectives for pioneering Arab painters and the debut of highly anticipated artist projects. Ayyam Gallery, **Dubai**, through October 29.

Faisal Samra, "Improvisation," *Distorted Reality* series, Video, 09:58 minutes, Edition of 5.



Saudi Arabia, challenging the hyperbole and contradictions that often sculpt the narrative of Saudi Arabia internationally, while questioning Western perceptions of Saudi society. The goal is to open dialogue and further understanding. Station Museum of Contemporary Art, **Houston**, through October 2.

**Harun Farocki: *Empathy*.** Two years after the death of Harun Farocki, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, in collaboration with the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM), presents the second half of a project that brings together the more than 120 films and installations of an author whose career as a filmmaker, artist, critic and activist in Germany made him a seminal figure of the second half of the 20th century. While the selection at IVAM focuses on Farocki's research on surveillance cameras and the "technification" of vision, the Fundació Antoni Tàpies presents a series of emblematic works analyzing new forms of labor arising from capitalist production demand, especially those that require the mobilization of more subjective and human aspects than previously employed. The notion of empathy, taken from a text by Farocki, guides the selection of works that is founded on an idea of cinema as something that avoids the illusions of an innocent image in favor of ideological transmission. Fundació Antoni Tàpies, **Barcelona**, through October 16.

**Gülsün Karamustafa: *Chronographia*.** Gülsün Karamustafa (b. 1946) is regarded as one of the most important Turkish artists of the second half of the 20th century. Her oeuvre stretches from the mid-1970s to the present day and encompasses various media, including painting, installation, performance art and video. Her work focuses on questions of migration, politically induced nomadism, pop culture, feminism and gender, and often provides a critical analysis of the Western view of Middle Eastern countries. The exhibition illustrates how these themes have been continuously interlaced with each other over the decades; the approximately 110 works are deliberately displayed not according to chronology, but by theme, thus revealing the underlying and ongoing dialogue among them. Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, **Berlin**, through October 23.

**What We Carried: *Fragments from the Cradle of Civilization*.** Created by Oregon-based photographer Jim Lommasson, this exhibition brings to light the life-changing decisions made by Iraqi and Syrian immigrants and refugees escaping their homelands in search of safety and a better life for themselves and their families in the us. All the pieces in this exhibition are presented in English and Arabic. The "carried objects" and the intense personal stories behind them combine in more than 85 images that illustrate the common threads that bind all of humanity: the love shared for family, friends and the places people

call home. Arab American National Museum, **Dearborn, Michigan**, through October 23.

## CURRENT NOVEMBER

**Sunken Cities: *Egypt's Lost Worlds*.** Vanished beneath the waters of the Mediterranean for thousands of years, Thonis-Heracleion, named after the Greek hero Heracles, was one of Egypt's most important commercial centers for trade and, with Canopus, was a major city for the worship of Egyptian gods. Their recent discovery transforms our understanding of the deep connections between the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Greece. Two-hundred-ninety-three stunning objects in the exhibition, ranging from magnificent colossal statues to intricate gold jewelry, reveal stories of political power and popular belief, myth and migration, gods and kings. The British Museum, **London**, through November 27.

**Zaha Hadid Exhibition at Palazzo Franchetti.** In celebration of Zaha Hadid's career in architecture and design that spanned four decades, Fondazione Berengo is hosting an abridged retrospective of her work at the 16th-century Palazzo Franchetti on the Grand Canal in Venice, coinciding with this year's Venice Architectural Biennale. The exhibition showcases many of the seminal paintings, drawings and models of Hadid's repertoire, which convey the ingenuity and dynamism of her architectural projects

in a variety of media including photography and film. Through Hadid's designs—built, under construction, in development and unrealized—this tribute displays the pioneering research and investigation that defines Zaha Hadid Architects. Fondazione Berengo, Palazzo Franchetti, **Venice**, through November 27.

## CURRENT DECEMBER

**One God—Abraham's Legacy on the Nile: *Jews, Christians and Muslims in Egypt from Antiquity until the Middle Ages*.** Judaism, Christianity and Islam share a very long common history in Egypt. The exhibition takes a closer look at the religious life and day-to-day coexistence of the three faith communities there from the time of the Romans all the way up to the Fatimid Caliphate in the 12th century. Much can be learned from archaeological finds that reflect the largely peaceful interactions of the world religions over the course of many centuries, especially when viewed in today's political climate. More than 150 objects from Egypt's rich cultural heritage are presented, as well as reproductions and documentary photographs. Bode-Museum, **Berlin**, through December 31.

Most listings have further information available online and at [aramcoworld.com](http://aramcoworld.com). Readers are welcome to submit information for possible inclusion to [proposals@aramcoservices.com](mailto:proposals@aramcoservices.com), subject line "E&E".

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**AramcoWorld (ISSN 1530-5821) is published bimonthly by the Aramco Services Company, 9009 West Loop South, Houston, Texas 77096-1799, USA.**

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to AramcoWorld, Box 2106, Houston, Texas 77252-2106.

## AramcoWorld

Welcome to our reading selections for June 1, 2016.



### 50 Years Behind the Lens

As a boy, walking along the docks near his home in Oslo, Norway, Tor Eigeland watched ships and sailors from around the globe, and he dreamed of adventure. At home, "curled up in a cozy chair, I devoured everything from Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky to Thoreau and Hemingway," he recalls. Soon he was "desperate to smell the tropical world and see palm trees. I knew there was a lot more out there, and I wanted to see it."

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### Spotlight



#### The Islamic Roots of Modern Pharmacy

Testing, producing and refining from as early as the seventh century CE, alchemists in the Middle East who championed empirical methods developed, over some 500 years, the foundations of chemistry, pharmacology and the modern drugstore.

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### Events & Exhibitions



#### Symbolic Cities: The Work of Ahmed Mater

Stacker Gallery, Washington, D.C., through September 18

Born in 1979 in southern Saudi Arabia and trained as a doctor of medicine, Ahmed Mater has been a practicing artist since the early 1990s, creating works that offer an unparalelled perspective on contemporary urban Saudi Arabia.

[Read More >](#)

### Reviews & Recommendations



#### Soup for Syria: Recipes to Celebrate Our Shared Humanity

Good food and good photography are natural companions, and here they come together for a good cause.

Cookbook author Barbara Abdeslam has made a career photographing Lebanon's back roads in search of its culinary heritage.

Recently, that has also meant meeting some of the country's thousands of Syrian refugees.

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