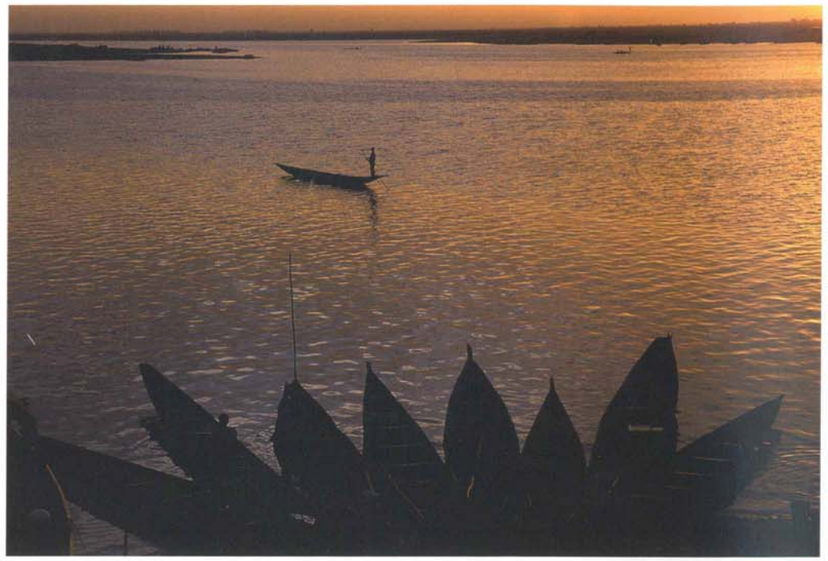

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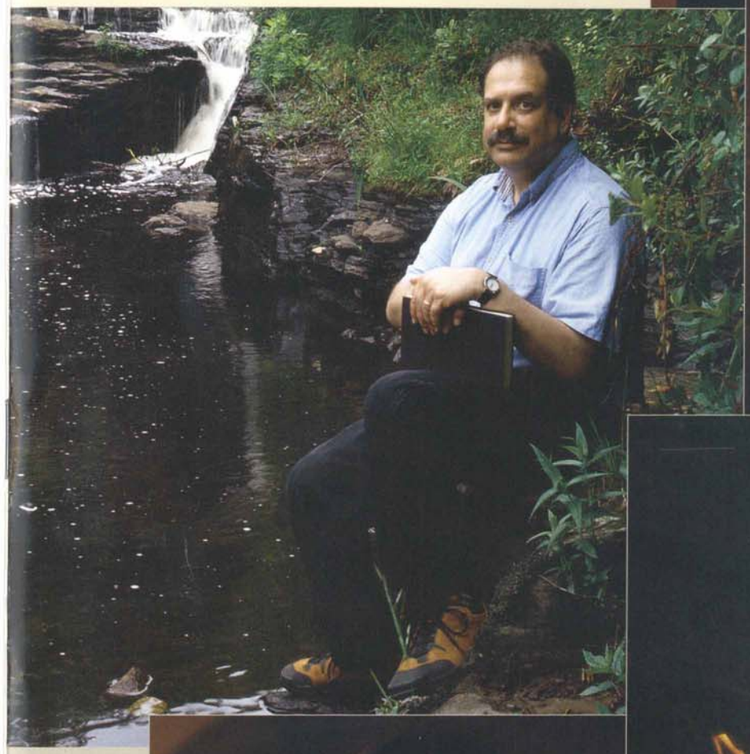
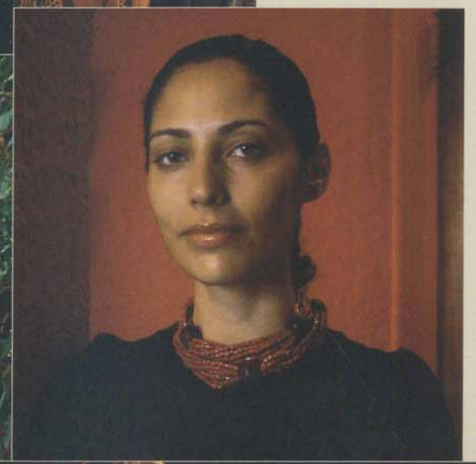
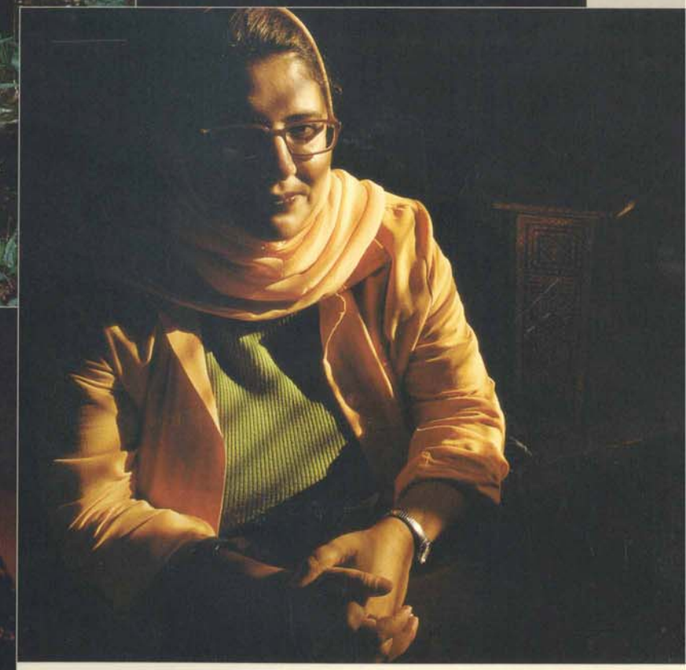




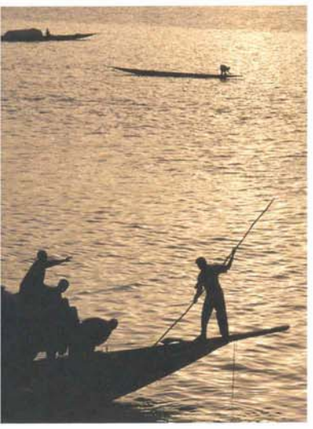


Of Stories and Storytellers

Saudi Aramco world

March/April 2005

Published Bimonthly
Vol. 56, No. 2



2 The River

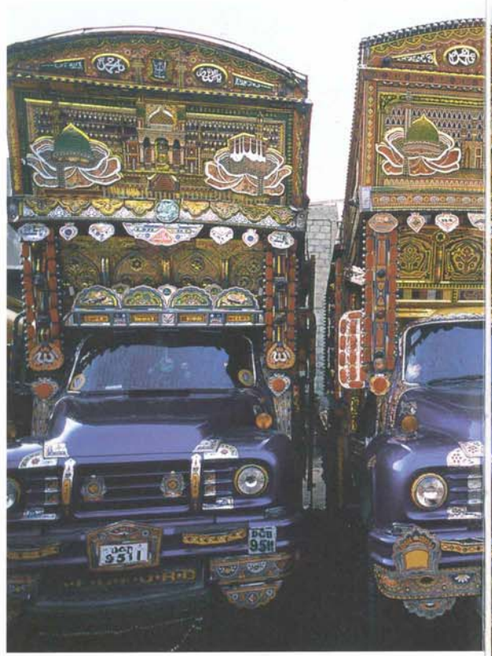
Written by Louis Werner
Photographed by Kevin Bubriski

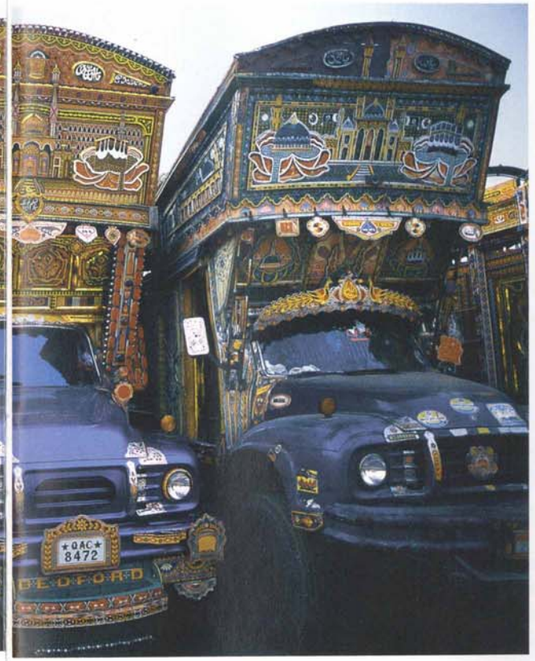
It is home to hippos, but has been known to run dry. Al-Idrisi thought it originated in the Mountains of the Moon. Herodotus reported that its banks were inhabited by otherworldly creatures. The Niger is Africa's third-longest river and, until about 200 years ago, one of its least known. It waters five countries, but its busiest stretch is in Mali, anchored on the west by the bustle of Mopti and on the east by historic Gao.

Masterpieces to Go: The Trucks of Pakistan 8

Written by Richard Covington
Photographed by Shahidul Alam / DRIK

Pakistani truck drivers may spend two year's wages customizing their Bedfords or Hinos, buying splendiferous vehicular makeovers that employ painters, carvers, metal chasers, weavers and bric-a-brac assemblage artists—some 50,000 of them in Karachi alone. Some of the decorations echo motifs that adorned pottery, textiles and oxcarts nine millennia ago, but to the owner-drivers, it's business: "More people will hire me if I have a beautifully painted truck," says one.





18 The Model of the Historians

Written by Caroline Stone
Manuscript courtesy of the Cambridge University Library

We know almost nothing biographical about the historian al-Mas'udi, other than that he wrote in 10th-century Baghdad, and only two of his 34 works survive—most notably *The Meadows of Gold*. His refreshingly anecdotal style was of lasting influence, and his personality—forcefully intellectual but endearingly humble—easily crosses the 11 centuries that separate our time from his. The great North African historian Ibn Khaldun paid al-Mas'udi a scholarly compliment of the highest order, calling him "the imam," or model, of historians, "a source upon which [others] depend...."

Cover:

From top to bottom: Barbara Nimri Aziz, Suheir Hammad, David Williams, Mohja Kahf and Pauline Kaldas are among RAWI's 150 members, as are (opposite page, clockwise from top left) Etel Adnan, Joanna Kadi, Betty Shamieh and Evelyn Shakir. The organization's name means "storyteller" in Arabic; its mission is "to be a gathering nucleus, a catalyst for creative energies, a starting point for more creativity" by its Arab–American writer members. Portraits by Lorraine Chittock.

Back Cover:

Sunset gilds the Niger River at Mopti, where local pirogue pilots have tied their boats for the night. Far upstream, the river's headwaters lie in Guinea, and from there it flows more than 3000 kilometers to its mouth in Nigeria. Photo by Kevin Bubriski.

Of Stories and Storytellers 24

Written by Lisa Suhair Majaj
Photographed by Lorraine Chittock

Three decades ago, you wouldn't have found much if you went looking for literature in English by Arab–American writers. Now it's a flourishing category that fills shelves with novels, poetry, plays and other writing—and fills pages with discussions of the meaning, boundaries and importance of the term "Arab–American writing." At its center is an organization called RAWI, a 10-year-old national salon where writers of Arab heritage are building an American literary community.

Gum Arabic 36

Written and photographed by Charles O. Cecil

Every time you gulp a soda, swallow a cold capsule, eat a jelly bean or lick a postage stamp, you're ingesting an almost ubiquitous ingredient: gum arabic. It's perfectly edible, you won't taste it, and it's not for chewing—nor is it actually Arab. It's the ultra-soluble, emulsifying sap of the *Acacia senegal* tree. Its name reflects the trade links that brought it to Europe in the Middle Ages, and today its growers across Sahelian Africa supply it to industries around the world for use in tens of thousands of products.

24, TOP LEFT: TOR EIGELAND

Publisher
Aramco Services Company
9009 West Loop South
Houston, Texas 77096, USA

President and Chief Executive Officer
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Director Public Affairs
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ISSN
1530-5821

Editor
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Circulation
Edna Catchings

Design and Production
Herring Design

Printed in the USA
Wetmore & Company

Address editorial correspondence to:
The Editor
Saudi Aramco World
Post Office Box 2106
Houston, Texas
77252-2106 USA

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

Printed on recycled paper

www.aramcoservices.com

the River

WRITTEN BY LOUIS WERNER ~ PHOTOGRAPHED BY KEVIN BUBRISKI

THE GREEK GEOGRAPHER STRABO NEVER SAW IT, BUT SAID IT FLOWED EASTWARD. THE MOORISH TRAVELER LEO AFRICANUS, HAVING SAILED ON IT, SAID IT FLOWED WESTWARD. PLINY WROTE THAT IT WAS INHABITED BY SATYRS. HERODOTUS QUOTED MEN WHO HAD SEEN DWARFS ON ITS BANKS. AL-IDRISI, THE GREAT GEOGRAPHER IN THE 12TH-CENTURY NORMAN COURT OF ROGER II, WROTE THAT ITS SOURCE WAS 10 SWAMPY SPRINGS IN THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON, 16 DEGREES SOUTH OF THE EQUATOR, AND THAT FROM THERE IT FLOWED INTO THE SEA OF DARKNESS.

All were writing of the vast and unknown Niger River, on whose banks some of Africa's greatest empires rose and fell.

Other writers, thinking it was a tributary of the Nile, named it "Nil al-Sudan" ("the Nile of the Blacks"); still others claimed it was the headwaters of either the Senegal River or the Gambia —or both. Mungo Park, the Scotsman who paid with his life to be the first westerner to reach it, compared it to the Thames at Westminster. When Park explained to the King of Segou that he had come from a great distance through many dangers to behold it, "He naturally inquired," Park wrote, "if there were no rivers in my own country and whether one river was not like another."

To Europeans, in fact, the Niger River was not like any other. Its mystery was part of the broad fascination with Africa, particularly in late–18th-century London, where it was the subject of betting pools and exploration societies. Henry Barth, one European explorer, called it "the great river of Western Africa, whose name under whatever form it may appear—whether Dhiuliba, Mayo, Eghirreu, Isam, Kwara, or Baki-n-ruwa—means nothing but 'The River.'"

On July 20, 1796, when Park became the first European (after Leo Africanus) to lay eyes on it, he wrote, "I saw with infinite pleasure the great object of my mission, glittering in the morning sun, flowing slowly to the east…the long sought for, majestic Niger."

With the question of the direction of its flow answered, Park died 10 years later seeking the river's mouth. "Even those merchants arriving from the eastward are ignorant of the termination of the river," he wrote in exasperation. "For such of them that can speak Arabic describe the amazing length of its course in very general terms, saying only that they believe it runs to the world's end."

Today, questions posed by people who make their living on the Niger are far more the stuff of daily life. Have the sandbars shifted between Konna and Lake Debos? How many days' travel from Segou to Koulikoro? What are they paying for smoked carp in Mopti? For Taodenni salt in Kabara? For Hausa cloth in Bamako?

The Niger rises 250 kilometers (155 mi) inland from the Atlantic on Guinea's Fouta Djallon plateau. From there it begins its journey of 10 times that distance by flowing east. Along its course, the ecological zones it passes through shift from rain forest to high bush to savanna to desert and then back again. In Mali, it flows northeast, then bends southeast at the "Boucle de Niger," then almost due south, on its way passing through an inland delta larger than several of the nearby countries and giving its name to two others —Niger and Nigeria—before disemboguing in the Gulf of Guinea near Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Its rainy season high-water mark can be 11 meters (35') above its low, a range rivaled only by the Amazon. In flood, the Niger spreads laterally for more than 160 kilometers (100 mi) in Mali's Lake Debos before squeezing through a rock-hewn defile at Tosaye that is barely 100 meters (325') wide. It is home to hippos, but has been known to run dry. Travel writer Ted Morgan saw it as "a moving path into the heart of the continent, a long, liquid magic wand."

Morgan cites a theory that the Niger was once two rivers. The upper reach took a straight course northeast past Timbuktu and evaporated in northern Mali's Djouf depression. The lower course originated in the mountainous Adrar of the Iforhas and ran south to its present mouth in Nigeria. At some point lost in time, an earthquake tied the two streams together.

The present-day Niger has been fully mapped for only 150 years. Samuel Sidibe, director of the National Museum of Mali, says today's knowledge is "built on the errors of the ancients. All this talk from Pliny about the source of the Niger and its crawling and squeaking and snake-eating men only confused those who came later," he says.

The Middle Niger, or the Niger Bend, extends from the inland delta to the Mali–Niger border. This is the Niger's historical heartland. It is to West Africa, says historian John Hunwick of Northwestern University, what the Nile Valley is to Egypt: "an ecological treasure and a civilizational magnet."

Anchoring the Middle Niger at either end are the towns of Mopti and Gao. Mopti is the inland delta's chief port of trade, situated on an island in the floodplain at the confluence of the Niger and its tributary, the Bani. It is connected to the Niger's south bank by a French-built causeway. The town of

Top: **His passengers carefully balancing, a boatman poles his pirogue up to the Niger's embankment at Mopti. Behind the pirogue, a long-distance cargo and passenger *pinasse* is docked.** Opposite: **Salt merchants Hasny Ould Fally and Sidi Ahmad Fally came downriver to sell salt mined from the Taodenni salt flats north of their home in Timbuktu.** Left: **A boatwright on Mopti's waterfront shapes the *casedral* woodwork of a new *pinasse* with an adze.**

Gao could hardly be more different. Once the seat of the Songhai Dynasty, the greatest of the native West African empires, Gao today is a nearly forgotten footnote, a quiet backwater steeped in pre-colonial grandeur. Between them, the towns sew together the Bend and embody the river's shifting fortunes.

Baba Tomata is a 30-year-old fisherman turned boatman, captain of a 20-ton vessel known here as a *pinasse* that he runs out of the teeming Mopti waterfront. He plies unfixed routes on the inland delta past his home in Jafrabe village. His pinasse—the narrow-beamed, high-sterned, redwood-hulled workhorse of the river's cargo trade—flies his personal ensign, which is a variation of the Malian national flag's colors of green, yellow and red. A checkered logo identifies its maker as Ali Ire, a noted pinasse builder. "It's only a year old and has a rebuilt Mercedes diesel. It cost $3000, and I treat it with care." Every three trips up and back from the delta, Tomata changes his engine oil and rubs the old oil into the hull as a preservative.

The eve of Wednesday's grand market is a whirlpool of waterborne traffic moving to and fro. Nosing in for landings at the cobblestone embankment, built by the French in the 1930's, come chugging pinasses laden to the gunwales with rice and fish and millet. Pushing off on quick glides across the river's inner harbor go two- and three-passenger pirogues, paddled or poled Venetian-style.

A flat-bottomed steamer operated by the Compagnie Malienne de Navigation tilts unsteadily on the mudflats, awaiting the summer's rains to clear the Niger's unpredictable shallows and make the 10-day run from Mopti to Gao navigable again. As if to mock its stranded hulk, a spinnaker-rigged pirogue fishtails lightly downwind against the current.

Up the embankment, market stalls spill out and topple over with sacks of cured fish and piles of firewood, carved calabash ladles and aluminum cooking pots, bags of dried okra and pearl millet, strings of goat cheese and balls of creamy shea butter. Mopti's market language is Bambara, the *lingua franca* for most Malians, but snatches of Bozo, Songhai, Dogon and French are interjected as necessary—except under an awning on the salt-sellers' quay, where the language is Arabic.

Thirty-year-old Hasny Ould Fally and his younger brother Sidi Ahmad are Malian Arab salt merchants from Timbuktu. They came to market a few days earlier with a pinasse loaded with tablets of salt they had bought in Kabara, Timbuktu's port, from a camel caravan arriving from the Taodenni salt flats some 640 kilometers (400 mi) to the north.

"Sometimes I organize a camel caravan, but I prefer not to," explains Hasny. "Two men and 40 camels, each carrying four 50-kilogram (110-lb) tablets for 15 days, just to triple my money—it's not worth it. I can double my money by buying in Kabara and hiring a pinasse. Believe me, three days on the water is a lot easier than two weeks in the desert."

The salt sellers operate a small factory under their tent, sawing each of the rectangular tablets into 15 retail-sized "plaquettes." Loose salt from the sawing sells for upward of 25 US cents per kilo, depending on the quality. (There are four categories, from dirtied crystals to pure white.)

When Hasny is lucky, his entire stock is bought by an importer from Burkina Faso. "Burkinans like Taodenni salt, but don't ask me why," he says.

In Mopti's boatyards, men are busy seven days a week. Pirogue-builder Kono Karabenta operates right in the middle of the embankment. His distinctive black and white logo, looking something like a Parcheesi board, adorns the hulls of many small craft. An outdoor sign is large enough to be read from the middle of the channel. "Kono Karabenta. Seller. Pirogues and Wood."

"I employ 40 men here, from nail makers to hull stringers," says the youthful Kono. "I give easy credit to my customers and good work to my boatwrights." An entire production line sits under one roof. Blacksmiths, attended by boys turning bicycle-wheel–powered bellows, make square-headed nails from flattened tin cans. Sawyers rough out long and narrow planks of *casedral*, a tropical hardwood. Framers set up ribs and gunwales.

A 14-meter (45'), seven-thwart pirogue is just now in its last stage. The hull is being charred inside and out and then adze-finished to thin and even its symmetry. Nails are set in triple rows. Knots in the wood are knocked out and their holes filled with custom-shaped casedral plugs that are then sealed with baobab leaves and tar.

Only the final step is lacking to sew up the job, so to speak: Most pirogue hulls are built in separate fore and aft halves. These are then stitched together with water-resistant cordage made from baobab bark. This allows an owner to lengthen the boat at a later time by opening the suture and adding a midsection, much like an extra leaf in a dining-room table. It's a technique that dates from when pirogues were made from dug-out tree trunks, for Mungo Park observed the boats "formed of the trunks of two large trees, rendered concave and joined together not side by side but endways."

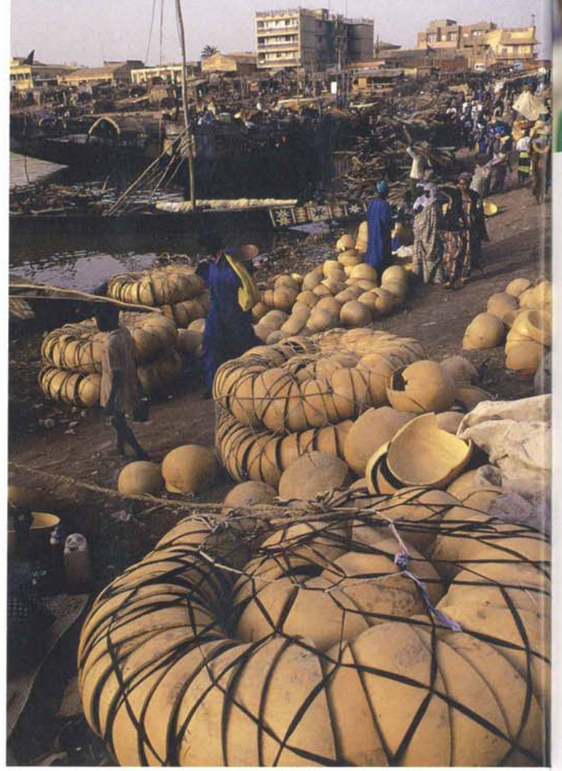
In a mounting flurry as dusk nears, arriving pinasses push their way into the crowded dock space. Most come in overloaded, drawing too much water to make a clean landing; they begin unloading—sack by sack, one stevedore at a time wading back and forth—a few meters offshore. As the boat rides higher, it slips in, until when it's finally close enough, three gangplanks are laid from gunwale to dry land, and the passengers stream off.

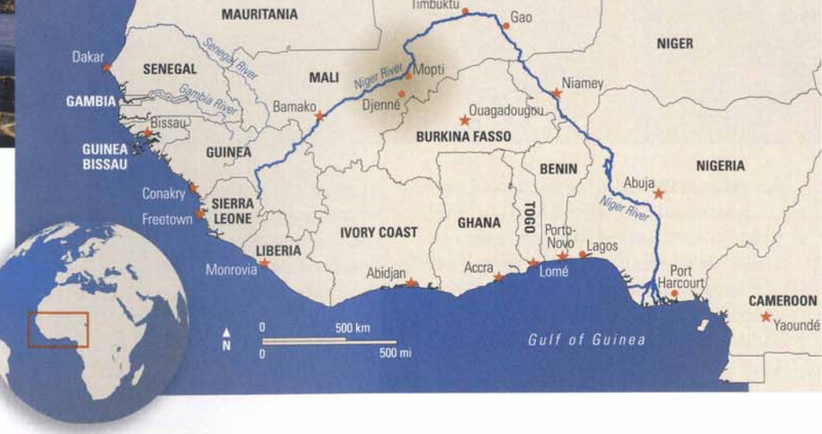
The boatmen aren't the only ones watching the water. Fisheries expert Mamadou Adama Diarra is worried. "There is too little water in the Niger, even though last rainy season was generous. The fish are suffering." Mopti's annual fish catch—mostly catfish, Nile perch and carp among 150 other varieties—has dropped from 100,000 to 80,000 tons, due, he says, to insufficient flooding during the spawn. Even in good years, Diarra explains, 65 percent of the flow at Mopti evaporates in the inland delta beyond. In the worst of the 1980's drought years, the river reportedly stopped flowing altogether downstream of Niamey, the capital of Niger.

Not just fish suffer when the river falls. Hippos have long made the Niger River their home. Ibn Battuta remarked that "they have manes and tails like horses and feet like elephants.... They swim in the river and lift their heads and blow." But lately their numbers in the inland delta have been dropping, and their only stable population is downstream of Gao.

Beginning in the ninth century, when Arab merchants first established an entrepôt at Essouk, a nearby oasis in the Tilmesi Valley, Gao has been a crossroads for African travelers heading east to Makkah, north to the Mediterranean and south to Hausaland. Traders came to buy and sell Ghanaian gold, Barbary horses, Damascene silks and Saharan salt.

According to the Andalusian geographer Abu 'Ubayd al-Bakri, Gao was founded in the late seventh century by Sorko fishermen and was originally named KawKaw or GaoGao,





Top: **Bundles of bowls cut from near-spherical calabash gourds await buyers at Mopti's waterfront market.** Right: **Fishermen near Gao are most likely to catch carp, catfish and Nile perch among the approximately 150 species of fish known to inhabit the Niger.**

Long a desert crossroads, Gao is visited today by Tuareg traders who come to its camel market. They reach it by ferry from the Niger's south bank.

an onomatopoetic tribute to the beat of their tom-toms. By 872, al-Ya'qubi wrote that Gao was "the greatest kingdom of the Blacks."

Gao's first Songhai dynasty was the Za, or Zuwa, who claimed a legendary tie to Yemen. King Kusoy, the 14th of the Za line's 32 rulers, converted to Islam in 1009. Tombstones of Moroccan marble, inscribed in a fine Andalusian hand, were discovered in the town in 1939. One inscription from the year 1100 reads, "Here is the tomb of Abu Abdullah Muhammad, the king who defended God's religion and who rests in God." But few of these tombstones remain, most having been carried off to French museums and private collections.

Ibn Battuta, nearing the end of his travels, came to Gao in 1352. His description of the market—perhaps not surprisingly for a man who had seen most of the world's treasures—concentrates less on luxuries than on edibles. "It is one of the finest and biggest cities of the Blacks, and best supplied with provisions...: plentiful rice, curds, chickens and fish, and melon which is incomparable."

The market today is far less plentiful, isolated from the river, and thus from easy resupply, in these times of chronic low water. The vendors tending near-empty stalls outnumber the few buyers, who come mostly to browse. The liveliest shop belongs to an incense dealer, whose burning sample drifts in lazy curls out the door and down the street.

In 1464, Gao was wrested from the Malian Empire back to local control by Sonni Ali, founder of the second Songhai Dynasty, which brought down the Malians and, in daring naval campaigns, expanded Songhai rule westward beyond Timbuktu and Djenné. That Songhai power was based as much on its navy as its cavalry is evident from the language's specialized military terms for "harbormaster," "boat-master" and "war canoe"—*goima-koi, hi-koi* and *kunta*.

Sonni Ali drowned in 1492—an unsurprising fate for a man of the river except that, according to the Songhai chronicle *Tarikh al-Sudan*, this occurred in the Gourma, a bone-dry desert region south of the Niger Bend. In any event, he was succeeded by Muhammad Askia, founder of the Songhai Empire's last dynasty and known in history as Askia the Great.

The Songhais relied on naval power to extend their reach as never before. One chronicle relates that at Gao alone there were ready for muster 400 war barges, 1000 fishing boats and 600 merchant canoes. Using this river transport to rapidly move its soldiers, the Songhais reached north to the Taghaza salt pans near Morocco, east to the Bilma Oasis near Chad and west to the mouth of the Gambia River.

Leo Africanus, whose visit to Gao took place in 1510, witnessed the Askia court in action. "Between the first gate of the palace and the inner part there is a place walled round where the king decides all his subjects' disputes," he wrote, "and although he is most diligent in this and performs all necessary things, still he has around him many counselors and other officers, secretaries, treasurers, factors, and auditors."

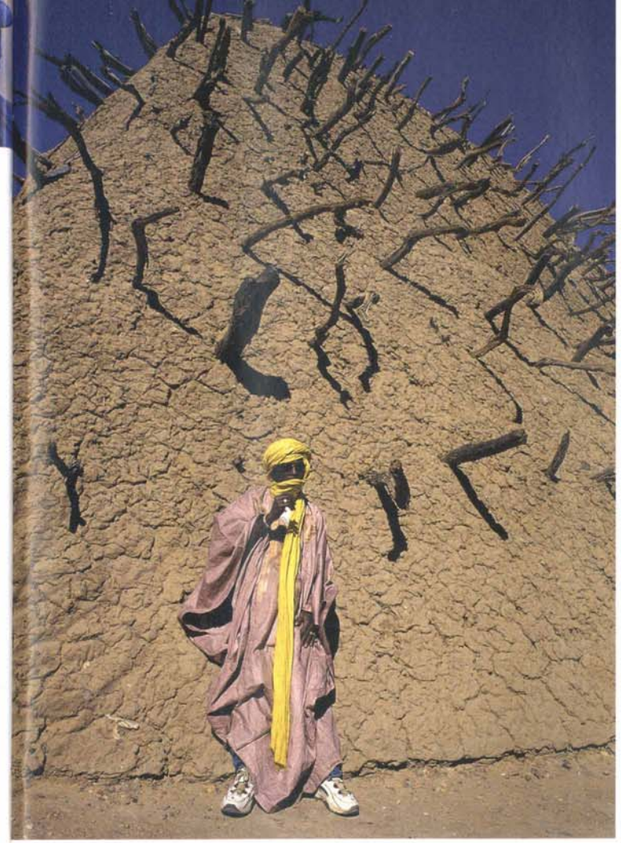
Today the emperor's palace has disappeared. Gao's sole surviving monument is the mosque and tomb of Askia the Great. It's a squat earthen ziggurat pierced like a pincushion by wooden spars that serve as scaffolding for its annual replastering. The tomb's outer staircase leads to a vantage point from which to view the river's broad sweep past the city. On the opposite bank, near a grassy swamp, rises an anomalous rose-colored dune, atop which he is said to have died in 1528 on returning from a campaign.

The prayer area adjacent to the tomb is a low-ceilinged labyrinth of 150 thick clay pillars, and the *mihrab* (prayer niche) is visible only to those standing directly before it. Outside, a freshly painted sign lists the names of all the mosque's imams, ending with the one currently serving, Moussa Aliou.

Henry Barth's description of the mosque, when he visited it in 1854, is still true today. "Its proportions are extremely heavy," he wrote, "rising in seven terraces which gradually decrease in diameter so that while the lowest measures fifty feet on each side, the highest does not exceed fifteen."

The Songhai Empire fell in 1590 at the hands of the Moroccan Sa'dian ruler Ahmad al Mansur, whose Spanish general Jawdar led a 4000-man, musket-equipped army. Having reached Timbuktu and found no river boats, the soldiers ripped doors off their frames in a hasty effort to patch together war vessels.

The *Tarikh al-Sudan* describes the Songhai evacuation of Gao thus: "There was loud weeping and lamentation as people began with much difficulty to cross the river in tightly packed boats. Many people drowned and God alone knows how much property was lost." Their power broken forever, the Songhai fled in disarray into Nigeria. From this downriver exile the Songhai kings did not reemerge until 1999. Then, as part of Mali's political decentralization policy, an honorary ruler was named in Gao to preside over tribal matters. As Mali's former envoy to the Soviet Union, he is no stranger to the rise and fall of empires.



Left: **The historic center of Gao is the 16th-century mosque of Askia the Great, founder of the Songhai Empire's last dynasty. Built of mud brick, it is pierced by wooden spars that serve as scaffolding for the mosque's annual replastering.** Below: **Passengers await the ferry across the Niger at Gao.** Opposite, below: **Today, most of the trade that made Gao a regional economic and political center lies several centuries in the past.**

Following the Moroccan conquest, Gao maintained its commercial stature even if its political star was in eclipse. Its reputation reached Mungo Park far upstream at Segou, even if he did mistake its name for a local term for the Niger's left bank. "The city of Houssa is another great mart for Moorish commerce," he wrote in his *Travels*. "I conversed with many merchants who had visited the city and they all agreed it is larger and more populous than Timbuctoo."

On Park's second voyage in 1805, he passed Gao without stopping, but he left a lasting impression with the locals: When Barth arrived 50 years later, he met a man who remembered Park. "I had the pleasure of meeting an old man," wrote Barth, "who gave me an accurate description of this tall commanding figure and his large boat. He related the manner in which the Tuareg of the tribe IdeMusa attacked that mysterious stranger."

Compare this with the account of Amadi Fatoumi, a guide who accompanied Park till just before he died, and who was later interviewed by a search committee sent by Park's London backers. "Seeing so many men killed and our superiority over them, I took hold of Mungo's hand, saying 'Let us cease firing, for we have killed too many already.'"

Park's death on the river, at central Nigeria's Bussa Falls, remains a mystery. Was he killed by local warriors unhappy at his refusal to pay customary tribute? Or did he drown trying to pass through the cataract in dangerously low water? All the search party turned up was his water-stained book of survey logarithms, now in the collection of the Royal Geographical Society.

For the next 25 years, English explorers continued to seek the Niger's mouth. Their London paymasters had told them it could be anywhere, from the Congo to Lake Chad to the Nile. Finally, on November 18, 1830, having traveled downriver from Bussa, Richard Lander emerged from the mangrove swamps into the surf of the Bight of Benin and put the Niger's course on the map from source to mouth.

Mopti harbormaster Mamadou Doukouré waves off all this downstream geography. Malarial swamps and rocky cataracts are unknown in his town. In his mind, the explorers should have been happy with the Middle Niger, "the crossroads of Mali, a land of fish, livestock and grain."

Mamadou peers out from his waterfront office at the Opération de Pêche. Jaunty pirogues and heavy pinasses pass right and left. Boys knee-deep in the river make a game of scrubbing unruly goats with loofahs. Grunting stevedores heft baskets of salted fingerlings and sacks of rice. Itinerant sellers of sunglasses, sunhats and cassettes work the crowd.

Tomorrow is market day. And the Niger flows ever on to the sun.

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Ibn Battuta: J/A 00
Songhai and trans-Saharan trade: J/F 03

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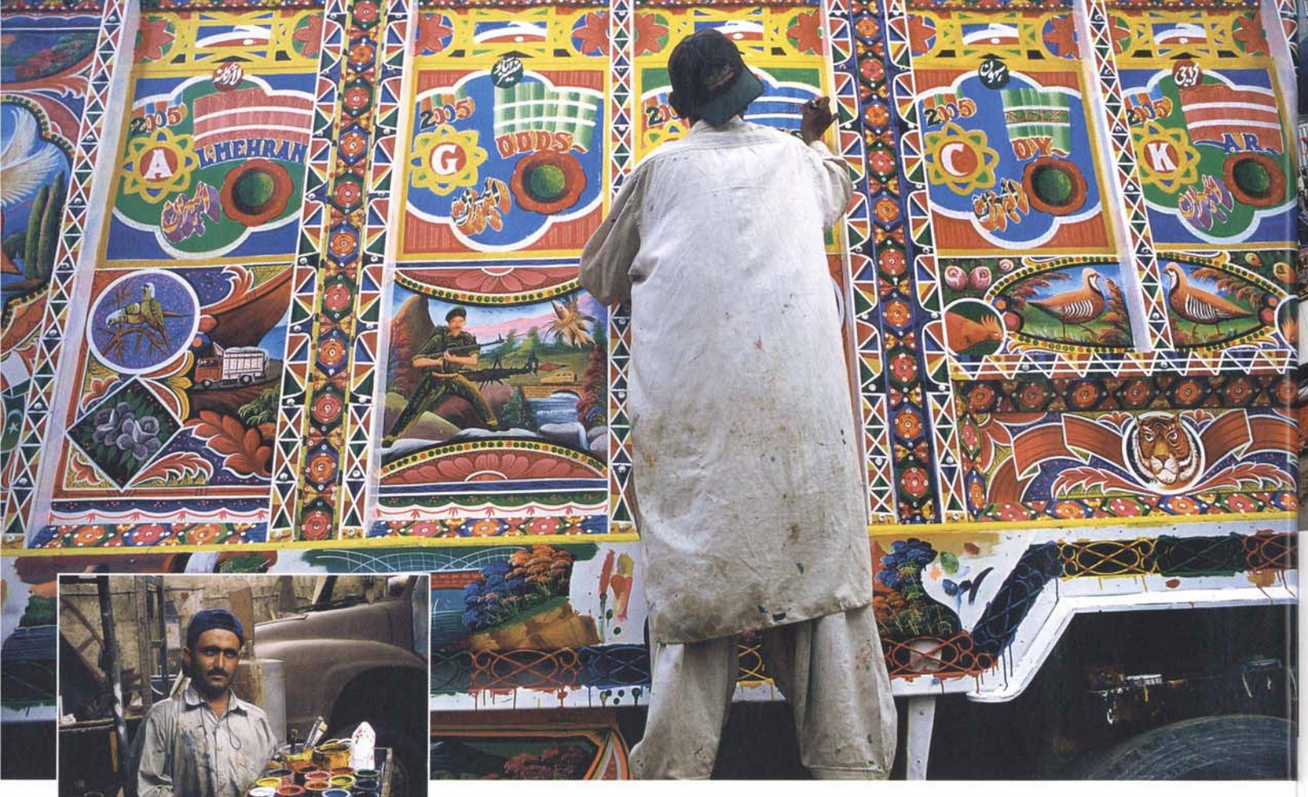
Written by Richard Covington
Photographed by Shahidul Alam / DRIK

Under the shade of a colossal banyan tree, Karachi truck painter Haider Ali, 22, is putting the finishing touches on his latest creation: a side-panel mural of Hercules subduing a lion, rendered in iridescent, undiluted hues of purple, yellow, red and green. His 10-year-old nephew, Fareed Khalid, applies a preparatory undercoat of white paint to the *taj*, the wooden prow that juts above the truck's cab like a crown. Like Ali's father, who first put a brush into his son's hand at age eight, Haider is carrying on a master-apprentice tradition with Fareed, who spends his afternoons in the painter's workshop after mornings in school.

Lying on his back beneath the truck—a 10-ton, six-wheel Japanese Hino—a body repairman strings a chain of hammered steel peepul leaves to dangle around the chassis. When the truck is under way, these metal leaves will clang together, creating a cacophony that is music to a driver's ears. Above the chain man, a carpenter is chiseling out the wooden panels



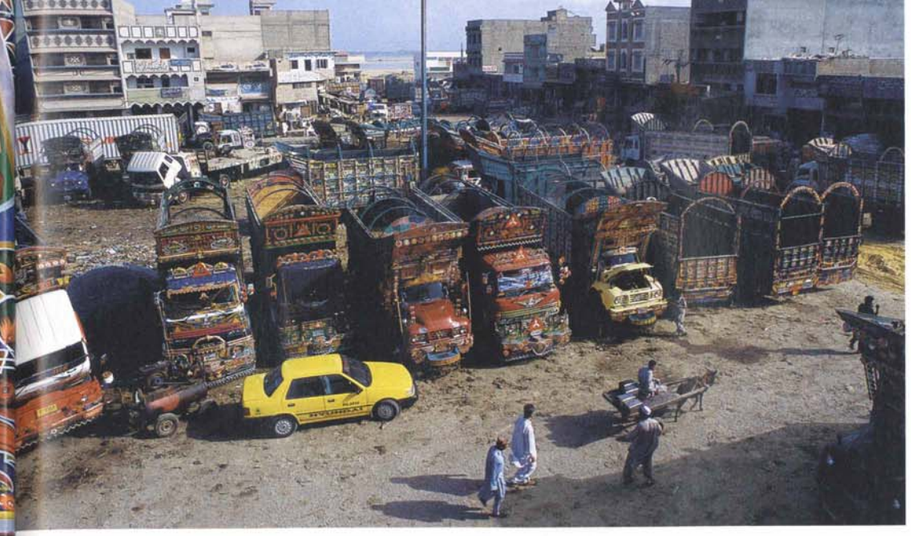
Above and left: **In Karachi's Garden Road truck-customizing yards, an artist's motifs often range from myth to movies and from pastoral landscape to religion on a single truck. The paints are enamels, often thinned with gasoline to speed drying. Some of the brightest colors are created by blending in fluorescent powders, which also make them reflective at night.** Previous spread: **A few yards of chain, a handful of reflectors and a lick or two of paint are all it takes to turn a factory front bumper into a personal statement.**

adorning the doors. Nearby, the truck's owner sits observing the work in progress as an outdoor barber lathers the man's face for a shave. A crooning pop tune crackles out of a tinny radio as a pair of pariah kites flutters noisily home to roost. Welcome to Garden Road, the traffic-choked heart of Karachi's booming truck-painting industry.

All across Pakistan, this rolling folk art has turned village lanes, city streets and long-distance highways into a national gallery without walls, a free-form, kaleidoscopic exhibition in perpetual motion. The vast majority of Pakistan's trucks, buses and motorized rickshaws are riots of color, bedizened top to bottom with eye-popping landscapes, portraits, calligraphic poetry, religious verses and wisecracking expressions of star-spangled banter. Only the biggest, blandest container freight trucks, the 18-wheeler rigs, escape decoration, looking naked by comparison.

The dazzling, eclectic choice of images is a cultural grab bag, mingling with equal gusto East and West, secular and sacred. Pakistani film stars like Musarrat Shaheen and athletes like cricket legend Imram Khan vie for space with figures from Greek myth and European icons from the Mona Lisa to Princess Diana. Decked out with romanticized visions of Pakistani military heroes like Sarwar Shaheed, F-16 fighter jets and Ghauri missiles, some trucks become roving patriotic billboards. Others give prominence to religious shrines like the Ka'bah in Makkah and the Faysal Mosque in Islamabad, or they display verses writ large on an image of an open Qu'ran. The Prophet's winged horse, Buraq, is a favorite emblem, handily symbolizing trustworthy devotion and speed. Dreamlike scenes of wooded lakes and snow-capped mountains, alpine hunting lodges and tigers chasing deer are framed by flowers and diamond-shaped reflective strips in bright red, orange and green.

In the cabs, faux marble Formica-paneled doors open onto gaudy treasure caves filled with artificial roses and marigolds spun of silk and satin. Tiny faceted mirrors and rick-rack ring the windshields, while swaying pompoms and wall clocks festooned with flashing lights hang from the ceilings. Giant



The yard at Mouripur, near the city's port, is one of several customizing hotbeds in Karachi, Pakistan's truck-art capital.

heavy-lidded eyes painted on side panels and pastel-colored scarves fluttering from cab windows are intended to ward off the evil eye.

Americans got a tiny taste of Pakistani truck painting in the summer of 2002 at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, when Ali and bodywork expert Jamil ud-Din brought a truck from Karachi to Washington, D.C. They decorated it right there on the National Mall, as outdoor artists-in-residence. As a talent scout for the festival's Silk Road theme, truck aficionado Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, an anthropology professor at the University of Michigan and a top US scholar of Pakistani culture, chose the pair for their versatility in incorporating the country's disparate styles of truck art. Their finished masterpiece, a 1976 Bedford, is now part of the Smithsonian's permanent collection.

As co-director of the Harappa Archaeological Research Project, based at the ancient Indus Valley site that flourished nearly 5000 years ago, Kenoyer takes a very long view of truck painting. The roots of the tradition date back more than nine millennia, he says, to well before the mud-brick city of Harappa was constructed. Today's truckers are the successors of Neolithic traders who moved goods along roughly similar routes from the coast of Pakistan inland to Central Asia, using what artifacts show were heavily decorated camel caravans.

Today, Kenoyer says, "the paint jobs identify competing ethnic groups, just as the different designs did on ancient pottery and later on fabrics and carpets. You can look at a truck and tell exactly what region it comes from and what ethnic group the driver belongs to."

Truck and bus painting and bodywork are also big business. In Karachi alone, a port city of 14 million on the Arabian Sea, more than 50,000 people toil in small, family-run workshops comprised of apprentices and highly trained artisans, each with his well-defined specialty. Dominated by the painstaking ethic of proudly independent craftsmen, this

The roots of the tradition date back more than nine millennia, says Kenoyer. "You can look at a truck and tell exactly what region it comes from and what ethnic group the driver belongs to."

time-consuming manufacture is the opposite of mass production: Every hand-painted truck, bus and rickshaw, despite sharing numerous signs and symbols, virtually screams its uniqueness.

A stroll through the warren of streets and alleys of the dusty Garden Road district, one of five Karachi neighborhoods devoted to vehicle decoration, offers an education in the truck painter's art. In one open-air stall close to Ali's workshop, a dapper metalworker, improbably clothed in an immaculate white knee-length tunic with matching prayer cap, hammers away at prefabricated nickel-steel mud-guard flaps, creating repoussé tigers and chevron designs that an assistant subsequently tints bright red, yellow and green. In a hole-in-the-wall shop nearby, a man surrounded by stacked cans of pigments and powders mixes electric orange fluorescent compound into resin varnish to produce vividly glossy lacquers that glow in the dark. Down one lane, a 14-year-old boy brushes an iron radiator grille with fuming acid to remove rust.

Rows of shops are filled with all manner of outlandish ornaments and tantalizing accessories. Suspended beneath an array of beadwork eagles in one tiny emporium, shimmering gilt peacocks and fish twirl gently in the breeze. Another store is crammed with plastic flowers and miniature chandeliers to furnish cab interiors. Hubcaps with spinning metal cones spill out of another. Nearby, the specialty is shiny model planes that flash red and green lights.

Truck owners spend small fortunes on all this. A decent paint job costs $500 to $1000—perhaps more, depending on how splendiferous it is. Body decoration and repair can easily run an extra $2000. All told, a basic painting and body job adds up to a minimum of $2500, equivalent to two years of the average truck driver's salary. As a rule, however, owners or owner-drivers pay for the decoration, although hired drivers employed by a company are often free to choose whatever illustrations they like.

This labor-intensive operation usually takes six to 10 weeks. During this period, many drivers hover around the workshops like part of the extended family, suggesting possible subjects and alterations, earning nothing during the time their truck is being spiffed up. Unbelievably, the majority of truckers splurge on a full makeover of their vehicles every three or four years.

In one of the countless shops that sell ways to make your truck your own, a boy tends an inventory of hubcaps, reflective panels and dangling ornaments.

Ali, who receives most of his commissions via word of mouth, always signs his work, and this discreet advertising regularly attracts new clients.

"Owners get what they pay for," the artist explains. "The fancier the painting, the more it costs." Recently, one particularly demanding trucking magnate lavished more than $13,000 on outfitting his rig. The mammoth undertaking took more than four months.

"It's worth the expense," volunteers truck owner Doda Khan after his shave at Ali's workshop. "More people will hire me if I have a beautifully painted truck." Khan is a native of Quetta who makes his living transporting wood and glass in Sindh, the province of which Karachi is the capital.

"Truckers don't even spend so much money on their own houses," marvels Durriya Kazi, head of the department of visual studies at the University of Karachi and a walking encyclopedia of Pakistani truck-decoration lore. "I remember one driver who told me that he put his life and livelihood into the truck. If he didn't honor it with the proper paint job, he would feel he was being ungrateful."

Kazi is convinced that truck art tells a broader truth about Pakistani society's pervasive desire to heighten reality. "We have an irresistible tendency to decorate everything—from lowly tape cassette players to brides to trucks—because we're such dreamers and escapists," she declares. "It's all part of our need to intensify experience, perhaps to make us forget our drab lives."

With her angular good looks, long, striking gray hair and upper-class accent, Kazi seems an unlikely champion of truck-painting esthetics. Her passion for this underappreciated art was piqued a decade ago when she dreamed up the idea of having her university students decorate a truck, fill it with paintings and drive the mobile magnum opus around Pakistan.

"The idea was to see how ordinary people would react," Kazi explains in her home in north Karachi, where photographs of painted trucks share space with war-themed Afghan kilims depicting tanks and helicopters, kitschy cinema posters featuring turbaned Lotharios, old-fashioned metal talcum-powder boxes with demurely smiling housewives, intricately embroidered Sindhi wall hangings and a whimsical Ali Baba hoard of eclectic folk art exotica. "Art has become such an elite activity and so marginalized in this country that I wanted to try to take it out of the galleries and literally get it on the road," she adds.

Reaction to this nomadic student exhibition was largely favorable, even if the professional truck artists turned out to be the toughest critics. "The Garden Road painters said the pictures were interesting, 'but you've painted them very badly,'" the professor recalls. "The students were flabbergasted. They thought they possessed superior talents just because they were in art school, but they soon realized how sophisticated the technique really is. The paint has to be applied in delicate layers and glazes. You can't just brush it on the way you do with oil paint."

Bangladesh and Thailand have their painted rickshas. Japan has its semitrailers strung with flashing, custom-fitted lights. The Philippines are reputed for their garish "Jeepnies," collective taxis whose bodies are built atop vintage US Jeep chassis. In Haiti, "tap-taps," jaunty buses dressed up in comic-book colors, ply the island's roads. But nowhere do vehicle artists get quite as carried away as in Pakistan. Kazi, who holds a master's degree in English literature, trained as a sculptor in the UK and now creates interactive exhibitions with local folk artists, set out to discover why. After 10 years of scouring workshops, haunting ornament shops and chatting up truck dealers, transport company proprietors, drivers, artists, craftsmen and suppliers, the art professor has pieced together an informal history of truck painting that she someday hopes to turn into a book.

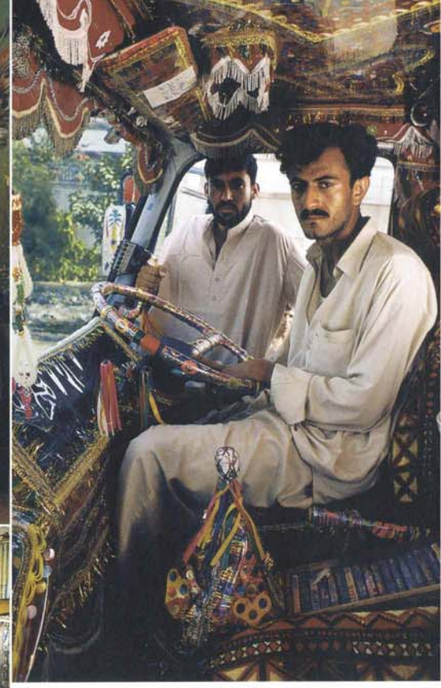
In the late 1940's, she says, when trucks first began to deliver long-haul goods, each company developed its own painted logo so that illiterate people, then and now the majority of Pakistanis, could recognize who owned the trucks. Displays of solidarity with the infant nation, partitioned from India in 1947, were always a sure bet. One enterprisingly loyal transporter featured a crescent and star modeled on the Pakistani flag; another had a sign tracing the geographical outlines of the new country. Gradually, these logos became more fanciful.

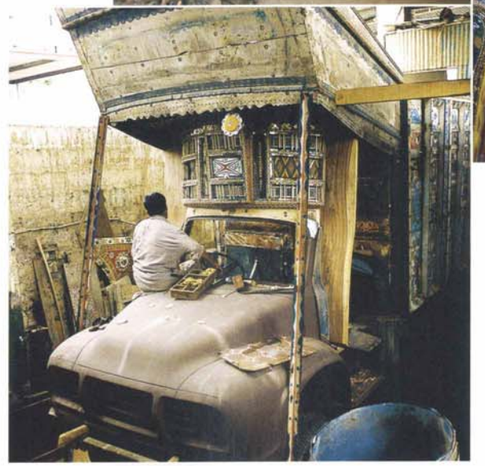
"They were badges of competition," Kazi explains. "And the more flamboyant the design, the better business became."

Although truck decoration initially mimicked motifs that had been found on camel caravans and oxcarts for thousands of years, the practice took a quantum leap in the 1950's when Hajji Hussain hit town. Renowned for the stylized murals and frescoes he painted in palaces in his native Gujarat province in India, on the border with Pakistan, Hussain settled in Karachi when he married a local woman.

With palaces in short supply in working-class Karachi, Hussain cleverly shifted gears, adjusting his flair for subtle line and shading to the task of embellishing horse carriages and trucks with discreet floral borders. The decoration did not remain discreet for long, as its appeal quickly led to its enveloping the entire exterior surfaces of the vehicles.

In the 1960's, the country's economy boomed and, along with it, the transportation industry. The Bedford, a British-built truck with a rounded cab and 2.3-meter-high (7') paneled sides that give it a precarious, top-heavy look, became the prestige truck of choice. Not by chance, Kazi soon discovered: The son of Muhammad Ayub Khan, Pakistan's president from 1962 to 1969, set himself up as the country's sole Bedford dealer and made sure that Bedfords were the only trucks imported into the country. (Locally manufactured trucks were no competition.) "The style of painting and decoration evolved to fit the Bedford like a glove," Kazi says.





Top, right: **A driver sits with a friend in a fully furbished cab. A cubby at his side holds eight-track tapes.** Top: **A body fitting workshop on Garden Road.** Above: **Usually, only the truck's cab and chassis are imported; the superstructure is designed to increase cargo space and take decoration. The work of fitters, electricians, carpenters, upholsterers and signwriters provides the foundation for the carvers, painters, chasers and assemblers of bric-a-brac to work on.**

"Truck art tells a broader truth about Pakistan, Kazi believes. "It's all part of our need to intensify experience."

Above: **Five masterpiece Bedfords, all products of the artisans of Karachi's Sohrab Ghot customizing yard. Painting and metalwork combine to provide complex, dazzling, dizzying effects.** Below: **Newer Japanese imports seem to take to decoration equally well.**

Mockingly dubbed "rockets," the lumbering Bedfords made up for their snail's-pace acceleration with virtual indestructibility, indefatigably chugging along a quarter of a century and more after they first rolled off the assembly lines. "The owners don't mind changing engines. It's the chassis that is so precious," Kazi explains. "Original Bedford springs, for instance, are like gold for truckers."

When Bedford's parent company, Vauxhall, stopped production of the much-loved Bedfords some 13 years ago, Japanese imports like Hino, Nissan and Isuzu supplanted them. "Even though the Japanese trucks have better fuel economy, superior brakes, longer wheelbases and bigger windshields, there's still nostalgia for the Bedfords," reckons Kazi. "It's only recently that the decorative panels, carving and accessories have somewhat grudgingly been adapted to fit these newer trucks."

During the 1960's and 1970's, the increasing sophistication of truck decoration began to reflect the growing wealth of the drivers and the rise of a new urban class. "People who had come from poor village backgrounds suddenly had money," Kazi observes. "They were richer than their parents and ancestors and wanted to show off their new-found confidence, position and authority." For rival truck and bus owners jostling for business, dueling paint jobs became essential for gaining a competitive edge.

Boldly speculating where only academics—and certainly not the artists themselves—dare to tread, the professor draws a parallel between contemporary truck design and the exquisitely refined court decoration of 16th- and 17th-century Mughal emperors. In Kazi's view, truck cabs boasting a profusion of dangling mirrors and fringed silk and satin embroidery are direct descendants of the Sheesh Mahal ("mirror palace"), sumptuous halls of mirrors and brocade found in palaces and forts in Lahore, Patiala, Jaipur and Agra.

"The Mughals loved this play of light where one candle could illuminate a vast hall," remarks Kazi. "Why not truck artists and drivers?"

Some of the more popular landscape scenes, those depicting the hunt, lions, grouse, deer, hunting lodges or mountain chalets, are taken straight out of Mughal court painting, she maintains.

Later, when a visitor tries to describe Kazi's theory of the Mughal connection to Haider Ali, the veteran painter flashes a puzzled, indulgent smile. It's clear he's not buying it.

"I paint from photos the drivers bring me, designs they point out on other trucks, anything they want," he says. "And if they don't know what they want, I make up scenes from my imagination."

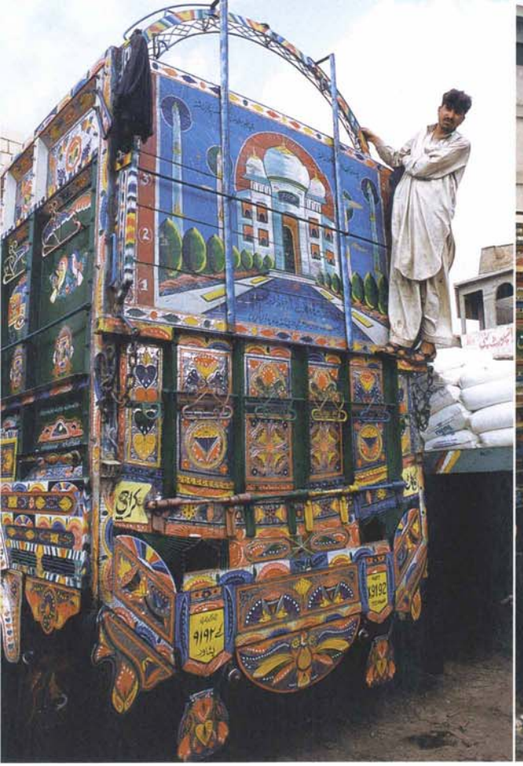
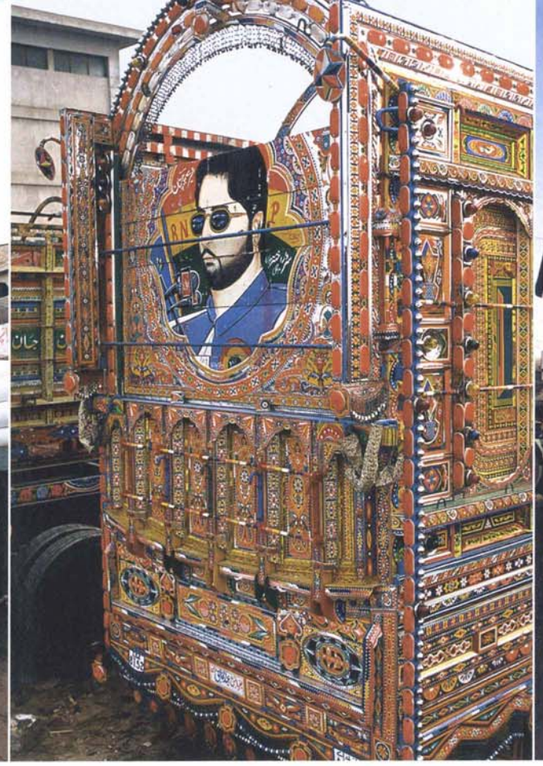
Generally, the painting follows an informal, unwritten grammar. The *taj*, or prow, above the cab is customarily reserved for mosques and other holy monuments. Side panels fizz with waterfalls, lakes, mountains, landscapes, hunting lodges and animals. The rear of the truck is typically emblazoned with a single large portrait encircled by flowers, vines and geometric configurations.

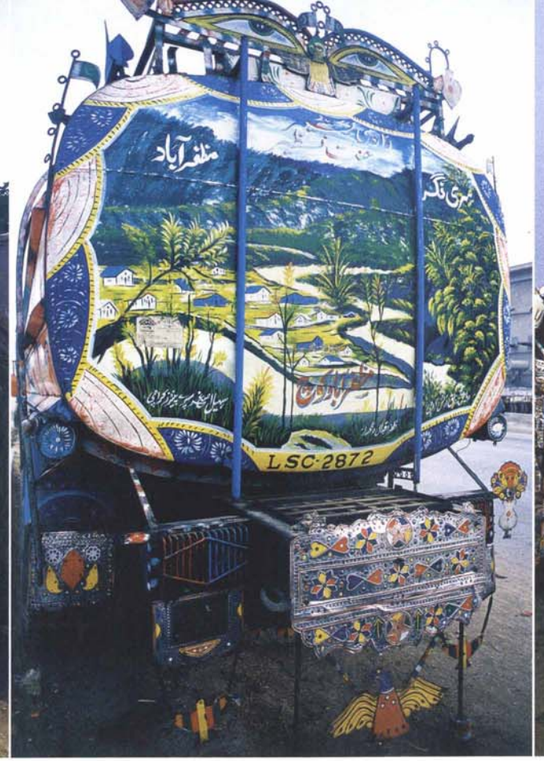
One recent trend speaks volumes about the emerging fortunes of truck owners and drivers. Instead of putting someone famous in the place of honor on back of their trucks, some drivers have commissioned portraits of their sons. "It's part of the country's newfound upward social mobility," says Kazi. "Now, truck drivers feel they don't have to boost their status with celebrities; their own sons are good enough."

Ponderous but virtually indestructible, "rockets"—British-made Bedfords—*are still the ultimate workhorses of the trucking industry* throughout Pakistan.

When a new truck comes in for outfitting, it is totally bare bones, with only a cab and a chassis—albeit invariably reinforced to within an inch of its life. Six-wheel rigs designed to carry five-ton payloads are routinely bolstered to haul 10, 15, even 20 tons. Used trucks are overhauled according to the owners' wishes and pocketbooks, ranging from simple paint jobs all the way to complete makeovers of bodywork and decorative art.

Like a medieval guild, the division of labor in truck and bus workshops is highly demarcated, with individual artisans responsible for each stage of the process. One person is in charge of erecting frames of steel ribs over flatbed floors of hard pine and, for buses, covering the frames with steel and plastic shells. (Ordinarily, cargo in open trucks is wrapped in




The rear panels of Karachi-decorated trucks are usually dominated by a single main image—such as the Taj Mahal and the Prophet's Mosque on these pages—framed by detail work. Heroes and home villages are other favorite images.

tarpaulins strapped down by ropes or simply left uncovered.) Separately, an electrician installs wiring while a metalworker fashions dangling steel balls, hammered-steel mud flaps and shiny leaf chains. The carpenter who carves arabesque inlays on cab doors and taj crowns of walnut or deodar cedar is distinct from the upholstery specialist who stitches beadwork into fancy cab-seat cushions and embroiders cloth flaps on windows with gold and silver thread. While a master artist like Haider Ali paints large portraits and landscapes, he commonly relies on an assistant to fill in backgrounds and borders. In a culture that puts great stock in poetry, there are even a handful of scholars and poets whom drivers commission to write original poetic inscriptions for their trucks or search out a few well-turned phrases by other authors.

"One classic line," says Kazi, is "'If your mother prays for you, it's like a breeze from heaven.'" Other selections, particularly on buses, are racier, like the teasing, convoluted come-on that reads, "I wish I were the book you are reading, so that when you fall asleep and the book falls on your chest, I would be so close to you." In general, she points out, trucks display themes of distance, the journey and spiritual longing, while "90 percent of the messages on buses have to do with love, particularly unrequited love." (Rickshas, with far less space, make do with a cryptic word or two like "I wish" or "broken pearl.")

"Sometimes you have no idea what they mean," laughs Kazi.

Like western pictorial allusions and the imported trucks themselves, many of the materials used in truck decoration also come from outside Pakistan, and they are put to uses the manufacturers never dreamed of. Shipped into the country in 10-centimeter-wide (4") rolls, reflective tape from Germany and Japan is cut, shaped and layered to create fantastical compositions. "Because the roads were not lit, reflectors were essential," Kazi explains. "But truck decorators turned this pragmatic necessity into an excuse to go wild."

Although Karachi is the country's principal center for truck decoration, other regions have evolved their own signature idioms. In Peshawar, trucks sport far more calligraphy than illustration. In Rawalpindi and Islamabad, designers cut out colored plastic sheets and layer them to create unusual patterns and geometric effects over the truck exterior. Artisans in Baluchistan and Peshawar are esteemed for their magnificently detailed woodwork carved on cab doors and interiors. Camel-bone inlay is emblematic of Sindh, while stainless-steel

Other regional idioms include calligraphy in Peshawar, geometric designs in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, woodwork in Baluchistan and camel-bone inlay work in Sindh.

peacock appliqués are popular both in Sindh and the Punjab.

Frequently, truck decoration mirrors the country's demographic shifts. When Kashmiri woodcarvers migrated south to Karachi in the mid-1980's to escape fighting in their homeland, many found work refurbishing trucks. Their spidery filigree tracery soon began to pop up on the doors and taj crowns of local vehicles.

For such a vibrant industry, supercharged with color, the future, unfortunately, looks distinctly gray. Unlike the current generation of painters, body workers and decorators who learned their trades from their fathers, uncles and older brothers, the upcoming generation shows little interest in following in their relatives' footsteps. Nor do their parents necessarily want them to.

Take 40-year-old Abdul Aziz, who started painting at age 15 in his father's workshop. "Business is not good now because there are too many truck artists," sighs Aziz in his blisteringly hot bus-painting atelier in the Landhi district of east Karachi. "My son will have a better future if he finishes school and takes up a more secure profession."

Still, with all the irrepressible energy that goes into truck decoration, it's hard to imagine this quintessentially Pakistani craft dying out any time soon, particularly with painters like Master Shahid Sahab around to renew the tradition.

"Master Sahab paints crazy, wacky things like army officers waterskiing, a Saracen warrior slaying Godzilla, mythic Greek heroes in togas," chuckles Kazi. "Then he'll put plastic lovebirds on the dashboard and a ludicrous-sounding horn that blasts out a wolf whistle. I love this kind of madness."

Somehow, you feel sure that the rest of Pakistan does, too. For optimists like Kazi, who shudder at the unthinkable prospect of the country's roads becoming as drab as any garden-variety interstate or autobahn, this moveable feast of imagery is nowhere near a dead end.

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Decorated rickshas: J/F 94
Art motifs in Pakistan: J/F 97
Faysal Mosque: J/F 92
Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, Harappa: S/O 99

The Model of the Historians

Baghdad in the ninth and 10th centuries was an exciting place. The seat of the caliphate, the great city was the undisputed center of the Muslim world in politics, trade, scholarship and the arts. It was both home and crossroads to people of many nationalities—a cosmopolitan city, fresh with innovations. This role was reflected in such institutions as the Bayt al-Hikma ("House of Wisdom"), a center established by the caliph al-Ma'mun for the translation of Greek scientific treatises and other works into Arabic. Baghdad also became noted for its scholars' new approach, driven by a passion for the natural world that paralleled the focus Islam had brought to the spiritual world. One of the leading intellectual innovators was the historian Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Mas'udi, born in the city in about AD 895.

Written by Caroline Stone

Earlier and more traditional Muslim historians such as al-Tabari, whom al-Mas'udi greatly admired, collected vast quantities of material and set it down in roughly chronological order. Each piece was supported by its chain of transmission—"I had it from *x*, who had it from *y*, who was present at *z* when such and such happened"—exactly as was done with *hadith*, the "traditions" of the actions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Such compilations were comprehensive but unreadable. The "new school" of al-Dinawari and al-Ya'qubi, two other ninth-century scholars, improved on this method, favoring a continuous, selective narrative. Al-Mas'udi built on their ideas, adding as much firsthand knowledge as he could, particularly with regard to foreign countries and contemporary events. More than any other Muslim historian, al-Mas'udi tried to keep his books lively with stories and anecdotes, and this gave him great appeal to readers in his day.

Though some modern commentators have called this characteristic frivolous, the criticism is unfair. Al-Mas'udi's digressions not only lighten his sometimes interminable accounts of internecine wars, but he also used them to make subtle points: A seemingly irrelevant story of a caliph's behavior as a child will foreshadow how, a hundred pages later, the same man faced death; or the rebelliousness of a slave girl will foretell future rebellion in the state. A close reading of al-Mas'udi reveals that he is a master storyteller, and in examining his technique, it is wise to assume that every detail is significant. One would also need to be hard-hearted to wish that he had left out some of his marvelously romantic stories: the picaresque life of the caliph's son, Ibrahim ibn al-Mahdi; the rise and fall of the Barmakid family, a tale that rivals Greek tragedy; or the footnotes to the life of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, whom we know today from the *Thousand and One Nights*. This all makes al-Mas'udi the most entertaining and charming of the classical Arab historians, and he has been compared with good reason to Herodotus.

About al-Mas'udi himself, however, strangely little is known. The lack of information is all the stranger in that al-Mas'udi, by his own account, was a native of Baghdad and knew many writers and scholars, some of whom mined his works for such purposes as providing entries in their biographical dictionaries. Yet those same dictionaries dedicate little, if any, space to him in return. Our knowledge of al-Mas'udi, therefore, relies almost entirely on what he tells us, which is precious little. He reveals nothing directly of his private life, his social position, his profession or the sources of his income—though we can reconstruct or deduce a small amount. On intellectual matters, however, he is more open, and it is possible to learn a good deal of his tastes, opinions and prejudices, his attitudes toward historiography and scholarship, and his friendships with other eminent men of his day.

Ibn al-Nadim, the Baghdad bookseller who lived from AD 935 to 990, mentions him in his *Fihrist*—essentially a detailed book catalogue—which was written some 30 years after al-Mas'udi's death. Unfortunately, the information he gives is sketchy and largely incorrect, but he does mention a number of his works, including the one for which he is best known, *Muruj al-Dhahab, The Meadows of Gold*. Even the exact years of al-Mas'udi's birth and death are uncertain; he must have been born about 895 and died in 956 or 957. His professional status is also unknown, but he was a prolific writer: He mentions 34 of his own works that have not survived down to our time, two of them massive compilations that are frequently—and maddeningly—referred to in *The Meadows of Gold*. For example, he writes this at the end of the chapter on China:

> "There are still a great deal of fascinating information and all kinds of interesting things to set down about the Chinese and their country, but we will come back to the subject later on in this book and say more about it, even though we have already dealt with it very thoroughly in our Historical Annals and in our Intermediate History. In fact, we have principally used this present book to set down such details as were omitted from those we have just cited."

Also among the books that have vanished there appear to have been a further four major historical works, while the others were largely theological and philosophical, with one or two on science, geography and travel. Fortunately, his masterpiece, *The Meadows of Gold*, is one that has survived. It seems to have been completed, at least in a first version, by AD 947, but al-Mas'udi apparently revised it repeatedly almost until his death. Ibn Khaldun, the great North African historian and philosopher of history, wrote this about *The Meadows of Gold* more than 400 years later:

"History consists of the recording of the particular events of an era or a generation. The general conditions of far-away places, generations and eras constitute a basis for the historian on which most of his objectives are built and according to which his reports are classified. Men once devoted themselves to this genre of writing, as did al-Mas'udi in his *Meadows of Gold*, in which he explained the conditions of nations and far-away places, both East and West, down to his own days.... He mentioned their creeds and customs, described countries, mountains, seas, kingdoms and states, and distinguished Arab from non-Arab nations. He thus became an imam [a model] for historians who refer to him, and a source upon which they depend to verify many of their reports."

The Meadows of Gold combines two of al-Mas'udi's great interests: history and geography. He covers, in the traditional medieval manner, the history of the world, from the creation up to his own century, with a wealth of stories and anecdotes drawn from other scholars or from his own experience. The mixture is glorious: a list of trees which, according to tradition, Adam and Eve were allowed to bring with them from Eden; a description of Cleopatra's death, uncannily foreshadowing Shakespeare, with whom al-Mas'udi shared the same classical sources; the purple and gold books of the pre-Islamic rulers of Iran; a life of the Prophet Muhammad; exchanges of prisoners with the Byzantines; a natural history of the elephant, both African and Indian, together with reflections on the ivory trade; tragic love stories; the caliphs' feasts, with recipes; and on, and on. The list is almost endless, and one by one the caliphs, even the most shadowy, warm to life.

The geographical sections, which are among the most interesting to modern readers, are either accounts of his own very far-flung travels or, where there are gaps in his personal experience, accounts gleaned from sources he considered reliable. For example, referring to other scholars, he tells us that "their researches on the latitude of the earth have proved that the inhabited area extends from the equator as far north as Thule, beyond Britain, and there the longest day lasts 20 hours."

Again, when discussing some methods of water divining, he quotes textbooks on agriculture. On the topic of India, he says of Jahiz—the great scholar, thinker and wit, of whom he elsewhere tells many admiring stories—

"Al-Jahiz claims that the Indus, the river of Sind, comes from the Nile and adduces the presence of crocodiles in the Indus as proof. I do not know where he could have found such an argument, but he puts the theory forward in his book, Of the Great Cities and Marvels of the Earth. It is an excellent work, but since the author never sailed, nor indeed traveled sufficiently to be acquainted with the kingdoms and cities, he did not know that the Indus in Sind has perfectly well-known sources."

Al-Mas'udi then recounts what those sources are. He is interesting to read for his accounts of his own travels, particularly to the Far East, Yemen and India, but he also went to a great deal of trouble to collect information about the Byzantine Empire and Greek culture in general. This is not surprising when one considers that Arab science and learning were in full flower and that their debt to the scholars of Greece was well-recognized. Furthermore, Byzantium was at that time the prime adversary of the Islamic world, and so naturally information about the country and its customs was of more than academic interest.

Al-Mas'udi also made great efforts to find out as much as possible about remote areas of the world. This was clearly not easy, but he managed to glean a certain amount about the Slavs, for example, small numbers of whom traded regularly in Baghdad, as well as the other peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. There is a certain amount about Africa, but there he is more concerned with the geography and natural history, such as exports of panther skins, the habits of the rhinoceros and the course of the Nile, than he is with the customs of the people. This is slightly surprising, since the large number of African slaves in Baghdad would have made gathering information relatively simple. (It may have seemed too easy, too well-known to be worth setting down.) More surprising is the lack of information on North Africa and Spain, which at that time was Muslim. He does say a little about Galicia, but clearly al-Andalus did not interest Baghdad as much as Baghdad interested al-Andalus.

Al-Mas'udi's aims are made clear to the reader in his address near the end of *The Meadows of Gold*:

"In this book, I have in very few words set down numerous happenings and have made brief mention of events of considerable importance. In any case, each of my works contains information omitted in the book that preceded it, information which could not be ignored and knowledge of which is of the greatest importance and a genuine need. Thus I have reviewed every century, together with the events and deeds which have marked it, up until the present. Furthermore, there is to be found at the beginning of this book a description of the seas and continents, of lands inhabited and uninhabited, of the lives of foreign kings, their histories and those of all the different peoples. If God gives me life, if He extends my days and grants me the favor of continuing in this world, I will follow this book with another, which will contain information and facts on all kinds of interesting subjects. Without limiting myself to any particular order or method of setting them down, I will include all sorts of useful information and curious tales, just as they spring to mind. This work will be called *The Reunion of the Assemblies*, a collection of facts and stories mixed together, to provide a sequel to my earlier writings and to complement my other works.

"As to the events set down here, they are of the kind that a wise man cannot ignore and which it would be inexcusable to omit or to neglect. If one does not more than enumerate the chapters of this book, without reading each one carefully, the truth of what I am saying will not be appreciated, nor will its erudition be given its due."

His remarks on the knowledge "that a wise man cannot ignore" have an interest for us that al-Mas'udi could hardly have foreseen: A thousand years ago, what knowledge *was* a wise or otherwise educated man in Baghdad expected to have? The answer, if *The Meadows of Gold* is to be believed, is a great deal. Indeed, the range would be comparable to that expected today, but of course different in content: a little more theology and a little less technology, but perhaps not so different as one might expect.

Another aspect of *The Meadows of Gold* that interests us today, though not a primary concern of al-Mas'udi's, is the light it sheds on the social life and customs of his times. Islam, perhaps because of its emphasis on the community rather than the individual, is not a tradition rich in autobiography. Therefore, the passages in which al-Mas'udi describes such things as being received at a millionaire's house for breakfast, fashions in architecture, the organization of a medical conference, the correct way to lay a table for a formal party or the functioning of the Baghdad police force are not only informative, but they help us to imagine, however dimly, a world which would otherwise at this distance seem to be mostly a matter of dates (often uncertain), battles (often indecisive) and political disagreements (often unresolved).

As we read through the whole of *The Meadows of Gold*, al-Mas'udi's character emerges with surprising clarity. Besides the breadth of his learning, the most striking thing is perhaps his tolerance. Al-Mas'udi's attitude to Christianity, Judaism, polytheism and heretical Muslim sects is above all one of curiosity, a wish to "set the record straight" and to inform his readers of the facts of each case insofar as he has been able to learn them. Though in Europe, in al-Mas'udi's time, intellectual activity was inconspicuous and hatred of the unorthodox or unfamiliar was rampant, al-Mas'udi's intelligence and lack of prejudice would have been remarkable in any time or place, and all the more so in a man who there is every reason to believe was devoutly religious.

Another aspect of al-Mas'udi's personality that his writings reveal is his distaste for cruelty. By the standards of the Middle Ages, or indeed our own time, *The Meadows of Gold* is poor in horror stories, and where al-Mas'udi describes the sack of a city or the punishment of a traitor, he rarely dwells on detail, and not infrequently one senses the author's disgust.

Al-Mas'udi had a fine sense of humor, and he was an excellent raconteur. To some extent his stories are literary devices, but a number were about incidents he himself observed. There is also a suggestion of kindliness, for although al-Mas'udi can tell a story against an individual—and he appears to have had a prejudice against the legal profession in general—the account is usually good-humored. Where he criticizes other writers and scholars, as we have seen in the case of al-Jahiz, he makes a point of tempering his remarks with praise. For example:

"I consider that Sinan ibn Tabit ibn Qurrah al-Harrani undertook a task outside his competence and followed a path that was not his when he composed that book which he addressed to one of his friends, secretary to the Audience Chamber, in the form of a letter.... However well the work is carried out and however truthful the author, we can only blame him for having abandoned his own sphere and having taken on something for which he was unfit. Why did he not remain in the field of science, where he had no rivals in knowledge of Euclid, of the divisions of [Ptolemy's] Almagest or of circles? Why did he not develop the views of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle...? In this, he would have acquitted himself with honor and his abilities would have coincided with

his undertaking. But where is the man who recognizes the limits of his strengths and the boundaries of his competence? 'Abd Allah ibn al-Mukaffa' has said with good reason, 'All authors pursue an aim; reaching it, they win glory; failing, they are dishonored.'"

When it came to research and writing, al-Mas'udi was, for all his occasional lightness, greatly serious. *The Meadows of Gold* opens with a description of what he is setting out to do, a table of contents and a list of sources that is a kind of *catalogue raisonnée*, in which he gives particular praise to such men as al-Suli, who set down what they themselves had witnessed, together with those who showed particular breadth of interest and encyclopedic learning. He prefaces his list with the following remarks:

"By composing these works on universal history and collecting such facts as have been bequeathed by time concerning the prophets, the kings and their reigns, the different nations and their places on the globe, we have sought to follow the path beaten by wise and learned men and have tried to leave to posterity a solid memorial built with art and skill. The authors who came before seem to have sinned either by an excess of detail or, on the contrary, by too great concision. Although the materials available have increased with time and as a result of the events which gave rise to their existence, even the most judicious minds have all too often neglected extensive areas of them, each one specializing in a particular field and limiting himself to what was available in his native country. Now he who has never left his hearth and has confined his researches to the narrow field of the history of his fatherland cannot be compared to the courageous traveler who has worn out his life in journeys of exploration to distant parts and each day has faced danger in order to persevere in excavating the mines of learning and in snatching precious fragments of the past from oblivion."

Al-Mas'udi was clearly thinking of his own efforts and his own travels. The debate on specialization versus broad knowledge is not peculiar to any era, and though our own time inclines to sympathize with the specialist, the 19th century—or for that matter the Renaissance—would have been entirely on al-Mas'udi's side.

He continues with a remarkable mix of rigor and generosity:

"The number of works dealing with history is very considerable, and among the various authors who set down the annals of antiquity or who have related the events of modern times, some have succeeded, while others, on the other hand, have proved unequal to the task. Nevertheless, we are obliged to recognize that all these writers did the best they could with their talents and deployed such strengths as they possessed."

Al-Mas'udi was, as he repeatedly says, scrupulous about quoting authorities (and he was anxious that he in turn should be credited), and he frequently qualifies statements by saying that he has been told such-and-such but has no way of verifying it. In the case of his geographical writings, he made every effort to go and see for himself. At the beginning of *The Meadows of Gold*, where he gives a bibliography of his own works, he writes:

"We beg the reader's indulgence for any mistakes or oversights that may occur in this book, for our memory has grown weak and our strength been exhausted by long and difficult journeys over land and sea. Avid to learn for ourselves all the remarkable things which exist among different peoples and to study the particular characteristics of each country with our own eyes, we have visited Sind, Zanzibar, Indochina, China and Java, have moved through the hearts of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran and Beilakan, and have explored Iraq and Syria."

Two other small points are, perhaps, worth making. Al-Mas'udi's attitude to women is liberal, though indeed their status was high in Baghdad at that time. His pages are full of noble and admirable women of all kinds: Zubayda, the wife of Harun al-Rashid, famous for having endowed the pilgrimage road to Makkah that still bears her name; Layla al-Akhyaliyya, the great poet; Khayzuran ("the reed"), who rose from the slave market to become the power behind the throne; the warlike Um al-Banin; and a whole host of dancers, singing girls, slaves, market vendors, poets, mystics and even Christian nuns, who collectively serve to give a much more balanced picture of the world than the one presented by so many historians of the Middle Ages.

Secondly, his other surviving work, the *Book of Instruction and Admonition*, is less interesting than *The Meadows of Gold* to the general reader, although it does contain some biographical material and extremely important geographical information, some of it found nowhere else.

But *The Meadows of Gold* is far richer. Near its end, the author wrote:

"The information which we have gathered together here is the fruit of long years of research and painful efforts, of our voyages and journeys across the lands of East and West and among various nations which lie beyond the pale of Islam. May the reader, then, examine the book with kindly eyes and have the goodness to correct any copyist's errors or mistakes in transcription which may offend him, and to take our efforts into account, bearing in mind the good relations and respect which learned men should have toward one another! The author of this book compares himself to a man who, having found pearls of all kinds and of all colors scattered here and there, gathers them together into a necklace and makes of them a precious ornament of great price which its possessor guards with care. Lastly, may the reader rest assured that I have not here taken up the defense of any sect, nor have I preferred this doctrine or that. My aim has been to trace the beauty of the histories of many peoples, and I have no other."

Caroline Stone divides her time between Cambridge and Seville, and has recently returned from the Caucasus. She is currently working with Paul Lunde on a translation of selections from *The Meadows of Gold* for Penguin Classics as well as a volume on the journeys of Ibn Fadlan and other Arab travelers to the north, to appear in 2007.

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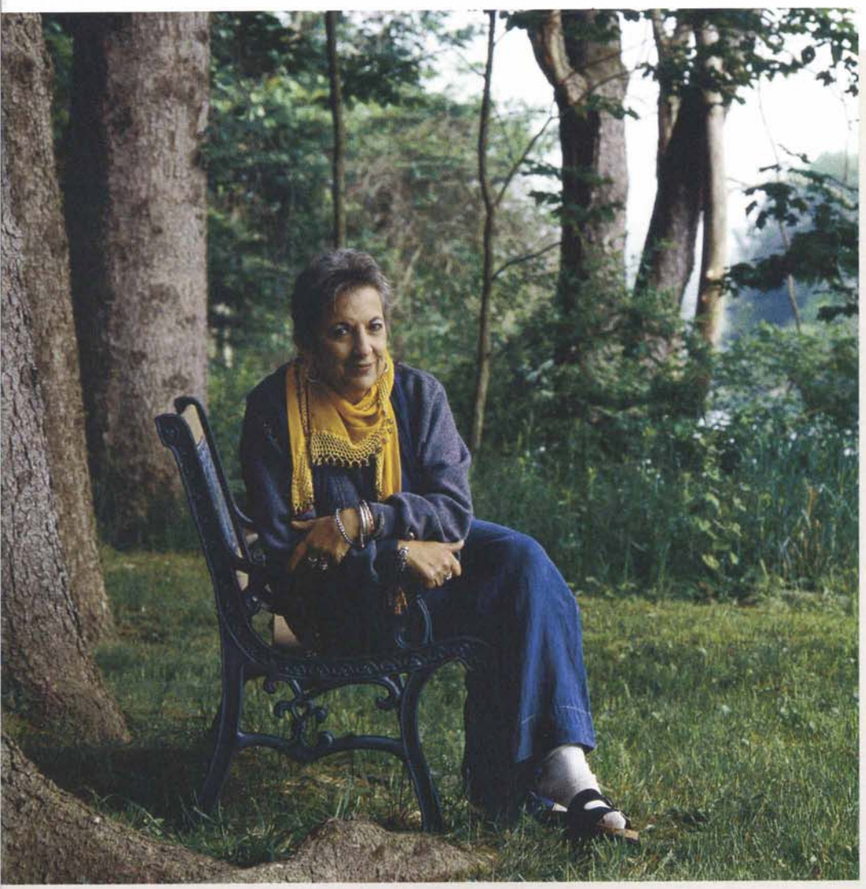
Of Stories and Storytellers

It started small, as most things do. In the 1980's, anthropologist, journalist and broadcaster Barbara Nimri Aziz was the only member of the famously influential John O. Killens writing workshop in Brooklyn who wasn't African-American. After Killens's death in 1987, Aziz recalls thinking, "Surely Arab writers also need the same privacy to discuss their personal and historical issues freely." Two years later, she began interviewing writers for her weekly radio show "Tahrir: Voices of the Arab World" on Pacifica-WBAI. Her experience convinced her there were enough Arab writers in the United States to "form a club of some sort."

Written by Lisa Suhair Majaj **Photographed by Lorraine Chittock**



Barbara Nimri Aziz

Roscoe, New York

Recent works: "Tahrir: Voices of the Arab Muslim Community Here and Abroad" radio series (producer and host since 1989); "Six Arab American Poets" radio series (producer), 1997; "From Cordoba to Baghdad" (producer), 1995

Favorite Writers: Mohja Kahf, Ahdaf Soueif, Ron David, Habeeb Salloum, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, David Baldacci, R. K. Narayan, Jhumpa Lahiri, Hanif Quraishi.

Quote: Although our most accomplished Arab–American writers today are poets, I expect that it will be in the area of creative prose —leading to novels, plays and films—that Arabs in this country will most forcefully articulate Arab character and history. Through fictional characters in our stories and through themes, plots and story resolutions, we demonstrate who we are and how we see the world. Our literature first helps us comprehend ourselves—where we came from, what we are and where we want to go—and fully feel our self-worth. Then, through the stories that emerge, we can move others. If African–American literature has needed several hundred years to reach its present state of diversity, participation and glory, Arab writers here need to give ourselves two or more generations to be a cultural force. When we realize we share many of our secrets and trials, complexities and possibilities with Italian, Latino, African, Irish, Pakistani and Chinese immigrants, we shed some of our loneliness, and we move ahead more swiftly.

So at the 1992 American–Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) convention, Aziz posted a flier announcing a meeting to explore the idea. Five people showed up, including journalist Leila Diab, and, informally at least, the "Arab Writers Group USA" had its start. "I still maintain there are not that many of us, but the way news is rolling in, I wonder," wrote Aziz in one of the group's first mailings.

She didn't have to wonder for long. At the ADC meeting the next year, 14 people gathered in what was widely considered a foundational meeting. In the spring of 1994, the group adopted a name suggested by poet Mohja Kahf: "Radius of Arab–American Writers, Incorporated," or RAWI (which means "storyteller" in Arabic). Soon there were more than 50 members. In late 1996, led by Aziz, RAWI formally incorporated and a board of directors was convened comprised of a dozen writers, poets, editors, translators and critics—and one attorney. The new board voted in writer and artist Etel Adnan as president and Aziz as vice-president. (Today Adnan still holds that title; Aziz is executive director.) To poet Khaled Mattawa, Aziz has long been "the main fixture" for RAWI.

"Her endurance has kept the organization surfacing," he says.

RAWI's mission, Adnan wrote in her first letter as president, is "to be a gathering nucleus, a catalyst for creative energies, a starting point for more creativity." That these creative energies have borne fruit is clear. A members' anthology, *A Different Path*, appeared in 2000, co-edited by Diab and poet D. H. Melhem. Since 2001 RAWI has held an annual writing workshop at the ADC convention, and since 2002 it has sponsored an annual creative nonfiction

ADNAN: TOR EIGELAND

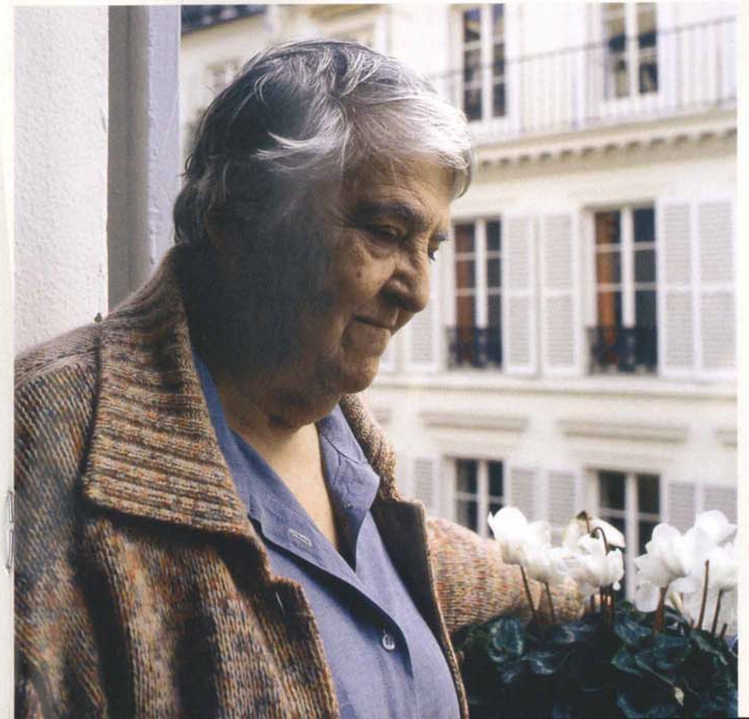
Etel Adnan

Paris

Recent works: *In/Somnia*, 2002; *There: In the Light and the Darkness of the Self and of the Other*, 1997; *Of Cities and Women, Letters to Fawwaz*, 1993; *Paris, When It's Naked*, 1993

Favorite Writers: Badr Shaker Al Sayyab, Herman Melville and Homer.

Quote: As for any serious writer, the audience of an Arab–American cannot be confined to his or her fellow Arabs. Books have a life of their own and no one can determine their fate. The only thing we can strive for consciously is to be aware of the existence of a growing body of Arab–American literature, try to know it and make it known.



Elmaz Abinader

Oakland, California

Recent works: *32 Mohameds*, 2002; *In the Country of My Dreams*, 1999; *Ramadan Moon*, 1999; *Children of the Roojme*, 1997; *Country of Origin*, 1997

Favorite Writers: All of literature is a never-ending discourse, a dialogue that can be comforting and challenging. I am comforted by other writers in the thick of the larger questions illuminated by their portraits, words and narratives. I try to enter the stories and the poems, seeing their countries, their issues and their imaginations. I read things foreign to me to find our similarities.

Quote: I am not interested in the rhetoric of politics or history, only the stories of people inside the larger context. Moments inspire me—usually a moment of complication or recognition—the very deepest human moment changed by significant events. Spoken word is my most Arab self.

contest initiated by Alice Nashashibi. Links to the Arab world have included delegations to the 2002 opening of the new Alexandria Library in Egypt and the 2003 Arab Writers' Union convention in Algiers; last year Adnan addressed the Union of Moroccan Writers. RAWI's own first nationwide meeting is planned for this June, and its current membership hovers around 150.

RAWI's most substantial accomplishment, however, is its newsletter ("a virtual living room," says Mattawa), published three times a year. First produced by nonfiction writers Ron David and Jean Bond, it was recently turned over to critic Stephen Salaita. Over the years it has grown to 12 pages of information on publications, competitions and workshops as well as member interviews and discussions of themes in the field. Salaita's goal is "extensive interchange," and to foster this, he hopes to see a RAWI Web site soon. There is, he says, a "general lack of meritocratic snobbery" among RAWI members. "Well-known writers and scholars were always willing to help me when I was a student by answering questions, responding to e-mails and being extremely generous with time and ideas. RAWI should help ensure that our community never loses this spirit."

Before RAWI, Arab–American writers were almost entirely invisible on the broader American literary scene, and they were just as invisible to each other. They could take for granted neither receptive audiences nor a supportive literary context. True, the early 1900's saw *mahjar* ("immigrant") writing in both Arabic and English in the United States, and in 1920 a literary organization, *Al-Rabita al-Qalamiyya*—"The Pen League"—was established. (Although short-lived, this group is still invoked as a model by US-based writers working in Arabic.) But the main impact of the mahjar writing was on Arabic, not American, literature. Immigration quotas, xenophobia and economic struggles all hampered the development of Arab–American creative writing in English. Despite the success of individual authors such as novelist Vance Bourjaily, most English-language texts revealed the pressure on authors to ignore or distance themselves from their Arab identity. As critic, translator and anthologist Salma Khadra Jayyusi notes, between the mahjar period and the reemergence of Arab–American writing in the 1970's there was "a very clear discontinuity."

RAWI's Goals

- Provide a support network for professional writers.
- Link writers in the United States with colleagues in the Arab world.
- Encourage writing among Arab–American youth.

Four historical events set the stage for RAWI. First, the civil rights movement of the 1960's opened new spaces for immigrant and ethnic literary voices and made possible the so-called "hyphenated genres" of literature: African-American, Asian-American, Jewish-American, Italian-American and others. Then, second-generation Arab–Americans, economically and linguistically better positioned to follow cultural pursuits than their immigrant parents, turned increasingly to literature as their form of ethnic self-expression. This coincided with the third event: the arrival after 1960 of well-educated, often politically astute Arab immigrants. Fourth, various international political crises in the Middle East forced Arab–Americans to grapple with their identity and the "write or be written" imperative: Define yourself or others will define you.

The Arab–American writing that emerged reflected both ethnic affirmation and politics. In 1982, Israel's invasion of Lebanon deeply affected the Arab–American community, and a

Diana Abu-Jaber

Miami, Florida and Portland, Oregon

Recent works: *The Language of Baklava*, 2005; *Crescent*, 2003; *Arabian Jazz*, 1993

Favorite Writers: Virginia Woolf, Leo Tolstoy, James Joyce, Arundhati Roy, Louise Erdrich, Michael Ondaatje, Lorrie Moore.

Quote: Like most writers, I just aim to tell the truest story I can. I try to create characters who are authentic, no matter what their culture or nationality is, and I try to tell their stories in ways that feel emotionally honest and compelling. We must be allowed to construct all sorts of extended narratives, characters and reflections if we ever want Arab–American experience and sensibility to gain a presence in the global imagination.

Elizabeth Boosahda

Worcester, Massachusetts

Recent works: *Arab–American Faces and Voices: The Origins of an Immigrant Community*, 2003

Favorite Writers: Lisa Suhair Majaj, writers on www.nitle.org/arabworld/ and all kinds of books and magazines, especially *Dahesh Voice*.

Quote: A significant portion of the Arab–American community (Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian; Christian, Muslim and Druze) emigrated to this country between 1880 and 1915. They integrated into western culture while they maintained their Arab heritage through debating societies, language, literature, philosophy, poetry, song, storytelling, theater groups. The Arab–Americans continue to make cultural, intellectual and economic contributions to the United States and are an integral and positive part of the fabric of America.

Ron David

Hoboken, New Jersey

Recent works: *Toni Morrison Explained: A Reader's Road Map to the Novels*, 2000; *Jazz for Beginners*, 1995; *Opera for Beginners*, 1995; *Arabs & Israel for Beginners*, 1993

Writers to read: Toni Morrison, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Noam Chomsky, Bob Dylan, Thomas Paine.

Quote: My Americanized sensibility is mostly about facts, blunt language, irreverent humor and zero tolerance for bull-slingers. To me the issue is not whether one writes "Arab–American literature," but whether one has the courage to speak the truth to people who don't want to hear it. To write as an outspoken Arab is an act of heroism.

BASIL CHILDERS

Kathryn Haddad

Minneapolis, Minnesota

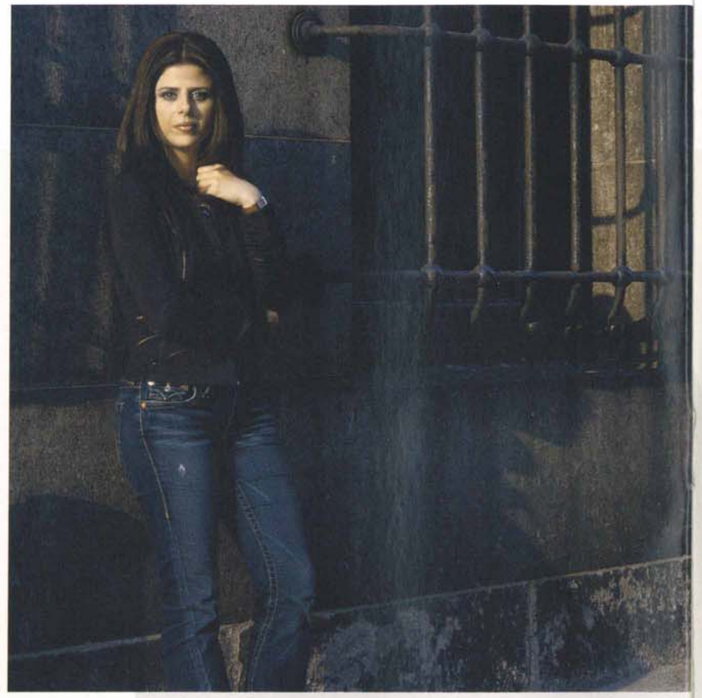
Recent works: *With Love from Ramallah*, 2004; *Looking for Home*, 2000; *Mizna: Prose, Poetry and Art Exploring Arab America* journal (co-founder and executive director since 1999)

Favorite Writers: Jamaica Kincaid, Suheir Hammad, Rabih Alameddine, Tayib Salih, Assia Djebar.

Quote: I am inspired by the morning and how it continues to give us the hope of creating something unimagined. *Mizna* means "cloud in the desert." We liked the metaphor of the guiding, leading, cooling cloud that leads the traveler to the destination. We thought it was perfect for our organization, which strives to be innovative and at the same time affirming to the community.

small booklet of poetry called *Wrapping the Grape Leaves: A Sheaf of Contemporary Arab American Poets*, edited by Gregory Orfalea, was published by ADC. The expansion of this collection in 1988 to a full-length anthology (*Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab–American Poetry*, co-edited by Orfalea and Sharif Elmusa) was groundbreaking. Brought together between the covers of this book, Arab–American writers began to realize that they constituted a community. As Boston writer and critic Evelyn Shakir observes, "In the early 1980's, I don't think such writers necessarily thought of themselves as 'Arab–American writers.' ...These days they and those who follow in their footsteps are almost forced to identify themselves in this way, or else explain why they refuse that label."

Then came the 1991 Gulf War. Arab–American authors had faced political difficulties before, and Aziz insists that the political climate of the time did not play a direct role in the genesis of RAWI. But something about the time was ripe. Playwright Kathryn Haddad, who in 1999 founded the literary journal *Mizna: Prose, Poetry and Art Exploring Arab America*, recalls that prior to RAWI she had searched in vain for an Arab–American literary forum and, in its absence, had joined an Asian-American group. RAWI, she says, affirmed that "there was someone else out there." And it made her feel that *Mizna* would someday be possible, too.



Suheir Hammad

New York

Recent works: *Def Poetry Jam on Broadway* (co-writer) 2003; *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, 1996; *Drops of This Story*, 1996

Favorite Writers: June Jordan, Stevie Wonder, Pablo Neruda.

Quote: My home is colorful, a haven from a graying world. While I was always happy to see an Arab name in an anthology or a journal, I often felt like there was no one who knew what it felt like to be from poor, brown people who grew up in cities around folks from different cultures. I love Arab music and the grace of it. That music has affected not only my work on the page, but my everyday vernacular as well. But it is still a disrupted Arabic, the Arabic of the Palestinian diaspora.

Nathalie Handal

New York

Recent works: *The Lives of Rain*, 2005; *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology*, 2001; *The NeverField*, 1999; *Traveling Rooms*, 1999

Favorite Writers: Pablo Neruda, Samuel Beckett, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, and others too many to list.

Quote: Our works contribute to the diversity and richness of American literature, and, as a Palestinian, my work is also part of Palestinian literature, but mostly we are part of a universal literature. I have always been in love with words and never cease to be captivated by them. Through literature, you enter worlds, and that incredible moment when a novel, play or poem has just given you something, made you aware of others, of yourself, in a way so unknown to you, so magical and mysterious, that you can only honor that instant and realize that you have gone beyond the self, beyond the sacred drum.

Although RAWI's inception also coincided with the advent of the Internet, its growth as an organization has taken place largely outside cyberspace. But it reached writers. Egyptian–American Pauline Kaldas recalls her first encounter with the RAWI newsletter: "I remember looking at it in astonishment," she says. Until that moment, "who I was and what I wrote about was not something I saw reflected in the world around me."

The sense of community that RAWI both represented and encouraged has built self-confidence and provided what Adnan calls "implicit encouragement." D. H. Melhem comments, "When a climate of acceptance and creative ferment becomes conscious of itself, it tends to promote that atmosphere and augment its elements, like a kind of magnetic field. So it would not be extravagant to say that RAWI has served to encourage the production of Arab–American writing." Elmaz Abinader puts it succinctly: "I feel like I have an international posse because of RAWI."

The network has also enabled authors to imagine at last a culturally informed readership. Kaldas calls it "an ideal audience"—one comprised not just of Arab–Americans, but of everyone who understands multicultural issues. Indeed, Arab–American writers repeatedly cite as their models authors who depict multicultural complexities: James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, Irena Klepfisz, Sandra Cisneros and Jhumpa Lahiri; Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou; Louise Erdrich and Maxine Hong Kingston. These and others have inspired RAWI members with what author Diana Abu-Jaber calls "the courage to believe that there was room and openness for different sorts of stories."

Such models are particularly important to Arab–American women writers, who confront dual stereotypes of

Joanna Kadi

Maiden Rock, Wisconsin

Recent works: *Thinking Class*, 1996; *Food for Our Grandmothers* (editor), 1994

Favorite Writers: Edward Said, Winona LaDuke, Gloria Anzaldua, Eli Clare, Dorothy Allison.

Quote: My identity has everything to do with my writing and my identity has nothing to do with my writing. Both of these are absolutely true. It can be hard to characterize something as "Arab–American literature," because there is a wide spectrum of beliefs, values and attitudes that comes through in the cultural work we do. I like to talk about positive, larger trends in our community as a whole.

Salma Khadra Jayyusi

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Recent works: Founder of the Project of Translation from Arabic (PROTA), since 1980

Favorite Writers: Edward Said.

Quote: The Arab–American writer would do well to have as deep an involvement as possible in the situation of the Arab world and its great and rich heritage.... We have a duty to stand as advocates to the truth of our cause and our culture. We are not heirs to [the mahjar writers'] traditions, which spanned the two worlds, but must forge our own, based on the schism that has been introduced between the Arab world and our adopted country. The most outstanding Arab–American writer to date has been Edward Said. He wrote in the very heart of the western tradition without losing sight of his relation with, and responsibility for, his native language and culture.

New On the Shelf

In addition to the "Recent Works" listed with RAWI members' portraits and comments, the following are other notable publications by members.

- *Scheherazade's Legacy: Arab and Arab–American Women on Writing*, Susan Muaddi Darraj, 2004
- *West of the Jordan*, Laila Halaby, 2003
- *The Cairo House*, Samia Serageldin, 2003
- *I, The Divine: A Novel in First Chapters*, Rabih Alameddine, 2002
- *The Alchemist's Diary*, Hayan Charara, 2001
- *Off Keck Road*, Mona Simpson, 2001
- *Ghost Songs: A Palestinian Love Story*, Kathryn Abdul-Baki, 2000

culture and gender even as they dominate Arab–American letters and make up some 60 percent of RAWI's membership. Aziz notes that for the most part, Arab–American women "are driven, as are women of color everywhere, by political motives, to speak against stereotypes, to 'set the record straight.'" But the catch is that in a stereotype-laden context, writing that is culturally self-critical may be taken as reinforcing negative cultural images—bad cultural PR. It's a problem confronted by ethnic writers generally; for women, the dual burden of both cultural and gender ambassadorship creates a heightened self-consciousness that can chill intellectual exploration.

Yet such burdens can also have upsides. Abinader contends that Arab–American women writers "are getting more attention than male writers because…Arab men are still unsettling figures to the American sensibility." Playwright Betty Shamieh observes that "it was easier for me to become a writer because I am a woman, and, in my family and in many immigrant families, there is much more pressure upon men to be breadwinners and go into more stable fields."

One of the hot-button issues in RAWI concerns the definition of the genre. Does anything written by an Arab–American qualify *per se*, or is "Arab–American writing" restricted to Arab–American themes? Some, like Shakir, cannot understand "why work that does not address the Arab–American experience should be labeled 'Arab–American.'" Others, like Kahf, are of two minds: While the category "Arab–American" is useful and important, writing should be judged not simply on the basis of ethnicity, but of quality.

And within the contested genre, how "Arab" and how "American" are "Arab–American" writers? Some note that Arab–American participation in Arab culture is necessarily limited—sometimes drastically—by language, geography and experience. Others urge Arab–Americans to strengthen their ties to the Arab world: Jayyusi, director of the Project of Translation from the Arabic (PROTA), which translates Arabic literature into English, insists, "We need to make our voice heard in America, not just as writers in English, but also as ambassadors of a great and rich culture." But for Mattawa, whose work is rich with Arabic cadences and allusions that are conjoined to English rhythms—"the Qur'an, folktales, history, Arabic poetry…Hopkins's 'sprung rhythm,' jazz syncopation"—the more urgent task is to take stock of, and assert a claim to, the American context by enriching the dialogue among Arab–Americans' diverse influences.

As writers explore these influences, other kinds of dialogues emerge that cross artistic and ethnic lines. New York writer Suheir Hammad, for instance, is best known lately for her role as co-writer and performer in the 2003 Tony Award-winning Broadway show and HBO series "Def Poetry Jam on Broadway." Drawing on music from sources as varied as jazz saxophonist John Coltrane, Egyptian singer Um Kulthum and Raï star Cheb Mami, Hammad voices her deep solidarities with other peoples of color. As she puts it, "The marginalized always make these connections. Always."

Mohja Kahf

Fayetteville, Arkansas

Recent works: *E-mails from Scheherazade*, 2003; *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque*, 1999

Favorite Writers: Nizar Kabbani spoke to me in an accent I understood in the oldest cell of my body. Leonard Cohen's *Book of Mercy* is worth its weight in tears. Marvin X is too extreme for many, but I like strong voices even if I don't agree with everything they say.

Quote: I don't write just to make different peoples comfortable with each other or to right "misunderstandings"—I think people need to face their real discomfort with each other first, and see what that's about—because it often has to do with real injustices requiring collective action to change. So I'm against a surface level of "tolerance" that is too glibly reached. I root for writing to be aesthetic and socially conscious, beautiful and brainy, dynamic, provocative and speaking truth to power.

Pauline Kaldas

Roanoke, Virginia

Recent works: *Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction* (co-editor), 2004; poems and stories in journals and anthologies including *The Poetry of Arab Women*, 2001; *Cultural Activisms*, 1999; *Post-Gibran Anthology of New Arab American Writing*, 1999; *The Space between Our Footsteps*, 1998; *Food for Our Grandmothers*, 1994

Favorite Writers: Marcia Douglas, Jhumpa Lahiri, Salwa Bakr, Irena Klepfisz.

Quote: For me the writing comes first and the subject matter comes second. In a sense, by virtue of my immigrant experience, I was handed my subject matter. Where the challenge is for me is in the writing. Arab–American literature is an expression of the world and of experience through the eyes of someone for whom Arab–American identity is a primary lens. It is similar to other ethnic literatures in the sense that cultural identity is at the center of the writing. As a young writer, I felt enormously isolated in terms of the subjects I wrote about, all of which related to the experience of being Arab–American. Now I feel privileged to be able to watch and participate in the growth of Arab–American literature.

Jamil Khoury

Chicago

Recent works: Silk Road Theater Project (co-founder and artistic director since 2004); *Precious Stones*, 2003; *Fitna: Chaos as Woman in the Arab World*, 1995

Favorite Writers: Reinaldo Arenas, Michael Bronski, Andrea Dworkin, Naguib Mahfouz, Fatima Mernissi, Mohammed Mrabet, Kate Millett, Wilhelm Reich, Rumi, Scott Symons and Edmund White. Playwrights include Yussef El Guindi, Velina Hasu Houston, Larry Kramer, and Tony Kushner.

Quote: I am heartened by the sheer quantity of Arab–American literary and artistic production out there. I am particularly encouraged by the increased visibility of US-born and mixed-blood Arab–American voices. Arab–American writing expands and continues the rich tradition of ethnic American cultural production, humanizing and "de-otherizing" an entire group of people, enhancing our concepts of community and self, and increasing our own sense of the possible.

Khaled Mattawa

Ann Arbor, Michigan

Recent works: *Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction* (co-editor), 2004; *Zodiac of Echoes*, 2003

Quote: We are not going away, not even in our imaginations. We're staying here. That is part of what I want to say as a person and as a poet. I want to write and take stock of what's here.... I think we need to get radical with the shape of our writing, to mix genres and just generally become more daring. We have a complex experience, and our styles and forms should express it. We need to have serious conversations with both heritages, the American and the Arab. We need to rewrite both myths, but first we have to know both with deep and sustained familiarity.

For Joanna Kadi, editor of the 1994 landmark feminist anthology *Food for Our Grandmothers*, one way to view Arab–American writing is as one form of cultural work amid the other arts, all of which link Arab–Americans to other historically oppressed communities. Kadi, who is also a writer, musician, artist and activist, sees such work as both critical and celebratory. When she first started writing, she admits, it was out of a sense of duty: to explain oppression. But although she remains grounded in her identity, she now writes "because it's fun and creative, because of love and connection and community, because of being such a verbal Arab and needing somewhere to put all those words and ideas!"

Clearly, the more writers can take for granted a supportive community, the more free they are to follow independent creative paths. For poet David Williams, "knowing that others are out there, working on similar material, is liberating. One can be relieved of feeling the burden of always needing to explain everything." Chicago playwright Jamil Khoury, co-founder of the Silk Road Theater Project, concurs, noting that a community context makes it easier to explore individual experiences instead of "feeling pressured to somehow represent 'all' Arab–Americans, or represent us only in a certain light."

Khoury's work is indicative of what Elie Chalala, editor of *Al-Jadid: A Review and Record of Arab Culture and Arts*, sees as the increasing openness of Arab–American writers. *Al-Jadid* means "the new" in Arabic, and Chalala, who established the journal in 1995 as a forum dedicated to Arab and Arab–American culture and the affirmation of intellectual freedom, has a particular interest in writing that challenges authoritarian structures. A decade of reviewing and publishing Arab–American writing has convinced him that this literature is becoming thematically more daring. For example, he says, authors now tackle "even topics that cannot be brought into the open in some Arab societies." Shakir agrees, noting that Arab–American writing reflects "an increased willingness to move beyond nostalgia and celebration and to present a more complex and nuanced rendering of the Arab–American community."

Haddad observes also that Arab–American writers, both immigrants and American-born, focus on "international politics, or on racial politics… that have to do with international politics" to a greater extent than other "hyphenated" American artists. Given the cold shoulder mainstream literary journals typically give such political writing, *Mizna*, she says, provides an important forum.

Finally, there are those authors for whom ethnicity is but one facet of their literary persona. Naomi Shihab Nye,

D.H. Melhem

New York

Recent works: *New York Poems*, 2005; *Conversation with a Stonemason*, 2003; *Poems for You* (chapbook), 2000; *A Different Path* (co-editor), 2000; *Country*, 1998; *Children of the House Afire*, 1976 (musical production, 1999); *Rest in Love*, 1995, 1978, 1975; *Blight*, 1995; *Heroism in the New Black Poetry*, 1990; *Gwendolyn Brooks: Poetry and the Heroic Voice*, 1987

Favorite Writers: Franz Kafka, Walt Whitman, Pablo Neruda, Gwendolyn Brooks, Etel Adnan.

Quote: What inspires me? A conviction that, as James Jackson Putnam expressed it, "history, at bottom, is an account of the efforts…to find freedom and show love," and that, as Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote in *A Defence of Poetry*, "the great instrument of moral good is the imagination." The growing interest in the field of Arab–American literature is most encouraging—witness the work of poet/critics like Lisa Suhair Majaj and Nathalie Handal, publications like *Al Jadid* and *Mizna*, organizations like ADC and RAWI. Politically, I am imbued with American ideals and yet internationally oriented—not surprising, given my positive family experience of diversity. My favorite quotation is a line from "The Eolian Harp," a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "O the one Life within us and abroad." I believe that.

Naomi Shihab Nye

San Antonio, Texas

Recent works: *A Maze Me*, 2005; *Going Going*, 2005; *Baby Radar*, 2004; *19 Varieties of Gazelle*, 2002; *Mint Snowball*, 2001; *Fuel*, 1998; *Habibi*, 1997; *Never in a Hurry*, 1996; *Words Under the Words*, 1995; *Sitti's Secrets*, 1994; *Red Suitcase*, 1994; *This Same Sky*, 1992; *The Space Between Our Footsteps: Poems and Paintings from the Middle East* (editor), 1998

Favorite Writers: William Stafford, Robert Bly, W. S. Merwin, Shuntaro Tanikawa, Lucille Clifton, and Canadian poets and all Arab–American writers and millions more besides—women, children, and birds.

Quote: We have a deep challenge right now. We who believe in bridges have no time off. Too many bombs and twisted voices opposing the realities of culture and compassion render us on duty at all times, saying small and meaningful things. I think the field of Arab–American literature is blossoming beautifully.

MICHAEL NYE

Steven Salaita

Madison, Wisconsin

Recent works: *Anti-Arab Racism: How Myth and Patriotism Combine to Inhibit Democracy*, forthcoming

Favorite Writers: Franz Fanon, Assata Shakur, Walter Rodney, Alexander Cockburn, Noam Chomsky, Kathleen Christison, Edward Said, Ward Churchill, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Vine Deloria, Jr.

Quote: Arab–American writers and scholars are entering more intrepidly into what has been called the United States' "culture wars." I see in the twenty-something Arab–Americans of my generation a passionate—sometimes even fierce—dedication to defining ourselves, with really exciting activism emerging as a result.

Evelyn Shakir

West Roxbury, Massachusetts

Recent works: *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States*, 1997

Favorite Writers: Jane Austen, still. Also Maxine Hong Kingston, Harriet Doerr, and Ahdaf Soueif.

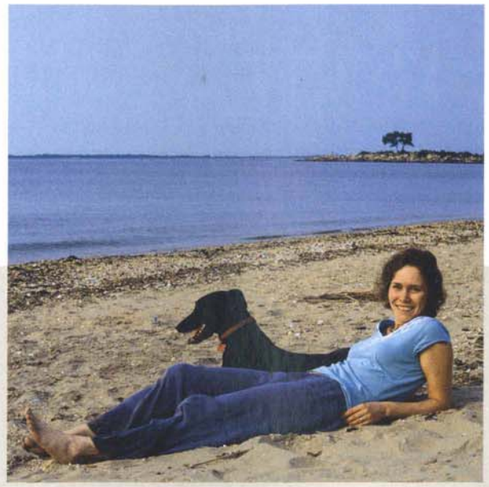
Quote: Writing about other Arab–American women was the easy part; writing about my own experience took longer and was harder. Creating fictions, as I now do, takes me outside myself again. Each step has been rewarding.

one of the leading American poets who is no less beloved as an Arab–American author, is as well-known for her writing about the American Southwest as for her Arab-themed work. Novelist Mona Simpson, author of four critically acclaimed books, rarely draws on her Arab–American ethnicity at all.

Since 9/11, less seems to have changed than one might expect. As poet and anthologist Nathalie Handal notes, "The challenges are the same—marginalization, exclusion and so forth." What is needed, says Nye, is to "speak honestly without growing exhausted," to be what Aziz calls "a long-distance runner"—one focused on "issues of craft and writing as a profession." Arab–American writers are now confronting the same difficulties shared by all other writers, most notably the shrinking publication market caused by concentration in the publishing and bookselling industries. Activist Arab–American writers share much with activist writers in general—Adrienne Rich, Carolyn Forché and others—and like them, they write to confront violence, address inequities and bear witness to our times.

As for future literary directions, the watchwords seem to be diversity and courage. Kahf calls for expansion into new genres: science fiction, children's fantasy, romance, corporate crime, action and murder mysteries. Meanwhile, Patricia Ward urges writers to "write what they believe in,...not what they think they're 'supposed' to write." Ward, whose first novel dealt with the emotional impact of the Lebanese civil war and the disjunctions of exile, notes that her next work is a fantasy epic. After reaching a point of despair in writing about the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, she says, it came to her that "if you start in another world, the reader cannot possibly have any preconceptions."

As Arab–American authors weave their ever-expanding stories, they affirm the community that sustains them. For Aziz, as for others, RAWI's main contribution has been to inspire people "to press ahead with their dreams to write." After all, says Nye, "it's a thin veneer, those headlines, but books, stories, poems, music, art—that's where we feel at home."



Betty Shamieh

New York

Recent works: *Territories*, 2005; *The Black-Eyed*, 2004; *Roar*, 2003; *Chocolate in Heat*, 2001

Favorite Writers: Tennessee Williams, Kahlil Gibran, Mahmoud Darwish.

Quote: From Stephen Biko: "The greatest weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."

Patricia Sarrafian Ward

Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey

Recent works: *The Bullet Collection*, 2003

Favorite Writers: I don't have favorite writers. I read all kinds of books, usually several at a time. The most beautiful books I read in the past year are *Nisanit* by Fadia Faqir and *Martyr's Crossing* by Amy Wilentz.

Quote: I have stopped worrying about nationality. What is Arab–American? Some people laugh when I am called that; others argue it is absolutely justified. Sometimes I wish those things were more clear, but mostly I am relieved they aren't. I don't know what I am, other than being a writer. I've been writing ever since I can remember. I am always experimenting, from the literary voice of my novel to strange fables about faith to epic fantasy to science fiction. I have come to realize my past of war and loss is a thread I pull through every tale; maybe that is a kind of identity. As for being a writer, here is my favorite thing: If I go for a walk on the beach, or lie on the floor staring out the window, I'm still working.

Lisa Suhair Majaj

Nicosia, Cyprus

Recent works: *These Words* (chapbook), 2003; *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab–American Writer and Artist* (co-editor), 2002; *Intersections: Gender, Nation and Community in Arab Women's Novels* (co-editor), 2002; *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers* (co-editor), 2000.

Favorite writers: Naomi Shihab Nye, David Williams, Maxine Hong Kingston, Barbara Kingsolver, Ursula Hegi, Adrienne Rich, Carolyn Forché, Toni Morrison—and more.

Quote: In difficult times, poets and writers have always provided lifelines. How lucky we are today to have such an expanding array of Arab–American literary voices. As a writer, I feel personally enriched by this growing community. As a critic and scholar, I marvel at what is unfolding before my eyes. And I can't wait to see what comes next.

Contact: RAWI, P.O. Box 220, Prince/Greene St. Station, New York NY 10012

www.radiotahrir.org

Lorraine Chittock (www.cats.camels.com) grew up between England and the United States, which taught her much about biculturalism. She is now traveling around the US with her dogs, Dog and Bruiser, while writing her next book. "Nomadism is not an escape from society, but a return to natural rhythms deeply imbedded into us."

Related articles from past issues can be found on our Web site, www.saudiaramcoworld.com. Click on "indexes," then on the cover of the issue indicated below.

New Alexandria Library: M/A 94
Salma Khadra Jayyusi: J/F 91
Naomi Shihab Nye: S/O 86, J/A 90, J/F 98, S/O 04
Diana Abu-Jaber: M/A 94, S/O 04
Etel Adnan: J/F 94
Arab–American poets: J/A 90

David Williams

Worcester, Massachusetts

Recent works: *Far Sides of the Only World*, 2004; *Traveling Mercies*, 1993

Favorite Writers: Too many to list.

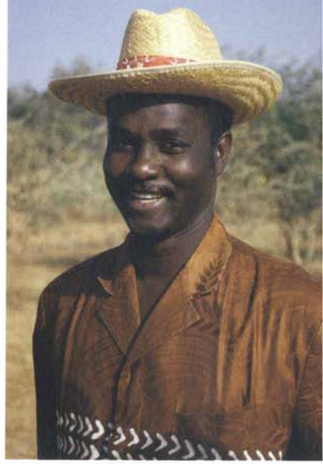
Quote: Articulating the ways we are all related, a writer can imagine reconciliations that violent forces insist are impossible. Words give birth to actions.

MAJAJ: MARIAN ADAMOU VIOLARIS; CHITTOCK: TROY SNOW

Gum Arabic

Written and photographed by Charles O. Cecil

Though some gum will flow naturally from cracks in the bark of the *Acacia senegal* tree, commercial tappers stimulate the flow by removing thin strips of bark, an operation that requires some skill if the tree is not to be injured. Tapping is normally done once a year starting in October, the end of the rainy season in Niger. Gum collection begins about four weeks after stripping, and can be repeated every few weeks thereafter for several months. Most trees yield gum for about 10 years. Opposite: *Acacia senegal* is one of more than 1100 varieties of acacia tree. Most common in the African grassland savannas along the southern edge of the Sahara Desert, it is found as far east as Oman and India. During their first two years, seedlings require protection from weeds and livestock, but need little care after that. Drought-resistant, trees can survive sandstorms and temperatures up to 45 degrees Centigrade (113°F), but cannot tolerate frost. When mature, they reach two to six meters' height (6–20'). Their lateral root system makes them soil stabilizers, useful for erosion control, and researchers give their mineral-rich leaf litter high marks for rehabilitating degraded soils. In several countries, *Acacia senegal* is part of large-scale sustainable-agriculture, forest-management and rural economic-development strategies. Opposite, top: In Niger, Boureima Wankoye, with his brother Boubacar, are leaders in developing private-sector production of gum arabic. Using seedlings imported from Sudan, their operation provides work for some 6000 rural families. In 2003 the United Nations Environment Program named Wankoye to its Global 500 Roll of Honor, one of eight individuals selected worldwide as outstanding contributors to sustainable development.



I remember the morning I realized why gum arabic is so vital to modern manufacturing—and to several African countries. I was stationed in Niamey, the capital of Niger. I took homemade pancake syrup out of the refrigerator and saw, in the bottom of the pitcher, a large deposit of crystallized sugar. Remembering some samples I had brought back from a visit to a gum-arabic tree farm, I measured out a bit of water, dropped in a pea-sized pellet and stirred.

Gum arabic can be almost completely dissolved in its own volume of water—a very unusual characteristic. I added the resulting solution to the pancake syrup, and in less than half a minute, the sugar crystals dissolved.

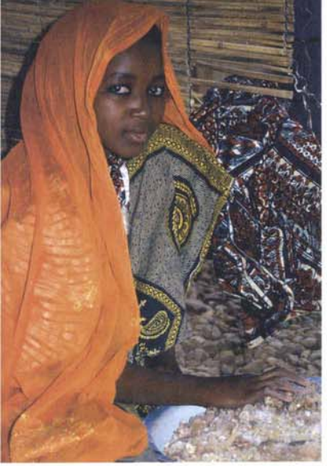
Gum arabic is the hardened sap of the *Acacia senegal* tree, which is found in the swath of arid lands extending from Senegal on the west coast of Africa all the way to Pakistan and India. Just as Arabic numerals acquired their name because Europeans learned of them from the Arabs—who had picked them up from India—so too do we owe the name of gum arabic not so much to its origins, but to Europe's early trading contacts with the Middle East.

According to Sudanese sources, gum arabic was an article of commerce as early as the 12th century BC. It was collected in Nubia and exported north to Egypt for use in the preparation of inks, watercolors and dyes. Herodotus, writing in the fifth century BC, mentions its use in embalming in Egypt. In the ninth century of our era, the Arab physician Abu Zayd Hunayn ibn Ishaq al-Ibadi, writing in his *Ten Treatises on the Eye*, described gum arabic as an ingredient in poultices or eye compresses.

By the Middle Ages, gum arabic was valued in Europe among scribes and illustrators. Following the gilding of letters in illuminated manuscripts, the application of color was the final stage. For this, illustrators mixed pigment in a binding medium. Until the 14th century, the most common medium was glair, which was obtained from egg whites. However, glair was not only difficult to prepare, it also reduced the intensity of the colors. When it was discovered that gum arabic—so readily soluble in water—could be applied more thinly and that the resulting colors were more transparent and intense, gum replaced glair.

In Turkey, illuminators used gum arabic in the application of gold to manuscripts by mixing 24-carat gold leaf with melted gum arabic to make a gold paste. This they applied with fine brushes dipped in a gelatin solution. The ability to judge the correct density of the gold paste and the gelatin prior to application was one of the marks of an accomplished illuminator. Too much gelatin would make the gold look dull, while too little could cause the gold film to crack.

Gum arabic was also important to Turkish scribes for making lampblack ink, which was obtained by burning linseed oil, beeswax, naphtha or kerosene in a restricted airflow. The resulting imperfect combustion produced a fine black soot that could be collected on the inside of a cone or tent of paper or a sheepskin placed above the flame. The soot—lampblack—was then mixed with gum arabic and water. The carbon particles in the ink did not dissolve but remained suspended in the water, thanks to the emulsifying qualities of the gum. When the ink was applied to the paper, the particles remained on the surface, offering a smooth appearance. In case of an error, they could be easily



wiped or scraped away. In contrast, most modern inks are solutions that are absorbed into the fibers of the paper.

In Africa today, individual farmers use gum arabic for other, more traditional uses, and heaps of gum arabic can be found in most local markets. It is said to soothe sore throats, assuage stomach and intestinal disorders, treat eye problems and combat hemorrhages and the common cold. It can be used as an emollient, astringent or cosmetic. The seed pods of *Acacia senegal*, 8 to 13 centimeters long (3–5") with flat seeds inside, make excellent fodder for livestock. Left unprotected, the trees will be browsed by sheep, goats, camels, impala and giraffe. Dried and preserved seeds are eaten by some people as a vegetable. When the trees have passed their gum-bearing age, the wood is used both for fuel and in charcoal production. The dark heartwood is so hard that it makes excellent weavers' shuttles. Ropes can be made from root bark fibers.

The modern industrial era has produced an explosion of manufacturing uses for gum arabic. In the 19th century, it was important to early photography as an ingredient in gum bichromate prints. Today it is used in lithography, where its ability to emulsify highly uniform, thin liquid films makes it desirable as an antioxidant coating for photosensitive plates. The same quality also makes it useful in sprayed glazes and high-tech ceramics and as a flocculating agent in refining certain ores. It is a binder for color pigments in crayons, a coating for papers and a key ingredient in the micro-encapsulating process that produces carbonless copy paper, scratch-and-sniff perfume advertisements, laundry detergents, baking mixes and aspirins. It is used in textile sizing and finishing, metal corrosion inhibition and glues and pesticides. Moisture-sensitive postage-stamp adhesives rely on it.

It is used in textile sizing and finishing, metal corrosion inhibition, glues and pesticides. Moisture-sensitive postage stamp adhesives rely on it.

Gum arabic is also used in sweeteners and as an additive in foods and beverages, as a thickener in liquids, including soft drinks, and in food flavorings. It is used to manufacture pharmaceutical capsules and to coat pills,

Top and left: **In the Wankoye enterprise, the women who work in the warehouse are the primary points of quality control, as they are in most other gum-arabic sorting facilities in Africa. Sieving and picking through the bags of gum, they remove sand, dirt, bark, twigs and other undesirable debris, as well as pieces of other, less desirable, gums that individual collectors may mix in with the gum arabic. The gum does not deteriorate if kept dry and can therefore be transported long distances.**

Gum arabic is unique among the natural gums because of its extreme solubility in water and its lack of taste. As a food additive, it has been extensively tested and appears to be one of the safest for human consumption. In beverages, gum arabic helps citrus and other oil-based flavors remain evenly suspended in water. In confectionery, glazes and artificial whipped creams, gum arabic keeps flavor oils and fats uniformly distributed, retards crystallization of sugar, thickens chewing gums and jellies, and gives soft candies a desirable mouth feel. In cough drops and lozenges, gum arabic soothes irritated mucous membranes. Many dry-packaged products, such as instant drinks, dessert mixes and soup bases, use it to enhance the shelf life of flavors. In cosmetics, too, it smoothes creams, fixatives and lotions. Lower: **Added to watercolor paints, gum arabic can increases the brilliance of color.**

and in the manufacture of vitamins, lotions and mascara and other cosmetics. Gum arabic is also a valuable addition to sweets, one supplier's Web site adds, "including chocolates, jujubes, and cookies."

"New industrial uses are likely to ensure growing demand," says Drew Davis of the US National Soft Drink Association. "The soft drink industry is growing all the time. Production of chocolate and other candy is growing. A growing global middle class, increasingly educated, is driving the demand for printed media. Better health care increases the consumption of pharmaceuticals. Scarcely any industry now using gum arabic is in decline," he observed.

World trade in gum arabic reached about $90 million in 2000. Some 56 percent of the traded volume came from Sudan, and much of the remainder was exported from Chad and Nigeria. Sudan's historically dominant position in the modern gum-arabic trade is a result of excellent soil conditions for *Acacia senegal* in much of the country and the long experience of many Sudanese in collecting and sorting the gum to yield the consistent quality grades that high-tech manufacturers rely on. One major US importer told me that "the tree can grow in Australia, New Mexico, Benin—but the gum isn't right."

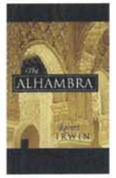
Mussa Mohamed Karama, former general manager of the Gum Arabic Company of Sudan, points out that several million Sudanese—the country's population is 29 million—are involved in some aspect of the gum-arabic trade. "The tree doesn't need foreign components to produce," says Karama. "You don't have to fertilize it; you don't have to water it or add chemicals. It grows naturally, and with minimum effort you collect the gum." Anthony Nwachukwu, president of Atlantic Gums Corporation, a Connecticut importer of gum arabic, adds, "The employment opportunities at collection centers are really important for women. The gum harvesting season presents them with one of the few opportunities to earn real cash."

Thus a drop of sap hardened in the hot African sun is plucked, sorted, bagged, shipped, ground into powder and added to a product you purchase, improving its qualities. Also "improved" are the farmer who owns the trees, the laborer who collected the gum and the women who sorted it—a chain of beneficiaries that has existed for at least two millennia, ever since Arab traders first introduced gum arabic to the western world.

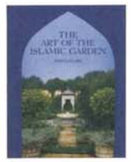
After 35 years in the United States Foreign Service, **Charles O. Cecil** retired to devote himself to photography and writing. He first became interested in gum arabic while serving as ambassador to Niger, where local businessmen are working to increase gum-arabic exports. Cecil can be reached at cecilimages@comcast.net.

SuggestionsforReading

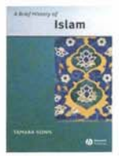
Readers of *Saudi Aramco World* who want to range more widely or delve more deeply than a bimonthly magazine can do will find interesting material, most of it recently published, in this list. Without endorsing the views of any of the authors, the editors nonetheless encourage varied and omnivorous reading as a sure, if winding, path to greater understanding. The books listed here are available in libraries, from bookstores—we urge our readers to patronize independent bookstores—or from their respective publishers; 10-digit International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) are given to facilitate ordering. Please do not order books from *Saudi Aramco World*. The full-text electronic archive of "Suggestions for Reading" from 1993 to the present can be found on the magazine's Web site at www.saudiaramcoworld.com.



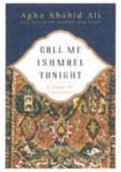
The Alhambra. Robert Irwin. 2004, Wonders of the World Series, Harvard UP, 0-674-01568-1, $19.95 hb.
British scholar and polymath Robert Irwin is the only contemporary writer who has published surveys of Arabo-Islamic art and literature for a general audience; he has shown himself a wise and sensitive reader of Islamic civilization. The Alhambra, as Irwin presents it, is a historical riddle: a series of castles and buildings shrouded in mystery, a veritable series of interlocking "texts" in need of decoding. Originally built in Nasrid Spain during the Christian *reconquista*, the Alhambra is the product of a civilization in retreat, but it was also enriched by the dazzling civilizations that had informed Andalusia through many centuries of triumph. The compound was built and rebuilt, and became an amalgam of the spiritual and artistic strains and trends that had been developing and evolving over many centuries of Arab life. *The Alhambra* is that rare book that entertains while it enlightens: not merely a boon for those needing a guidebook, but also a valuable gateway into the world of Islam during its European sojourn. —DAVID SHASHA



The Art of the Islamic Garden. Emma Clark. 2005, Crowood Press, 1-861-26609-X, $50 hb.
In many Islamic lands from Asia to Africa, the art of the garden has based itself on the principle that this world is a reflection of the divine realm. While there have been different garden styles—palace gardens, private home gardens, orchards, public open gardens and flower gardens are a few—there are frequently recurring common elements among them, including most notably a central pool or fountain from which four streams flow symbolizing the four directions or four corners of the Earth. The author is an English Muslim who teaches at the Prince of Wales School of Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts. She makes extensive use of both her historical research on Islamic gardens and the Prince of Wales's Carpet Garden, which serves as a thorough case study of the issues that arise in attempting to adapt traditional Islamic garden principles and species to colder, western climates and cultural contexts.



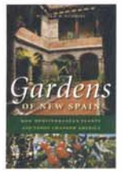
A Brief History of Islam. Tamara Sonn. 2004, Blackwell, 1-4051-0900-9, $17.95 pb.
This concise work, an outstanding primer, is divided into five major sections. The first presents the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and explains the early ideological disputes that led to the split between Sunni and Shi'a. In part two, Sonn examines the development of institutions, law, political structure, cultural achievements and spirituality during the "Golden Age" of Islam. This is followed by a look at division and reorganization, and how external challenges—the Crusades, the decline of the Abbasids and the rise of the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals—affected Islamic history. Section four is particularly relevant to understanding current events in the Middle East, as the author addresses colonialism and its effects, along with themes of Islamic reform that have developed during this period. Last, she examines the possible directions for the future. —HELEN EL MALLAKH



Call Me Ishmael Tonight: A Book of Ghazals. Agha Shahid Ali. 2003, Norton, 0-393-32612-8, $21.95 pb.
This collection of poetry by the late Agha Shahid Ali brings the classical Arabic *ghazal*, or ode, to an English-speaking audience. Ali, who died in 2001, was a renowned Kashmiri-American poet able to bridge literary and cultural divides. This compilation of his best ghazals takes its reader on a journey through the intricacies of this extremely disciplined, centuries-old poetic form. Ali works with both East and West, tradition and modernity, as he weaves themes of romantic love and spirituality amid global locations and issues. (A profile of Ali appeared in the July/August 2001 issue of *Saudi Aramco World*.) —HELEN EL MALLAKH

The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization. Richard W. Bulliet. 2004, Columbia UP, 0-231-12796-0, $24.50 hb.
Middle Eastern scholar Richard Bulliet presents a new concept: "Islamo-Christian civilization," which challenges common stereotypes about the irreconcilability of Muslim-led and Christian-led societies. The author argues that Islamic and Christian cultures were both born of the same civilization and are thus "sibling societies." Evaluating the shared historical experiences of both religions and their interactions over the centuries, Bulliet lays out his case in the first of four essays. For more than 1400 years, Islam and Christianity were linked by trade, the transfer of ideas and their Abrahamic heritage. But then what explains the current state of conflict, particularly between the US and Muslim countries in the Middle East? The author turns to this question in his second essay, which argues that readers should be asking, "What went on?" rather than "What went wrong?" Beginning in the 16th century, the sibling cultures took different paths, particularly regarding the separation of religion and state. By the second half of the 20th century, the role of Islam grew as secular states in the Middle East failed to deliver democracy and became more authoritarian. Islam, Bulliet argues, served as a counterbalance to authoritarianism and is thus not a barrier to either democracy or economic growth. The third and fourth essays continue to question beliefs that have shaped western policies and interventions in the Middle East since the Cold War. Bulliet challenges the rationale behind attempts to impose particular values on the Middle East. According to him, it is these policies—not an inherent incompatibility of values—that are the basis of current conflicts. The book concludes by suggesting an alternative path in which the West respects, rather than attempts to change, the values of Islamic societies, and thus builds on the deep roots of the shared Islamo-Christian civilization. —HELEN EL MALLAKH

The First Scientist: A Life of Roger Bacon. Brian Clegg. 2003, Carroll & Graf, 0-78671-116-7, $26/£14.99 hb; 0-78671-358-5, $14 pb.
Roger Bacon, a 13th-century Oxford-educated Franciscan, wasn't the first scientist, but he was an influential advocate of the scientific method and, in the author's view, met four criteria that define a true scientist: He believed in mathematics as the foundation of science; he was open to information without bias; he understood the need to communicate his findings; and he realized the importance of experimentation. Arab and Muslim savants like al-Kindi and Alhazen qualified as true scientists in this sense, and Bacon advanced the method in Europe, setting the stage for figures like Galileo and Newton; his fascination with applied science (i.e., technology) influenced Leonardo da Vinci three centuries later. He was a genius in many fields, and much of his scientific knowledge was based on the Arab masters, whom he read in Latin translation. After his death, he was marginalized and still stands in the shadow of a more famous Bacon, Sir Francis, the Elizabethan more often identified with the scientific method. Yet in many ways, Roger was much more influential: Not only did he recognize the great value of Arab science for ongoing research, but he brought new insights to those endeavors and assured their dissemination in Europe's scientific community. —ROBERT W. LEBLING



Gardens of New Spain: How Mediterranean Plants and Foods Changed America. William W. Dunmire. 2004, University of Texas, 0-292-70271-X, $65 hb; 0-292-70564-6, $24.95 pb.
When the Spanish began colonizing the Americas in the late 15th and 16th centuries, they brought with them the plants and foods of their homeland—wheat, melons, grapes, vegetables and fruits. Missionaries and settlers introduced these throughout what became "Latin" America and the southwestern United States, where they became staple crops amid the corn, beans and squashes that had sustained Americans to that time. This intermingling of New and Old World plants and foods was one of the most significant fusions in the history of international cuisine—and what the Spanish brought to the New World was itself a legacy much enriched by the country's 800 years of rule by Arabs, who brought new agricultural technologies and crops to Spain. The author of this careful, highly detailed account of "plantways and foodways" is a retired naturalist of the US National Park Service. He begins with how Spain came to adopt foods from the Fertile Crescent, Africa and Asia, and then traces which ones came to which place (mostly in Mexico and the United States) and how each diffused, region by region. He does not limit his view to consumables: he looks also at the very idea of the garden, how it is conceived and set to purpose; at farming technologies and cookery; and at the interactions among native Americans and newcomers.

Gertrude Bell. H. V. F. Winstone. 2004 (rev. ed.), Barzan, 0-9547728-0-6, £19.95; Stacey International, 0-9547728-0-6, $29.95 hb.
In this expanded edition of his 1978 biography of Gertrude Bell, Winstone offers new insights into this formidable woman's life and her work in British-occupied Iraq following World War I. Bell's writings from that time highlight some of the same political complexities that still remain today, some 80 years later. The first half of the book shows Bell as a child of fortune, born to a wealthy and influential British family that enabled her to circumvent many of the constraints traditionally placed on Victorian women. The author follows Bell on her numerous journeys to Persia, to India and across Arabia, and describes Bell's work as the first female officer in the British military intelligence service. The latter half of the book details Bell's struggles with the conflicting agendas prevalent in British-occupied Iraq from her arrival in 1915 until her death there in 1926. The author shows Bell's profoundly positive contributions, including her foundation of the first modern museum and libraries in Baghdad and her conservation of the country's archeological treasures; he also describes some of the unintended consequences of her activities, such as her mapmaking of the region, which contributed to decades of territorial dispute. "Like all champions of other people's causes," Winstone says, "she was often given to error, dangerous error, but her words and actions were those of a friend." —HELEN EL MALLAKH

God's Rule: Government and Islam—Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought. Patricia Crone. 2004, Columbia UP, 0-231-13290-5, $39.50 hb.
Think tanks, journalists and other analysts are devoting much time and attention these days to forecasting the shape of political institutions throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds. But to do that, we must understand how these institutions developed. The author, a distinguished Islamic scholar known for straight talk and surprising insights, cuts through a welter of misconceptions and describes the birth and evolution of government in the Islamic Middle East. Writing unpretentiously, making connections to modern-day life, Crone explores how rival versions of the Islamic community, the *umma*, developed over time, and how the nature and role of the caliphate changed through history. She explains the influence of Persian and Greek political thought on Islamic government and on the great Islamic thinkers like al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd. She shares her insights on the role of religion in government: While the Christian concept separates religion and state (i.e., God and Caesar), in the Muslim tradition "the *umma* was a congregation and a state rolled into one." —ROBERT W. LEBLING

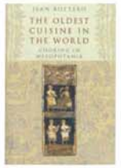
Islamic Tiles. Venetia Porter. 2005, Interlink, 1-56656-572-3, $19.95 pb.
Persian Painting. Sheila R. Canby. 2005, Interlink, 1-56656-573-1, $19.95 pb.
These slim, rich, introductory survey books are the latest volumes in Interlink's Eastern Art Series, and each is authored by a curator of the Islamic and Oriental collections at the British Museum. *Islamic Tiles* covers the ninth to 19th centuries in Iraq, Persia, Central Asia, Syria and Turkey, and examines craft techniques as well as styles. *Persian Painting* covers the 14th to 19th centuries, beginning with the tools and materials that enabled artists to achieve unprecedented effects. These and the other books in this series will be useful additions to library shelves.

Kartography. Kamila Shamsie. 2002, Harcourt, 0-15-602973-1, $13 pb.
Set in Pakistan during the turbulent 1990's, this complex, metaphorical novel about childhood friendships, adolescent love and family secrets has received much acclaim. As privileged children of Karachi's elite, Karim and Raheen grow up as best friends until Karim is a teenager, when his family moves to London. Separated from Raheen, Karim turns inward and finds escape in the world of maps. But it is more than geography that is separating them, as Raheen uncovers the history of the relationship between her parents and Karim's. Throughout the novel, maps are metaphors for clashes among the polities, borders, ethnicities and identities that have deeply affected Pakistanis at all levels of society for two generations. —HELEN EL MALLAKH

The Most Magnificent Mosque. Ann Jungman. Shelley Fowles, ill. 2004, Frances Lincoln, 1-84507-012-7, £10.99/$15.95 hb.
Set in Cordoba in Muslim Spain, this is a lively, fully illustrated read-aloud children's fable about religious tolerance. In the garden of Cordoba's Great Mosque, the playful mischief of three boys—a Muslim, a Jew and a Christian—arouses the caliph's ire, and as punishment they must work in the garden together for three months. They grow up to be prominent citizens, and when Cordoba is captured by Christians and the new ruler proposes razing the mosque to build a church on its site, their shared childhood experience leads them to come together to plead for saving the mosque. The ruler is impressed, and agrees to put the church in part of the mosque and to preserve the whole, as it can be seen to this day.

The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History. Ibn Khaldun. Franz Rosenthal, tr. and intro; N.J. Dawood, abridged and edited; Bruce B. Lawrence, new intro. 2005, Bollingen Series, Princeton UP, 0-691-12054-4, $24.95 pb. (Orig. pub. 1969.)
Ibn Khaldun was a 14th-century Arab jurist and scholar from Tunisia who revolutionized the writing of history. *The Muqaddimah* laid the foundation for new disciplines, among them sociology, ethnography, economics and the philosophy of history. This work—part of a larger history—expounds a theory for the rise and fall of civilizations. Ibn Khaldun paints the story of humankind on a vast canvas, encompassing nations, cities, dynasties, tribes and families, along with their works, their arts and their sciences. When Rosenthal's original three-volume translation appeared in 1958, British historian Arnold Toynbee called *The Muqaddimah* "undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever been created by any mind in any time or place." Dawood shrewdly condensed it into one volume in 1969 and improved Rosenthal's translation, and Princeton has now made the book available in a new paperback edition, with a fresh introduction. If you're new to Ibn Khaldun, you'll likely be impressed by his modernity, his frankness and his scientific approach to history. He is also, refreshingly, a literary man, who loves finely turned phrases and well-expressed ideas. You'll find plenty of both in this book. —ROBERT W. LEBLING

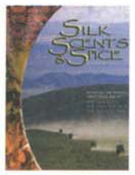
The Oldest Cuisine in the World: Cooking in Mesopotamia. Jean Bottéro. Teresa Lavender Fagen, tr. 2004, University of Chicago, 0-226-06735-1, $22.50 hb.
The author is not only a preeminent scholar of Mesopotamia, but also a



culinary aficionado. When he discovered in Yale University's Babylonian Collection three hitherto unnoticed cuneiform tablets recording some 40 recipe-like accounts and a wealth of eclectic culinary advice, he set to the task with both head and heart. By appealing to one of the few experiences that we fully share with the people of the second millennium—eating—this book makes that distant, "ancient" time almost tangible. Bottéro begins with an orientation to the region and its peoples that is as good a summation as can be found anywhere, and takes care to explain that reading second-millennium texts is not quite like reading as we know it today: Though often lyrical and personal, their brevity makes for enormous gaps; to glean meaning from a passage, it is thus useful to have much other knowledge to bring to bear. Bottéro's chapter headings are illuminating in themselves: Fire; Hearths and Equipment; Indirect Cooking in Fatty Broth; Cooks and Culinary Tradition; Food Preparation Without Heat; Drinks; and more. It is all at least as much interpretation as translation, and Bottéro is superb, even charming, at directing his explanations to non-specialists.

Return, Afghanistan. Zalmaï. 2004, Aperture, 1-931788-49-9, $39.95 hb.
Afghanistan has inspired several recent monographs that might be called visual elegies—Fazal Sheikh's and Simon Norfolk's come to mind—as photographers struggle to break the conventions of war photography to communicate national trauma in ways that might linger amid a world of streaming media. Zalmaï fled his country as a boy in 1980 and returned several times as a photographer: Under the Taliban, he photographed (surreptitiously) in black and white, for "either war has no color, or war drains the color out of life." In 2002, he returned again to travel up and down the country. Though shocked by the destruction, he found "an incredible life force that had survived despite everything," and to him, "the colors were returning." He loaded panoramic and 35mm cameras with color film. His results are intimate, taking the viewer into both physical and emotional territory in towns, cities, camps, shops, schools, homes and countryside. The panoramas, which unfortunately make up only about half the book, are by far the most effective, as this format better replicates our true visual field, and Zalmaï uses it skillfully. Hold this book up close. Go slowly. When you shut the covers, the photographs linger.

The Scimitar and the Veil: Extraordinary Women of Islam. Jennifer Heath. 2004, Hidden Spring, 1-58768-020-3, $28 hb.
Refreshing and lucid, this is an "aha!" book that will expand the way you walk the difficult terrain of women and Islam. Starting with the formative roles of women in the life of the Prophet Muhammad himself, the author presents carefully researched accounts of 50 historical women—queens, warriors, poets and more—over 13 centuries, embellished for feeling and story but true to facts. All show abundantly how "the veil is not a burial shroud. Behind it there has always been dynamic life." Heath grew up in Afghanistan in a diplomatic family, and though Islam is not her religion, Islamic society was the crucible of her character. She learned firsthand that Islam is "monotheistic, but it is not a monoculture." Now a journalist, she laments her lack of scholarly credentials, but her popular style gives this excellent, timely book staying power in the arena of cultural dialogue.



Silk, Scents and Spice: Retracing the World's Great Trade Routes. John Lawton. 2004, UNESCO, 92-3-103927-X (French edition: 92-3-203927-3), €19.80 hb.
Since the late 1980's, the author has been a frequent traveler on three of the world's most historically significant trade networks—often on assignment for this magazine, which first published his theme issue on the Silk Roads in November/December 1988. (Lawton's Silk Roads accounts here are updated and considerably expanded.) Each route, of course, carried millennia of ideas and culture as well as the three commodities for which we know them today: silk, spices and incense. The Silk Roads linked Europe and North Africa with Asia by land. The Spice Routes wove together Europe, the Arabian Peninsula, India and Asia by sea. The much older Incense Trail, which the author treats only briefly, reached from the southern Arabian Peninsula to Egypt, Babylon and Rome. The volume is abundantly and beautifully illustrated with photographs by Tor Eigeland, Bill Lyons and Nik Wheeler, who often accompanied Lawton on assignment. He writes an engaging mix of travelogue and history, pulling together in one useful, attractive volume the often overlooked history of Old World trade.

Stars and Numbers: Astronomy and Mathematics in the Medieval Arab and Western Worlds. Paul Kunitzsch. Ashgate/Variorum Collected Studies Series, 0-86078-968-3, £59.50 hb.
Many of the brightest stars in the heavens today have Arabic names—testimony to the great influence of medieval Arab and Islamic astronomy on European science. German historian of science Paul Kunitzsch has done more to document and study this important influence than almost any other living scholar. He has written at least 20 books and more than 160 articles and papers on various aspects of medieval astronomy and related sciences. Some of Kunitzsch's most interesting work is in German and published in hard-to-find journals, but the Variorum series helps give his studies wider exposure. In this collection on Arabic–Islamic astronomy and its reception in medieval Europe—Kunitzsch's second—the 29 articles (20 in English) are divided into four sections: Ptolemy in the Arabic–Latin Tradition, Arabic Astronomy, Arabic Astronomy in the West, and Mathematics and Numbers. The author devotes special attention to 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi, a 10th-century Muslim astronomer whose catalogue of the fixed stars was the earliest and most important channel for transmission of Arabic star names to the West. He also concentrates on the astrolabe, a star-locating device invented by Greeks and perfected by Arabs. European scientists learned about the astrolabe from their colleagues in Islamic Spain. It was by way of al-Andalus, Kunitzsch explains in more than one article, that much of the Arabs' legacy of scientific knowledge found its way into Europe.

—ROBERT W. LEBLING

The Unromantic Orient. Muhammad Asad. Elma Ruth Harder, tr. 2004, Al-Qalam, 0-9732333-2-X, c$22/us$17 pb. (Orig. **Unromantisches Morgenland: Aus dem Tagebuch einer Reise**, 1924, Frankfurter Societäts-Druckerei.)
Before he embraced Islam, took the name Muhammad Asad and went on to a lifetime of Islamic scholarship, Leopold Weiss made his first trip to the Levant in 1922 at the invitation of his uncle. He kept a journal, which he published on his return to Germany; it is now available in English for the first time. It reveals a brilliantly articulate, searching young man, increasingly—at times passionately—disillusioned by colonial politics and warmed by the Arab friendships he begins to form in British Mandate Palestine, Transjordan, Egypt and Damascus. Raised as a Jew in an intellectual family, he arrived in the Muslim "East" painfully conscious of its "otherness" and the degree to which it had been romanticized, and he was ready to explore and embrace it as an alternative to the "spiritual laziness" of his milieu in Europe. This book will be most valuable to those who are already familiar with Asad's biography and writings, and to those looking for a firsthand account of daily life in that region in 1922 and 1923. For those seeking an introduction to Asad, *The Road to Mecca* is his classic, and the historical profile in the January/February 2002 issue of *Saudi Aramco World* will be helpful as well.

Visions: Palestine. Andrea Künzig. Udo Steinbach, essay. 2004, Kehrer, 3-936-636-07-9, €40 hb.
This book could have been titled "Palestine in the Last Decade of Arafat." Starting in 2003 with the euphoric return of Yasser Arafat to Gaza in 1993, Künzig poignantly captured a wide range of daily life and landmark political events in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and Jerusalem, ending with the construction in 2004 of the separation wall cutting off the West Bank. (Arafat died several months after the book was published.) While much of her focus is on Palestinian life, Künzig occasionally offers sharp contrasts: A leaky hose watering a playing field in a settlement appears next to a Bedouin girl filling dirty water jugs from a public pump in East Jerusalem. It's an eclectic, thoughtful time capsule of a volatile era.

SuggestionsforListening

REVIEWED BY CHRIS NICKSON

Mory Kanté. Sabou. Riverboat Records
Guinean vocalist Kanté's career dates back to the 1970's, and in 1988 he became the first African artist to sell a million singles ("Yéké Yéké"). Born to a family of hereditary singers, or *griots*, he departs, in this acoustic record, from his more commercial, dance-based sound, not only taking lead vocals, but playing most instruments, including the xylophone-like *balofon* and the *kora*. Intimate and gently glorious, it's an album that celebrates the voice—and his is superb throughout. It's a disc that's constantly aware of tradition, but never dated. The music sparkles; the singing reaches for the skies.

Khaled. Ya-Rayi. Wrasse
Khaled might still be the King of Raï, but plenty of people think he's let the crown slip a little lately. Possibly he feels that way too, because on this he seems determined to show he still deserves the throne, bringing the kind of spirit that hasn't been there since the early 1990's when his dynamic, adventurous recordings transformed him into an international superstar. There's a deep passion to his singing on tracks like "Yema Yema" and the title cut, pushed along by arrangements that eloquently expand the possibilities of Raï into rock and soul. Intelligent production gives it guts, not blandness. The result is his best disc in a decade.

Marcel Khalife. Caress. Nagam
Although he's known as "Lebanon's Bob Dylan," Khalife is more than a singer-songwriter—he's also a virtuoso on the *'ud*, one who moves the instrument into jazz and other styles, as he shows on this instrumental outing. Working with his longtime quartet Al Mayadine, which includes two of his sons, Khalife is as much at home on the Andalusian-influenced "Samai Bayati" as on the shape-shifting "Al Hambra." In Khalife's hands, these fusions are supple and fluent, breaking musical rules with easy grace and delightful results. The music is indeed a caress, showing that Khalife is a visionary on the instrument.

Masters of Persian Music. Faryad. World Village
The band members are the four leading Persian classical musicians in Iran, and on this new disc they mix traditional and original compositions with inspired improvisation. There's a filigreed delicacy to the music while the poetic vocals range from the lovely counterpoint of "Ham Avazi Shushtari" to others with an almost operatic grandeur. These are live performances, and they are thrilling, with a knife-edge excitement to music that sounds as fresh as the day it was written. With just three instruments and two voices, the group achieves a stunning, majestic sound.

Rachid Taha. Tékitoi. Wrasse
For several years Algeria's Taha has been pushing to find the perfect mix of rock and North African music. His previous disc, *Made in Medina*, came very close, and this time he's nailed it. There's a brooding, abraded quality to his increasingly raw voice, and the balance between strings, flailing percussion and the crunchy guitars—usually by Steve Hillage—is just about perfect, all pushed by an unstoppable, at times even punishing, backbeat. The highlight for some will be the Arabic remake of The Clash's punk anthem "Rock the Casbah," which not only turns the song on its head and reenergizes it, but also pays tribute to one of Taha's inspirations.

Daby Touré. Diam. Real World
Against his father's wishes, Mauritanian Touré became a guitarist, eventually teaming up with his cousin in Paris to form the successful group Touré Touré. On this subtle and gentle solo debut, Touré is an African singer-songwriter with a cosmopolitan execution and western influences from Bob Marley to The Police. The melodies soothe, but it's his achingly beautiful voice that commands attention, pulling at the emotions, sometimes layered so it's almost choral, and ideally coupled with his wistful songs. Easy to listen to without ever being easy listening, it's a shimmering bridge between worlds. Not a blockbuster, perhaps, but *Diam* is the kind of record that lures you back over and over again, satisfying the spirit each time.

Indonesia: Beyond the Gamelan
Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim state, and with 13,600 islands—more than 3000 of them inhabited—it's a sprawling country full of musical styles that enjoy no apparent unifying tradition. The most famous, perhaps, is *gamelan* (the term refers to the orchestra, not an instrument), the hypnotic rural music found most frequently in Bali, Java and Lombok. It is played on gongs, metal tubes and other percussion. It can range from the seductive to the clashing, with Balinese gamelan in particular offering a kind of contemplative beauty. The exquisite 1940's field recordings of **Music for the Gods** (Rykodisc) capture Balinese gamelan at its finest, while the Nonesuch Explorer Pacific series has *Music for the Shadow Play*, a soundtrack to the country's famous shadow puppet theater, and offers also the spirited, often stately volumes of *Javanese Court Gamelan*. In all, 10 of the 12 discs in the series are devoted to Indonesia.

Beyond this, both *kroncong* and *gambang kromong* are termed early Indonesian pop styles, but not in any western sense. There's a raw, folklike, rice-paddy-village feel to both of them. Both are distant ancestors—an equivalent to a line connecting Jimmie Rodgers with Britney Spears—of *dangdut*, a kind of ethnic disco with drum machines, synthesizers and vocals whose name derives from the sound of a musical bar ending on a low note ("dang") and starting on a high note ("dut"). That's the only style that today seems to come close to a national sound. It's spawned some major stars like Rhoma Irama, who's popular all across Indonesia. You can sample all of them on *The Rough Guide to the Music of Indonesia* (World Music Network). It's a healthy introduction that samples previously recorded tracks.

Bandung, a few hours out of Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, has developed its own popular music form called *jaipongan*, which evolved in the 1960's by modernizing local folk styles. It's light as gauze and utterly infectious, with exotic twists of melody that are as smooth as cream when played by Sabah Habas Mustapha and the Jugala All Stars on *So La Li* (Kartini/Omnium).

Ambitiously, the Smithsonian Folkways label has produced a 20-volume series called Music of Indonesia which attempts to catalogue many styles using field recordings made all over the archipelago between 1990 and 1997. The full series could be daunting to all but ethnomusicologists, but there's an excellent overview of it on *Discover Indonesia*, which cherry-picks the series and offers selections ranging from church music to funeral gongs. Volume 20, *Indonesian Guitars*, is one in the series worth discovering all by itself.

There's so much to explore in Indonesian music that it could take a lifetime, but the records above are a good place to start sampling.

Chris Nickson is a journalist and broadcaster who covers world music. He's the author of *The NPR Curious Listener's Guide to World Music* (Perigee Books).

Reader's Guide

WRITTEN BY JULIE WEISS AND JOHN MAGUIRE

For students: We hope this two-page guide will help sharpen your reading skills and deepen your understanding of this issue's articles.
For teachers: We encourage reproduction and adaptation of these ideas, freely and without further permission from *Saudi Aramco World*, by teachers at any level, whether working in a classroom or through home study.

—THE EDITORS

Analyzing Visual Images

Usually this section of the "Reader's Guide" has you looking at a photograph, analyzing its composition, and exploring its symbols. This month, we'll try something a bit different. We'll explore what it means to adorn objects and to decorate surfaces.

Read "Masterpieces to Go." According to the article, why do truck drivers decorate their trucks? List the reasons. Look at the photographs. What do they make you think of? Las Vegas? Times Square? The Crown Jewels? Come up with your own list. Think about other reasons people decorate. For example, sometimes decorations—like bright-colored stockings or tattoos—simply make a surface more visible. Sometimes they announce status. Add any reasons you think of to your list of why truck drivers decorate their trucks.

Get a magazine that has lots of pictures of celebrities (musicians, athletes, actors). Cut out three pictures of people. Glue each to a piece of paper. How do the people in your pictures decorate themselves? Think about makeup, tattoos, jewelry and types of clothing. Identify the adornments as if you were identifying a lab specimen. That is, make lines that point to the decorations. At the end of each line, in the space outside the picture, name each decoration. Next to each image, write a hypothesis that answers the question, "Why does this person decorate himself or herself in this way?" Are any of the reasons similar to those that inspire the Pakistani truck drivers to decorate their trucks?

Now think about decorating objects. Look at the places and objects around you. Which do you decorate? With a disposable camera from the drugstore, take pictures of your decorated objects and places. For example, do you decorate the inside of your locker? The walls of your bedroom? The covers of your books? Make a display of your photographs. To accompany the display, write about what the decorations mean to you. Why decorate those specific objects? Why these specific decorations? Finally, if you were given a truck to decorate, how would you decorate it?

Class Activities

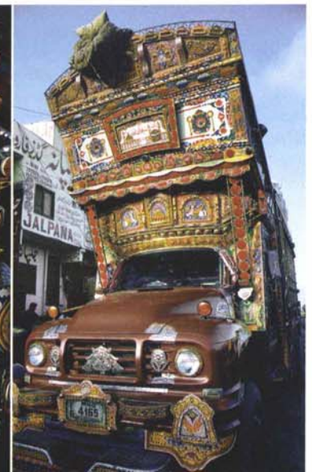
The activities in this section are designed to engage students with the material in this issue of *Saudi Aramco World* while encouraging them to connect it to the larger themes they explore in their other studies. This month's activities revolve around two basic concepts: **A Historian's Tools** and **Identity**.

Theme: A Historian's Tools

Professional historians define history as the study of continuity and change over time. Historians have tools, just as carpenters have tools. In "The Model of the Historians," you can see the tools in action. These activities give you a chance to get acquainted with, and to try out, some of the tools in the historian's tool box. As you complete them, think how a carpenter had to pay close attention to a hammer or a saw the first time he or she used one. You'll be doing the same sort of thing. Only you won't be building objects; you'll be telling stories.

What is chronological thinking? How important is chronology to historians?

The word *chronology* comes from the Greek *chronos*, which means time, and *logos*, which means knowledge. Chronology is the science of time. Do you use chronological thinking? To find out, try this: List, in order, what you did last weekend, or today, or the details of a recent adventure. Number your list, identifying what happened first, what happened second, and so on. Now tell a partner about what you did. How do you want to tell the story? Do you want to tell the details in the order that they happened? Or maybe you want to start with the most interesting details and leave out some of the duller stuff. After you've both told your stories, discuss whether you told them in chronological order. If you did, what did you like about telling it that way? If you didn't organize your story chronologically, did your partner feel that anything important was missing?



Class Activities (cont'd.)

Now let's think about chronology as historians use it. Find at least one history textbook, and look at the table of contents. How are the chapters organized? Pick a chapter from the middle of the book to read. Does it make sense when you pull it out from the chronological order? In other words, when you think about history, how important is chronology to your understanding of what happened in the past?

"The Model of the Historians" reports that before al-Mas'udi, historians "collected vast quantities of material and set it down in roughly chronological order." That word "roughly" is interesting: What if it *weren't* entirely chronological, or maybe not chronological at all? What if the result were more like a collage, a patchwork of information that you couldn't put on a timeline because time *wasn't* the organizing principle? Think about a society of people that write about events that way. If they don't think about time as a straight line, perhaps they think of it as a circle. Agriculture, astronomy, and religion often view time as circular. Try writing about part of your own life story as a circle, rather than a straight line from past to present. (It might take some imagination!) Then move on to this exercise: With your partner, hold a conversation, with one of you taking the role of someone who lived before al-Mas'udi, while the other lives today. Explain to the other person how you think about history. Use the questions above as guidelines. Look for similarities between your worldviews. Try to help each other understand the differences.

What sources do historians use?

The people who wrote your history textbooks got their information from someplace—and we hope it wasn't just another textbook! Historians study objects and documents that were created in the past. When it's possible, they also talk to people who lived during the time period they're studying. According to "The Model of the Historians," how did historians before al-Mas'udi get their information? List the sources al-Mas'udi used to get his information. Which do you think would be the most useful? The most credible? Rank the sources from most to least valuable.

Working with a small group, come up with a list of sources you would use to answer this question: How did television change people's lives when it was first introduced in the late 1940's? Rank your sources just as you ranked al-Mas'udi's. If time allows, assign different people different sources to pursue. Report back to your group. Discuss which sources turned out to be most valuable. What made them so valuable?

How do historians gain credibility? Why are people willing to believe them?

Do you believe everything you read in a history book? Do you ever wonder what might have been left out? Do you believe what Caroline Stone has written about al-Mas'udi? After all, she's writing a piece of history. With your group, look back at the activities about historians' sources. Identify the sources Stone has used to write this brief history of al-Mas'udi's life and work. Are they sources you trust? What about Stone herself? Does she have knowledge, experience or credentials that make you willing to trust her work? Write a classified ad, looking for a historian. In your ad, identify the skills and abilities you are looking for in the person you will hire. If al-Mas'udi applied for the job, would you hire him? Why or why not? In a group or pairs, conduct a "job interview" in which one person takes the role of al-Mas'udi and the others ask him to defend his qualifications.

Theme: Individual and Group Identity

We all have many ways of identifying ourselves. We are citizens of a country, members of a religion. We play roles in our families (brother, sister, son, daughter and so on) and in our communities (student, employee, library patron). "Of Stories and Storytellers" looks at a group of Arab–American writers and how they identify themselves, as individuals and as a group of Americans with a more-or-less common ethnic background.

How do group affiliation and individual identity affect each other?

On page 29, Egyptian–American Pauline Kaldas is quoted remembering that until she saw her first RAWI newsletter, "who I was and what I wrote about was not something I saw reflected in the world around me." Kaldas implies that the lack of group identity posed a problem for her. Choose a group you're part of that's important to your sense of who you are. Write a journal entry addressing these questions: What does it mean to you to be part of the group? How does membership in the group affect your sense of who you are? Do you remember a time when you weren't part of the group? What was it like? If you can't remember such a time, imagine it: How would you be a different person if you weren't part of the group?

Why would—or wouldn't—a writer want to claim an identity as Arab–American?

Think about what Evelyn Shakir means when she says, "In the early 1980's, I don't think such writers necessarily thought of themselves in this way… These days they and those who follow in their footsteps are almost forced to identify themselves in this way, Arab–American writers, or else explain why they refuse that label." Make a T-chart. In the left-hand column, list reasons the writers would want to identify themselves as Arab–American writers. In the other column, list reasons they might not want to identify themselves that way. Using the chart as a starting point, think about your own identity. What is one way you like to identify yourself? Is there some part of your identity that others might expect of you but you don't want to claim? For example, do you not want to be known as "your kid brother's sister"—at least when you're in school? Write a statement that begins: "I am proud to claim my identity as…" List as many things as you can. Follow it with a statement that begins: "I prefer not to claim my identity as…"

How do groups maintain their stability? Why is stability important to group identity?

Part of "Of Stories and Storytellers" explains RAWI's history. It's filled with information that seems, at least at first glance, not to be nearly as interesting as how people think about their identities. But think again. What actions did RAWI's leaders take to assert the group's identity and to ensure that the group would survive? Look at a group you're more familiar with, such as a religious congregation or a sports team or a club. What does the group do that helps maintain its ability to go on from year to year without falling apart? What do you think would happen if the group didn't take those actions? Write a brief imagining of one of the groups without the structures that help stabilize it (e.g., a congregation without a building to meet in, a team without a coach or a game schedule).

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Events&Exhibitions

Iraq and China: Ceramics, Trade And Innovation focuses on revolutionary changes that took place in Iraqi ceramics during the ninth century as the humble character of Islamic pottery responded to a wave of luxury Chinese goods imported by Arab and Persian merchants. During this period, Iraq became a center for Islamic ceramic production as new technologies transformed common earthenware into a vehicle for complex multi-colored designs. Chinese ceramics were admired in Iraq for their shiny white surfaces and hard body. As neither the essential raw materials nor the appropriate firing technology were locally available, Islamic potters created their own versions by covering finely potted yellow clay hemispherical bowls with a glaze that turned opaque after firing, creating ceramics that were described as "pearl cups like the moon." This technique offered the potters an ideal canvas for bold decorative designs, first in cobalt blue and then with "luster"—mixtures of copper and silver that were painted onto the glaze and fixed in a second firing. Following the disintegration of the Abbasid Empire after the 10th century, migrating Iraqi potters transmitted these techniques to Egypt and Iran, whence they traveled to Europe, giving rise to the great "majolica" tradition in medieval Spain and Renaissance Italy. In China, 14th-century experiments with cobalt blue from the Islamic world led to Yuan and Ming blue-and-white, which in turn influenced such European production as Delft, Royal Copenhagen and English blue-and-white. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through April 24.

Light-handed calligraphy decorates a glazed earthenware bowl made in ninth-century Iraq, possibly in the port city of Basra.

<<< Ongoing

Mummy: The Inside Story uses cutting-edge computer graphics and the latest scientific and medical research to allow visitors to view a "virtual unwrapping" and autopsy of the 2800-year-old mummy of Nesperunnub, priest of Karnak in Egypt. Visitors sit in a state-of-the-art immersive theater where, wearing 3-D glasses, they can scrutinize the mummy's body and objects inside the wrappings. British Museum, **London**, through March 27.

The Sky in a Carpet presents some 60 rugs from the "classical" period between the 15th and 19th centuries, woven in Mamluk Egypt, Ottoman Turkey or Safavid Persia, as well as some Caucasian, Turkmen and Moroccan pieces. Whether court rugs, tribal rugs or village rugs, all show strong and incisive designs, fully developed as if they had "fallen from the sky." Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, through March 31.

Pharaoh was far more than a sovereign: He was also god, priest-king, victorious warrior and uxorious family man. As guarantor of the equilibrium of the world, all power in his immense realm, unified around 3300 BC, was his. This exhibition traces the principal stages of Egypt's history through the monuments left behind, beginning with a gallery of pharaonic portraits. Some 200 objects, mostly from the brilliant New Empire period (ca. 1550–1069 BC), illuminate different aspects of the rulers' personalities. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, through April 10.

Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600 explores the art and culture of the Turks from inner Asia to the Bosporus over a thousand-year period. The successive empires they created stretched from China to the Mediterranean and gave rise to splendid architectural monuments as well as an incomparable artistic heritage, including the extraordinary array of paintings, manuscripts, calligraphy, textiles, ceramics, glass, woodwork and metalwork on display at the Royal Academy, **London**, through April 12.

Arab Americans in Arizona: Stories, Traditions, Experiences explores the migrations of Arabic-speaking people to Arizona since the latter part of the 19th century, using musical instruments, calligraphy, jewelry, metalwork and historical items to document their experiences and their economic and cultural contributions. The exhibition explains the diversity of Arab–Americans' communities, their religious beliefs, social customs, dress, language, music, family structure and traditions of hospitality, and how such elements have influenced their assimilation into American society. **Mesa [Arizona]** Southwest Museum, through April 17.

John Feeney Retrospective: 40 Years of Photographing Egypt surveys the career of the New Zealand-born photographer and filmmaker who came to Egypt in 1963 and whose keen eye and love for the country's culture made him one of this magazine's most prolific free-lance writers and photographers. The exhibit shows images of Nasser's funeral, the final Nile flood, the multicolored pavilions of Tentmakers' Street, the gathering of jasmine blossoms, the search for desert truffles, shadow-puppet plays, traditional public baths and—some of Feeney's best-loved images—the domes of Cairo's old city. Sony Gallery, **Cairo**, through April 21.

Masterpieces of Islamic Art from the Metropolitan Museum adds some 30 works from what is considered America's finest collection of Islamic art to the Louvre's own large and very impressive collection. The objects displayed cover a period from the ninth century to the zenith of Islamic culture reached by the great empires of the modern era. The most spectacular is a large enameled and gilded glass bowl produced in Syria in the 13th century. Other exquisite works come from 10th- and 11th-century Egypt, medieval Iran, 14th-century Granada and 16th-century India. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, through April.

Tutankhamen—The Golden Beyond: Treasures from the Valley of the Kings is a worldwide exhibition of some 120 artifacts from the tomb of Tutankhamen and other royal tombs of the 18th Dynasty (15th and 14th centuries BC), many shown for the first time outside the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle, **Bonn, Germany**, through May 1.

Digging Up a Story: The House of Claudius Tiberianus is an innovative interdisciplinary exhibition that combines archeological artifacts and translated papyri from a single house in Kiranis, in Roman Egypt, to show what life was like there for a man and his family almost 2000 years ago. The papyri include letters from Claudius Tiberianus's son, who was on active duty with the Roman army in Alexandria, asking for money and supplies, asking for parental blessings to marry and complaining about lack of promotion. The artifacts, such as faïence bowls, help to place Tiberianus's household within the socioeconomic spectrum of Graeco-Roman society of the time. Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, **Ann Arbor, Michigan**, through May 2.

Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur features more than 200 Sumerian treasures that reveal traditions of royal life and death, excavated in the 1920's by Sir Leonard Woolley. They include the famous statuette of a goat nibbling the leaves of a tree, jewelry, a comb, a wooden lyre decorated with a gold-and-lapis bull's head, games, furniture, seals and vessels of gold, silver and alabaster, many found in the intact tomb of a woman—a queen or high priestess—named Pu-abi who died between 2600 and 2500 BC. Catalog $75/$50. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, **Philadelphia**, through May 28.

Mirrors of the East explores the impact of the East on Europe, especially Spain, between the mid-19th and the 20th century by examining three episodes: "The Legacy of the Moorish Queen" discusses the rediscovery of the world of al-Andalus and Islam; "The Garden of the Rising Sun" explores the contacts with the Philippines and the presence of China and Japan in European fashions; and "Mirages of Paradise" examines the supposed sensuous, dream-like "Oriental" world that was one of the most important influences on the modernist and Art Deco periods. Centre de Documentació i Museu Tèxtil, **Terrassa, Barcelona**, through May.

Beyond East and West: Seven Transnational Artists displays recent work by seven important contemporary artists who come from the region stretching from Egypt to Pakistan, but who have lived much of their lives in Europe or the United States. They draw on their experiences of displacement and their knowledge of multiple cultures to offer alternative visions of the contemporary world and the possibility of new kinds of intercultural understanding. Williams College Museum of Art, **Williamstown, Massachusetts**, through May 15.

<<< Ongoing

Asian Games: The Art of Contest uses the paraphernalia of games, as well as paintings, prints and decorative arts that depict people playing games, to explore the role of games as social and cultural activities in the diverse societies of pre-modern Asia. It also highlights the paramount importance of Asia as a source of many games—chess, backgammon, pachisi, Ludo, Snakes and Ladders, card games and such sports as polo and field hockey—now played in the West. Drawing on major collections of Asian art in the United States, Europe, Japan and China, the exhibition displays more than 120 works of art, including spectacular examples of game sets from the 12th through 19th century, Persian and Indian court paintings and illuminated manuscripts of the 16th through 18th century, and Chinese and Japanese scroll paintings, screens and ceramic and decorative arts. The exhibition also includes an interactive component consisting of sets of major board games (chess, *weiqi* [go] and *chaupur* [pachisi]) along with newly invented games with Asian themes. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through May 15.

Art of the Ancient Mediterranean World: Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome shows 204 works that span a period from predynastic Egypt—6000 years ago—to the Roman late imperial period about AD 350. Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilizations developed neither in sequence nor in parallel, but changed in a complicated and interactive manner, and this exhibition demonstrates how they influenced one another throughout their histories through travel and trade on the Mediterranean Sea. Drawing on evidence from history, archeology, folklore, geography, religion and culture, the exhibition traces the rise and fall of power-seekers, the unchanging daily needs of ordinary people and, above all, their creative energy. BYU Museum of Art, **Provo, Utah**, through June 4.

Art of the Written Word in the Middle East. Throughout the Middle East, the written word is an emblem of the highest learning, the deepest thought and the greatest beauty, and is often incorporated in works of fine art. This exhibition explores different forms of the beauty of writing through manuscript pages of religious, scientific and legal texts; poetry and prose; and inscribed tiles, ceramics and metalwork. University of **Michigan** Museum of Art, **Ann Arbor**, through June 5.

Beyond the Bag: Textiles as Containers explores the ways different cultures create textiles to be used as containers, whether for specific purposes—like the Iranian salt bags on display—for general utility or to convey festivity, gender or status. Unlike clay or glass containers, textile containers adapt to their contents and collapse to take up minimal space when not in use. Exhibited containers come from Mexico, Central Asia and Iran. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, through June 5.

Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India offers a decade-long perspective on contemporary visual practices in India, presenting works dating from 1993 to the present that speak through a rich variety of materials and in a rich variety of idioms. The exhibition includes 80 works by more than 30 artists who represent three generations and who work in sculpture, painting, drawing, installation, video and interactive media. Drawing on important public and private collections, the exhibition provides opportunities to explore cross-cultural influences in the art of a country generously supplied with cultural diversity and juxtaposition, and to examine the coexistence of urban fine art, adavasi art, Bollywood imagery and popular culture. Queens Museum of Art, **New York**, through June 12, and Asia Society, **New York**, through May 29.

Luxury and Luminosity: Visual Culture and the Ming Court includes 48 objects—not all of them blue-and-white and not all porcelain—that demonstrate the dynasty's connections with other cultures and the artistic influence it exchanged with them. Ming artists' use of turquoise and cobalt blue probably derived from ceramics imported from the Islamic world. A tankard in the exhibition is shaped to emulate Iranian models, and Ming porcelain was exported in enormous quantities to Egypt, Turkey and other parts of the Muslim world. Freer Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through June 26.

The Sport of Kings: Art of the Hunt in Iran and India explores the rich traditions of the hunt in West and South Asia through a presentation of paintings, ceramics, decorative arts and weaponry. Hunting is one of humanity's oldest forms of social organization and the inspiration for some of the earliest efforts at visual art. By uniting lands from Spain to India, the Muslim conquests brought together different practices and thematic associations for the hunt that had developed on three continents over millennia. The exhibition focuses on forms of hunting and on thematic associations of hunting, warfare and kingship. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, through June 26, 2005.

Carved for Immortality. In ancient Egypt, brightly painted carved wooden figures of the deceased were placed in special chambers or niches in tombs to represent the person at different stages of his or her life. In some cases, additional carvings represented family members and servants. Because the wood used was often soft sycamore fig (*Ficus sycamorus*)—appropriate in that twin sycamores were believed to stand at the eastern gate of heaven, from which the sun god Re emerged each morning—relatively few of these statues have survived from ancient times. Walters Art Museum, **Baltimore**, through June 26.

Sephardic Horizons uses paintings, graphics and artifacts from the museum's collections to tell the story of Sephardic Jews' creative coexistence with surrounding Christian and Muslim cultures during centuries of spiritual, intellectual and material flowering on the Iberian Peninsula. Magnes Museum, **Berkeley, California**, through July 15.

Islamic Art From the Madina Collection presents some 200 works from what was widely regarded as one of the most significant private collections of Islamic art, donated to the Museum in 2002. Assembled by Dr. Maan Madina during his career teaching Arabic and Islamic studies at Columbia University, and comprising more than 700 objects, the collection is especially rich in ceramics, glass, wood, stone, textiles and metalwork from Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran, as well as calligraphy. In addition, the collection includes some "lost" objects: For example, the whereabouts of a spectacular pair of large glazed ceramic ewers—the only known examples from Timurid Iran—had been unknown since their display at the famous Islamic exhibition at Munich in 1910. **Los Angeles** County Museum of Art, through July.

Gold! Natural Treasure, Cultural Obsession traces the human fascination with gold through history and across diverse cultures—from ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt to the New World and the Spanish Conquest. Visitors will see native gold specimens and hoards of gold bullion and coins from around the world and will learn how gold is found, mined, refined and turned into fascinatingly beautiful objects, such as the stunning Indian wedding sari on display. The large-format film "Gold Fever!" shown in conjunction with the exhibition further explores the cultural, economic and historical significance of this natural treasure. **Houston** Museum of Natural Science, through August 7.

Caravan Kingdoms: Yemen and the Ancient Incense Trade emphasizes the rich interaction that resulted from overland and maritime contacts linking the southern Arabian Peninsula with the eastern Mediterranean, northeastern Africa and southern and southwestern Asia. For some 1200 years from about 800 BC, the kingdoms of Qataban, Saba (biblical Sheba) and Himyar grew fabulously wealthy from their control of caravan routes and in particular from the international trade in frankincense and myrrh. Excavations have yielded spectacular examples of architecture; distinctive stone funerary sculpture; elaborate inscriptions on stone, bronze and wood; and sophisticated metalwork. Drawn from the collections of the Republic of Yemen, the American Foundation for the Study of Man, the British Museum and Dumbarton Oaks, this exhibition of approximately 200 objects explores the unique cultural traditions of these ancient kingdoms. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through September 18.

Morocco: Art and Design 2005 presents a broad overview of the contemporary art climate in Morocco, displaying painting, photography and sculpture as well as industrial and fashion design by 21 artists, all of whom have strong reputations in Morocco, and in some cases also abroad. Wereldmuseum **Rotterdam**, through March 5, 2006.

<<< March

The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt. The causes of illness were little understood in ancient Egypt, and the prevention and cure of illness were of great concern to most Egyptians—a concern that informs much of ancient Egyptian art. This exhibition presents objects that address this concern, including the rarely seen Edwin Smith Papyrus, one of the world's oldest scientific documents. The 15-foot surgical papyrus deals with both the practical and the magical treatment of wounds. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, March 15 through July 17.

The Pre-Islamic Archaeology of the Red Sea Coastal Plain of Yemen is the title of a lecture by archeological journalist Nadia Durrani. 5:30 p.m. School of Oriental and African Studies, **London**, March 17.

Anadolu Rock: Rock 'n' Roll Comes to the Turkish Village presents music from the intersection, in the late 1960's and early 1970's, of American rock and pop with Turkish village music. A full rock band with guests on Turkish ethnic instruments will perform. 8:00 p.m. Aidekman Hall, Tufts University, **Medford, Massachusetts**, March 18.

In the Realm of Princes: The Arts of the Book in Fifteenth-Century Iran and Central Asia. In 1370, the Turkic warlord Timur, known as Tamerlane in the West, conquered a vast territory that extended from Anatolia to the borders of China. He chose Samarkand as his capital and established the Timurid dynasty, which remained in power until 1506. Although Timur's descendants lost much of the conquered land, their rule ushered in one of the most artistically brilliant periods in the history of the Islamic world. The exhibition includes some 30 individual objects from the Timurid period, ranging from monumental Qur'an folios and delicately painted manuscript illustrations to an exquisitely carved agate cup and a finely tooled wooden door. They illustrate how Timurid patrons fostered the development of a distinct, highly refined artistic language that bolstered their religious and secular authority and affirmed their role as the rightful heirs of the Persian political, cultural and artistic tradition. The exhibition also includes four rare paintings by the legendary late–15th-century artist Bihzad, never before seen together. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, March 19 through August 7.

Teaching About the Arab World and Islam is the theme of teacher workshops co-sponsored by the Middle East Policy Council in Washington,

Continued from previous page

D.C., and conducted by Arab World and Islamic Resources and School Services (AWAIR) of Berkeley, California. The program is fully funded and workshops may be requested by any school, district, office of education or university. ⓘ www.awair@igc.org, www.mepc.org or www.awaironline.org; 510-704-0517. Sites and dates include: **White Plains**, March 19; **Dubuque**, March 21; **Worthington, Ohio**, April 7; **Salt Lake City**, April 9; **Milwaukee**, April 16; **Las Vegas**, April 29–30; **Anchorage**, June 17, 20–21.

<< April

Textiles for This World and Beyond: Treasures from Insular Southeast Asia explores the important role that textiles in Indonesia and Malaysia play in daily society, their part in many old beliefs and customs still followed today and their use in ceremonies to maintain harmonious relationships with the deceased or the gods. On display are more than 60 Southeast Asian textiles dating from the 19th to the early 20th century, many never before exhibited. Catalog. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, April 1 through September 18.

Petra: Lost City of Stone, a traveling exhibition, features extraordinary art and artifacts from the red sandstone cliff city in southern Jordan. Petra was a major crossroads of international trade routes from the first century BC to the second century of our era, when it was governed by the Nabataeans, who were renowned for their skills in trade, agriculture, engineering and architectural stone carving. The exhibition presents some 200 objects, including stone sculptures and reliefs, ceramics, metalwork and ancient inscriptions, and a selection of 19th-century artworks documenting the European rediscovery of Petra. An ancillary exhibition of color photographs by Washington photojournalist Vivian Ronay documents the lives of the Bedoul, a Bedouin tribe inhabiting the environs of Petra. Calvin College, **Grand Rapids, Michigan**, April 4 through August 15.

Ali Ufki'nin Mezmurları: The Psalms of Ali Ufki. Ufki was a 17th-century Polish Christian who converted to Islam and became an Ottoman court musician. In this concert, his settings of the psalms into Ottoman classical style will receive a rare performance. Harvard University Fogg Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, April 6.

SAUDI ARAMCO WORLD
(ISSN 1530-5821)
is published bimonthly by
Aramco Services Company
9009 West Loop South
Houston, Texas 77096-1799, USA

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
Saudi Aramco World
Box 2106
Houston, Texas 77252-2106

The Art of Rice: Spirit and Sustenance in Asia draws on a rich variety of objects of art and material culture from a dozen Asian countries to explore the significance of rice for the region's people, highlighting the cultural underpinnings and influences of the world's most important food crop. First domesticated 8000 years ago in the Yangtze River valley, rice now exists in 120,000 varieties and feeds one-third of humankind. It is so fundamental to daily life that it has become intimately entwined with individual identity, social organization and artistic expression. Catalog. **Honolulu [Hawaii]** Academy of Arts, through April 24.

<< May

Geometry in Gold: An Illuminated Mamluk Qur'an Section displays the final *juz'* (section) of an early 14th-century copy of the Qur'an possibly illuminated by the celebrated Muhammad ibn Mubadir. Bold and flowing *muhaqqaq* script on pages measuring 18½ by 13 inches complement vegetal and geometric motifs and three different types of exegetic commentary on the margins. The first volume of this copy is in the National Museum in Damascus. Sam Fogg, **London**, April 25 through May 13.

10,000 Years of Art and Culture From Jordan: Faces of the East presents archeological evidence of the various cultures of the region from the Early Neolithic (eighth millennium BC) to the early years of Islam in the eighth century of our era—a time span during which fundamental developments in the history of civilization took place, as well as events that shaped western culture. Archeological discoveries of the last 15 years have considerably changed our view of the region's history, and now more than 700 superb objects, lent by Jordanian museums, illuminate the great eras and the turning points of important cultures, including a display of the world's earliest sculptured human figures from 'Ain Ghazal and objects from the legendary Nabataean city of Petra. Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle, **Bonn, Germany**, April 29 through August 21.

Osmanli'da Ermeni Bestekarlari: Armenian Composers of the Ottoman Empire will be performed by Armenian performers of Boston with a new generation of Turkish and American musicians. **Massachusetts** Institute of Technology Big Kresge Hall, **Cambridge**, May 20.

<< June

Tutankhamen—The Golden Beyond: Treasures from the Valley of the Kings is a world-wide exhibition of some 120 artifacts from the tomb of Tutankhamen and other royal tombs of the 18th Dynasty (15th and 14th centuries BC), many shown for the first time outside the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. **Los Angeles** County Museum of Art, June 16.

Genghis Khan and His Heirs: The World Empire of the Mongols presents archeological artifacts, old maps, manuscripts and miniatures that exemplify the cultural achievements of the Mongol Empire, founded 800 years ago. The apogee of a long series of states established by nomads in the steppes of Eurasia, Genghis Khan's empire stretched from the Pacific Ocean to Central Europe and was as efficiently administered as it had been brilliantly and brutally conquered. An effective bureaucracy, a postal system, the use of paper money and broad religious and cultural tolerance were at the foundations of the *Pax Mongolica*; under it, trade in goods and ideas between Europe and Central Asia blossomed until into the 16th century. Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle, **Bonn, Germany**, June 17 through September 25.

Matisse, His Art and His Textiles: The Fabric of Dreams presents some 45 paintings, drawings, prints and painted-paper cutouts that attest to Henri Matisse's lifelong interest in textiles, including works from the 1910's and 1920's demonstrating the influence on him of North African fabrics and screens. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, June 23 through September 25.

The World History Association's Annual Conference will be on the dual themes of "The Mediterranean in World History" and "Africa in World History," reflecting Morocco's special geographical and cultural position. Scholars, teachers and others are invited to attend. The WHA promotes the study of history with special attention to global processes, and assists teachers at all academic levels by providing venues and media for discussion of innovative pedagogy and the best current research in the field. University of Al Akhawayn, **Ifrane, Morocco**, June 27–29.

<< July

The Earthenware of Antiquity: Egypt, the Near East, Greece continues the museum's investigation of artistic techniques, begun with the "Ivories" exhibition, with an examination of the arts of fired earthenware. Using objects from the museum's own collections, the exhibition describes different techniques of creation and the uses of the objects produced. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, July 1 through September 26.

<< September

The Quest for Immortality: Treasures of Ancient Egypt dramatically illustrates the ancient Egyptian concept of the afterlife through 143 magnificent objects and a life-sized reconstruction of the burial chamber of the New Kingdom pharaoh Thutmose III (1490–1436 BC). This exhibition includes objects that have never been on public display and many that have never been seen outside Egypt, selected from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, the Luxor Museum of Ancient Art and the site of Deir el-Bahari. Ranging in date from the New Kingdom (1550–1069 BC) through the Late Period (664–332 BC), the works of art include luxurious objects that furnished tombs, including jewelry, painted reliefs, implements used in religious rituals, a sarcophagus richly painted with scenes of the afterlife and an ancient painted model of the royal barge that carried the pharaohs along the Nile. **Dayton [Ohio]** Art Institute, September 1 through January 3.

Silk & Leather: Splendid Attire of 19th-Century Central Asia features different types of garments and accessories worn by the ruling class and urban and nomadic elites of the region, which encompasses present-day Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikstan and part of Kazakhstan. The exhibition includes coats, hats, boots, belts, queue covers, children's clothing, purses, pouches and veils. Leather, felt and fur, as well as a distinctive clothing style that included trousers, made life easier for the horse-riding nomadic pastoralists of the vast, sparsely populated Eurasian steppe. The nomads' mobile economy and potent cavalry enabled them to extort vast quantities of coveted luxury goods—primarily silk—from the Chinese, which they both consumed and sold. Until the Russian conquest, completed in the late 19th century, the western part of Central Asia, including Samarkand and Bukhara, was ruled by different groups that had originated in the Eurasian steppes. Although they largely gave up their nomadic lifestyle, these ruling elites retained their taste for rugs, textiles and the garments worn on the steppe. The copious production of silk, its brilliant dyeing and multifaceted use in textiles of urban and nomadic manufacture, along with the continued use of leather, were all part of the spectacular blossoming of the textile and related arts during the 19th century in western Central Asia. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.** September 2 through February 26.

<< Permanent

Fountains of Light: Islamic Metalwork From the Nuhad Es-Said Collection presents 27 inlaid metal objects created between the 10th and 19th centuries in lands now part of present-day Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Included are ewers, candlesticks, incense burners, inkwells and bowls that exhibit great technical expertise and esthetic refinement and that reflect the political and cultural aspirations of the individuals for whom they were created. As portable symbols of wealth and status, they come from a world where public expression of those attributes was juxtaposed with popular beliefs and superstitions. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**

Ancient Cyprus: A Preview of The A.G. Leventis Foundation Gallery of Cypriot Antiquities showcases some 60 pieces from the museum's extensive collection of Cypriot artifacts and focuses on the art created in Cyprus between the Bronze Age and the Roman era (3000 BC–AD 200). One of the most famous pieces on display is a fragmentary bronze sculpture of a man carrying a large copper ingot, the material that gave the island its name. The exhibit is a preview of the museum's new permanent gallery of Cypriot antiquities, to open in December 2005. Royal Ontario Museum, **Toronto**.

Glimpses of the Silk Road: Central Asia in the First Millennium presents 37 diverse objects demonstrating that the art of Central Asia is marked by an astonishing amalgam of different influences, combining Hellenistic imagery and Near Eastern motifs with Chinese and Indian features. Goods and raw materials as well as new ideas, religious beliefs, artistic styles and motifs and technological innovations were transmitted throughout the region along overland caravan routes that later became known as the "Silk Roads." Metropolitan Museum, **New York**.

Arts of the Islamic World flourished in a vast geographic area from Morocco and Spain to the islands of Southeast Asia. Although distinct in their cultural, artistic, ethnic and linguistic identities, the people of this region have shared one predominant faith: Islam. The works on view represent the three principal media for artistic expression in the Islamic world: architecture (both religious and secular), the arts of the book (calligraphy, illustration, illumination and bookbinding) and the arts of the object (ceramics, metalwork, glass, woodwork, textiles and ivory). The works date from the ninth to the 17th century. On view are brass bowls and candlesticks, folios from the Qur'an, earthenware and ceramics and paintings representing the traditions of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and other parts of North Africa, Turkey, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, **Washington, D.C.**

Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century uses thousands of objects from the Museum's collection to show how people in the West understood their own world in the Age of Enlightenment and attempted to explore, systematize and explain worlds beyond their own. It describes a period which saw the development of a systematic approach to nature and human achievement, the founding of fields of scientific study still useful today, and the establishment of museums organized more like modern ones and less like the *Wunderkammer*, or collections of curiosities, of earlier times. The exhibition is divided into seven sections, called "The Natural World," "The Birth of Archaeology," "Art and Civilization," "Classifying the World," "Ancient Scripts," "Religion and Ritual" and "Trade and Discovery." Accompanying book, £15. British Museum, London.

Luxury Arts of the Silk Route Empires includes examples of metalwork and ceramics that illustrate the effects of multicultural interaction on the arts of the first millennium of our era: ornaments, bowls, cups, bottles, jars, mirrors, ewers and ritual objects in gold, silver or silver gilt, earthenware or porcelain from Iran, China, Turkey, Syria and Afghanistan. Freer and Sackler Galleries, **Washington, D.C.**

The Saudi Aramco Exhibit relates the heritage of Arab-Islamic scientists and scholars of the past to the technology of today's petroleum exploration, production and transportation, set against the background of the natural history of Saudi Arabia. **Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.**

Information is correct at press time, but please reconfirm dates and times before traveling. Most institutions listed have further information available through the World Wide Web, and our Web site, saudiaramcoworld.com, contains more extensive listings. Readers are welcome to submit information for possible inclusion in this listing.

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