

JULY AUGUST 2021

AramcoWorld





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Written by **Ken Chitwood**

New platforms, new stories and more subtitles are making the comedies, thrillers, biopics and dramas of what has long been TV's peak season in Muslim-majority countries into a year-round, binge-ready global window on popular cultures.

12 Mesopotamia's Art of the Seal

Written by **Lee Lawrence**

Photographs courtesy of **The Morgan Library & Museum** | Video by **David Helfer Wells**

Compact in size yet complex in the scenes they depict, stone cylinders—many no larger than your thumb—were a popular medium for Mesopotamian artisans talented enough to reverse-carve semiprecious stones and produce unique, often mythological tableaux in astonishingly sensitive, naturalistic detail. Their craft gave each seal's owner a personalized graphic signature for use with the most popular media channel of the third millennium BCE: damp clay. Seal impressions certified ownership, validated origins, attested to debts, secured against theft and more. Many seal cylinders were drilled so they could be strung and carried as amulets and status symbols—uses that may find echoes among today's compact, personalized communication devices.

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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 As if caught by a camera, a stag bounds through a miniature landscape that comes to life by rolling clay with a 3-centimeter chalcedony cylinder seal carved in Mesopotamia more than 3,000 years ago. Photo courtesy of The Morgan Library & Museum.

BACK COVER "I especially noticed the light on colors ... on every street corner in Marrakech, you encounter astonishingly vivid groups of men and women, which stand out in a blend of pink, blue, green, and purple caftans," wrote Yves Saint Laurent. His sketch of this cape ensemble is part of his 1989 *Bougainvilleas* collection. Image courtesy Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris.



22 The North African Eye of Yves Saint Laurent

Written by **Jeff Koehler**

The French fashion designer frequently mentioned Morocco as his muse for colors, collection design and even models from around the world, but Yves Saint Laurent's eye trained early while growing up on the Mediterranean coast of Algeria.



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Written by **Matthew Teller**
Art by **Ivy Johnson**

Thanks to recently published translations of a Syrian storyteller's handwritten travelog, we now know that it was conversations between him and a French writer that laid the foundations for the final four volumes of the most-famous fabulation ever published in Europe.



34 Spice Migrations: Cloves

Written by **Jeff Koehler**
Art by **Linda Dalal Sawaya**

Stems like tacks, buds like gems and scented so richly that their sweet redolence wafted far out to sea, cloves have come to the kitchen from the island of Ambon, the archipelago of Zanzibar, and many places between and beyond.

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FIRSTLOOK

The Sari and the Balloon

Photograph by Fatima-Tuj-Johora

On a winter's afternoon in 2018 in Bogura, Bangladesh, I went out for a walk with my nephew. While walking, I saw a group of toddlers playing with colorful balloons and across from them boys playing cricket. I was struck to see a bright yellow sari hanging to dry in the sun, which really drew me into to the scene. I noticed that one of the toddlers had a yellow balloon in their hand and I thought about the composition. I positioned myself and waited there for about 10 minutes before the yellow balloon got away from the kids and landed in front of me. I clicked a photo on my cell phone just before one of them ran over to pick it up.

When on the street, I am always looking for light, color, and connection. This photograph reminds me of the stages of life, and here with beautiful light and color, I drew a line between the toddlers playing with balloons, the boys playing cricket and a woman's sari. This is how life goes, in its own way.

—Fatima-Tuj-Johora

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FLAVORS

Spinach and Ginger Salad

Recipe by Troth Wells
Photograph courtesy of
Kam & Co. Denmark

I have childhood memories of my mother making this for me and telling me about its beneficial health effects!

It is foolproof, with easy-to-buy ingredients and very healthy. Serve with jasmine/basmati rice.
—Jenny Ai-Ling Lo, Penang, Malaysia, on this Malaysian side dish.

(Serves 4)

800 grams / 2 pounds fresh spinach,
chopped.

2–3 tablespoons peanut / groundnut or olive oil

4 tablespoons fresh ginger, finely chopped

Splash of soy sauce

Pinch chili powder, or ½ teaspoon chopped
fresh chili pepper, de-seeded

Heat the wok over a high heat and add the oil when very hot and slightly smoking. Add the ginger and stir-fry for 12 to 15 seconds or until cooked but still slightly crispy. Now splash in the soy sauce.

Next, put in the spinach and stir-fry for 1 to 2 minutes so that it blends with the ginger, oil and sauce.

When the spinach has wilted to a third of its size, add lots of pepper and continue to stir-fry briefly to combine the ingredients well before serving.

Reprinted with permission from
One World Vegetarian Cookbook
Troth Wells, 2019, Interlink Books, 978-1-56656-
834-0, \$35 hb, interlinkbooks.com.

Troth Wells is an Oxford-based food writer and author of cook-
books including also *The Spices of Life* (2001), *Global Vegetarian
Cooking* (2010) and *Small Planet, Small Plates: Earth-Friendly
Vegetarian Recipes* (2012), all published by Interlink Books.



STREAMING Ramadan TV TO THE WORLD

Written by KEN CHITWOOD



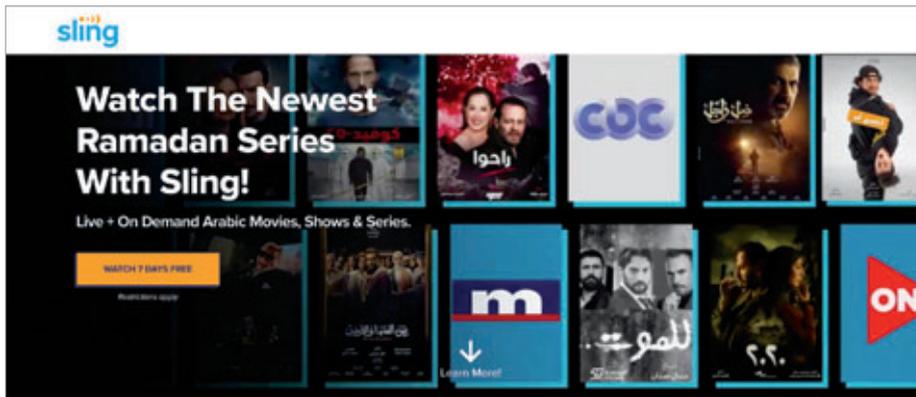
Fatima al-Masri, a sales consultant in her 20s, grew up watching TV drama serials during Ramadan as a family tradition in Amman, Jordan. “We will be talking about it for hours, for days even,” she says. “You have no idea how much time we spend watching these shows, analyzing them. It opens up a lot of conversation.”

For nearly 2 billion people worldwide, the holy month of Ramadan is not just 29 or 30 days of fasting from dawn to sunset, prayer and charity. It is also a month of social gatherings and cultural events—including television dramas produced for the season. As travel and public health restrictions have hampered in-person socializing during Ramadan both in 2020 and this year, social media and television have been playing greater roles than ever.

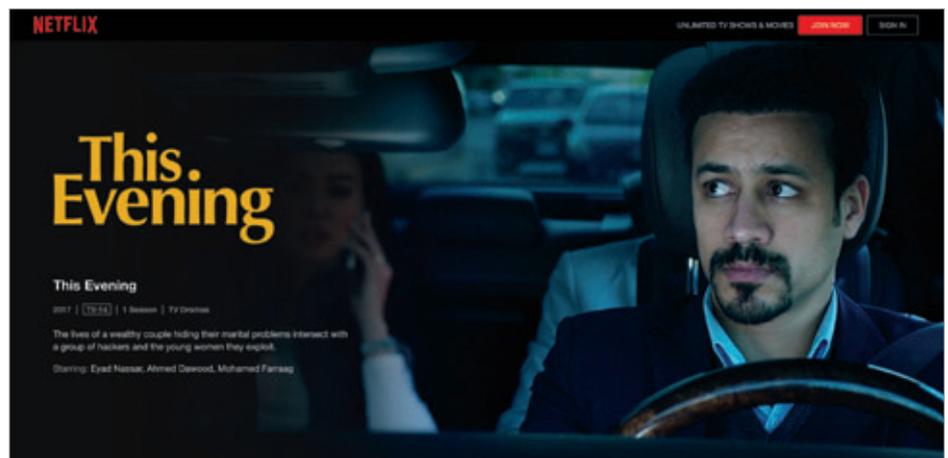
Now along with searching YouTube for advice on how best to fast or what to make for the day’s fast-breaking *iftar*, observing Ramadan also involves deciding among apps such as Ramadan Diet, Daily Dua or dozens more. It means picking out Ramadan-themed gifs to share on Whatsapp threads. And it means selecting which TV series to binge with the family—and the options are overwhelming. Traditional Ramadan programming powerhouses like Egypt and Turkey as well as ones in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Algeria and the UAE are all serving up ever-more sumptuous buffets

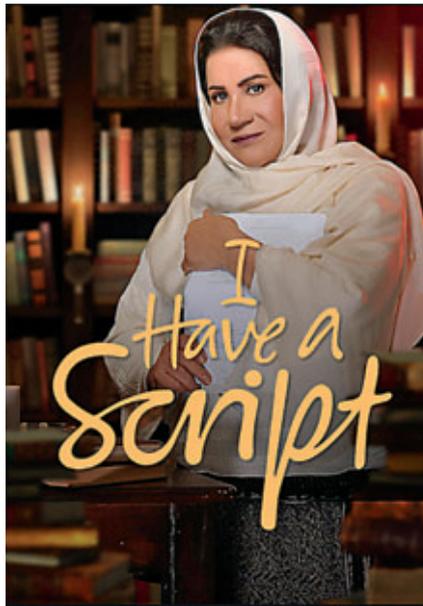
of social dramas, cooking shows, music specials, comedies and religious programming.

Often described by Arab media experts as a sweeps season for the Middle East, Ramadan boosts TV viewership by up to 45 percent on traditional platforms, and YouTube has recently seen three-fold to four-fold Ramadan spikes. This is why Arabic-language networks so often premiere their top shows in Ramadan—from perennially popular prank shows like *Ramez* to cooking



Streaming services Sling, StarzPlay and Netflix all now promote programs that, although timed for Ramadan release, are available year round. Recent hits have included, *OPPOSITE*, *Secret of the Nile*, a remake of the Spanish drama *Gran Hotel* that marked Netflix’s first Egyptian-made show; celebrity chef Assia Othman from Morocco; Egyptian star Yehia el Fakharany in a comedy about a wealthy man’s search for the son he didn’t know he had; satirical puppet Abla Fatiha’s *Drama Queen*; and comedian Ramez Gala’s latest exploits in pranking unsuspecting celebrities.





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT In a miniseries produced by Telfaz11 Studios in Riyadh, the creators take on social themes. Comedy from Kuwait arrives with *I Have a Script* starring popular Kuwaiti actress Souad Abdullah. Set in the 1960s, *Paranormal* follows the adventures of a hematologist facing a series of supernatural events. *Secrets of the Saqqara Tomb*, originally produced in English, tells the story of one of the most important discoveries from ancient Egypt.

shows with popular Moroccan chef Assia Othman to *Al Namous*, a Kuwaiti drama featuring stories across social classes set in the 1940s and 1970s, and dozens more.

While satellite channels have delivered programs like these to millions of Arabic speakers for decades, streaming platforms like Netflix and YouTube are now bringing even more to new audiences, particularly in Europe, North America and Asia, with subtitling in major world languages.

Along with widened distribution and added viewership, streaming platforms and competitive programming are pushing producers to offer increasingly contemporary storylines and series shorter than a month's worth of 30 episodes. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, Ramadan TV has offered a window on places viewers couldn't travel to and also offered cultural insights.

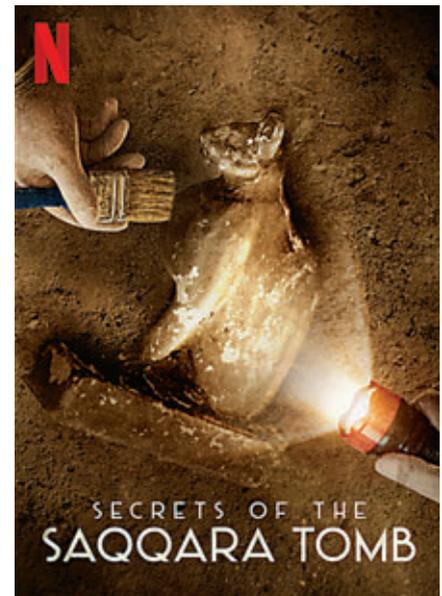
"If you want to understand the region, you have to see it through its pop culture," says Egyptian film critic Joseph Fahim. "A good way to start learning is through a show."

Ramadan TV's roots reach deep into centuries of Arabic oral story and poetic traditions. One of the most colorful figures of these traditions is that of the *hakawati*, or storyteller, who provided both entertainment and cultural continuity in streets, coffee shops, homes and salons mainly across the Middle East and North Africa. Hakawatis regaled crowds with romance and heroism, tragedy and comedy, often telling and retelling favorite stories. Many of the stories were serialized and contained moral nuggets embedded in their adventure or mirth—much like Ramadan

TV today.

Although hakawatis—again like television—performed year round, they were particularly prized during Ramadan. During the holy month, they would prepare "a sumptuous repertoire of after-iftar tales to delight residents and visitors alike," as Dubai-based *Gulf News* writer Sharmila Dhal put it, often competing with one another for pride and payment.

Today's annual feast of drama and delight may take place around a high-definition screen, but it remains robust—as do revenues. According to Paris-based ratings company IPSOS, ad spending on TV during Ramadan has increased annually by about 12 percent. From Amman to Beirut, Casablanca, Dubai and beyond, streets and rooftops are plastered with massive ads touting the big-budget shows that rely on high viewership to be profitable.



"If you want to understand the region, you have to see it through its pop culture."

—JOSEPH FAHIM, FILM CRITIC

In Amman, while al-Masri's family prefers socially driven cheekiness like the Jordanian sketch comedy *Bath Bayakha*, the most popular Ramadan genre worldwide is the social-drama serial. In these the biggest stars often attract social media followers by the tens of millions. Al-Masri says that even when she doesn't like the



Egyptian star Yasmin Abdulaziz, shown **LEFT** in a poster publicizing the comedy series *El-Talatah Yishtaghaloonha*, and Syrian actor Taim Hasan, shown **ABOVE** in his series *Al-Ameed (The Dean)*, have both raised the star power in Ramadan productions. **LOWER** The Emirati series *Justice* follows an ambitious lawyer who, after a prestigious education in the US, comes home to launch her career.

premise of a show, she still might watch it for the actors. “If the main character is played by a big name—like Taim Hasan or Yasmin Abdulaziz—that’s a huge factor,” she says.

In the past, al-Masri explains that she had to wait a whole year for new programs to be launched during Ramadan. But that is changing.

Heba Korayem, an independent marketing consultant in the UAE, says that until about five years ago, the Arabic TV industry was based on big production houses putting together shows that made a splash on pay TV before being sent to free TV and later ending up on YouTube for residual revenues.

“That lasted until around 2016,” she says, when streaming platforms like Sling TV, Netflix and others began to appear in the region.

“What was bad news for pay-TV networks became good news for the regional production houses,” says Korayem. “It meant new commissioning opportunities and new money.”

Korayem points out that it was actually in 2014 that Dubai-based ICFlx inaugurated original content in Gulf-region streaming with a social drama, *HIV*, and a police thriller, *Al Makida*, both from Egypt and both accompanied by subtitles in English and French. In 2017, with the Emirati series *Qalb Al Adala* (literally “heart of justice,” but in English the series’s title is *Justice*), Netflix began stepping in with investments in



what she praises as “a diverse range of titles representing some of the best content from the Arab world,” all with subtitles in multiple languages. This year Netflix launched a documentary series, *Secrets of the Saqqara Tomb*; comedy series *Drama Queen*, starring satirical Egyptian puppet character Abla Fahita; as well as Jordanian producer, director, writer and comedy actress Tima Shomali’s *Al Rawabi School for Girls*, which features an all-female cast and crew.

Netflix now also hosts a global library of recent Ramadan hits, from the Syrian Lebanese drama *Al Hayba* to the Egyptian period remake *Secret of the Nile*, which enjoyed massive success upon its release during Ramadan 2016.

Netflix also announced this year a multipicture partnership with the Riyadh-based Saudi studio Telfaz11, which first became famous a decade ago for homegrown comedy sketches on YouTube. The goal, says Nuha Eltayeb, Netflix’s director of content acquisitions for the Middle East, North Africa and Turkey, is to produce eight new feature films “showcasing the beauty of Saudi storytelling that will resonate with both Arab and global audiences.”

Korayem says the investments streaming platforms are making represent the biggest change since 1997, when satellite TV became widely available. More competition in the industry has sparked new creativity and made shows produced originally in Arabic more accessible worldwide. “You can be a lot more creative with streaming platforms,” she says. “The Arab media industry is experimenting.”

That’s a good thing, says critic Fahim, who welcomes the stimulus to upgrade from flash to substance and “push things

beyond patriotic thrillers or stolid social dramas.” Many of the series to date, he says, “are not particularly good. And the ones that are really good usually don’t have bigger audiences.”

Fahim notes that streaming affects more than just content. It is changing its structure, “from storylines to stars, even the length of a series,” he says, “experimenting with shorter series, more bingeable content whose life isn’t restricted to Ramadan.”

Ramadan may remain “the core prize,” he says, “but streaming services are messing up the whole concept of Ramadan TV.”

Korayem credits Jamal Sannan, founder and CEO of Lebanon-based Eagle Films, with what she senses has become the new normal: “The whole year has become Ramadan season.”

More competition in the industry has sparked new creativity.

Prominent among the new global audiences are Western viewers interested in Arabic language and Muslim-world cultures. Hannah Forster, a teacher of Arabic in Germany, observes that “there’s no other way you’re going to learn about Arab media and culture in such an authentic way without going there yourself.” And that, for the time being, isn’t yet possible for people without family or business relationships.

Watching Ramadan shows as a non-Muslim Westerner, she says, “confronts you with things you didn’t know about. It’s an educational activity and a challenge.” That’s why she has encouraged her high school and university students to watch as much as they can and take advantage of the subtitles as needed. “These

Ramadan shows are authentic materials that convey important sociocultural and political content to students, straight from the source.”

Julie Williams, who lives in Michigan, USA, is a newcomer to Ramadan TV, one for whom it’s a way to get more acquainted with the extended Middle Eastern family of her daughter’s husband. She says she started watching *Secret of the Nile* and a few others with English subtitles during the COVID-19 pandemic. The serial drama, lavish costumes and over-the-top plots were more fun than she anticipated.

Focused on a businessman and father who disappears after his son’s wedding, the family saga *Al Namous* is set between the 1940s and 1970s in Kuwait.





Netflix's first Arabic-original series, *Jinn*, was set and filmed in Jordan with supernatural special effects by Elan and Rajeev Dassani, who worked on *Star Trek: Discovery* and other effects-heavy productions. The series follows a group of teens whose lives are disrupted by a boy who turns out to be something other than human.

"I was expecting a documentary," she says. "I was surprised to not see anything about Ramadan or Muslims. It showed me there are lots of different ways Muslims believe and think and act."

She knows too that, at the same time, viewers need to be careful about what they take seriously and what they don't. "It would be as if people in other countries thought the US was just like *Keeping up with the Kardashians* or *Law & Order*," she says.

That kind of discretion is vital, says Rebecca Joubin, who is a professor of Arab studies at Davidson College in North Carolina, USA.

As an Arab American, she reflects that on one hand she is happy to see Ramadan TV open new windows into the Arab world for viewers in the West. But on the other hand, she finds herself at times frustrated. "I watch something and think, 'Ugh, this is what represents us?' Viewers have to realize that people on the ground are going to have mixed feelings about these series."

She points to Netflix's 2019 supernatural series *Jinn*, which courted controversy for its portrayal of youth culture in Jordan.

"We have to contextualize these programs and dig deeper," says Joubin. "How are things being represented? Is this being written for a Western audience or an Arab audience? Is what we watch an authentic representation of Arab culture?"

"It's OK to watch these shows for enjoyment, but you need to have a critical perspective as well."

—REBECCA JOUBIN, PROFESSOR

"It's okay to watch these shows for enjoyment, but you need to have a critical perspective as well," she continues. "Stop for a moment and reflect on your stereotypes, realize that what makes it to the West will not always be representative of another part of the world—in part *because* it made it to the West."

Viewed this way, the expanding vistas through the windows of Ramadan

TV are also "a kind of mirror" to the shows' own audiences, as each show is produced with certain expectations about viewers and what the producers expect will be their preferences. In viewing, she says, "we are also learning more about who we are and what we think about the world." 🌐



Ken Chitwood, Ph.D., is an award-winning writer on religion, travel and culture. He is currently the Fritz Thyssen Foundation Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies at Freie Universität Berlin. He is also a journalist-fellow with the University of Southern California's Center for Religion and Civic Culture's Spiritual Exemplars Project.



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MESOPOTAMIA'S



WE CAN ALMOST HEAR THE SCREECH AS THE OSTRICH PULLS AWAY from the man who has grabbed its tail. Beak open, wings spreading as though in a desperate—and futile —attempt to fly, it has twisted its head round to see its assailant, who brandishes a sword. We see the quill of each feather, the rounded knees, the strain in the bird's throat and, nearby, a younger ostrich echoing this posture. The attacker, meanwhile, advances, striding forward, locks bouncing, revealing enough of a wing to show he is superhuman. And just in case we miss the buff arms and broad shoulders, twin tassels dangling from his tunic frame his exposed leg, as muscular as that of the ostrich is bony. No matter that ostriches are associated with death, rebirth and preternatural strength, the strong diagonal from the hero's raised sword to the bird's two-toed foot predicts the outcome: The birds don't stand a chance. Carved sometime between 1200 and 1000 BCE in Mesopotamia, the relief radiates the confidence of a people on their way to ruling the most-powerful empire in the world.

ART OF THE SEAL

Written by LEE LAWRENCE | Photographs courtesy of THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM | Video by DAVID HELFER WELLS



Shown **ABOVE** in four rotations, this cylinder seal carved from gray marble measures just 3.1 centimeters tall and 1.4 centimeters in diameter. When rolled on clay, **OPPOSITE**, it reveals an image Sidney Babcock, head of The Morgan Library & Museum's Ancient Western Asian Seals & Tablets department, calls "one of the most striking" in the library's extensive collection. The ostrich, he says, may represent "the earthly equivalent of the griffin, the conveyor of death."

I am standing in The Morgan Library & Museum in New York, and the more I lean in, the more vividly each detail pops until the scene fills my mind. It's like when watching a movie: Whether looking up at a big screen or staring down at a smart phone, the image can seize our attention so fully that we see nothing else. So it is with this scene. Yet, displayed next to it is a cylinder of light gray marble just 3.1 centimeters long and 1.4 in diameter. And that's when it hits me. The relief isn't the artwork; it's the stone, where I can see, carved into it, the mirror image of the ostrich.

Having grown up exposed primarily to European art, I cannot help comparing this approach to that of Michelangelo, who "saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free." Looking at the chiseled hashmarks

of plumage, the deep drills for pupils, the scooped-out channel for the animals' necks, I find myself thinking: If Michelangelo liberated form *from* marble, might this Mesopotamian sculptor be regarded as one who infused form *into* marble? This required him to conceive the composition, reverse it in his mind, and then carve it in the negative on a rounded surface, leaving the stone intact *except* for the hero and ostriches. When pressed into a soft surface like clay or wax, the material fills the voids so that as the cylinder is rolled, the original vision emerges in relief.

Welcome to the meticulous, miniature world of Mesopotamian cylinder seals.

Around 3,500 BCE in Uruk, generally considered the world's first true city, people were beginning to erect



LEFT Dated between 2500 to 2340 BCE, artifacts discovered at Ur in the grave of Queen Puabi included what proved to be a royal headdress with flowers and leaves of gold. Found alongside it, visible to its left, was one of three cylinder seals that included the seal **LOWER LEFT**. Made of lapis lazuli, it depicts two banquet scenes attended only by women. **ABOVE** Blocks of clay served as a kind of lock for storage spaces and containers. On each one, a relief made by pressing a seal identified the owner.



monumental buildings, embellish large-scale vessels with narrative reliefs, sculpt statues in the round and decorate stone vessels with friezes of animals. There, in the alluvial plains between the Tigris and the Euphrates, they also developed this type of seal, of which The Morgan (as it is informally called) holds a world-renowned collection of more than 1,400.

Seals were so prized as amulets and personal symbols that people were buried with them.

None of the clumsy experimentation that accompanies a new genre appears in the archeological record, not even in the early years. A small cylinder of pale green serpentine, for example, carved around 3400-3000 BCE, is a complex composition centered on a one-eyed creature—“the earliest known cyclops anywhere,” says Sidney Babcock, who heads The Morgan’s Ancient Western Asian Seals & Tablets department. The creature stands inside an oval frame, but if we lean in—or magnify the online image, as The Morgan’s website allows us to do—we see it is composed of lions. (See opposite, top right.) Two hang upside-down from the cyclops’s clenched fists while another pair leap and converge over his head. Triumphant, he rises between

what appear to be two boats (sometimes interpreted as fenced-in enclosures), where we spot lion-headed eagles, various pots, a sheep-headed demon perhaps casting a net, all under a sky populated by fish, birds and large baskets.

We will see variations on the theme of super-strong beings fending off wild predators but, for now, let’s focus on scale: All this is carved into a cylinder 5 centimeters in diameter, which means its circumference—the artist’s “canvas”—is almost 16 centimeters long. Today, we would call something this size a miniature, but for seals this offered a huge expanse. (By contrast the hero’s pursuit of ostriches is depicted on a cylinder whose circumference is just shy of 4.5 centimeters. This is fairly typical, and plenty are even smaller.)

There was an incentive to make them small. By their very nature, alluvial plains tend to yield few rocks and ordinary ones at that. So, people imported semi-precious stones from neighboring regions and some, like the highly prized lapis lazuli, came from as far away as Afghanistan. The stones themselves were often regarded as inherently possessing amuletic powers. From a few surviving depictions and plenty of archeological evidence, we know people wore them as pendants or pinned to their garment. So much were they prized as amulets and precious, personal symbols that people were buried with them.

Seals also proved immensely practical for more than 3,000 years. People wrote on clay tablets and, as urban centers expanded, they authenticated official documents and letters by rolling their seals onto them. They did the same to establish ownership of containers filled with foodstuffs and other valuables. This also deterred pilfering, for a thief



The first-known depiction of a cyclops was carved into this seal from the Sumerian city of Uruk between 3400 and 3000 BCE. The impression shows the one-eyed hero figure, at center, holding up two lions, and above him two more lions appear; the rest of the scene includes a human figure, various animals including a two-headed eagle, and ceramic containers. **LOWER** Site of many cylinder seal finds, Uruk was among the earliest cities of Mesopotamia, founded around 4800 BCE.

might easily replace a lid, but not one with the impression of the owner's unique seal.

The same principle was at work when keeping track of debts and promises. If, say, someone owed the city a contribution of pots of honey, an administrator could place the appropriate tokens representing the debt into a hollow clay ball, pinch it shut and roll his seal and that of the debtor on the exterior. Later, as this and other debtors came through on their commitments, another administrator might deposit the goods in a storeroom, fasten the doors, slather clay over the locking mechanism and roll his seal over it.

Was all this foolproof? Some 20 years ago, the Vulnerability Assessment Team of the Los Alamos National Laboratory conducted a series of studies to determine how effective a preventative it was to mark containers of cargo or sensitive material with a seal—and, as part of their research, they looked back in time to Mesopotamia. Using only materials that were then available, they showed that it would not have been all that hard to make a passable fake from a seal impression. “We do not know if ancient seal users were generally aware of the vulnerabilities

demonstrated in this work,” they wrote in their report. But given the widespread use of seals, they speculated that “a certain amount of seal fraud may have been accepted as inevitable—much the way that modern societies accept occasional credit card fraud as simply part of the cost of doing business.”

Any possible fraud notwithstanding, for every jar opened, every door unlocked, every debt paid off or letter read, seal impressions were broken. The trove of fragments seems endless, and yet, interestingly, archeologists have been able to match only a handful of surviving impressions to known seals, says Babcock. This suggests that archeologists have only discovered a fraction of the seals that existed, some of which may have been made of wood and other perishable materials. It also reflects the degree to which some seals were cherished solely as precious amulets and rarely if ever rolled.

Given the personal association between seal and owner, seal-makers had to come up with ever-different designs.

Seals proved practical for more than 3,000 years.

LOWER LEFT: ROBERT HARDING / ALAMY; OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT AND LOWER LEFT: PENN MUSEUM





WHITE NUMBERS INDICATE ACTUAL SIZE 1 Pattern of two running goats, black serpentine, 4.2 centimeters, 3100-2600 BCE. 2 Three stags with a plant showing individualized antlers becoming an abstract pattern, green-black serpentine, 2.5 centimeters, 3400-3000 BCE. 3 A leaping stag in a landscape, milky chalcedony, 3 centimeters, 1300-1200 BCE. 4 Heroes protecting animals from felines, lapis lazuli, 2.4 centimeters, circa 2300 BCE. 5 Eagle shown above a hatched, undulating line and crosshatched triangle below, greenish-black serpentine, 2.6 centimeters, 2100 BCE. 6 Zigzag ladder patterns, which may have derived from weaving patterns, black serpentine, 4.8 centimeters, 3100-2900 BCE. 7 Lion attacking a mouflon (wild sheep) with a star in the sky, banded agate, 2.8 centimeters, 1300-1200 BCE.



8



9



10



11



8 Banquet scene with seated couple and attendants, black serpentine, 3.5 centimeters, 2300-2100 BCE. 9 Winged hero contesting with a lion for a bull, carnelian, 3.9 centimeters, 700-600 BCE. 10 Man prodding an ox pulling a plow, black serpentine, 3.7 centimeters, 900-700 BCE. 11 Deity astride a bull-headed dragon, steatite, 3.7 centimeters, 1000-700 BCE.



How to leave good impressions, Mesopotamian style: Sidney Babcock starts by kneading the clay and removing any air bubbles before using a marble roller to make a strip of even width and thickness. A sprinkle of silica powder acts like flour on baking dough—it prevents the clay from sticking to the seal. With the seal held between his forefingers, he now uses his thumbs to apply strong, even pressure as he rolls the seal down the clay. The intaglio or “negative” carving produces the image on the clay in a “positive” relief that can then be trimmed. **LOWER AND OPPOSITE, LOWER** In May 2019 Babcock presented members of the The National Institute of Social Sciences with a lecture on cylinder seals and The Morgan’s own collection of more than 1,200.

But while necessity may be the mother of invention, it does not consistently beget masterpieces. “Seals run from the miserable to the spectacular,” says Babcock, who has been studying them for some 40 years. This was not an issue for generations of archeologists and scholars who were interested in mining seals for information about the names and dates of rulers, historical events or religious beliefs, trade routes and the variety of occupations from scribes to weavers to storeroom guardians. As vignettes of everyday life, the seals also offered glimpses of temple architecture, forms of entertainment, fashion and military dress.

As may be obvious from my own reactions to them, today we also appreciate these seals as artistic achievements. The distinction that sociologist Yuniya Kawamura of the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York draws between clothing and fashion is helpful when thinking about seals: “Clothing is tangible, while fashion is intangible,” she writes in her 2004 book *The Japanese Revolution in Paris Fashion: Dress, Body, Culture*. “Clothing is a necessity while fashion is an excess. Clothing has a utility function while fashion has a status function.” And so it is with many cylinder seals made of expensive stones with carvings that far exceed what would have been required for them to be merely functional.

The first person “to

really make people look at this as artwork,” Babcock says, was the late Edith Porada, who in 1937, as a young archeologist from Vienna interested in early civilizations, spent six weeks at the Louvre in Paris studying seal impressions from Assyria produced from roughly the early 2000s BCE to 600 BCE. “For six weeks,” she says in a 1987 interview for the Columbia Center for Oral History Research as it is the last word in the institution’s name. “I sat day by day on a rickety cane chair which had a big and rather painful hole in the middle. But of this, I was only aware at the end of the day at 6 p.m. Why? Because of the fascinating forms of the various styles,” she says in a distinctive, even cadence. “The whole provinces of art revealed themselves in these seal impressions, which at that time were completely unknown.”





LOWER AND OPPOSITE: LOWER: HECHLER PHOTOGRAPHERS / THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

People only knew them from drawings which were, she added, “so miserable one had no idea of the style.”

Porada, who died in 1994, went on to become a world-renowned expert on Mesopotamian seals. She marveled at the articulation of human figures in whose forms and proportions she saw more than acute observation; she saw the expression of “man’s awareness of himself as the dominant element in nature,” as she wrote in 1993. Porada also led the way in charting the identification of distinct styles, articulating a fundamental split that occurred early on between designs “with simple subjects that continued to be primarily engraved with a bow drill, and those in which careful work with a graver created rounded and even modeled forms depicting ritual and narrative scenes.”

The stylistic chronology that scholars of seals have since been continuously refining is nothing if not complex, with distinctions that variously reflect the arrival of new people, exposure to foreign artifacts, or the development of technologies that added to sculptors’ tool kits.

Sometimes two styles even play out within a single seal,

as Babcock points out, and it is something we see almost from the beginning. A composition carved into a cylinder of greenish black serpentine around 3400 to 3000 BCE, for example, depicts three stags walking one behind the other. At one level it is naturalistic: their legs are all in slightly different positions, and the gap between the front and back legs of each progressively widens, suggesting forward movement. The sculptor also varied the lengths of their antlers, but then stylized them to create, at the top, a continuous, gently undulating motif. Babcock sees this as a seminal moment in the history of art. “This,” he believes, “is the first time that you have an artist who is consciously creating an abstract design out of natural elements.” (See 2, p. 16.)

He knows he might never be able to prove this claim,

“This is the first time that you have an artist who is consciously creating an abstract design out of natural elements.”

—SIDNEY BABCOCK

in the same way that Porada acknowledged she might never answer the role a seal from around 2250 BCE played in the history of art. “Whether this and other narrative scenes on seals may be miniatures of large wall paintings,” she wrote, “or, as [scholar] Henri Frankfort believed, the seal cutters were the most creative artists of their time and inspired artists of larger works remains to be determined.” Whenever artists may have begun morphing natural elements into designs, Mesopotamian sculptors, it seems clear,





A seal 2.3 centimeters tall made of carnelian depicts, at center, a Persian soldier; kneeling before him is a Greek prisoner and, behind the soldier, a second prisoner is tethered by a leash. The soldier to the right, curiously, is wearing the same distinctive helmet as the Greek prisoners, yet he appears in battle dress—not a prisoner at all. Babcock's conclusion: This depicts a Greek mercenary, one of the many who, according to written sources, hired on with Persians. **LOWER** Babcock poses with pioneering seal expert Edith Porada in Istanbul in 1983. In addition to consummate artisanship, Porada detected in the seals early expressions of, as she wrote in 1993, "man's awareness of himself as the dominant element in nature."

ran with it. Between 3100 and 2600 BCE, they stylized flowers, people, animals or other subjects, then repeated these abstractions to create patterns in a style since dubbed "brocade." In many cases scholars haven't "cracked the code," as Babcock puts it. Hence the purely descriptive title he has assigned to a stunningly graphic design: zigzag ladder patterns.

When it comes to studying the works to detect stylistic differences, parse their iconography or determine whether the sculptor wielded a graver or a drill, the seals themselves

offer the most useful tool: the impressions they make, provided they are clear and detailed, which turns out to be no mean feat in itself. A good seal impression entails kneading clay, rolling out a smooth strip of even thickness and then pressing down hard on the seal and rolling it, with even pressure, down the length of the strip. Porada made many impressions

while curator at The Morgan from 1955 through 1993, but she did not for the longest time allow her students, Babcock included, to make their own.

One summer, Babcock recalls, he accompanied Porada on a trip to Turkey in her later years. Even though by then she already had difficulty making impressions, she insisted on doing them herself. "There was one evening where the so-called adults had a dinner and the lowly student was left out," Babcock recounts, "and I was rather properly miffed." So he went to his room with some fake seals he had bought in the Ankara Museum gift shop. Using a bottle he made strips of

clay and then "just rolled and rolled and rolled all night, until I thought I got it good enough." The next day when Porada had trouble, he suggested he have a go at it—"and I showed off." Her reaction? "Her face had a kind eye and a strict eye," Babcock says. "She showed me her kind eye."

Babcock has since championed the importance of properly made impressions as a way to fully appreciate the work carved into stone. Depending on the stone's color as well as the depth and style of the carving, however, we can sometimes appreciate the artwork directly. This is also something we can experience virtually on The Morgan's

"Whole provinces of art revealed themselves in these seal impressions."

—EDITH PORADA (1912-1994)





A seal made from chalcedony, 2.5 centimeter tall, shows a delicately formed striding bull. It dates from 499 to 400 BCE, which led Porada to observe it “recalls Greek gems” of the same period “in its exquisite engraving and spacious background.” To Babcock this prompts speculation about not only possible Greek influence but also the further possibility that this seal’s sculptor may have been Greek, perhaps living in captivity.

website, where the online collection includes images of seals we can rotate. Such is the case with one of the museum’s masterpiece seals, a red carnelian cylinder carved sometime between 701 and 601 BCE. The form of a hero is immediately visible, from his wing to his luxurious robe and bare foot. The next rotation reveals one foot resting on the neck of a bull whose head is touching the ground as its front legs buckle, and the hero is yanking its hind legs into the air. With another rotation, we see coming at the hero a lion standing on his hind legs, one clawed paw raised, ready to swipe at him, the other planted on the bull’s haunch. With a final turn, we now approach the winged hero from the back and spot the shepherd’s crook he hides behind his back, a balancing counterpoint to the lion’s raised paw.

Unlike our previous hero in pursuit of ostriches, there is no foreseeable victor in this contest, just a perpetual tension powerfully expressed in a composition full of menace yet static. Time and again on seals we see variations on the theme of heroes protecting a society in which land was tilled and animals were domesticated from the wild, destructive forces of nature.

I’ll end with a seal that depicts a more earthly conflict: the Greco-Persian war. (See opposite, top.) Carved between 499 and 400 BCE—the war ended in 449 BCE—this is not a fighting scene but rather the aftermath of one. Kneeling before a Persian soldier is a Greek prisoner; behind him, another prisoner is tethered to his captor by a leash. What is puzzling is a fourth man, in full battle gear: He is clearly not a prisoner, yet he wears the same helmet as the Greeks. “We know from the Greek sources that there were Greek mercenaries hired by the Persians,” says Babcock. “And here is one of them.”

There may be yet another Greek hiding in a masterful portrayal of a bull from the same period. (See above.) The animal is magnificent, from the pointed tip of its horns to the switch at the end of its tail. The sinuous contours

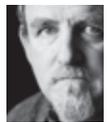
and lines of his head, hump, back and haunches appear in the milky-brown chalcedony like an ethereal imprint. To Babcock the treatment of the musculature and face reminds him of archaic Greek gems, and he wonders aloud whether it might be the work of a Greek artist in captivity.

We will probably never know because, for all their eloquence, the Mesopotamian seals have yet much to tell us. What we do know is that the form sculpted into this seemingly modest bit of rock makes it more than a functional artifact of a bygone civilization. It imbues the stone with the timeless, intangible quality of great art. 🌐

The question remains whether seal artists inspired artists of wall paintings and reliefs, or the other way around, or both.



Based in Brooklyn, New York, freelance writer **Lee Lawrence** also writes frequently on Islamic and Asian arts for *The Wall Street Journal*. **David H. Wells** (thewellspoint.com) is a multimedia photojournalist and photo educator based in Rhode Island.



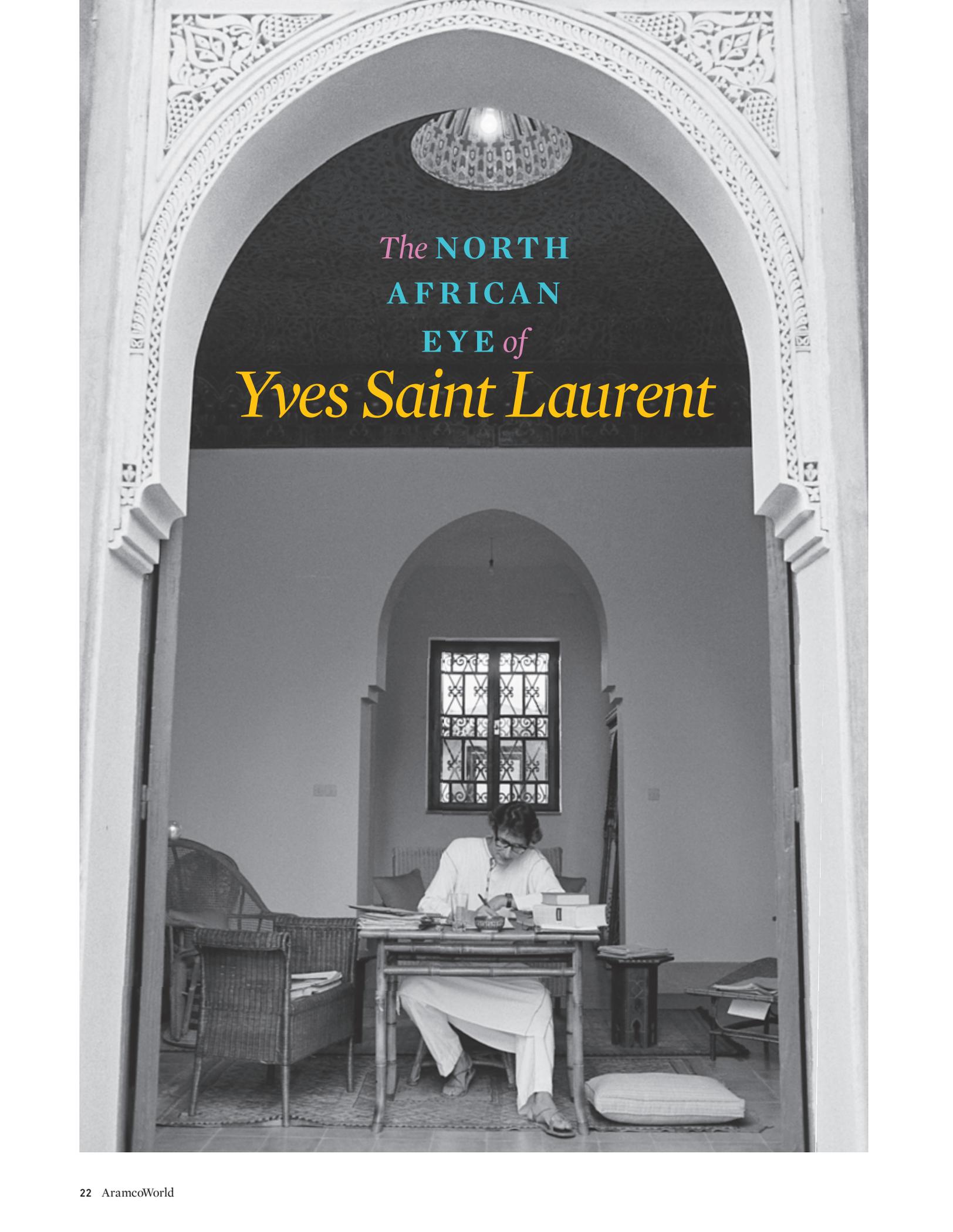
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The NORTH
AFRICAN
EYE of
Yves Saint Laurent

Written by

J E F F K O E H L E R

Sitting at the desk in his childhood room in Oran, Algeria, at the end of 1957, the young man moved his practiced hand across the drawing paper. From the spare lines of his pencil came sweeps, swishes, and another dress design. And then, another. Yves Saint Laurent was 21 years old, and he was under pressure.

“Only in the calm of my true home can I work,” he told *L'Écho d'Oran* at the time.

Born in 1936 in the city on Algeria's northwest coast, he had left for Paris at 18 to study fashion at the *École de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne*. Before he completed the first year, however, a brief interview with Christian Dior led the leading fashion designer to hire him as an assistant. When Dior suffered a fatal heart attack three years later, the mantle of the world's most famous fashion house passed to the precocious protégé. Faced with having to sketch out his first collection for the House of Dior, Saint Laurent withdrew to his family home.

A sunny port city of long boulevards and whitewashed buildings, Oran takes its name from the Arabic root of “lion” and more recently has carried the nickname *Al Bahia*, “The Radiant.” The family home was in the Plateau Saint Michel neighborhood, near the art deco train station. His father worked in insurance and also ran a string of cinemas, so he was not often home. The Saint-Laurent household was dominated by three generations of women—a grandmother, his mother and his two younger sisters.

After a few weeks of sketching, Saint Laurent returned to Paris carrying more than 600 designs. These were turned into

the 178-piece *Trapeze* collection, which moved away from Dior's famous cinch-waisted “New Look” that had reigned since its 1947 debut. Saint Laurent jettisoned its geometric shapes and tight constructions for light, fluid designs—“more casual, more flexible, more natural,” he said at the time. Presented on January 30, 1958, it was a resounding success. Newspapers heralded the triumph on front pages.

He never returned to Oran. The Algerian War of Independence, which had begun in 1954, ended in 1962, and that year his parents and sisters joined the flight of French residents to France, carrying what they could in their hands. But Oran never left him.

Saint Laurent's ancestors had settled in Oran having fled Alsace, in northeastern France, in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War. Founded in the early 10th century CE on a wide crescent of harbor, Oran was ruled by Berber and Muslim dynasties until 1509, and then by Spanish and Ottoman sovereigns until the French took control and colonized it in 1831. In 1950, when Saint Laurent was a teenager, about 1 million European settlers (known as *Pieds-Noirs*) were living among some 9 million Algerians. In Oran, however, Europeans accounted for

OPPOSITE Yves Saint Laurent was world-renowned by 1974, when he and Pierre Bergé purchased Dar Es Saada (House of Happiness) in Marrakesh, Morocco. With high ceilings, vaulted doorways and ornamental plaster and tilework, it became another creative refuge as well as a social hub. **LOWER, FROM LEFT** A sketch from his first haute couture house collection in 1962; two designs from the 1966 American spy film *Ara-lesque*, starring Gregory Peck and Sophia Loren; a sketch from his spring-summer 1989 *Bougainvilleas* collection.

MUSÉE YVES SAINT LAURENT PARIS (4); OPPOSITE: PIERRE BOULAT / ASSOCIATION PIERRE ET ALEXANDRA BOULAT / REDUX





The Saint Laurent family lived in this house, **ABOVE**, in Oran's Plateau Saint Michel neighborhood. Although their social life ran mainly within the French community, Saint Laurent later described the city itself as "a cosmopolis of trading people from all over, and mostly from elsewhere." **RIGHT** As a teenager, Saint Laurent appeared at the center of this family photo taken at the family's second home in the countryside at Trouville, where Saint Laurent said he spent "days when I was happiest of all." At 18 he left for Paris, and in 1962 his family fled Oran in the wake of the Algerian War of Independence.

60 percent of the population.

Saint Laurent's family socialized with others in the socially and economically dominant French community. "It was a very small, insular world," says Madison Cox, a leading American garden designer and current president of the Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent Foundation based in Paris and the Majorelle Garden Foundation in Marrakesh. "But of course the minute he walked in the streets, the minute he was confronted with the outside world, it was a completely exotic place for a French youngster." One heard a variety of languages, and communities of Muslim Algerians of Arab and Berber descent, French, Spanish and Italians lived side-by-side, even if they didn't always mix. The designer later described Oran as "a cosmopolis of trading people from all over, and mostly from elsewhere, a town glittering in a patchwork of all colors under the sedate North African sun."

In summer his family would move to its beachside villa for "days when I was happiest of all," he said late in life. There, a wild, shady garden, boats from the yacht club and swimming proved a haven for the shy, sensitive, bespectacled young man for whom school meant bullies and beatings.

In response, says Cox, Saint Laurent created a private world at home with drawings, costumes, puppet theater and magazines

In 1980 Saint Laurent acquired Jardin Majorelle, his third and largest Marrakesh villa and former home of another French artist whose life and work was inspired by the city; painter and gardener Jacques Majorelle. The Jardin Majorelle is now a popular museum.



from the epicenter of culture, Paris.

From age 14 he created his own couture house with what he called his "paper dolls." He cut out models from magazines and then designed different sets of garments for them, explains Olivier Flaviano, director of Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris, which conserves these. "He had 12 different models and about 650 items of fashion," he says. Saint Laurent created whole fashion shows, complete with programs.

At Dior, Saint Laurent designed six collections before the French Army drafted him. Within weeks he had a breakdown, and Dior replaced him while he was still in a military hospital. Soon afterward Saint Laurent launched his own



LEFT In 1957, 21-year-old Saint Laurent displayed a few of the hundreds of sketch models he produced as a teenager to design ensembles and even seasonal collections. That same year, he was named successor to Christian Dior, **RIGHT**, to whom the young Saint Laurent was both prodigy and protégé; Saint Laurent appears at right. **LOWER, LEFT TO RIGHT** In a 1960 collection, a model poses in a leather suit and strawberry grosgrain camisole jacket. In 1962 Saint Laurent's first collection under his own name featured loose lines such as those on this jacket. By 1967 his Spring-Summer African Collection featured gowns using natural materials such as raffia, straw and wooden beads.

onymous house with partner Pierre Bergé handling the business side. The first collection, presented in January 1962, opened with a navy-blue wool pea coat, heralding a new and distinctive style. Critics raved. *Time* gave it a cover story.

Over the next decades, Saint Laurent created some of the most iconic and influential designs in fashion history. Each collection, it seemed, opened a new chapter of style: trench coats, *le smoking* tuxedos and safari jackets, trousers, jumpsuits and pantsuits. Carrying over elements from men's wardrobes to designs for women, he produced clothing that projected confidence and authority without diminishing femininity. Celebrated for their lightness, the garments were also sensual, says French fashion historian Florence Müller, who has also curated two major Yves Saint

Laurent retrospectives. "By sensual I mean how the garment feels like a caress on your body."

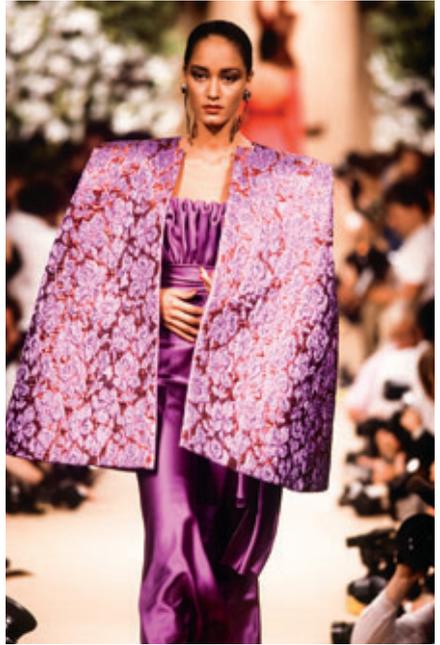
In 1966, desiring to dress more than just an elite handful of wealthy haute couture clients, Saint Laurent began opening what became the first ready-to-wear boutiques to bear a couturier's name, revolutionizing the fashion industry.

That same year, he renewed his links to North Africa.

Saint Laurent and Bergé traveled to the southern Moroccan city of Marrakesh. They were enthralled. By the time they returned to Paris, they had bought a small house just inside the old city's famously pinkish-red walls. "He was a teenager when he left Oran," observes Müller, and thus Marrakesh's light,

TOP LEFT: FRANCOIS PAGES / PARIS MATCH / GETTY; TOP RIGHT AND LOWER, RIGHT AND CENTER: MUSÉE YVES SAINT LAURENT PARIS; LOWER LEFT: KEYSTONE-FRANCE / GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY; OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT: BRUNO BACHELET / PARIS MATCH / GETTY; TOP RIGHT: MUSÉE YVES SAINT LAURENT PARIS; LOWER: JEAN-CLAUDE DEUTSCH / PARIS MATCH / GETTY





ABOVE: DANIEL SIMON / GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY; OPPOSITE, TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: BERNARD WEIL / TORONTO STAR / GETTY; DANIEL SIMON / GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY; PAUL SCHUTZNER / THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION / GETTY; MIDDLE ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: DANIEL SIMON / GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY; WILLIAM STEVENS / GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY; LOWER ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: JOHN VAN HASSELT / SYGMA / GETTY; VICTOR VIRGILE / GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY; ARNAL / GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY

In 1979 Saint Laurent closed the YSL collection debut, **RIGHT**, to the sound of a screeching rock guitar as models, selected for their intercontinental origins highlighted the final pieces. **OPPOSITE, TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT** His uses of block colors, such as this trio of primary colors from 1987, was influenced in part by his admiration for modernist painter Piet Mondrian; Somali-born Iman Abdulmajid, shown here in 1984, was one of his favorite models; this turban and brocade coat were shown in 1962. **CENTER, LEFT TO RIGHT** Warm colors with scarf, 1991; menswear, 1991; and a floral cape from 1989: All show the influence of North Africa on color and style. **LOWER, LEFT TO RIGHT** Modeling the 1989 ready-to-wear collection; a fez and harlequin-like design in 1991; and, moments later, applause for the designer.

colors and gardens were, in that sense, more familiar to him than the grays of Paris. “It was like going back to his childhood.”

For the next 40 years, Saint Laurent and Bergé divided time between France and Morocco, restoring two other homes as well as Marrakesh’s Fondation Jardin Majorelle, which they opened to the public.

By the time of that first visit, Saint Laurent was designing four collections a year—two couture, two ready-to-wear—on an unmovable timetable. “Unlike most other designers, he was able to find designs that expressed a new vision each season but were also real, wearable garments,” says Müller, “a combination that is the most difficult thing to achieve.”

“The creative part of sketching a collection is one that really required him to withdraw from the day-to-day,” says Cox, who began a life-long friendship with the designer in the late 1970s. “He really only could do that when he was away from Paris.” With few distractions in Marrakesh, he could work uninterrupted for two weeks and return to Paris with up to 1,000 drawings. From these the collection would be realized in six weeks in the couture house.

Dazzled by the clothing worn locally, Saint Laurent found design ideas on the streets and in the souqs. Rich embroidery, colored threads and other North African influences abounded in his collections. He created new silhouettes for some of the world’s most chic women with capes inspired by the *djellaba* (robe) and the *burnous* (cloak) and he drew on local scarves, tunics and caftans to synthesize avant-garde designs.

But it was Marrakesh’s saturated colors—sunset pinks and ochre reds, sunflower yellows, indigo blues—on *zillij* (mosaics), *zouac* (paintworks) and walls, in gardens and on traditional garments that made the biggest impact. Saint Laurent was, Bergé wrote after the designer’s death, “carried away by the hint of a saffron-colored lining underneath a green caftan, by headscarves with borders of jet-black fringes, but also by the jacaranda and



**For Saint Laurent,
to be modern meant to be
culturally diverse, global.
It also reflected his childhood.**

blue melia trees, the red hibiscus, the orange clivias, the pearly white water lilies.” As the designer himself once said, “I discovered Marrakech very late and it was an extraordinary shock. Especially for the color. This city brought me color.”

Saint Laurent’s palette brightened from the mid-’60s. “Before, I only used dark shades,” he told his biographer Laurence Benaïm. “Then Morocco came with its colors ... colors of earth and sand. But also the colors of the street: the women in turquoise or mauve caftans ... and the sky.”

But such chromatic sensitivity was already present in him, says Flaviano, making Marrakesh “more of a *rediscovery* than a discovery itself.” As Saint Laurent’s muse and creative partner Loulou de la Falaise put it the 1970s, “He always had it in him because he was brought up in color.”

When Saint Laurent died in 2008 of a brain tumor at the age of 72, the headline of *The New York Times* obituary read,

“Yves Saint Laurent, Who Changed the Color of Couture.” It was a double wordplay. Along with his garments in which color wasn’t there simply to vary or brighten but was intrinsic to a design, Saint Laurent was the first major designer to routinely hire models of color, beginning with the original collection he presented under his own name in 1962. His muses and models in the fitting room and on the runway were always from ranges of ethnicities, including the Somali-born supermodel Iman Abdulmajid, whom he called “my dream woman.”

For Saint Laurent, to be modern meant to be culturally diverse, global. It also reflected his childhood. “The idea of introducing models of color, of different ethnicities, down the runway in Paris is something I think he embraced because of his formative years in Oran,” says Cox, leaving one more piece in a design legacy that was always a step ahead. 🌍



Jeff Koehler is a James Beard and IACP award-winning author and cook. His most recent books are *Where the Wild Coffee Grows* and *Darjeeling: A History of the World’s Greatest Tea*. His writing has appeared in the *Washington Post*, NPR.org, *Wall Street Journal*, *Saveur*, *Food & Wine*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *South China Morning Post* and many other publications. Follow him on Instagram @jeff_koehler.



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THE 1001 TALES OF HANNA DIYAB

WRITTEN BY MATTHEW TELLER

ART BY IVY JOHNSON



For the people of Paris, May 1709 was a time of anger. Inflation was running out of control, driving up the price of wheat daily. Louis XIV, who had been king of France for more than 65 years, ruled with absolute authority, yet his regime was starting to unravel. People were out in the streets shouting for bread: One aristocrat reported that Louis's son, safe in his carriage en route to the opera, would order his servants to toss coins at the hungry crowds and drive on.

But not everywhere was in uproar. One Sunday, in a quiet room somewhere in the city, shielded from the tumult, two men talked earnestly together. The older man, in his 60s, listened intently to what the younger one, barely 20, was telling him. He scribbled brief notes and committed as much as he could to memory.

But it wasn't a political meeting, and what the men discussed had only the loosest of ties to reality. Nevertheless, the words they exchanged on May 5, 1709, changed the world.

The older man was Antoine Galland, scholar, librarian and archeologist. He was at the peak of a glittering career that had included journeys to Syria and around the Levant in search of historical artifacts for collections in France, and which had culminated in his royal appointment as antiquary to the king. By 1709 Galland was winning public acclaim for the eight volumes of stories he had translated from a medieval Arabic manuscript procured by a Parisian contact from the Syrian city of Aleppo. They had been published in French as *Les mille et une nuit* [sic], a rendering of the Arabic title *Alf layla wa layla*: in English, *The Thousand and One Nights*.

But after almost a decade of work, Galland was running dry. Volume 8 had been a travesty. The publisher had cobbled it together without Galland's knowledge or permission, yoking Galland's translations from Arabic together with other stories from a different, Turkish collection translated by one of Galland's competitors. That had infuriated him, but it revealed that the demand from readers for stories of magic from the East was insatiable. Galland was desperate to find fresh material.

So when, shortly before Easter in 1709, he happened to meet

Hanna Diyab, a young man from Syria recently arrived in Paris, it was too good an opportunity to ignore. He asked the young man if he might know any stories he could tell. Stories? Ha! The librarian was in luck. Diyab was born and raised in Aleppo, famed for its coffeehouse culture, its literary cosmopolitanism, and its professional storytellers. He could spin yarns like silk brocades. Galland was delighted. Soon afterward, they met again. More meetings followed, all through May and into June. Then Galland set to writing.

Volumes 9 and 10 of stories from the *The Thousand and One Nights* came out in 1712 to enthusiastic receptions. Galland was preparing more at the time of his death in 1715, and volumes 11 and 12 appeared posthumously. The stories' fame quickly spread. Renderings of Galland's work in English (under the title of *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*) and German had already become hugely popular. More translations followed, into Italian, Russian, and other languages. They all fuelled a literary taste for folktales and stories of sorcerers and the supernatural that has never abated since.

For more than a century thereafter, Galland was hailed as a lone genius, a brilliantly creative scholar who had single-handedly brought "Aladdin" and other tales from Arabic into European literature. Then questions emerged. Scholars could trace the stories in Galland's early volumes back to manuscripts in Arabic. But some of the later tales most popular with European readers—"Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," for instance, and also the character of Aladdin—seemed to have no source earlier than Galland's publication in French. It eventually became apparent that Arabic manuscripts of "Aladdin" and other tales, circulating among connoisseurs, were not only forgeries as sources but were in fact back-translations from Galland's own text.

Even when Galland's journal was found and published in 1881, revealing that on May 5, 1709, he had been told the story of Aladdin by

one Hanna Diyab who had told him 15 more stories over subsequent weeks that Galland had used to write the last four volumes of his *magnum opus*, the librarian's reputation remained intact. Diyab seemed, then, tangential. Galland had not credited him in print, and no other sources mentioned his name. The brief



The oldest-known written versions of the loose collection of stories that came to French scholar and writer Antoine Galland is found in a ninth-century-CE Arabic manuscript on papyrus whose title page, **ABOVE**, calls it "a book of tales from 1,000 nights." Such stories, and others, also circulated orally for generations, and they would have been familiar to Hanna Diyab as he was growing up at the turn of the 18th century in Aleppo, Syria.



The man to whom Diyab told his stories, Antoine Galland, had learned Latin, Greek and Hebrew by 1670, the year Galland traveled, at age 24, to Constantinople (now Istanbul) to accompany the French ambassador. Galland stayed five years and there learned Turkish, Arabic and Persian. He was later appointed as antiquary (historian) to King Louis XIV. His first volumes of *Les Mille et Une Nuit* (*The Thousand and One Nights*) appeared in 1704, when Galland was 58. The first volume to contain stories related to him by Diyab was ninth in the series, **LEFT AND OPPOSITE**, published in Paris 1712. There are no known portraits of Diyab.

reference in the journal was the first anyone had heard of him. Some even doubted Diyab existed at all, suggesting that Galland might have invented a chance meeting with a Syrian storyteller as a plausible cover for having conjured the stories himself. Another hundred years passed.

Then, in 1993, in Rome, linguist Jérôme Lentin came upon Diyab's own memoir. The manuscript had spent decades in the library of the Vatican, brought there in the early 20th century but mis-catalogued as anonymous because its first few pages (including the title page) were missing. It has been published only very recently—2015 in French, by Lentin and others; 2017 in Arabic; and since last year twice in English—and it has swiftly overturned our understanding of how "Aladdin" and other pivotal stories of the *The Thousand and One Nights* entered European culture. This discovery means we are at last able to not only piece together how Galland met Diyab over those days in 1709 but also to reassess the genesis of Galland's later volumes of stories.

"The memoir offers us a rare glimpse of the 18th-century Mediterranean world as seen through the eyes of a Syrian man. Diyab was a marvellous storyteller, and [his book] shows real artistry in the composition of its narratives and the vividness of its descriptions," says Brown University professor of comparative literature Elias Muhanna, whose English translation of Diyab has been published this year by New York University Press under the title *The Book of Travels*.

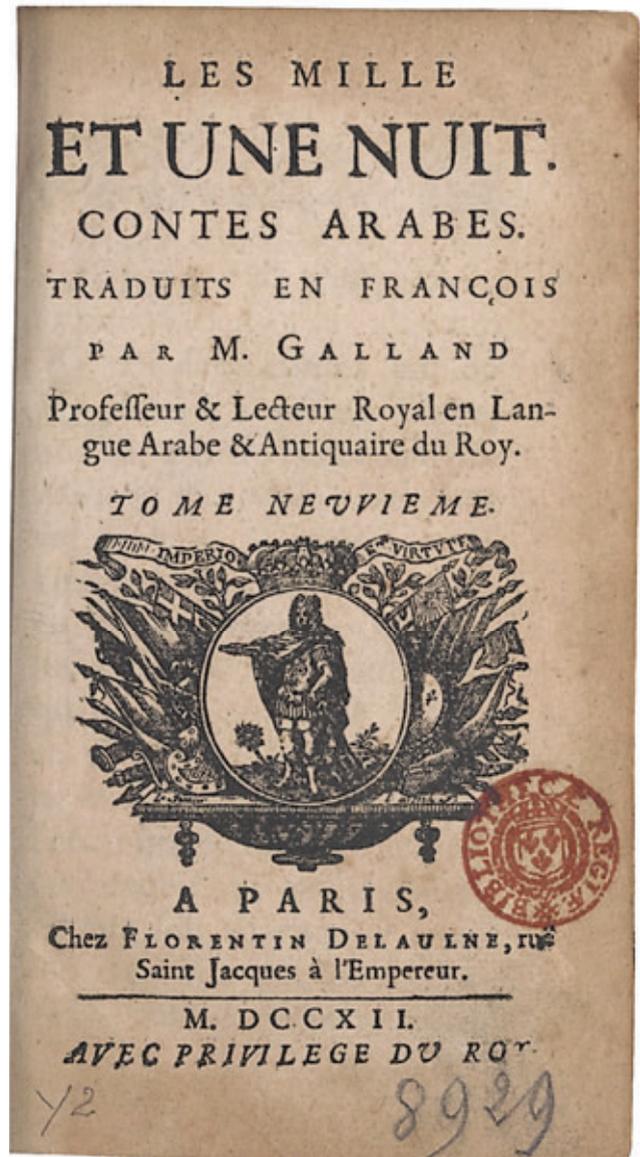
Lentin was not, however, the first linguist to analyze Diyab's damaged manuscript. Last year British writer Caroline Stone published the English translation of Diyab's memoir made by

her late husband Paul Lunde, an American scholar and linguist raised in Saudi Arabia who also, over more than 40 years, wrote frequently for *AramcoWorld* (as Stone, too, continues to do). In her foreword to the book titled *The Man Who Wrote Aladdin*, published by Hardinge Simpole, Stone recounts how Lunde found Diyab's manuscript in the Vatican library in the early 1970s but chose not to publish his discovery, or his translation of it, before his death in 2016. "He was never interested in publishing," she says.

After 250 years in the shadows, Hanna Diyab is famous.

"What's thrilling about reading Diyab's memoir is we get this portrait of a very complex person with a complex sensibility, who has all kinds of specific and singular experiences and tastes," says Yasmine Seale, who wrote the foreword to Muhanna's translation. She is in the middle of translating the entire *The Thousand and One Nights* anew for an edition planned for release in 2023.

"The question of who wrote 'Aladdin' is often posed in a binary way: Is it an orientalist fantasy invented by Galland, or is it in fact an Arab story with an Arab author? The discovery of this memoir helps us think of it more as a Franco-Arab



collaboration,” Seale says.

Thanks to the memoir, we can fill in some detail. We learn that Diyab was born into a Christian Maronite family in Aleppo around 1688, just at the time when the Maronites “become the preferred interlocutors of European merchants and missionaries” in the city, Seale says, emphasizing the privilege his religious identity conferred. From boyhood

Diyab worked for Aleppo’s trading magnates, picking up languages including French and Italian. As a teenager he entered the monastery of Mar Lichaa (Saint Elisha) in the mountains of Lebanon, but quickly felt himself ill-suited to that life. It was on his way back there after an illness that he happened to meet Paul Lucas, “a traveler dispatched by the sultan of France.”

“The question of who wrote ‘Aladdin’ is often posed in a binary way: Is it an orientalist fantasy invented by Galland, or is it in fact an Arab story with an Arab author? The discovery of this memoir helps us think of it more as a Franco-Arab collaboration.”

—YASMINE SEALE

Lucas, then in his mid-40s, was another of the loose circle of archeological treasure-hunters attached to Louis XIV’s court. He was experienced—this was his third trip to the Levant filching artifacts for Parisian display cabinets—but he lacked skills in Arabic. Lucas made Diyab an offer: Serve as guide and interpreter for the remainder of his journey and, in return, he would guaran-

tee Diyab a job at the Royal Library in Paris and royal patronage for life. Diyab accepted. He was perhaps 19 years old.

That episode ends the first rollicking chapter of Diyab’s memoir, which continues as the mismatched pair embark on all sorts of adventures, following a route that led from Syria, Egypt, and Tunisia to the Italian coast, Marseilles, and finally, in September of 1708, Paris.

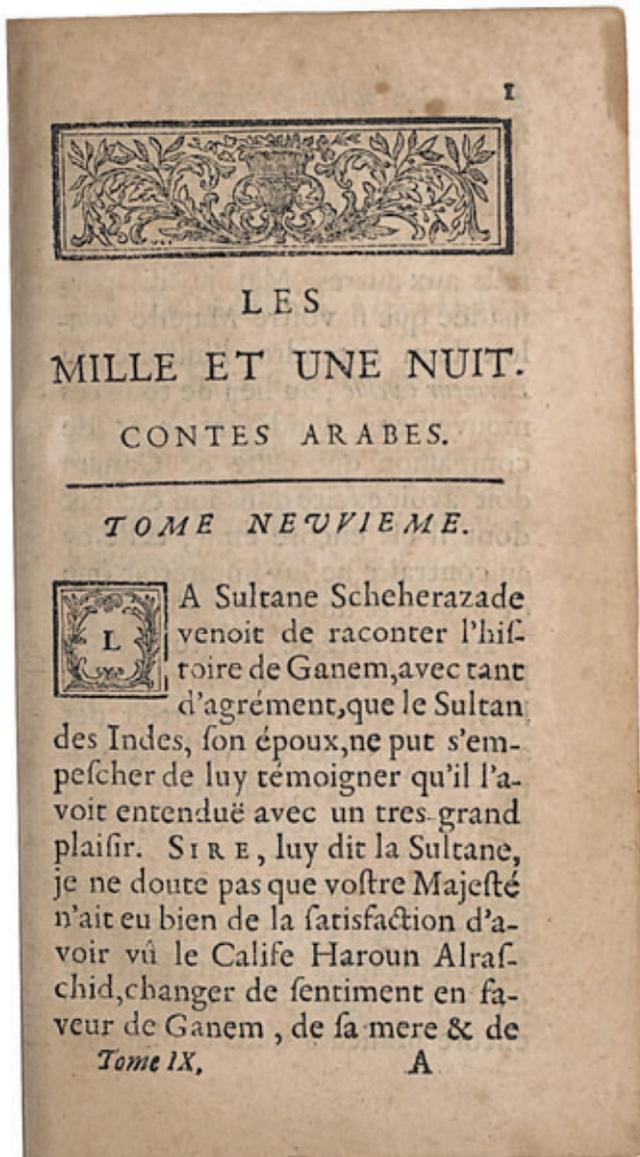
Diyab stayed in Paris for around nine months until he tired of waiting for Lucas to make good on his promise. After departing Paris in June 1709, he made an extended stopover in Istanbul and arrived back in Aleppo the following summer. With family support he went into business and became a mainstay in the famed Aleppo suq, where he sold textiles for more than 20 years. He completed his memoir in 1764, at the grand old age of 75. We don’t know when he died, but the book that became his legacy stayed in his family for several generations before passing to Paul Sbath, a Syrian Catholic priest and manuscript collector. In the first half of the 20th century, Sbath donated part of his library, including the Diyab manuscript, to the Vatican. There it rested.

The memoir dramatically bears out Diyab’s narrative skill. It’s a compelling read, full of stories, characters, narrow scrapes and colorful situations. Seale calls it “an amazing thing to have,” and talks of its significance in the context of earlier, medieval Arabic travel writing, which more commonly comprises impersonal lists of places visited, dense with quotation and literary references. “Diyab is different: He lets us in and keeps us close,” she remarks. “There is no poetry in this memoir, no quotation. Its cadences are those of Syrian speech, its subject everyday emotions: Fear, shame, astonishment, relief.”

This implies that this master storyteller didn’t so much write his own autobiography as dictate it like a coffee-house tale. Every so often a passage ends with, “Let’s get back to the story” or, “Let me go back to what I was saying.” Linguistic analysis by editor Johannes Stephan of nonliterary vocabulary and verb forms in Diyab’s Arabic confirms the theory.

Seale chuckles. “You get the feeling reading [the memoir] that Diyab must have spent his life telling these stories. Of course he would have! It’s the most extraordinary thing to happen to you when you’re 19!”

Nights scholar Paulo Lemos Horta clarifies how Diyab’s memoir “reveals his ability to weave anecdotes and story motifs into a compelling tale of a life shaped by ambition and curiosity.” Horta explains how the memoir offers “clear evidence of [Diyab’s] attraction to religion, magic, and mystery; his thirst for adventure; and



THE LUNDE TRANSLATION

In her foreword to *The Man Who Wrote Aladdin: The Life and Times of Hanna Diyab*, Caroline Stone reflects on the work of her late husband, scholar and linguist Paul Lunde, who also contributed more than 50 articles to *AramcoWorld*.

When I first met Paul Lunde in the early 1970s, he was working on Arabic manuscripts in the Vatican Library. One day he came home excited at having found a travel account by a priest from Mosul who visited the New World. Not long after, that document led him to the Aleppo Hanna Diyab.

As Paul read passages to me and to his close friends, and saw that we found them fascinating and amusing, he decided to translate the two accounts. He also became very determined—I would almost say obsessed—with tracking down every place and person mentioned, every unusual

word or construction, and identifying every event in considerable detail.

At a certain point, especially when the Vatican catalogues and

manuscripts were being digitized, various friends, as well as myself, encouraged him to finish and publish, since it was obvious that sooner or later other scholars would come across the manuscripts and publish them. However—in spite of interest from more than one academic publisher—he continued to work in his own way, collecting the background details that fill dozens, probably close to a hundred, notebooks and files.

I do not know why he decided not to publish—except, perhaps, that this research had come to feel like his own private garden, rather than a public space. I do not know whether he knew that “his” manuscripts had indeed been

discovered and published.

Paul Lunde died very suddenly in August 2016 and there had been no occasion to discuss what he would like done with his books, papers or unfinished work. After a great deal of soul-searching, I have decided to publish his completed translations, beginning with Hanna Diyab. I have not had the courage to go through his many notebooks to track down the numerous references (apart from the fact many of his notes are in Arabic) and reconstruct the story in detail—that task will fall to some future researcher.

The richness and breadth of learning—and humor—that Paul Lunde would have provided is, alas, impossible to emulate.



his willingness to break from what was conventionally expected.”

That’s exemplified by one early episode, which has particularly tantalizing parallels with “Aladdin.” Diyab describes how one day near the Syrian city of Idlib, Lucas is shown a tomb-cave dug into the earth, and he sends a goatherd down into it to explore. The goatherd emerges bearing a ring and an old lamp.

Later, in Paris, Diyab relates how Lucas arranges an audience with the king at the royal palace of Versailles and has Diyab dress up in fancy gear brought specially from Aleppo: pantaloons belted at the waist (made, ironically, of a cloth exported to Syria from France), with a silver dagger, a jacket of Damascene corded silk, and an elaborate sable hat. (Seale remarks, “His outfit, like his mind, bears a pan-Mediterranean print.”) Diyab gapes at the grandeur of Louis’s palace and is in awe as the pair are ushered into the royal presence. Lucas bows and scrapes, and Louis acknowledges the treasures Lucas has brought. Then Diyab is called forward to place in front of the king a cage holding two small rodents with outsized ears and long legs.

Louis asks Lucas where he got them. Earlier in the memoir

Diyab describes how Lucas bought them from a merchant in Tunis, but now he shows his boss lying to the king: “Upper Egypt,” Lucas says. Louis asks their name. Diyab relishes the tongue-tied Lucas’s embarrassment as he turns to the young Syrian for help.

Addressing the king and assembled courtiers, Diyab names them as *jarbu’*, or jerboa, a kind of desert jumping mouse, and he writes the word in both Arabic and French. He then spends the rest of the day being summoned to show the animals to a tide of ministers and extravagantly bejeweled princesses in sumptuous halls. He is called back later that night to the king’s silk-draped bedroom to display the jerboas again, and he ends up lodging at Versailles for a week, “[touring] the palace freely. . . . The glories of the place are simply indescribable.”

Less than six months later, Diyab happened to meet a man—Galland—who was desperate to hear stories of amazing scenes and incredible happenings.

In the version of “Aladdin” that Galland published, Aladdin is a poor boy from a far-off land (named as China, though everything about the setting suggests an exoticized Arabia), in thrall to a charismatic yet disappointing paymaster, bedazzled by an opulent palace. It’s striking that—thanks to the memoir—we now see that Diyab is a poor boy from far-off Syria, in thrall to his charismatic yet disappointing paymaster Lucas, bedazzled by

the opulence of Versailles. How much of “Aladdin” comes from Diyab, and how much from Galland? We may never find out. To Seale, the story is “an unknowable blend of both men.”

This reflects a core problem in trying to analyze the *The Thousand and One Nights*: What actually is it? Is it a book? Not really: It has no author, it has never had a fixed title, and there is no authoritative record of its scope or content (no collection holds 1,001 stories: the number was as symbolic of abundance as China was of remoteness). The starting point—a story about a smart young woman who fends off a mortal threat by telling stories—has been identified as originating more than 3,000 years ago in the Sanskrit literature of India. It, and the tales around it, were probably brought first into Persian, and then, perhaps sometime in the eighth century CE, into Arabic. Stories told by the young woman—by then known as Scheherazade—moved into and out of the compilation with each translation, and each new edition. Galland, for example, includes the cycle of stories featuring Sinbad the Sailor, though Sinbad had, until then, never been part of the *Nights*.

For many, this is all part of the charm. “I would argue for a maximally inclusive definition of what the *Nights* is,” says Seale. “It has always been a series of additions of inauthentic material, which is absorbed and adapted to the tastes of each particular readership.”

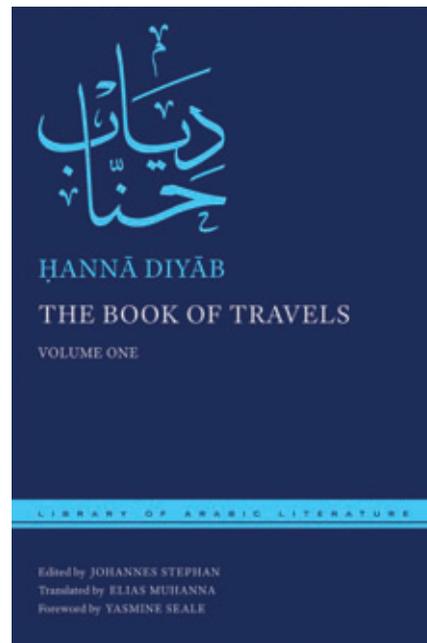
That describes perfectly the stories comprising Galland’s last four volumes. With no source other than—we now know—Galland’s Syrian storyteller, they have been called “orphan tales.” Did Diyab make them up? We have nothing to go on. From Galland’s diary it seems likely Diyab narrated them in French rather than Arabic, but did he offer them as stories of his own, only to have his agency erased by Galland? Or did he describe them as extra material from the *The Thousand and One Nights*, or as Aleppan tales like to those in the *Nights*?

Another question rests on how much of what Diyab wrote was fact, and how much was fabrication. He is relating his memoir at the end of his life, remembering what it was like to be 20: How much did he shape his memories to match his own style of narration—or even to match Galland’s “Aladdin,” published 50 years before? We are left guessing, though nothing in the memoir, or anywhere else, suggests Diyab had any idea of either the identity of the man he met in Paris or the impact his storytelling had on him and the wider world. Diyab records the contact in just a few lines, leaving Galland unnamed.

Yet that May 5 meeting between the two men when, as Galland notes, Diyab finished telling “the story of the lamp,” did indeed change the world. From 18th-century fantasies to 19th-century colonial encounters to 20th-century Hollywood and beyond, “Aladdin” has colored political and cultural contacts between the West and the Islamic world. In the name of entertainment, it has fuelled prejudices and stereotypes galore. Galland’s *The Thousand and One Nights*—especially the later stories—have had incalculable influence on European and world culture, from music and art to the development of the novel.

One thing we can say with certainty is that Diyab’s memoir puts to bed the idea that Galland worked alone.

It also shows us the limitations of the European perspective of its time. Lucas published his own account of the journey from Aleppo to Paris, but entirely ignores Diyab, describing only ruins and plunder. With the discovery of Diyab’s memoir we can now compare. Diyab’s eye catches what Lucas overlooks: We see compassion for the poor suffering through a freezing Parisian winter, empathy for washerwomen and beggars, and delight at meeting other Syrians in Paris and elsewhere. Seale calls the memoir “a reminder that the Arab presence in Europe goes back very far—and that the Mediterranean wasn’t always a border.”



For Muhanna, this contextual detail is key. “It’s no wonder that Diyab played some role in the history of the *The Thousand and One Nights*, but in some ways that’s the least interesting thing about him,” he says.

Horta concludes that the memoir fixes Diyab as author of the “orphan” tales, whose origins can now be placed “not only in the French

literary practice of Galland but in the imagination and narrative skills of the Syrian traveler who first told them.”

Uncredited and even disdained, his life story published 250 years late, Hanna Diyab is starting to look like one of the great unsung heroes of world literature. 🌐

Penning his memoir at age 75, Diyab had no idea of either the identity of the man he had met in Paris or the ultimate impact of his storytelling.



Matthew Teller is a UK-based writer, journalist, broadcaster, and documentary-maker for the BBC and other international media. He contributes regularly to *AramcoWorld*. Follow him on Twitter @matthewteller and at matthewteller.com.



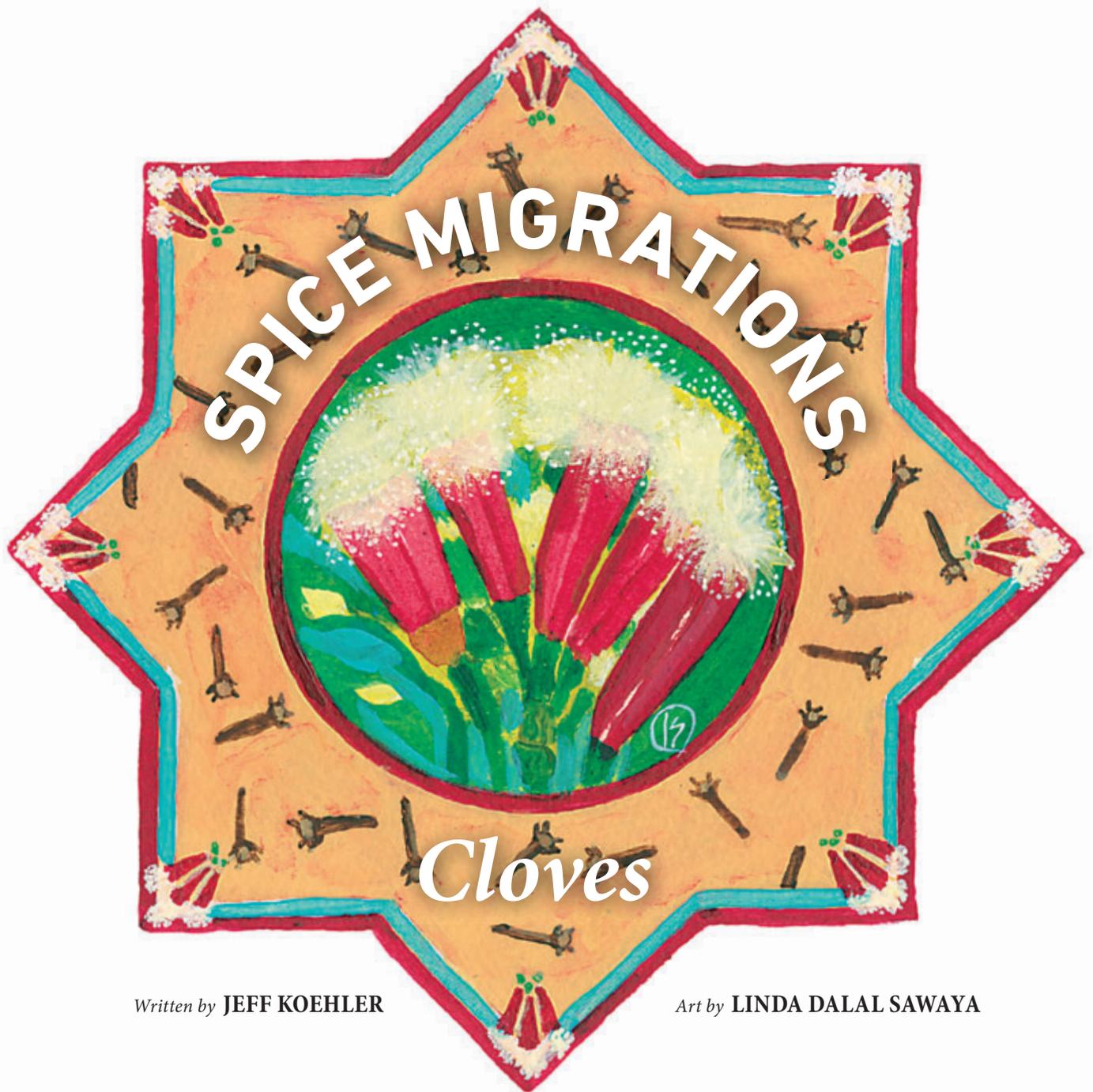
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The Thousand and One Nights: Jan / Feb 2008



The Book of Travels. Hanna Diyab. Johannes Stephan, ed., Elias Muhanna, trans., 2021. New York: NYU Press, 2 vols., ISBN 978-1-4798-9230-3.

The Man Who Wrote Aladdin: The Life and Times of Hanna Diyab. Hanna Diyab. Paul Lunde, trans., Caroline Stone, intr., 2020. Edinburgh: Hardinge Simpole, ISBN 978-1-8438-2228-8.



Written by **JEFF KOEHLER**

Art by **LINDA DALAL SAWAYA**

Like a gentle breeze of the east wind arriving with the sweet smell of cloves.

—Imru' al-Qays, sixth century CE

At the end of the 19th century, the East African archipelago of Zanzibar was the capital of cloves. Ninety percent of the world's cloves grew there. People used cloves for numbing a toothache, seasoning a biryani or pulao rice dish or even for stringing into an ornamental, aromatic necklace. According to sailor lore, when the wind was right, it carried the scent of cloves far out into the waters of the Indian Ocean.

"The strongest tasting of all the pungent spices," says Ian Hemphill, author of *The Spice & Herb Bible*. Cloves are "warm, aromatic, camphor-like and faintly peppery," he continues. And for their flavor? "Words like medicinal, warming, sweet,

lingering and numbing come to mind," lending "palate-cleansing freshness and sweet, spicy flavor."

Cloves are the dried and unopened flower buds of a species of evergreen tree, genus *Syzygium* and—no surprise here—family *aromaticum*. In Swahili-speaking Zanzibar, they are called *karafuu*, which comes from both the Arabic *qaranful* and the older Greek *karuóphullon*, meaning "nut leaf." Latin, however, looked straight at its shape and dubbed it *clavus*—nail—from which we have "clove" today in English.

Zanzibar farmers harvest karafuu in September, October and November by gently picking the buds, which grow in clusters

ZANZIBAR CLOVES



PICKING CLOVES



CLOVE TREES



DRYING CLOVES



HEAP OF CLOVES



of 10 to 15 on trees that can reach as high as 15 meters, requiring nimble climbing. Harvesters then spread the buds on mats to dry in the sun. As they dry, they release their redolence to the sea-bound breezes. They also lose about two-thirds of their weight, and a kilogram may contain up to 10,000 buds. “When dried, the top part where the bud is has small spikes, a bit like the clasps on an engagement ring. When fully dry, you can feel the sharpness of these spikes when held firmly in your hand,” says Hemphill, whose childhood was spent amid the herbs and spices of his parents, who were pioneers in the business.

B ut Zanzibar is not where cloves originated. It is perhaps just a curious coincidence the sixth-century-CE Arab poet Imru’ al-Qays, quoted at the top of this article, wrote of cloves’ “sweet smell” coming on an “east wind,” for indeed it was then that cloves grew exclusively on islands 10,000 kilometers due east of the Arabian Peninsula.

Some 500 years after the poet, Egyptian author Ibrahim ibn Wasif Shah came closer to the mark thanks to merchants who hinted at but ultimately hid their source. “Somewhere near India is the island containing the Valley of Cloves,” he wrote in *Kitab al-‘Adja’ib al-kabir (The Great Book of Marvels)*.

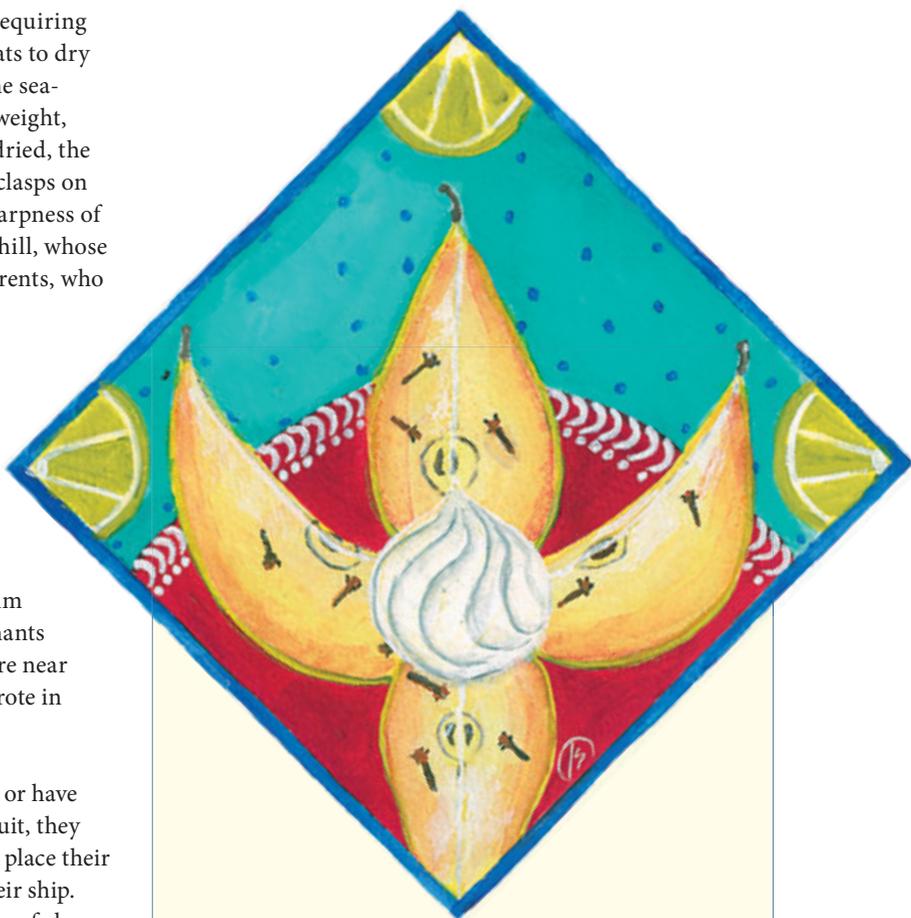
No merchants or sailors have ever been to the valley or have ever seen the kind of tree that produces cloves: its fruit, they say, is sold by genies. The sailors arrive at the island, place their items of merchandise on the shore, and return to their ship. Next morning, they find, beside each item, a quantity of cloves.

The actual source lay amid the same volcanic islands in the modern Indonesian province of North Maluku that is also the origin of nutmeg, the third spice in this series. Also known as the Moluccas or the Spice Islands, North Maluku is an archipelago made up of some 1,000 islands.

The first-known written reference to cloves, however, comes from China. During the Han dynasty, from 206 BCE to 220 CE, clove’s minty astringency freshened the breath of courtiers speaking to the emperor. It was around the second century CE that records note Arab traders were making cloves available to the Mediterranean region through the Egyptian port of Alexandria as well as others. Along with trade came uses aromatic, medicinal and culinary.

“Clove was already well known in Arabia in the seventh century,” explains translator and scholar Charles Perry. Referencing the line in the famous ode by al-Qays, he points out that “this quote fails to prove that clove was being used in cookery rather than perfumery, but I have little doubt that it was.” In the 10th century CE, the Iraqi Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq listed cloves in *Kitab al-Tabikh (The Book of Cookery)*, the earliest-known Arabic cookbook.

“By the 13th century CE clove was very common in cookery throughout the Arab world,” says Perry, who recently translated the popular *Kitab al-Wuslah ila l-Habib*, a 13th-century-CE Syrian cookbook, into English as *Scents and Flavors*. A trio of recipes from the anonymous cookbook rely on cloves for “sweetening breath” as well as for incense, handwashing powders and perfumed soaps. Perry also points to *An Anonymous Andalusian Cookbook* of the 13th Century, which he also translated, that calls for cloves in dishes poultry, lamb and sweets.



Eva Sud’s Simple Stewed Pears

This is a delicious, super-easy-to-make dessert with sweetened pears spiced with plenty of cloves. Adapted from Marryam H. Reshii’s *The Flavour of Spice*.

Serves: 4–6

4 firm medium pears	10 cloves
1/2 cup sugar	1 tablespoon lime juice

Peel, core and quarter the pears. Put in a microwave-proof dish. Add the sugar, cloves and lime juice, and toss. Cook in the microwave on high heat until the pears are soft but still hold their shape, 7 to 10 minutes. Serve with custard or cream. Enjoy!

W ith the founding of the Sultanate of Malacca in 1403 CE, the port of Melaka, in present-day southwestern Malaysia, began attracting more merchants carrying spices, including those who would row in bearing dried clove buds by the tonne, from the Malukus 3,000 kilometers east. The spice trade attracted Arabs, Javanese and Chinese, among others around the Indian Ocean and beyond. The market prospered on these terms until European ships sailed in, looking to exploit the valuable commodity.

The Portuguese in 1522 became the first Europeans to set

up forts on those Malukus that grew cloves, and the story of the colonial takeover of the clove trade bears much in common with the stories of cinnamon, pepper and nutmeg. The struggle over cloves, however, took place mainly on the island of Ambon in the Banda Sea. The Ambonese, after being forced to cede land to the Portuguese and contend with their aggressions for nearly a century, in the early 17th century found themselves facing the Dutch *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC). Like the nutmeg growers on the Banda Islands, the Ambonese lost all control of their trade when the VOC decreed that cloves could only be grown on Ambon and enforced a policy of *extirpatie* (extirpation): All trees not controlled by the VOC were destroyed. “Burning of young trees was the VOC way of regulating supply and keeping prices high,” says the Indonesian spice trader Karen Faroland.

On Ambon this violated more than economics. By custom Ambonese parents planted trees when children were born and believed their lives were thus linked to the lives of the trees. This, Faroland says, was part of what inspired the unsuccessful 1817 revolt led by Ambonese soldier Thomas Matulesy, also known as Kapitan Pattimura (or simply Pattimura), who is today a national hero.

It was the French who broke the Dutch monopoly in 1770 when an administrator on Isle de France (now Mauritius) and Ile Bourbon (now Réunion) smuggled out some seedlings. They thrived, and their descendants were transplanted to the Seychelles, Réunion and Madagascar.

How cloves came to Zanzibar is popularly attributed to a Zanzibari Arab named Harmali bin Saleh, who in 1812 introduced them from Réunion and set up clove plantations. He did not, however, get to enjoy the fruits of his labors for long: His plantations were confiscated by the sultan, Said bin Sultan of the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, whose realm included Zanzibar. Bin Saleh’s loss proved Zanzibar’s gain in the 1830s when Bin Sultan moved the sultanate’s capital from Muscat, Oman, to Zanzibar. The clove industry flourished even more when the sultan promoted its expansion to supplant the slave trade, Hemphill points out. “To stop Zanzibar’s dependence on the slave trade, Sultan Said decreed that three clove trees would have to be planted for every coconut palm on Zanzibar and Pemba, making Zanzibar one of the world’s largest producers by the mid-19th century,” says Hemphill.

Zanzibar dominated the world market until 1964 when revolution led to its merger with what is now Tanzania. Clove production plummeted as the new government nationalized and redistributed

plantations. Although yields crept up, they never came close to their former outputs. By the 1980s the islands were focusing on tourism. Today’s clove production of some 5,550 tonnes a year still, however, makes cloves Zanzibar’s top cash crop.

Spotting opportunity, Madagascar and Indonesia both expanded clove production from the 1960s, and today, Indonesia is the

world’s leading producer at around 112,000 tonnes, or 80 percent of the global output. Yet 90 percent of it sells on the local market to the Indonesian tobacco industry to produce kretek cigarettes, which blend tobacco with ground cloves.

Via a Zoom call from her office in Bali where she sources and exports high-quality organic Indonesian spices, Faroland points out that the clove producers in North

Sulawesi have earned their place as not only the largest but also the ones that grow the best-quality cloves. These are, she says, larger and better-looking, and they contain higher percentages of clove’s active ingredient, eugenol, an essential oil that can be used to flavor food or as herbal medicine or aromatic.

In the Indonesian kitchen, cloves are key to the popular pineapple-filled cookies punctured with a whole clove called *kue nastar*, explains Faroland. “We serve *nastar* during *Lebaran*,” she says, using the popular Indonesian name for ‘Id al-Fitr, the celebration following Ramadan. Cloves are also found in savory cooking, “mostly used in dishes made of goat, mutton, seafood and offal,” Faroland continues. Pounded with other spices,

they go into the aromatic, curry-like *gulai* and *soto betawi*, a famous Jakarta soup made with beef, tripe, coconut milk, galangal, lime leaves, lemongrass and spices that often include cloves.

Just like the ancient sailors who could once smell cloves from out at sea, she says, “you can smell soto betawi from the parking lot.” And that is a modern ode to the rich power of cloves anywhere. 🌍



Today Indonesia is the world’s leading producer of cloves.



Jeff Koehler is a James Beard and IACP award-winning author and cook. His most recent books are *Where the Wild Coffee Grows* and *Darjeeling: A History of the World’s Greatest Tea*. His writing has appeared in the *Washington Post*, NPR.org, *Wall Street Journal*, *Saveur*, *Food & Wine*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *South China Morning Post* and other publications. Follow him on Instagram @jeff_koehler. **Linda Dalal Sawaya** (lindasawaya.com; @lindasawayaART) is a Lebanese American artist, illustrator, ceramicist, writer, teacher, gardener and cook in Portland, Oregon. Her 1997 cover story, “Memories of a Lebanese Garden,” highlighted her illustrated cookbook tribute to her mother, *Alice’s Kitchen: Traditional Lebanese Cooking*. She exhibits regularly throughout the US, and she is listed in the *Encyclopedia of Arab American Artists*.



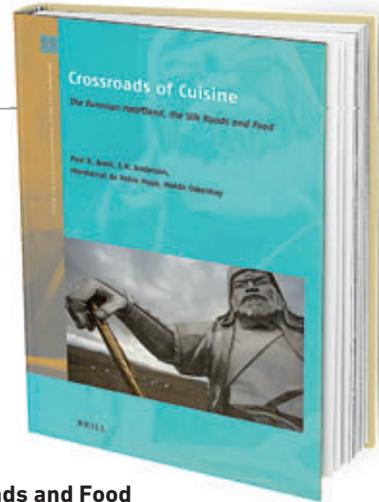


REVIEWS

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

“The story of the food of Central Asia is a story of travels, meetings, interactions, borrowings and trade.”

—CROSSROADS OF CUISINE

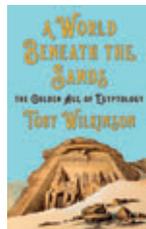


Crossroads of Cuisine: The Eurasian Heartland, the Silk Roads and Food

Paul D. Buell, E. N. Anderson, Montserrat de Pablo Moya and Moldir Oskenbay. 2020, Brill Publishing, 978-9-00443-205-5, \$159 hb.

The steppes, deserts and mountains of Central Asia are well-known as the setting for the Silk Roads, but less familiar to a global audience are the hybrid cuisines the trade routes left behind. Amidst endemic orchards of apples and apricots, Chinese noodles came to be slurped from the hearty stews of Turkic, Mongolic and Persian nomads, while rice pilaf was washed down with “camel sweat tea.” In a book of astonishing ambition, Buell, a historian, and Anderson, a human ecologist, set out to tell “the story of food in Central Asia,” a project that familiarizes the reader with thousands of years of foodways over a territory that stretches from the Caspian to Mongolia. Our omnivorous guides succeed by matching a rigorous academic foundation with enough gee-whiz enthusiasm to charm the general reader. Color photographs of the region’s people, bazaars and (of course) food bring the text to life, while dish-by-dish descriptions and recipes are sure to reward the most adventurous of home cooks.

—DENNIS KEEN



A World Beneath the Sands: The Golden Age of Egyptology

Toby Wilkinson, 2020, W. W. Norton, 978-1-32400-689-3, \$30 hb. Not until the 19th century did scholars

in the West dub “Egyptology” an academic science. This history of the field’s evolution examines its leading international players, culminating in the early-20th-century excavations by English archeologist Howard Carter, discoverer of the tomb of Tutankhamun. Many were in it for the money, such as early-19th-century British consul Henry Salt; others, like France’s Jean-François Champollion, who in 1822 cracked the code of hieroglyphs, sought renown. Although US consul George Glidden advocated Egyptology as a genuine science in the 1850s, his characteristically colonialist scorn for the local populace puts a tarnish on the very idea of a “golden age” for Egyptology, since the same could be said of many of his predecessors, contemporaries and not a few of those who followed. Wilkinson offers an accessible read for those looking to gain an understanding of how Egyptology evolved from a hobby for the adventurous and (usually) wealthy to a scientifically informed discipline. —TOM VERDE



Inside Arabic Music: Arabic Maqam Performance and Theory in the 20th Century

Johnny Farraj and Sami Abu Shumays. 2019, Oxford UP, 978-0-19065-835-9, \$135 hb.

The music of the Arab world has been little understood outside the region, yet in recent years it has gained enthusiasts worldwide. Coauthors Farraj and Abu Shumays have written both an engaging guide for general readers and a valuable resource for musicians and scholars. The book focuses on the musical “Golden Age” from 1930–1970 that encompassed the region from Egypt to Syria. The book’s topics include Arab and Arabized instruments, ensemble types, song and instrumental genres and the art of ornamentation. Its guide to rhythms includes those that accompany *muwashahat*, sung poems that arose in al-Andalus that are still loved today. The book also delves deeply into *maqam*, the system that guides melodic structure, development and improvisation. *Inside Arabic Music’s* greatest strength lies in its generous presentation of Arab music as an accessible, living art that today’s musicians can learn and that general readers can understand and appreciate.

—KAY HARDY CAMPBELL



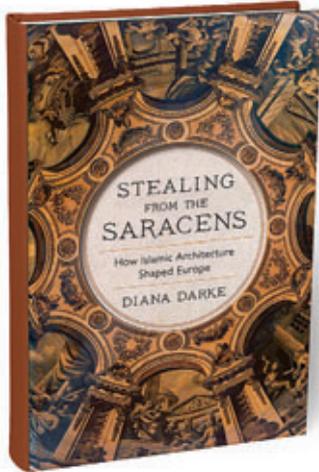
The Ghoul

Taghreed Najjar. Hassan Manasra, Il. 2020, Crocodile Books, 978-1-62371-925-8, \$17.95 hb. Aimed at 3- to 8-year-olds,

this inspiring story presents itself as big in format and packed with illustrations. It explores the story of a boy named Hasan who begins to question the fears of ghouls he learns from the old folk tales in his village. He musters his courage and sets out to meet one of the creatures that all the villagers believe are lying in wait for unsuspecting humans, in order to capture and devour them. Despite moments of apprehension, Hasan discovers that the ghoul he meets is as frightened of the villagers as they are of him. That reality forms the beginning of a friendship that surprises everyone and changes the village. This makes the story a valuable primer on how to accept and empathize with those who seem different, and how to challenge rumors and prejudices while seeking out an experiential truth.

—ROBERT W. LEBLING

AUTHOR'S CORNER



On the Origins of Gothic Architecture: A Conversation with Diana Darke

by TOM VERDE

With its rose windows and soaring, pointed arches, Gothic architecture is a crowning achievement of medieval Western Christendom but not, writes Oxford-educated Arabist Diana Darke, an independently developed one. Rather, what came to be called Gothic “arose out of a succession of influences that started in the Middle East and Muslim Andalusia,” she writes in *Stealing from the Saracens*, whose title highlights the book’s central irony: Medieval Europeans applied the term *Saracen*, from the Arabic *saraqā*, “to steal,” generally to Muslims. A nonresident scholar with Washington DC’s Middle East Institute, Darke has spent decades working and traveling throughout the Middle East. She has written several guidebooks and lived off and on since 1978 in Syria, where in 2005 she bought and restored a traditional courtyard house in the Old City of Damascus. This experience, coupled with her travels, inspired interest in the region’s role as the cradle of Gothic architecture. She traces the Gothic’s origins to three key structural elements—the trefoil arch (with its trio of interlinking cusps at its apex), the pointed arch, and elaborate ceiling vaulting—that migrated west between the eighth and 11th centuries CE.



Diana Darke

How did the trefoil arch, the pointed arch and complex vaulting get to the West?

Abd al-Rahman, who was born in Syria in the eighth century and became founder of the Muslim Umayyad dynasty in what is now southern Spain, introduced the trefoil arch into the European mainland. When you look at the Córdoba Mezquita and the arcade of trefoil arches above the mihrab, you can see exactly how that was then copied and used farther north in Spain and southern France. The pointed arch seems to have been copied from the ninth-century-CE Ibn Tulun Mosque in Cairo and came in via Amalfi [Italy], and then made its way to Cluny [in France], the wealthiest monastery in Europe. Then the other absolutely major one is the geometrical vaulting of the ceilings, which again comes in the Córdoba mosque, in the astonishing dome in front of the mihrab which has never needed any structural repair in its entire thousand-year existence. That level of craftsmanship combined with the knowledge of geometry that Muslim

masons inherited from centuries of stone-masonry tradition in Syria led to this astonishing knowledge of geometry that was completely lacking in Europe at the time.

Who were other key characters in this transmission? Merchants, crusaders, craftsmen, clerics?

It pretty much was all of them. Irish monks were sent off to Syria to learn about monastic architecture and came back and built [religious structures] in England and Ireland. The crusaders actually were the least influential. Most of the elements of Gothic had already found their way onto the European mainland before the Crusades.

The verticality of Gothic is famed for saturating religious interiors with light. Were there similar aesthetics at work in Islamic architecture?

Islamic architecture is not particularly interested in verticality, but it is interested in light and the way that light enters a building. The other major thing

is the different sense of space, and you see this quite clearly in the Córdoba Mezquita. The fact that there is no beginning and no end, it’s a sense of infinitely multiplying arcades and you never quite know where you are. There is the mihrab giving the direction of Makkah, but there is no sense of hierarchy within the building, whereas the thing that really strikes you in Gothic architecture is the hierarchy. There’s no doubt about where the important bits of the church are—up by the altar.

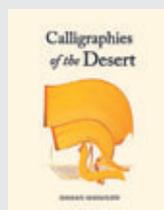
You devote an entire chapter to Restoration-era English architect Christopher Wren. Why?

Wren wrote at the end of his life that he used “Saracen vaulting,” as he called it, in the dome of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. He had the theory that “what we call the Gothic style should rightly be called the Saracen style.” He was happy to take the best of whatever he could find wherever he could find it, and he explained in his memoirs why he used Saracen vaulting: because it was the best.

Stealing from the Saracens: How Islamic Architecture Shaped Europe

Diana Darke. 2020, C. Hurst & Company, 978-1-78738-305-0, £25 hb.


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Calligraphies of the Desert

Hassan Massoudy. 2020, Saqi Books, 978-0-86356-177-1, £10 pb.



The Architecture of Ramses Wissa Wassef

Conchita Añorve-Tschirgi and Ehsan Abushadi, eds. 2020, AUC Press, 978-9-77416-924-3, \$59.95 hb.



EVENTS

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schedule before visiting.

CURRENT / JULY

After Hope: Videos of Resistance explores the role of hope in contemporary art and activism through an eclectic selection of more than 50 short videos from across Asia and the Asian diaspora. The result is a six-hour looping chronicle of hope that is comprehensive and exploratory in nature, not a product of a single narrative. Asian Art Museum, **San Francisco**, through July 24.

CURRENT / AUGUST

Nubia: Treasures of Ancient Africa. The kingdoms of Nubia flourished along the upper Nile Valley, now in Sudan, and provided strategic links among Central and Eastern Africa, Western Asia, and the Mediterranean for more than 6,000 years. The exhibit presents artistic achievements and examines concepts of power, representation and cultural bias that have influenced perceptions of Nubia since antiquity. **Saint Louis Art Museum**, through August 22.

CURRENT / SEPTEMBER

Sleep Tight! Bedcovers and Hangings From Around the World features outstanding bedcovers and bed curtains from the museum's collection, bringing together textile masterpieces such as embroidered suzanis from Central Asia, hand-painted Japanese futon covers and Pennsylvania German quilts. The exhibition explores how community, trade and migration

all play roles in shaping traditions. **Allentown Art Museum, Pennsylvania**, through September 12.

Moroccan Trilogy 1950–2020 assesses modern and contemporary art and its connection to culture in Morocco's major urban centers of Tangier, Tetouan and Casablanca from the 1950s to the contemporary era of the new millennium. The exhibition divides into three historical timeframes, each a chapter of diverse, interconnected forms of expressions and relationship to sociopolitical struggles for freedom. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, **Doha**, through September 27.

CURRENT / OCTOBER

From Fragment to Monument: The Ishtar Gate in Berlin. From its excavations in Babylon (Iraq) to its partial reconstruction in Berlin, the Ishtar Gate has fascinated visitors to Berlin's Pergamonmuseum for nearly 90 years. Built by King Nebuchadnezzar II (604–702 BCE), the gate gradually disintegrated after the fall of the Babylonian Empire in the late sixth century BCE, so that only small fragments were found during the excavation in 1902. These were then used to reconstruct the section of the gate that can be experienced in Berlin. Pergamonmuseum, **Berlin**, through October 3.

CURRENT / DECEMBER

Assyria to America. Bowdoin College holds six reliefs from the Neo-Assyrian period (911–609 BCE) of the

Mesopotamian city of Nimrud. This exhibition examines both the ancient and the modern histories of the reliefs, bringing them together for the first time in their 150-year history in the college's collection, together with ivory inlays, cuneiform tablets, cylinder seals and palace vessels whose material legacy is evidence of esthetically sumptuous, culturally vibrant court life. Bowdoin College Museum of Art, **Brunswick, Maine**, through December 12.

COMING / SEPTEMBER

Taking Shape: Abstraction From the Arab World, 1950s–1980s. In these decades, painters and sculptors throughout the Arab world explored challenges and possibilities of abstraction in art. The exhibition explores intricate geometries of color and line, from earthly to celestial, fluid to precise, suggesting the inexhaustible richness of nonobjective approaches to art through 80 works by leading Middle Eastern and North African artists whose creative visions stretched beyond the boundaries of representation. The Block Museum of Art, **Evanston, Illinois**, September 20 through December 4.

Readers are welcome to submit event information for possible inclusion to proposals@aramcoamericas.com, subject line "Events."



Not I: Throwing Voices (1500 BCE–2020 CE)

As a guiding motif for staging dialogs across collections, the exhibit focuses on the misdirection of voice, silence and sounds of ventriloquism, which relies on confusion between sight and sound, puppeteer and puppet, silence and speech. Issues of agency, authorship and objecthood are at the core of even the most conventional ventriloquist sketch: Where is the voice coming from? How is that voice split into many bodies? Who is speaking on behalf of whom? Amid institutions in which objects are often made to speak on behalf of cultures, ages, regions or nations, ventriloquism can be a useful way to critically assess the history, logic and social role of institutions devoted to the dissemination of knowledge such as libraries and museums. Favoring conversations among objects over singular masterpieces, *NOT I* includes a special project by Stockholm-based artist Meriç Algün. **Los Angeles County Museum of Art**, through July 25.



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