





Painter and sculptor Bayu Utomo Radjikin is among Malaysia's leading artists, and he is one of five founders of Matahati ("eyes of the soul"), now a leading gallery, studio space and artists' education institution in Kuala Lumpur. Photo by Jimin Lai.

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

**President**  
Ahmed M. Alzayyat

**Director  
Public Affairs**  
Ali M. Al Mutairi

**Editor**  
Robert Arndt

**Managing Editor**  
Dick Doughty

**Assistant Editor**  
Arthur P. Clark

**Administration**  
Sarah Miller

**Circulation**  
Edna Catchings

**Design and Production**  
Graphic Engine Design

**Printed in the USA**  
RR Donnelley/Wetmore

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

**ISSN**  
1530-5821

**Back Cover**



Turned and gently inflated, this orb of molten silica probably differs little from early blown glass in Hebron, where good sand was abundant, and clay for furnaces was gathered from the Dead Sea to the east. Photo by George Azar.

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

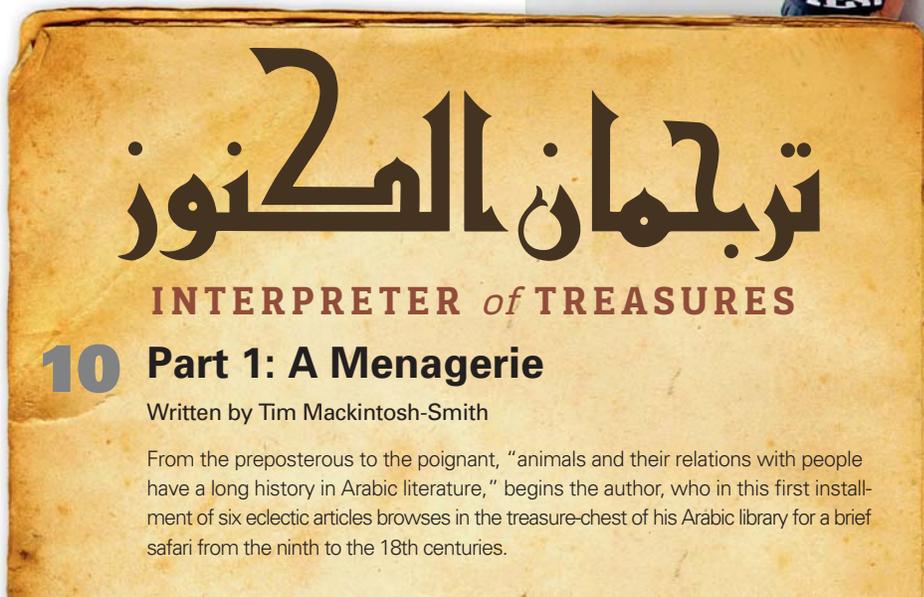


**2**

**Hebron's  
Glass History**

Written by Gail Simmons  
Photographed by George Azar

Not long after the Phoenicians invented free-blown glass in the eastern Mediterranean some 2000 years ago, the city of Hebron began offering some of the finest, most colorful glass in the region. Today, among the city's dwindling number of glassblowers, the Natsheh family has kept its furnaces fired for some 700 years.



**ترجمان الكنوز**  
**INTERPRETER of TREASURES**

**10 Part 1: A Menagerie**

Written by Tim Mackintosh-Smith

From the preposterous to the poignant, "animals and their relations with people have a long history in Arabic literature," begins the author, who in this first installment of six eclectic articles browses in the treasure-chest of his Arabic library for a brief safari from the ninth to the 18th centuries.



14

## Pasta's Winding Way West

Written by Tom Verde  
Recipes by Nancy Verde Barr

The tale is as long and complicated as, well, spaghetti: What we call pasta today is made from hard wheat grown in the Middle East for thousands of years. Some early sources, and seemingly all folklore in Sicily, say dried pasta came from the Arabs, who may have developed it to preserve wheat's nutrition through desert heat and travel.

## Malaysia's New Art Mix

Written by Richard Covington  
Photographed by Jimin Lai

In the capital of Kuala Lumpur, an artistic generation that has grown up with Malaysia's thriving economy is writing, composing, designing, painting and performing to creative cultural rhythms that have both local roots and a newly global reach.



24



## 36 The Explorations of Frédéric Cailliaud

Written by Andrew Bednarski and W. Benson Harer, Jr.  
Art courtesy of W. Benson Harer, Jr.,  
photographed by Gustavo Camps.

In the early 19th century, Frédéric Cailliaud trekked Egypt's oases, mapped Pharaonic emerald mines and ventured up the Nile to the Ethiopian border, collecting, discovering and sketching scenes, exquisitely copied from tombs and monuments, that shed light on daily life in antiquity. Yet much of his work was lost in time and tumult—until now.

## 44 Classroom Guide

Written by Julie Weiss

## 46 Events & Exhibitions



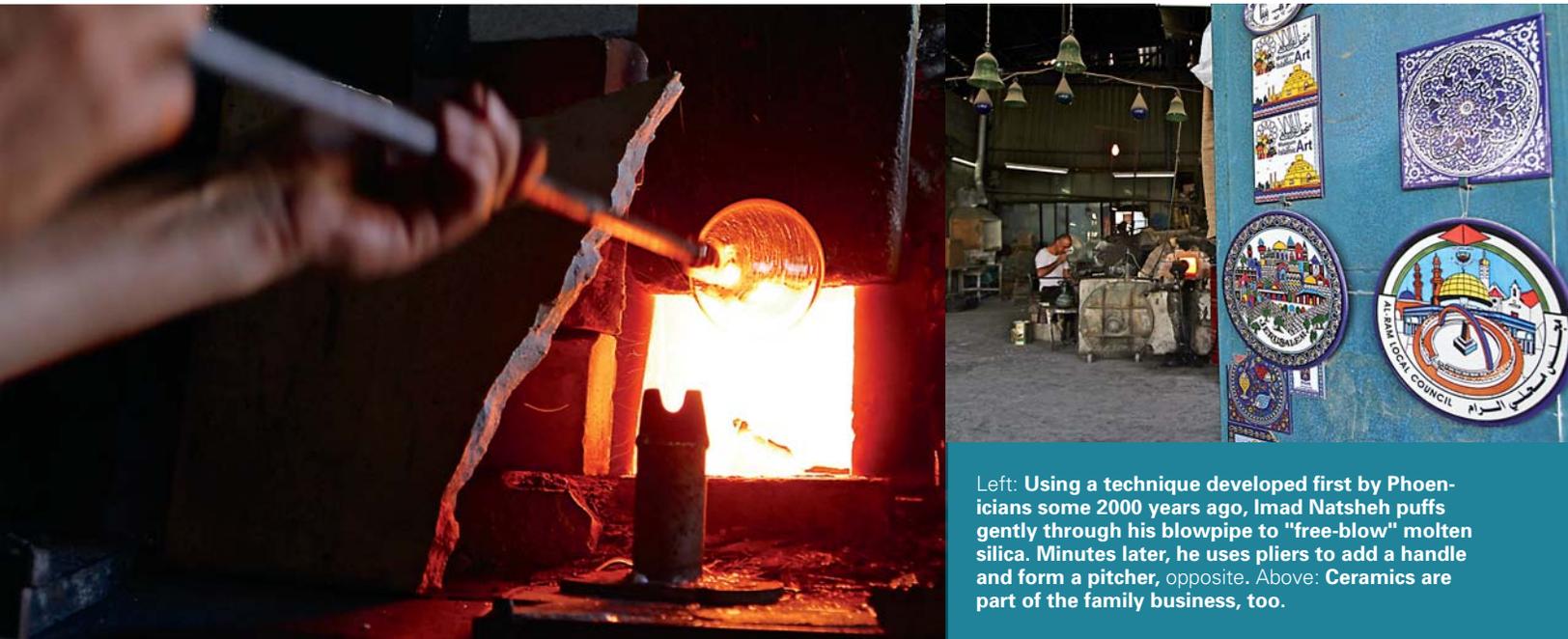


# HEBRON'S GLASS HISTORY

WRITTEN BY GAIL SIMMONS    PHOTOGRAPHED BY GEORGE AZAR

IT'S A FINE MORNING IN JUNE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN SUN IS BLAZING DOWN ON THE WEST BANK CITY OF HEBRON. ITS DOMES AND MINARETS THROW DEEP, WELCOME SHADOWS ONTO DUSTY STREETS. INSIDE THE HEBRON GLASS & CERAMICS FACTORY, THE TEMPERATURE IS EVEN WARMER, AND IT'S HOTTER STILL AS I APPROACH THE FURNACE WHERE 43-YEAR-OLD IMAD NATSHEH IS CREATING THE GLASS THAT, FOR CENTURIES, HAS BROUGHT HEBRON RENOWN THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

"MY FAMILY HAS BEEN BLOWING GLASS IN HEBRON FOR AROUND 700 YEARS," IMAD TELLS ME AS HE WORKS THE GLASS, HIS FINGERS MOVING DEFTLY DESPITE THE SWELTER. "I LEARNED THE CRAFT FROM MY FATHER, AND HE FROM HIS FATHER. I STARTED TO LEARN WHEN I WAS FIVE OR SIX YEARS OLD. GLASS WAS MY TOYS."



Left: Using a technique developed first by Phoenicians some 2000 years ago, Imad Natsheh puffs gently through his blowpipe to "free-blow" molten silica. Minutes later, he uses pliers to add a handle and form a pitcher, opposite. Above: Ceramics are part of the family business, too.

**I**mad picked up his English, he says, from the tourists who've visited his workshop over the years—including former US president Jimmy Carter, he points out. As Imad talks, the whirring fans around him barely make a dent in the heat. With the furnace running at 1400 degrees centigrade (2550°F), 20 hours a day, this is hardly surprising.

It's clear that glassblowing is more than just a job for Imad—it's an obsession. And like most obsessions, it demands personal commitment. "I work around 10 hours a day, six or seven days a week," Imad says. "And while I'm working, I don't eat. No breakfast, no lunch. But I drink at least 20 liters of water a day." During Ramadan, when he can't drink during daylight hours, he works at night.

Imad is demonstrating the craft that has made the Natsheh family preeminent among Hebron's glassmakers. First, he thrusts a thin metal blowpipe into the bowels of the furnace, into the incandescent pool of molten silica. With a twist of the pipe, he plucks out an igneous blob called a "gather." He lays this on

a metal plate. Putting the blowpipe to his lips, he puffs and rolls the red-hot glass until it begins to expand, then removes it from the plate and blows again, twirling the blowpipe in his fingers. With a pair of long pliers, he teases the glowing orb until a clearly recognizable vase-shape begins to emerge.

"The sand gives us colorless, or 'white,' glass," Imad explains. "But Hebron is most famous for its blue and turquoise colors. We make the dark blue by adding cobalt to the melted glass, and the turquoise by adding copper. We cook the copper in a special oven at around 700 degrees centigrade [1300°F] for one month, and it becomes like powder. After we've finished blowing, we decorate the glass by hand."

Imad works quickly. The fire is fading as the liquid sand solidifies into glass. It's an age-old alchemy that, even with today's abundance of cheap glassware, still seems magical. Apart from a few subtle changes, it's a method that has been practiced in Hebron since at least the Middle Ages, and perhaps much longer.

Around 50 BCE, Phoenicians living along the coast of the eastern Mediterranean developed the art of "free-blowing," in which air is blown into glass to shape it without using a core or a mold. It was also the Phoenicians who moved glass-making inland to such cities as Hebron.

Founded as long as 8000 years ago, Hebron is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. Believed by Jews, Christians and Muslims to be the burial place of the patriarchs Abraham ("Ibrahim" in Arabic), Isaac, Jacob and their wives, it's regarded by all three faiths as a holy city. Its name in Arabic, Al-Khalil, means "friend," and "Friend of God" is the epithet ascribed to Abraham in the Bible and the Qur'an. At 900 to 950 meters (1460–1540') above sea level, the city enjoys one of the best climates in a region traditionally famed for grapes, ceramics, pottery and glassware.

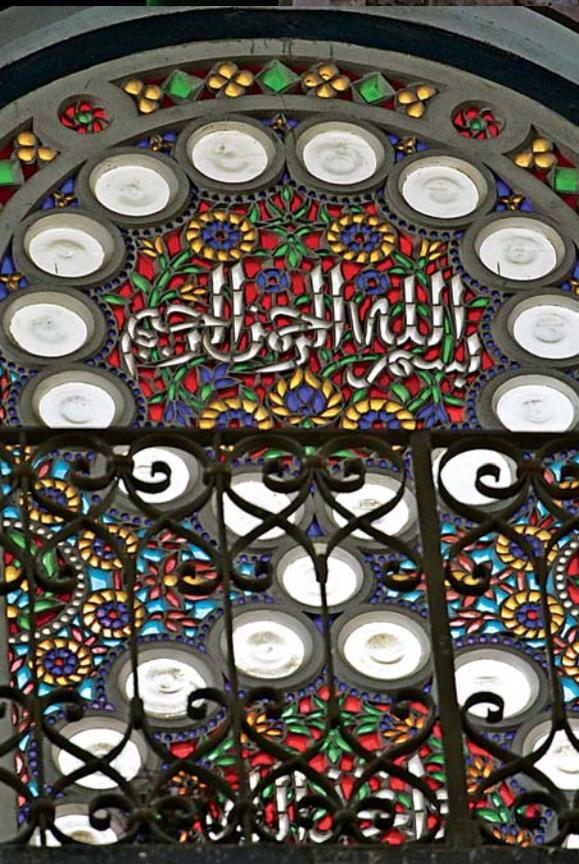
By the time the Phoenicians invented free-blown glass, their influence was already waning. It was the Romans who disseminated the technique around the Mediterranean. Then, in the Middle Ages, historians concur that it was the Mamluks, who ruled from Anatolia to North Africa, who led the revival of glass-making in the eastern Mediterranean, then known as Greater Syria, in the 13th and 14th centuries.

Though the craft was developed much earlier, it was in the Middle Ages that Hebron's glassmakers first won fame. Hamed Natsheh, top, handed off glassblowing to younger members of the family in the 1990's, "when the tourists stopped coming" due to the political tensions that have made travel to and from Hebron difficult ever since.





Hebron, or Al-Khalil in Arabic, is among the oldest continuously inhabited cities. Among its 13 historic neighborhoods is the *harat al-qazzazin*, or glassblower's quarter. Left: Recently cleaned and renovated, locally made glass fills the windows of the Ibrahimi Mosque.



Nazmi al-Jubeh, historian of architecture and archeology at the universities of al-Quds in Jerusalem and Birzeit in Ramallah, writes of Hebron that the glass industry had “a tremendous effect on the city’s economic growth in the 13th century,” leading to a consolidation of trade ties with Damascus, Jordan and Egypt. By the 14th century, glass from Hebron was being exported across the Middle East in heavily guarded caravans that carried it in specially designed wooden boxes to protect the valuable, fragile cargo.

Hebron’s medieval reputation in glassmaking is corroborated by some of the many Christian pilgrims who visited the city over the centuries. Between 1345 and 1350, Franciscan monk Niccolò da Poggibonsi noted that “they make great works of art in glass.” In the late 15th century, the German friar Felix Faber and his companions also stopped in this “exceeding ancient city,” and he described how “we came forth from our inn, and passed through the long street of the city, in which work-people of divers crafts dwelt, but more particularly workers in glass; for at this place glass is made, not clear glass, but black, and of the colors between dark and light.”

In the 16th century, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into Palestine saw glass-making flourish through commerce between Palestine and Turkey. Hebron expatriate communities thrived in Cairo and Kerak, Jordan, where they marketed the city’s crafts. In the 1740’s, business was still booming, according to another Italian pilgrim, Abbot



**“The sand gives us colorless, or ‘white,’ glass,” explains Imad. “But Hebron is most famous for its blue and turquoise colors,” which he makes by adding cobalt and copper, respectively, to the molten sand.**

Giovanni Mariti. He wrote: “A trade is carried on at this city in small glass toys of different colors, such as rings and globes, which are used for ornamenting the women and camels of the Arabs. These articles are sent to every part of Egypt and Syria.”

And 141 years after that, in 1881, Alberto Bacchi della Lega, the editor of Niccolò da Poggibonsi’s *Libro d’Oltremare*, noted similarly that “the art of glass-making is still flowering there, and they principally make bracelets in colored glass which they transport to all parts of the Turkish Empire and Egypt.” Late 19th-century Islamic court records show that there were 11 glassmaking factories in Hebron. It was only in the early 20th century that stiff competition from European markets left the Natsheh family to continue alone the tradition of making glass in the old way—the situation that continues to this day.

The Ottoman connection still shows in the family: Raslan Natseh, 48, whose grandmother and whose given name are both Turkish, recalls family memories that stretch back generations. “Over the centuries, many Palestinians went to Turkey to serve as soldiers for the Ottoman Empire,” he tells me over cardamom-scented Turkish coffee in his Hebron workshop. “When they returned, they brought the skills back with them, from generation to generation. My own grandfather was a soldier in Istanbul, and he taught me how to blow glass.”

But what was it about Hebron that stimulated both the production and trade of this exquisite yet functional material? The answer is geological, geographical and religious. Hebron’s immediate environs



provide sand that is well suited to glassmaking, and at the Dead Sea, just 25 kilometers (15 mi) to the east, there are both the soda ash (sodium carbonate,  $\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3$ ) essential to glassmaking as well as the clay from which to build furnaces.

In addition, some consider the city the fourth-holiest site in Islam, where pilgrims come to pay their respects at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, and it lies on the pilgrimage route that connects Jerusalem with Makkah. Hebron’s position on a natural crossroads leading south to Arabia, east to Jordan, west to the Mediterranean Sea and north to Damascus made it a commercial hub. All the traffic traveling through Hebron, whether religious or mercantile, also passed through its markets, where Hebron’s glassmakers and other craftsmen sold their wares. And, just like modern tourists, pilgrims would buy souvenirs to take home and enjoyed watching the glassblowers at work, just as they do today.

Yet today, far fewer travelers pass through. Since the Israeli closure in the 1990’s of all but one Palestinian road into the city center,



“WHEN I WAS BORN, THERE WERE AROUND 15 GLASS MANUFACTURERS IN HEBRON,” SAYS IMAD NATSHEH. “NOW, MY COUSIN AND I ARE THE LAST TWO GLASSBLOWERS IN OUR FAMILY.”

the Natsheh family’s workshop, and others that produce glass by more modern methods, as well as other craftspeople, have all moved to Ras al-Jura, a suburb on the north side of town.

Though quieter now, the city center is still its historic heart. Alaa Shahin of Hebron Municipality was responsible for the city’s application this year to the World Heritage Sites list administered by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. We walk together through the old city, where Mamluk architecture still dominates. I admire its golden limestone, atmospherically dim alleyways and refreshingly shady squares.

“We have 13 quarters in the old city,” Shahin says. “Each one has a different economic or social profile, depending on the kind of activity practiced or its ethnic makeup—the Kurdish quarter, Jewish quarter, Iraqi quarter, Moroccan quarter, and so on. For example, the Kurdish quarter was inhabited by families who came with Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub [Saladin] in 1187—he was a Kurd, of course. The main artery of the *suq* [market] connects all these different components of the city to each other, and to the Ibrahimi Mosque.” The beautifully renovated buildings around me are the work of the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC), which is restoring the homes and

craft workshops of Hebron’s citizens to breathe life back into the city, in the hope that both locals and tourists will return.

We arrive at the *harat al-qazzazim*, the glassblowers’ quarter, and the Hosh Natsheh, the area named after Hebron’s most famous glassblowing family. “We’ve finished restoring much of the infrastructure of the old city. Now we’re restoring the shops in the *suq*,” Shahin explains. It is in the Hosh Natsheh that the municipality, working with the HRC, is planning to create an academy to train young people in traditional crafts, including glassmaking. Zbyněk Wojkowski, a spokesperson for the HRC who—for local convenience—goes by “Sami,” explains that, in addition to providing workshops and training areas for craftsmen, “the academy will also allow us to research the history of our handicrafts and the materials used. In this way,” he says, “we hope that Hebron’s traditional crafts will thrive once more.”

The streets of the *qasabah*, or old city center, lead me to the Ibrahimi Mosque. Here I see the most dazzling displays of Hebron’s glass history. The roof’s dome is pierced with stained-glass windows in jewel-like colors: scarlet, gold, turquoise and blue—this last particularly favored among Arabs. According to the HRC’s Walid Abu-Alhawaleh, the HRC has recently renovated the mosque’s glass “millimeter by millimeter,” especially in the dome, built during the Mamluk period to showcase Hebron’s pre-eminence in glass. (It’s also Hebron glass that embellishes Jerusalem’s most celebrated Islamic building, the Dome of the Rock.)



Right: **Turning while blowing helps keep a semi-molten glass gather symmetrical.**

Far right: **Pliers give final shape to this vase as it cools, streaked with colors and wrapped in a decorative spiral.**



ack in the days when the glassmakers' clientele was chiefly locals and pilgrims, homewares and jewelry—especially beads—were the preferred products. Now, most of the glassware produced is sold out of the city and exported, and the merchandise reflects that. Nader Tamimi, chair of the Association of Traditional Industries in the Palestinian Authority, explains that this shift came after the 1987 Palestinian *intifadah*, or uprising, and the Israeli restrictions that followed.

“Twenty-five years ago, hundreds of tourists came to Hebron every day, and we had no export market,” he says. “Now that Hebron is off the tourist map, we’re trying to open new markets, exporting to European countries, the USA, Canada. This market demands different products, with a decorative rather than utilitarian function: baubles for Christmas trees, bells, chalices, beads and drinking glasses, painted in elaborate designs.”

Hamed Natsheh, 80, has personal experience of the change Tamimi describes. Dressed in a pristine white *thawb*, he brightens when he speaks of his recollections of a life spent working with glass. “My family has always worked in glass, my grandfather, my great grandfather. We made bead ‘eyes,’ necklaces and the clear medicine bottles that the doctors used to carry around.” As a young man, Hamed went to Cairo to teach his methods to young Egyptian craftsmen. When the tourists stopped coming to Hebron, he closed his business and let other members of his family carry on. “Today we make a much wider range of products,” he says.

Hamed’s younger relative Imad, whom I had met earlier in the workshop, agrees with his elder about today’s difficulties. “When I was born, there were around 15 glass manufacturers in Hebron, based in the old city,” he says. “Now, my cousin and I are the last two glassblowers in our family. This is a very hard job. Our children have Facebook and iPhones and they want to go to university instead. But I continue, because I love it.” Each year, Imad travels a couple of hours north to the Birzeit Festival near Ramallah, where he builds a small furnace to





**Holiday decorations, above, have helped Hebron glass reach contemporary global export markets. Left: With fresh air behind the heat of the workshop and a glass of tea at his right, Imad Natsheh rolls glowing glass to help it stay round. Above right: Inside the Natsheh's family store.**

cool any faster, he says, "and the glass will shatter."

Taking me to the back of the workshop, he shows me high piles of broken bottles in three colors—green, brown and clear. "These days we recycle broken glass, and mix it with the sand." Melting the broken glass in the oven, they then color it using pigments they usually import nowadays rather than making it themselves. And instead of olive wood to fire the furnace, as in the old days, they now use recycled engine oil.

Back at his furnace, Imad pauses to sip one of the many glasses of tea brought to him throughout the day by his young son, Yusef. The boy is helping his father and the fellow glassblower sitting on the other side of the furnace, as well as the ceramists working at the back of the family factory. But Imad won't pressure Yusef into going into the family business. "He must choose his own life," he tells me.

Imad is now making a delicate swan, using another style of glass that is proving popular among his customers. Semi-opaque, the glass is interlaced with fine swirls of pale turquoise, green and blue. It seems to glitter from within. Imad calls this "Phoenician style," after the glass found in archeological sites and which his family has recreated through trial and error over the past 30 years. The recipe? "It's a family secret!" he smiles.

All he will disclose is that he makes everything by hand, from beginning to end. "You can't use a machine to do this work," he says. "The old ways are best." 🌐

demonstrate his craft, and he has also been invited to demonstrate in Tel Aviv. It's clear that there's still interest in glassblowing, with room for further exploitation by Palestine's tourism authorities.

In the Hebron Glass & Ceramics Factory, Imad is putting the finishing touches on his vase. He cuts off one end with the long pliers and, with a strand of molten glass fresh from the furnace, he adds an elegant handle. He pinches the lip—and the vase becomes a pitcher. Around him a gaggle of Palestinian teenagers from Jerusalem, out on a school field trip, have gathered to watch, but Imad's concentration doesn't waver. Like a top athlete, it's clear he has entered a mental state where instinct, tempered by a lifetime of acquired skill, takes over. He's "in the zone."

The whole process has taken perhaps 10 minutes. Now, Imad puts the glass into an adjacent annealing oven, heated to a mere 550 degrees centigrade (1020°F), where it will stay for six hours. Let it



Historian and travel writer **Gail Simmons** ([www.travelscribe.co.uk](http://www.travelscribe.co.uk)) surveyed historic buildings and led hikes in Italy and the Middle East before becoming a full-time travel writer for UK and international publications. She holds a master's degree in medieval history from the University of York and is currently earning her Ph.D. She lives in Oxford, England.



Photojournalist and filmmaker **George Azar** ([george\\_azar@me.com](mailto:george_azar@me.com)) is co-author of *Palestine: A Guide* (Interlink, 2005), author of *Palestine: A Photographic Journey* (University of California, 1991), and director of the film "Gaza Fixer" (2007). He lives in Jordan.

🌐 [hebronglass@yahoo.com](mailto:hebronglass@yahoo.com)

📖 **Related articles** from past issues can be found on our Web site, [www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com). Click on "indexes," then on the cover of the issues indicated below.  
 glass in Islamic Art: M/J 02  
 "desert glass": S/O 79  
 glass painting: J/A 78



**PART 1:**

**A MENAGERIE**

WRITTEN BY TIM MACKINTOSH-SMITH

TITLE CALLIGRAPHY BY SORAYA SYED

This is the first of the author's six collections of eclectic, occasionally irreverent, excerpts from the vast treasure-house of Arabic literature. In each, he samples and comments thematically, seeking that which is insightful, prescient or poignant, as well as the curious, mischievous or wisely satirical. Like the original authors, his goal, and ours, is to entertain, educate and enlighten.

—The Editors



**ANIMALS AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH PEOPLE**

have a long history in Arabic literature. Pre-Islamic poets often described favorite horses; the ninth-century master of prose al-Jahiz compiled a monumental *Book of Animals*. What follows is a kind of literary menagerie captured and corralled on my own bookshelves.

Al-Jahiz, who recognized that sailors were generally “not

respecters of the unvarnished truth,” would have sniffed at *The Wonders of India* by the 10th-century sea-captain Buzurg ibn Shahriyar. One of the captain's fellow seamen told him that, in an Indian market, he had seen elephants carrying baskets containing shopping lists and the local currency—cowry shells. The animals were heading for the vegetable stalls, the captain reported:

*All this counting of cowries must have been time-consuming. In later times, at least, exchange rates varied from around 1000 cowries to a gold dinar in West Africa to 1,000,000 per dinar at source, in the archipelago of the Maldives. Given that the story is set not far from their Maldivian origin, even a daily grocery run would presumably have cost hundreds if not thousands of cowries. Perhaps the elephant was needed merely to carry them.*

**W**hen the grocer sees the elephant, he stops whatever else he may be doing—even if he is in the middle of serving a customer, whoever that may be—and takes the basket from the elephant. He counts the cowries that are in the basket and looks at the list to see what provisions are needed, then picks out for the elephant the very best of what he has in stock, charging the lowest price possible. If the elephant indicates that he wants more for his money, the grocer gives him extra. Sometimes the shopkeeper makes a mistake in counting the cowries, and if this happens, the elephant will shuffle the cowries about with his trunk until the grocer does a recount. When the elephant takes his purchases home, his owner will sometimes think he has received too little for his money and will give the elephant a beating. Then the elephant goes back to the grocer and starts laying into his stall, turning all the goods topsy-turvy, until the grocer either gives him extra or returns the cowries.

*The captain's yarns probably inspired elements of Sindbad's fictional adventures.*

*Such elephants could apparently cost 10,000 dirhams—apparently the cost of a couple of dozen top-quality slaves, if we go by other prices in the captain's book. Wouldn't it be cheaper to do the shopping yourself? But then, what you'd save in money you'd lose in style.*

*Traveler, geographer, historian. Not averse to the odd marvel, he has been aptly compared to Herodotus.*

Elephants have a better-documented history on the battlefield. According to Captain Buzurg's more down-to-earth contemporary al-Mas'udi, war-elephants have a weak point: They are terrified of cats. Al-Mas'udi gives the example of Harun ibn Musa,

*Al-Jahiz claimed that elephants are also terrified of lions because they resemble enormous domestic cats.*

**H**arun came out to confront the line and made for the mightiest of the elephants, having first concealed a cat under his clothing. He charged the elephant, and when he was near it, he let loose the cat. At the sight of the puss, the elephant turned tail and fled.

'The tusker abandoned his mahout and flew  
With cowardly heart and lumbering bulk.  
Glory be to the One who alone created him,  
The God of men, the Lord of elephants!'

*The rhyme in this ode brings to mind the Qur'an's chapter The Elephant, which recounts the defeat of Abrahah the Abyssinian's pachyderm-reinforced attack on Makkah.*

Bestial marvels are not confined to creatures large and exotic. In his *Wonders of Creation*, the 13th-century cosmographer al-Qazwini defines wonderment as "a feeling of perplexity that comes

upon a person on account of his lack of acquaintance with the cause of something." He goes on to illustrate the idea:

**C**onsider a person contemplating for the first time a cell in a honeycomb. If he were unacquainted with what had made it, he would be extremely perplexed. And even if he knew that it was the work of bees, he would still be perplexed at how so feeble a creature could have brought into being these hexagons with sides so precisely equal that an expert draughtsman equipped with compasses and ruler could not produce the like. Such is the meaning of wonder, and everything on earth is analogous to this example.

*This passage has echoes of the Qur'an's chapter The Bees, in which God inspires the insects to make their habitations: "In this is indeed a sign for people who think."*

To return to cats, al-Qazwini mentions in another work, *Monuments of Various Lands*, a less heroic feline function than that of routing war-elephants. The city of Ardabil, in northwestern Iran, was, he said, plagued by rats. As a consequence, the city

was home to a cat bazaar where "they hawk the cats around, crying, 'Here's a cat to catch your rat! Guaranteed genteel! Won't bolt, won't steal!' Or so they claimed. The reality was altogether different:

**S**indi ibn Shahak, one of the celebrated doctors, said: 'I've never been cheated by market people as thoroughly as I was by the cat-sellers. They get hold of a cat that eats chickens and pigeons and breaks into the cages of ring-doves, partridges and turtle-doves, and they put it in a big covered pot and fix the lid on tightly. Next, they roll the pot around on the ground until the cat gets dizzy. Then they put the cat in a cage together with some chickens, while it's still too dazed to bother about catching them. When a customer sees this, he's amazed. He thinks he's found exactly what he's looking for, and pays a good price for it. But by the time he gets the cat home, the dizziness has worn off, and the cat turns into a devil that eats all his birds and his neighbors' birds too.'

*In present-day Iran, southwest of the Caspian Sea. My out-of-date guidebook recommends Ardabil's honey bazaar, but it is silent on the matter of cats.*

*"Tankiz" is a variation of "Genghis," as in Genghis Khan. All Tankiz's biographers agree that the governor was, like his namesake, "exceedingly severe."*

In Damascus, the stray dogs that plagued the city were dealt with more efficiently than the rats of Ardabil. The historian Ibn al-Wardi mentions a ruthless dog-cull initiated by Tankiz, 14th-century

governor of the Syrian capital. Tankiz eventually fell out with his boss, the Mamluk sultan, and was himself culled—but not before he had turned his wrath on another species: frogs.

**B**efore his downfall, Tankiz had been driven to distraction by the incessant croaking of frogs, and had had them removed from the waters of the city. A certain person said this of the affair:

'Ah, Tankiz, in Damascus you've gone sore astray—  
A sign, I think, that you have had your day.  
They say, "A thousand joyful tidings to the frogs  
Upon his death!" I say, "And to the dogs!"'

*Tankiz might have benefited from the antidote to noisy frogs mentioned by the 15th-century Cairene scholar al-Maqrizi: Mix crocodile fat with clarified butter; place the mixture in lamps and light these in the offending pond or reed-bed. As long as they remain lit, no frog will croak.*

Human-animal antipathy worked both ways. An Andalusian contemporary of Tankiz, the poet and writer Ibn al-Murabi, told the story of a goat in Granada that took extreme exception to people. In this excerpt, the narrator has been looking for a ram to

slaughter for the post-Ramadan festival meal, but he is strapped for cash. He eventually finds a monstrous billy-goat, "smaller than a mule but bigger than a donkey," at an unexpectedly cheap price. Alarm bells ring in his mind when the goat's owner advises:

**Y**ou'll need four porters, 'cause there's no way you can carry it yourself, and you'll have a job getting it to follow you—or rather, the other way 'round.

But to save money, the narrator hires only a single porter. This was, indeed, a mistake:

*Appropriately, the author wrote his tale when he himself was short of cash and in need of festive mutton. He recited it to a wealthy patron. The story ends with fulsome praise of the addressee, and thus we may assume that the hint worked.*

*A loose rendering of "Abu Uways," which is a man's name euphemistically given to wolves.*

**I**tell the porter to bring the goat and keep up with me until we get to the slaughterhouse. And when we do—well, the animal's nowhere to be found. So I say, 'Okay, Wolf-Face, what have you done with my goat?' And he says, 'It got away, and I don't know where it is.' ... So I go 'round the market and the whole neighborhood, calling out to all and sundry that whoever finds a goat should let me know, and that there's a reward in it. Then this man comes out of a show-room, all grumbling and mumbling, and says, 'Who's the owner of that damned goat? Whoever it is—damn him too! If I clap eyes on him, there'll be words, I can tell you.' So I say, 'I'm the owner. What's up? What have I done to hurt you?' And he says, 'When that goat of yours broke free, it took off like a lion and went on a rampage around town. It left nobody unharmed, and when it got into my pottery showroom, it went totally crazy and turned the place into a hell's kitchen. In short, it trashed everything!'

*"Hell's kitchen" is interpreter's liberty. The original has, "the work it did was cooked and raw."*

The unfortunate narrator foots the bill for the broken crockery and, after more disasters, eventually gets the goat home—to the consternation of his wife, who chides him, saying, "You've brought home a demon!"

A few decades earlier, another Andalusian, Abu 'l-Barakat al-Balafiqi, celebrated in verse a happier example of human-animal (though certainly not human-human) relations. The journey described took him and his companion from Almería to the hot springs at Pechina and back:

*i.e., of the city of Vevefique, in Almería province.*

*"Qatmir" is the name given by tradition to the faithful dog, mentioned in the Qur'an, that guarded the People of the Cave during their 300-year sleep.*

**I** set off with Qatmir, my dog, a fellow traveler  
Whose presence warmed my heart along the way.  
For every time I paused to rest, he'd pause by me,  
Regarding me with looks of love and tenderness.  
Fulfilling all the dues of good companionship,  
As if he were of all friends the most true.  
And this while my own people—of the human race—  
All treat me with a meanness that's insatiable ...  
Among them there's no single bosom friend,  
No one to show fraternal feelings, true and pure.

*A round trip of 15 kilometers (9 mi). The spa is still going strong.*

As a tailpiece, Abu 'l-Barakat elsewhere reports hearing these verses:

**H**ow cruel it is, I think, that men will take the name of 'dog' in vain,  
When of all creatures dogs will least forget good deeds.  
Surely, if some person makes you cross enough to curse,  
The proper insult is, 'You man, son of a man!'

*i.e., not "You dog, son of a dog," the conventional insult.*

Moving to 14th-century Morocco—but returning to feline vermin control—a scholar and raconteur of Miknas called Ibn Abi Jalla owned a remarkably clever cat:

**O**ne day, he went home and found that the cat had moistened one of her front paws and then dipped it in some flour, so that the flour stuck to it. She was holding this paw out in front of a mouse hole in the wall; the other paw she held up in the air, ready to grab the mouse when it emerged. Seeing this, Ibn Abi Jalla called her by name—whereupon she turned her head to him and put a claw to her mouth, exactly in the manner in which one gestures for silence.

*Take this with a pinch of salt. It comes from a small volume compiled by the scholar's students entitled "Collected Gems of Ibn Abi Jalla." According to his biographer, the students slipped in some of their own apocryphal tales to poke fun at their master.*

More conventional rattling methods of a cat called Wardaghan were commemorated in an elegy by her owner, the 18th-century Yemeni poet al-Khafanji:

*When I lived in Bi'r al-'Azab, al-Khafanji's quarter of Sana'a, it was still frequented by prowling cats. An elderly gentleman I used to visit was so fond of his own cat that he would feed her in his lap at lunchtime, between his own mouthfuls.*

**W**ardaghan has made my loneliness complete,  
Wardaghan the white, the precious cat.  
She's dead, the one who filled the room with life,  
Who fussed around it, housemaid-like.  
She guaranteed the peace of all who took a nap,  
Was diligent in every task she undertook.  
Her bravery made cowards of all the other cats,  
And when she pounced, she terrified.  
She'd spring into the air to catch a moth—  
She could have caught a falcon, too!

*Other creatures have been lamented in Arabic verse. A 12th-century ruler of Hama, in Syria, gave a much-loved falcon a state funeral, complete with Qur'an-reciters.*

To end on a different elegiac note, we return to goats—but better behaved than that one in the Granada china shop. It is sunset in the highlands of Yemen, on any day over the past millennium and more;

the hour has come to gather in the flocks from the mountainside. The blind poet and folklorist Abdallah al-Baradduni, who died in 1999, collected this *mahjal*, a traditional song chanted while at work:

**I**t's time for home now—night is near,  
Sunset's come and we're still here.  
You've had your fill of food since dawn  
So come, my wattled goat with curling horn! 🌐

*On mahjals, another commentator notes that "some are exceedingly powerful and beautiful." I can confirm that, having heard them echoing through remote mist-filled valleys.*



*Even the best efforts at translation often entail some loss. However, the pleasing sound of the original Arabic title of this series, Tarjuman al-Kuruz, makes up for some of the literary shortfall when it becomes the syntactically accurate but less euphonious English "Interpreter of Treasures." Tarjuman is the root of the English word "dragoman," which refers to an interpreter serving in an official capacity. The full title echoes Ibn al-'Arabi's early-13th-century collection of poems, Tarjuman al-Ashwaq (Interpreter of Desires).*



**Tim Mackintosh-Smith** (tim@mackintosh-smith.com) recently appeared in *Newsweek's* list of the top dozen travel writers of the last 100 years. Following his award-winning trilogy of travels in the footsteps of Ibn Battutah, he is working on a history, a thriller set in 14th-century Spain and the translation from Arabic of an early collection of travelers' accounts from around the Indian Ocean.

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

# PASTA

## WINDING WAY WEST

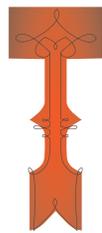
WRITTEN BY TOM VERDE  
WITH RECIPES BY NANCY BARR

Local legend has it that when the Arab conqueror of Sicily, Asad ibn al-Furat, landed with his fleet on the southern shore of the island in 827, one of his first orders of business was to muster up food for his troops. Quickly surveying the local resources, Asad's cooks caught sardines in the harbor, harvested wild fennel, currants and pine nuts from the surrounding hills, and combined them all with an ingredient then unknown in Europe, which the invading Arabs had brought with them in the holds of their ships: pasta.





بنید زنی این چنین شکاری  
شد شاو باین چنین شکاری



Today, *pasta con sarde*, or pasta with sardines, is one of Sicily's signature dishes. Yet as legends go, this version of how pasta became a staple of Italian cuisine is far less familiar than the tale of Marco Polo's supposed discovery of noodles in China in the 13th century—a tale that has been subject to more spin than a forkful of spaghetti.

In the first place, Polo actually wrote in his account of his travels that the noodles he ate in the Orient were “as good as the ones I have tasted many times in Italy,” and likened them to vermicelli and lasagna. Second, there are commercial documents recording pasta shipments and production in Italy long before Polo's journey. Most convincingly, scholars have pointed out that the whole story was a deliberate fabrication published in the late 1920's by editors of *The Macaroni Journal*, a trade publication of North American pasta manufacturers.

While the Asad ibn al-Furat tale may be no less fanciful, there is evidence to suggest that pasta may have come from the Middle East. Still, the story of the humble noodle's journey from east to west has as many twists and turns as a strand of *fusili*, and is often as slippery.

No matter what its shape (Italian food writer Oretta Zanini De Vita's scholarly *Encyclopedia of Pasta* identifies more than 300 shapes) or its flavor (from pumpkin to squid ink), pasta is, essentially, flour and water mixed into dough that is rolled out, cut and cooked by boiling in liquid. This last step is one way pasta is distinguished from bread, which is baked or fried. Another distinction comes with the type of wheat used in the flour.

Pasta is generally made from hard durum wheat (*Triticum turgidum* var. *durum*), which is loaded with the gluten that helps pasta maintain its shape both during manufacture and later in boiling water. With some 30 percent more gluten than common wheat (*Triticum vulgare*), and with a naturally lower moisture content, durum flour mixed with water dries into a hard but reconstitutable foodstuff—*pasta secca* in Italian. Therein lies another crucial distinction.

*Pasta fresca*, as its name implies, is fresh pasta. Soft and pliable, *pasta fresca* is meant to be cooked promptly. While it can be made with durum, most cooks find all-purpose flour from common wheat, sometimes enriched with eggs, easier to work, especially by hand. *Pasta secca*, on the other hand—the kind of pasta commonly found on grocery-store shelves—can be made only with durum flour, because durum's unique properties permit its nearly indefinite preservation. Writing in the 14th century, the Mamluk civil servant Al-Umari cited a government report that claimed that the durum wheat of North Africa “could be stored for 80 years in silos,” and, in the 11th century, Andalusian geographer Al-Bakri boasted that one of the characteristics of Toledo is that “its wheat never changes or goes bad over the years.”

The key to tracking down pasta's origins, therefore, lies in finding a common answer to three questions: Who cultivated durum wheat, or at least had access to a regular supply of it? Who first processed durum flour into dough, shaped it and dried it? And then, who pioneered the method of cooking those preserved shapes in boiling liquid?

The questions go back millennia. One of the world's oldest domesticated grains, durum emerged as early as 7000 BCE as a natural mutation or hybridization of emmer wheat, a wild grass native to the Fertile Crescent and one of the first cereal grains cultivated there roughly 10,000 years ago. (Today emmer wheat is also known as spelt; in Italy it is *farro*.) In addition to its long shelf life, another advantage of durum, people found, is that it is a so-called naked wheat. This means that the hulls encasing the grain kernels easily break away as chaff during threshing. Its disadvantage is that, when milled, its flour—also known as semolina—is hard and granular rather than the soft and powdery

**This painting comes from the *Khamsa* of Nizami, a book of masterpiece illustrations produced in mid-16th-century Tabriz. It depicts an episode in the 12th-century Persian epic tale of Majnun—shown here in chains—and Layla, who awaits his arrival at her tent. In the background, at upper right, artist Mir Sayyid Ali included four cooks: One holds meat over a fire tended by another; one brings a bowl; and one woman uses both hands to roll what is likely *reshteh*, a Persian word for pasta. Opposite: Though handmade pastas remain a boutique food craft, since the 19th century most pasta has been made by the mechanized extrusion of dough through perforated discs, after which it is sliced, dried and conveniently packaged.**

BRITISH LIBRARY, OPPOSITE: PHOTOCUISINE / ALAMY

## COUSIN COUSCOUS, BROTHER BULGUR

Aside from pasta, durum wheat is most widely used in North African Arab cuisine for couscous, which is made of coarsely ground dried semolina dough. A staple of the North African diet, couscous is also popular in southern Europe, especially in Sicily, where the dish appears routinely on the menus of *trattorias* throughout Palermo and is regarded as a staple by many modern Sicilians. Meanwhile, whole-grain durum wheat is also popular throughout the Middle East as bulgur or *burghul*—an Arabic word that comes from the Persian for “bruised grain”—which is durum that is steamed or parboiled, then dried and crushed. It is a basic ingredient in such dishes as *tabbouli*, *kibbe* and pilafs. In Tunisia, it is called *borghol*; in Saudi Arabia, it is *jarish*, popular especially in Najd and the Al-Hasa Oasis of the Eastern Province. In Jordan, bulgur sometimes replaces rice in that country’s national lamb dish, *mansaf*, while in Egypt and Syria, roasted grains of unripe durum, called *frikah* (or *fariik*), add body and a nutty flavor to pilafs and soups.

“all-purpose” flour that comes from soft wheat. These characteristics were apparent to the world’s first bakers, whoever and wherever they were: Soft wheat produced the better bread, while durum was better suited to porridges, whole-grain concoctions and, eventually, pasta.

From its origins in the Middle East (most likely the Fertile Crescent), durum—with its intrinsic pasta-making



***Triticum turgidum* var. *durum* has been known and cultivated by humans for at least eight thousand years.**



potential—spread far and wide, though just how far and when are questions historians and paleobotanists debate. The Chinese are often credited with the invention of noodles, and it is true that by 2500 BCE they were growing wheat—but not durum. It was common wheat, and anthropologists generally agree that the grain, and possibly the technique of milling it, were introduced to China by West Asian merchants via the Silk Roads. Linguists have found that, in China, many non-Chinese food terms “have Near Eastern names, borrowed from Arabic or Persian,” according to the late Herbert Franke, a founder of the University of Munich’s Sinological Section and an author of the *Cambridge History of China*.

“It should be noted that the words for ‘noodles’, ‘Ravioli’ and similar flour-made dishes are all Turcic [*sic*],” Franke wrote. “This points to the fact that the dishes themselves were originally non-Chinese and may have been introduced into China from the Near East.... This would mean that even such dishes as *chiao-tzu* [dumplings], which have become a staple and household feature in Chinese cuisine, might have come to China from the ‘Western barbarians.’”

We know that, by the Han Dynasty in the late third century BCE, the Chinese were making *mein* (noodles), but the evidence suggests that early Chinese noodles were pasta fresca, not pasta secca. As late as the 12th century, the Chinese traveler Chau Ju-kua noted with wonder that the wheat in Muslim Spain was “kept in silos for tens of years without spoiling”—an unlikely remark to make if he had known durum wheat back home. East Asians also relied on flour from other sources, such as rice, to make noodles. In fact, Polo’s surprise at encountering noodles on the Indonesian island of Sumatra was that they were made with “*farina di alberi*” (“flour from trees”), that is, the starchy pith of either the sago palm or the breadfruit tree. It was samples of those “exotic” noodles—not pasta secca—that Polo brought back to Italy.

**This illustration showing five varieties of durum wheat was produced in the United States in 1900. The group was called “macaroni varieties” because the high gluten content of durum wheat helps pasta hold its shape.**



# WHO CALLED IT MACARONI?

Italians were eating pasta long before they had a collective noun for it. *Pasta* is a word that comes to us unchanged from the Latin one that meant “paste,” “dough” or “pastry cake.” It was itself a loan word from the Greek for a collation of grain and water that was sprinkled with salt—*pastos*—that itself comes from another Greek word, *passein*, “to sprinkle.” The earliest written use of the word *pasta*, in the modern sense, came in 1584, in a guide to organizing banquets written by Giovan Battista Rossetti, head steward of the Duchess of Urbino.

Prior to this, pasta was more commonly referred to by its particular shapes. Among the most popular—all made by hand—were *gnocchi* (dumplings, from *noccio*, “a knot of wood”); *lasagne* (“sheets”); *vermicelli* (“little worms”); *tagliatelle* (ribbon-shaped strips or “cuttings,” from *tagliare*, “to cut”); *tortellini* (“little pie”) and *ravioli*, whose derivation is uncertain, but which was referred to as early as 1100 as *raviolo* and described a century before that by Ibn Butlan as *sambusaj*, indicating possible culinary (if not lexical) origins in Persian dough-wrapped meats.

*Nudel* (“noodle”) is likely of 18th-century German origin, while the multitude of pasta shapes on modern grocery-store shelves are products of mostly 19th-century industrial extrusion technologies that pushed pasta dough through die-cast copper discs, each perforated with holes of various shapes, from circles and ribbon slits to wagon wheels and alphabet letters.

But of all the names for pasta, the most common is *macaroni*, or *maccheroni* in Italian. This catch-all term covers a wide range of types, from the specific (short, tubular, curved pasta) to the general (any type of pasta, long or short, tubular or flat, string-like or curled). Thus, while Maestro Martino’s *macharoni alla siciliana* were string-shaped and his *macharoni alla romana* (“in the Roman fashion”) were long and flat like fettuccine, early references to *macharoni/maccheroni* also indicated short, round, *gnocchi*-like pasta. This rounded shape helps explain how *maccheroni* could tumble down the fluffy, cheesy slopes of Boccaccio’s fanciful Parmesan mountain. The word *macharoni* appeared, along with *vermicelli*, as early as the 13th century, in texts composed by Italian Jews.

Yet despite its widespread use and familiarity, the origins of the word *macaroni* remain elusive. Many believe it derives from the Latin *maccare*, “to bruise, batter or crush,” a term which suggests the kneading of dough and which survives in the Italian *ammaccare*, meaning “to pulverize or squeeze together.” (In Sicily and Puglia, puréed fava beans, called *macco*, are a regional favorite.) A vestige of the same word survives in the Italian for rubble, *macarie*, and in the name of the ground-almond confection called “macaroon.”

Greek origins are also suggested. *Makarìa* means “food made from barley and water” in late Greek, the patois of the eastern Mediterranean from the third to the eighth centuries—broadly, the time frame within which pasta secca came to the West. The term also translates as “food of the blessed,” from the Homeric Greek *macarios*, “blessed.” In southern Italy, when it was part of the classical Greek world, a thin noodle soup served at funerals was called *macaria* or *macaria-aionia*, “eternal food of the blessed.” As late as 1548, Ortensio Lando, a medical doctor from Modena, paid homage to macaroni’s possible Greco-Sicilian roots in his *Commentario della*

*Piu Notabili et Mostruose Cose d’Italia* (*A Guide to the Most Notable and Monstrous Things of Italy*) by enviously remarking to a friend that “in a month, if the winds do not fail you, you will reach the rich island of Sicily, and you will eat those macheroni, which have taken their name from the beatifying.”

*Macaroni* may also hint at a connection between the culinary and theatrical arts. In the Atellan Farce, a collection of bawdy and buffoonish skits performed for the lower classes in ancient Rome, the name of the clown was Maccus. To medieval Italians, any stupid, bumbling figure whose antics recalled those of Maccus was thus a *maccherone*. Maccus went on to inspire the roguish character of Pulchinella in the *commedia dell’arte*, a masked, improvisational street theater popular during the Italian Renaissance. Pulchinella’s pointy-nosed, black-and-white mask was called a *macco*, and his distinguishing props included a heaping plate of macaroni and large wooden spoon. The pasta symbolized gluttony, while the spoon served the dual purpose of accommodating Pulchinella’s voracity and clobbering anyone who attempted to curb it. By the 17th century, Pulchinella was also known as Punchinello, and he traveled north to become the puppet character Punch of “Punch and Judy” fame who, having ditched the macaroni, yet retained the spoon, the better to whack at his equally pugnacious co-star.

This association of macaroni with fools crossed the Atlantic and appeared in the familiar American Revolutionary War jingle “Yankee Doodle Dandy.” In Elizabethan England, Italian fashion, cuisine and customs were de rigueur for those wishing to put on worldly airs. Some took this to extremes, and by the 18th century, the derisive epithet for an overdressed, often foppish poseur of Italian mannerisms was “macaroni.” In London, undeterred by their critics, the city’s “macaronis” in 1760 formed The Macaroni Club, and it was their outlandish hairstyles that inspired 19th-century English sailors to nickname a colorfully crested Antarctic species the macaroni penguin. Similarly, when the American Revolution broke out in 1775, “macaroni” was equated with the hairstyle, and it was to mock such pretense that the homespun, irreverent Yankee Doodle “stuck a feather in his cap and called it ‘macaroni.’”

No less intriguing, and no less intricate, is the theory that *macaroni* is a word rooted in Arabic. *Duwayda* (“inchworm”) is the Arabic name of an early, Tunisian form of vermicelli, in which the pasta is broken into short pieces. (See sidebar, page 21.) Linking the two ends of fresh *duwayda* yields little rings, called *qaran*, which comes from the Arabic *qarana*, “to join.” Once joined, they are—to use the Arabic past participle—*ma-qrun* or *maq-runa*. Not a long leap from there to *macaroni*.

While food writer Clifford Wright is guarded in citing this theory in *A Mediterranean Feast*, food historian and cookbook author Nawal Nasrallah, in *Delights from the Garden of Eden: A Cookbook and a History of the Iraqi Cuisine*, is more direct: “In Iraq up until the [nineteen-] fifties, pasta in southern regions was called *maqarna*,” Nasrallah noted, while “in more cosmopolitan areas such as Baghdad, that word was already passé. They replaced it with the classier Italicized *ma’karoni*.”

*Maqarna* and *itriyya* aside, pasta has been known by a host of names throughout the Middle East. In addition to the Akkadian connection between *semidu* and semolina, a 3700-year-old Babylonian



Satirizing gluttonous affecters of Italian men’s fashions and manners in 18th-century London, the artist titled this caricature “The Macaroni.”

recipe for “spleen broth,” found among the cuneiform tablets of the Yale Babylonian Collection, calls for adding “bits of roasted *qaiatu*-dough.” Nasrallah suggests that this ingredient could be interpreted as fine, thin noodles.

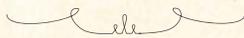
“The Akkadian *qatanu*, from which *qaiatu* was possibly derived, means ‘to become thin and fine,’” she explains. “The Arabic *qitan*, with its plural, *qaiateen*, is ultimately derived from this Akkadian *qatanu*, which means ‘strings’ or ‘cords.’ Therefore, there is the possibility that the *qaiatu*-dough was flattened thin and cut into strips like *qatanu*—strips or cords.” The fact that they are toasted before going into the pot—still a common technique in many pasta-based soups and pilafs—also suggests it was not just any dough but a sturdy sort—such as dried pasta.

Toasted noodles are still sold in the markets of Iraq, Nasrallah noted. There they are known as *rishta*, a Persian word that translates as “thread.” Recipes for *rishta* appear after the 13th century in Arabic cookbooks, replacing an earlier term for noodles, *lakhsha*, which is Persian for “slippery.” Renowned food historian Charles Perry theorized that the shift in terminology was for the sake of clarification: Lakhsha were noodles used exclusively in the wild-ass soup that possibly went out of vogue by the 13th century. (The word lived on, however, in other languages and cultures: Today, *laksa* is a spicy Chinese–Malay noodle

soup, and in regions once part of or bordering the Ottoman Empire, it survives as *laska* in Hungary, *lapsa* in Russia, *lokshina* in Ukraine, *laks-tiniai* in Lithuania, *lakhchak* in Afghanistan and *lokshen* in Yiddish.)

*Rishta*, now often transliterated *reshteh*, remains the central ingredient in many traditional Persian dishes, such as *reshteh polow* (rice with noodles) and *ash-e reshteh* (noodle soup). This latter dish is also called *ash-e pushteh-pa*, or “pilgrim’s soup,” traditionally served on the eve of a loved one’s departure on pilgrimage to Makkah, or on the occasion of a son leaving the house to make his way in the world.

“Dishes containing noodles are traditionally prepared at times of decision or change so that the ‘reins (of life) may be taken in hand,’” according to Margaret Shaida, author of *The Legendary Cuisine of Persia*. In pre-Islamic Iran, noodle soup was eaten at the beginning of each month, Shaida notes, a custom that survives in Iran today, where the soup may be served at the first prayer meeting of every month. *Ash-e reshteh* is also the food of religious pledges (*nazn*) invoking God’s intervention in family matters, such as the safe return of a loved one after a long journey or the recovery of a sick child. “Noodle soup is specially favored for pledges since the tangle of noodles is thought to resemble the tangle of paths in one’s life,” Shaida observes.



Looking west to Greece and Rome, there are numerous references to what is believed to be durum wheat scattered throughout classical sources, as well as archeological evidence supporting the early presence of that grain in the Greco-Roman world. Many of the references come from medical writers. The second-century Greek physician Galen compared durum’s taste to that of barley, but cautioned readers to lay off the *semidalis*, a word derived from *samid* or *semidu*, the Mesopotamian word for semolina.

Most writers, however, praised durum’s fiber-rich goodness, much as nutritionists do today. The first-century Roman agronomist Columella, who served as a tribune in Syria, reported that durum wheat thrived best in dry climates, like those of North Africa and Sicily, where modern agronomist Renzo Landi of Florence’s Academia dei Georgofili points out that locally minted Roman coins depict sheaves of durum, distinguishable by its long awns. Such coins, says Landi, “confirm the presence of durum wheat very exactly to the time of the Roman republic.”

But did the Greeks and Romans use their durum to make pasta? Yes and no. Greek *laganon* was a broad, flat sheet of baked or fried dough made with flour and oil. It is often cited as a pasta prototype, along with its Roman derivative, *laganum*. The fourth-century-BCE Greek poet Archestratus of Gela frequently refers to *laganon* in his *Life of Luxury*, a sort of gourmet guide to the Mediterranean. In the Roman era, Athenaeus’s *Deipnosophistae (Philosophers at Dinner)*, a how-to manual for hosting highbrow dinner parties, claimed to have cribbed a recipe for *laganon* from the first-century Greek writer Chrysippus of Tyana.

Roman cooks indeed cut *laganum* into strips called *lagani* or *lagana*, and layered them with other ingredients in a baking

dish, thus producing the apparent culinary and lexical ancestor of lasagna. “Alternate the *lagana* with ladles of the filling,” read the instructions in *De Re Coquinaria (On Cooking)*, a fourth-century compilation of recipes attributed to the legendary first-century gourmand Marcus Gavius Apicius, a man so devoted to fine dining that he supposedly took his own life when he realized he didn’t have enough money left to maintain his lavish lifestyle. The more abstemious statesman Cato the Elder, who lived

from 234 to 149 BCE, wrote a practical guide to farm management and husbandry called *De Agricultura (On Agriculture)*, in which he recorded a recipe for a sort of cheesecake that blended *farinae siligneae* (common flour) with *alicae primae* (finest semolina) to form a *tracta*, a sort of pie crust. Later, between 68 and 65 BCE, the Roman poet Horace wrote that he found nothing more comforting after a long day hobnobbing in the Forum than to come home to a warm tureen of leeks, chickpeas and *lagani*.

Yet for all their details, not one of these sources discusses drying or boiling the durum dough, which indicates that these foods were still not quite pasta *secca*. Baked *laganum* was probably closer to Jewish matzo, while the fried variety resembled fritters or beignets. Pasta-type foods are, in fact, “conspicuous in classical sources only by their absence,” according to Robert Sallares, author of *The Ecology of the Ancient Greek World*. This begs a further question: Considering both Greek and Roman inventiveness, as well as pasta’s relative simplicity, how is it possible

that the idea of pasta *secca* never occurred to either the Greeks or the Romans?

Some scholars speculate that, given ancient milling technology, durum was too difficult to grind fine enough for pasta-making.



**Greek flatbread, called *laganon* or *lagana*, may be a predecessor both of pasta in the northern Mediterranean and—after Romans layered it with fillings—lasagna.**

## THE LAST PASTA-MAKER OF TRABIA

The Sicilian coastal town of Trabia, which al-Idrisi so significantly described, still roosts on a hillside overlooking the Mediterranean, about a half-hour's drive from Palermo. The "huge estates" of which he wrote are gone now, as are the mills that once ground acres of durum wheat into semolina. The location of the last mill, which disappeared around the middle of the last century, is now a car wash. Yet in the back room of an inauspicious little *trattoria*, about midway along Trabia's main thoroughfare, the town's last commercial pasta-maker still hand-makes a boutique supply of anellitti, tagliatelle and other favorites for a mostly local clientele.

"Making pasta was something my father taught me how to do," says owner Matteo Barbera. "I only make it on Saturdays and Sundays. I use flour, eggs and water. That's it."

The flour he buys from Tomasello, Sicily's lone industrialized pasta manufacturer, a firm founded in 1910 in Casteldaccia, a few miles west. Yet even the flour is no longer local: It is shipped to the island from the United States and Russia.

Still, Barbera is proud of Trabia's pasta heritage, which is promoted right alongside seafood and crabapple-like medlars in the town's tourism literature.

"It is strange that I am the only one left in a town where pasta was born," he says. "I suppose I am the last of the Arabs, even though I am Sicilian," he smiles.



Matteo Barbera's café in Trabia, Sicily advertises its *pasta fresca* (fresh pasta made with egg) as a takeout item to cook at home.

from the Greek *itrion*, meaning a cake or thin, unleavened bread. Yet by the fifth century, its Latin cognate *itria* had come to mean something else entirely.

"As to making vermicelli [*itria*] on the festival, if it is for drying them, it is forbidden. If it is for the pot [cooking right away], it is permitted," according to the *Jerusalem Talmud*, a collection of writings on Jewish law composed in the holy city during the late fourth and early fifth centuries. The passage concerns whether or not boiled dough qualifies as unleavened bread, but its importance goes far beyond a rabbinic debate. For here is the earliest written evidence that people in the Levant were not only boiling dough but, most importantly, were drying and preserving it in long strands, which they called *itria*. This word survives as *itriot* in Hebrew, *itriyya* in Arabic and as



In the 14th century, bookmakers in Lombardy published an illustrated Latin edition of the encyclopedic 11th-century health manual by Ibn Butlan of Baghdad. It included a recipe for pasta, called *trij*, and this illustration of women rolling and drying it.

Others believe that there was simply no place for pasta in the classical world's hierarchy of carbohydrates.

"In the Mediterranean, from antiquity to the Middle Ages, gruels and breads were the two fundamental, cereal-based foods," explains Françoise Sabban of the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in Paris. She is co-author, with her husband, Silvano Serventi, of the scholarly *Pasta: The Story of a Universal Food*. The distinctive methods of preparing bread and gruel, she suggests, kept them from cross-fertilizing each other. Like pasta, bread is made from kneaded dough, but unlike pasta, bread is baked in dry heat; gruels and porridges are boiled like pasta, but, unlike pasta, they are made from whole or crushed grains, not from flour. "In this context, pasta was unthinkable because it straddled both categories, and therefore belonged to neither," says Sabban.

The earliest indication of these categories emerging in the West appeared in the seventh-century writings of Isidore of Seville, who described *laganum* as "a broad, flat bread, which [is cooked] first in water and then fried in oil." A familiar approximation might be the crispy fried noodles that accompany *chow mein* or that serve as appetizers in many Chinese restaurants in the West.

Still, classical sources aren't entirely devoid of hints that point in an easterly direction for pasta's possible origins, as an etymological poke through the poet Horace's simple supper reveals.

Horace hailed from Venusia (today Venosa), a Greek commercial city bordering Apuglia, the "heel" of Italy's boot-shaped peninsula. It was a region occupied at various times by Byzantines, Lombards, Normans and, during the Middle Ages, Arabs. Yet through it all, and even to this day, Horace's humble bowl of chickpeas, leeks and lagani remained a regional favorite, known as *cic-eri e tria* or *pasta e ceci*, a classic dish of chickpeas (*ceci*) and wide, ribbon-shaped pasta, traditionally *laganelle*, a rustic form of tagliatelle. Aside from the obvious lexical connections between Horace's lagani and laganelle (not to mention *laganatura*, a southern Italian term for "rolling pin"), that little four-letter word *tria* is another regionalism of even greater significance. The word derives



**Pasta dries in the sun in this photo dating from 1900 in Naples, where pasta was often called *tria*, a term that may come from *itria*, the word for long strands of dried dough known in the Levant since the fifth century.**

*tria* in southern Italy, all meaning the same thing: pasta.

“*Tria* is what they traditionally call pasta in Calabria, in Naples, and in many of the towns and villages in central Sicily,” says anthropologist and Sicilian native Franco La Cecla, author of *Pasta and Pizza*. Nibbling on an appetizer-sized square of the latter entrée in a quiet neighborhood *trattoria* in Palermo, La Cecla says there is no doubt among Sicilians as to who introduced the island to pasta and the technique of its manufacture: Arabs.

“The Arabs developed most of the irrigation and agricultural techniques in Sicily during the great waves of conquest in the ninth century,” says La Cecla. “It is commonly known here that they also brought with them the methods for making pasta.”

There is more to La Cecla’s claim than mere legend. Early Arab medical writers—like their Greek and Roman forebears—recognized the health benefits of wheat, and in their discussions of its various preparations, they included pasta. As early as the ninth century, the Syrian physician and lexicographer Ishu bar Ali referred to *itriyya* as dried strands of semolina dough that are boiled. One of the foremost medical authorities of the Middle Ages, Ishaq ibn Sulayman of Egypt, discoursed on the preparation of pasta in his 10th-century *Kitab al-Aghdhiya wa’l-Adwiya* (*The Book of Foods and Cures*, known in the West as *The Book on Dietetics*). Further east, the late-10th-century lexicographer al-Jawhari, who hailed from the Silk Road city of Otrar in southern Kazakhstan, defined *itriyya* as a food similar to *hibriya*, or “hairs” (possibly “flakes”) made from wheat.

The earliest written reference to pasta and pasta-making on Italian soil comes from none other than the renowned medieval Arab geographer al-Idrisi. Describing the coastal towns of northern Sicily in his *Kitab Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Khtiraq al-‘Afaq* (*The Book of Pleasant Journeys into Faraway Lands*), composed in 1154 for his Norman patron, the Arabophile King Roger II of Sicily, al-Idrisi remarked on “a delightful settlement called Trabia,” some 30 kilometers (18 mi) east of Palermo, where “ever-flowing

streams propel a number of mills. Here there are huge estates in the countryside where they make vast quantities of *itriyya* which is exported everywhere: to Calabria, to Muslim and Christian countries. Very many shiploads are sent.” (See sidebar, page 19.)

Al-Idrisi’s description indicates a thriving industry and an expansive trade network that, by the 14th century, stretched north to Genoa and beyond. The earliest known document in Italian that clearly mentions pasta is the will of a Genoese soldier, Ponzio Bastone, notarized in 1279, that lists among his possessions a “*barixella una plena maccononis*” (“a chest full of macaroni”). This must have been pasta secca, as only dried

pasta could be stored and preserved in a wooden chest. The 13th-century Andalusian author Ibn Razin al-Tujibi, in his book *Fadilat al-Khiwan fi Tayyibat al-Ta’am wa’l-Alwan* (*Delights of the Table and the Best Types of Dishes*) describes various types of pasta used in the western part of the Islamic world, including a recipe for pasta fresca to be used in a pinch when the dried variety “is not available,” indicating a commodity more commonly purchased in the marketplace—hence imported.

Pasta was also by then a food of poetry and potentates. Tuscany’s Giovanni Boccaccio, in his classic 14th-century allegorical poem *The Decameron*, described a fairy-tale landscape with a “mountain made entirely of grated Parmesan cheese,” inhabited by people “who do nothing else but make *maccheroni* and *ravioli*, cook them in capon broth, and then throw them down the slopes.”

In the kitchens of England’s King Richard II, the master chefs took a more down-to-earth approach to pasta presentation, which nonetheless included plenty of grated cheese as the classic accompaniment. The anonymous English author of the 14th-century royal cookbook *The Forme of Cury* advised, “Take and make a thynne foyle [sheet] of dowh [dough], and kerve it in pieces, and cast [t]hem on boillyng water and seethe it wele. Take cheese and grate it, and butter, and cast bynethen [beneath], and above as losyns, and serve forth.” The “losyns” was essentially lasagna, and while the book’s recipe for losyns called for the use of bread flour as opposed to durum (and thus seems to indicate pasta fresca) it does state that an important step is to “drye it harde” before cooking—which can be done only with durum flour.

(Some scholars have attempted to link losyns, and thus lasagna, to the medieval Arab–Persian term *lawzinaj*, a sheet cake made with almonds, sugar and rose water using both hard and soft wheat. Like many Arab sweets, the cake was typically cut into diamond-shaped pieces. The late Orientalist Maxime Rodinson saw connections between these confections and the French word for the similarly shaped heraldic design *losange*, from which the English word *lozenge* is derived.)

These and other such references to pasta in medieval Europe indicate a commodity that was both valuable and expensive, something that was typically imported, not readily available locally.

“It was a product linked to ports and trade, not something that was produced internally,” according to Alberto Capatti, co-author of *Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History* and a faculty member at the University of Gastronomic Sciences south of Turin. In fact, Capatti points out, pasta production in the Italian peninsula was not really widespread until the 19th century and the onset of the industrial revolution. (Growing up in the northern Italian region of Lombardy, Capatti noted that risotto—rice—was standard fare at the dinner table, not pasta.) Up until then, pasta manufacturing and consumption were more commonly associated with southern Italy: Naples, Apulia and, most famously, Sicily, which Capatti considers the likely birthplace of Italy’s pasta industry.

But were Arabs, in fact, its parents? When al-Idrisi wrote of Sicily’s thriving pasta industry, was he referring to one that existed before the Arabs arrived, or the one that, as legend has it, came ashore with Asad ibn al-Furat’s warships? Thumbing through the pages of some of the earliest cookbooks offers more clues.

Just as there was no mention of pasta secca on Italian soil prior to al-Idrisi, there was also nothing much resembling a cookbook in Europe between the time of Apicius and the 13th century. By contrast, cookbooks in the Arab world emerged in Abbasid Baghdad, during the 10th century, perhaps earlier. There are, in fact, “more cookbooks in Arabic from before 1400 than in the rest of the world’s languages put together,” claims food historian

Lilia Zaouali, author of *Medieval Cuisine of the Islamic World*. Usually bearing the same generic title—*kitab al-tibakh*, or “book of dishes”—these books were more readily known by association with their authors, much like those by today’s celebrity cooks.

The earliest known Arab cookbook—and the first to mention pasta—was compiled in the 10th century by an Abbasid court scribe named Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq. Derived from earlier eighth- and ninth-century recipe collections of caliphs and court officials, the book features a chapter on pasta, which here was called *lakhsba*, from the Persian word for “slippery.” (See sidebar, page 17.) It featured a colorful story of pasta’s invention during the reign of the Persian king Khosrau, who died in 579 CE.

While out hunting on a chilly day, so it goes, Khosrau commanded his cook to whip up a nice hot pot of wild-ass soup. As an afterthought, the king suggested cooking “pieces of dough” in the broth. The delighted monarch “found it so delicious that for three consecutive days he wanted nothing else but this dish.” While this account is certainly folklore, al-Warraq’s book includes practical recipes for pasta

dishes. These include Nabataean chicken, which calls for adding to the pot “three handfuls of itriya” and letting it simmer until cooked—a step that clearly points to pasta secca. It is also likely that early Arab pasta was small and grain- or rice-shaped, “like a coriander seed,” as one 13th-century Hispano-Muslim cookbook described it.

“It was made to imitate grain, and mainly used in broth,” says Sabban, pointing out that this shape also made it more portable by maximizing its density when packed.

Throughout the Middle Ages, as European scholars translated

THE EARLIEST  
KNOWN ARABIC  
COOKBOOK, FROM  
10TH-CENTURY  
BAGHDAD, IS ALSO  
THE FIRST TO  
MENTION PASTA.

## THE TUNISIAN CONNECTION

“Italy is so close to us that you can smell the pizza,” jokes Tunisian guide Hatem Bourial. Indeed, the proximity of the Italian peninsula and Sicily to Tunis and other parts of this North African coastal nation have fostered centuries of cross-cultural exchange—including a diet that includes pasta. Tunisians are, in fact, the world’s third-largest consumers of pasta products, behind only Italy and Venezuela, respectively, according to the International Pasta Organization in Rome.

“I’m not surprised at these statistics, because Tunisians consume pasta almost daily. It is very popular,” says Marinette Pendola, author of *The Italians of Tunisia: The Story of a Community*. The presence of Italians in Tunisia dates back as far as the 10th century, she wrote. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many Italians fled south to escape fascism, wars and poverty, establishing their communities in various urban centers.

With their taste for pasta, these Italian immigrants found kindred souls among North African Arabs who likewise enjoyed a wide variety of pasta dishes, as catalogued by food writer Clifford Wright in his exhaustively researched *A Mediterranean Feast*. Among those still popular today are:

*Rishta*: This is egg fettuccine, often mixed with beans and vegetables as an entrée or as a soup (*rishta jariyya*). It is also made with lentils in Syria and Lebanon.

*Duwayda*: This is Tunisian Arabic for vermicelli broken into inch-long pieces. When formed into little rings, they are identical to *anelletti*, the signature pasta of Sicily, which strongly suggests a cross-cultural exchange.

*Hlalim*, *tlitlu* and *qat’a*: These are small, grain-shaped soup pastas of various sizes, sometimes steamed, like couscous.

*Muhammas*: These small balls of pasta, sometimes classified as a kind of couscous, carry a name derived from the same Arabic word as *hummus* (chickpea dip)—*hummais*—which means “small garbanzo beans,” even though muhammas are closer to peppercorn size. Toasted granules of muhammas are sold in the us as *moghrebiyya*—a name that reflects their roots in the Maghrib—North Africa.

*Eddeouaida*: This kind of vermicelli is used among the nomadic Tuaregs of the Algerian Sahara, where it is also called *talia*—short for “Italia.”





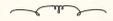
## PASTA WITH ONIONS AND PAPRIKA

Paprika, relished for the flavor and color it adds to a recipe, is made by grinding dried peppers—sweet, hot or a combination of both. Peppers were New World crops introduced to Europe and the Middle East during Ottoman times. Paprika, depending on the variety of peppers used and whether the seeds were included in the grind, can range from a mild, sweet variety to one that will leave your eyes watering and your nose running. Hot varieties—not recommended for this dish—are usually marked as such or will list hot peppers in the ingredient list. Don't be troubled by the large amount of paprika below. Four Tbs. is correct. Serves 4 to 6.

- 1/3 c. olive oil plus small amount to brush on serving dish
- 3 large onions, halved and sliced into thick slices
- 3 large cloves garlic, smashed and peeled
- Salt
- 4 Tbs. paprika
- 1 tsp. cumin
- 2 c. finely chopped canned tomatoes with juices,  
or 2 c. crushed tomatoes
- 12 oz. fettuccini or tagliatelle
- 1 c. unflavored yogurt at room temperature

Pour oil into a large sauté pan, add onions and garlic, season with salt, cover and cook over low heat for five minutes. Then uncover pan and continue to cook over low heat until onions are tender but resistant. Do not let them brown or caramelize. Lower the heat and quickly stir in paprika and cumin. Cook for a minute to release flavors. Keep the heat very low and stir constantly so paprika does not turn bitter. Pour in tomatoes, season with salt and simmer for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, brush a serving dish with enough oil to coat the surface. Beat the yogurt with a pinch of salt. Cook pasta in boiling salted water until tender. Drain, transfer to serving dish, and pour the onions on the pasta. Toss in the yogurt or, alternatively, serve the yogurt separately.



## PASTA WITH MINT AND ALMOND PESTO

Many people are familiar with *pesto alla Genovese*, but not so many realize that many other regions of Italy also have their own traditional recipes for pesto. *Pesto alla Trapanese*, a classic recipe from the western Sicilian port of Trapani, owes the introduction of almonds, replacing the pine nuts in the Genovese version, to Arab influence. The classic Trapanese recipe uses basil and tomatoes, but I like this modern variation, which also bows to Arab cuisine with the use of mint and cilantro. Serves 4 to 6.

### Sauce

- 1 c. packed fresh mint leaves
  - 1/2 c. packed flat-leaf parsley, stems removed
  - 1/4 c. packed cilantro leaves
  - 1/2 c. unsalted, blanched almonds
  - 2 large cloves garlic, peeled and halved,  
with pale-green areas removed
  - 1 tsp. ground coriander seed
  - Salt
  - 2 tsp. lemon juice
  - 1/2 c. olive oil
- 12 oz. vermicelli or thin spaghetti (spaghettini)

## PASTA WITH EGGPLANT

Arab cooks once disdained eggplant for its bitterness. By the 10th century, they embraced a method, mentioned in Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq's cookbook, of salting the vegetable before cooking, which draws out the bitter juices. This recipe reflects both the bounty of southern Italy—peppers, tomatoes, anchovies—and the culinary gifts the Arabs brought there: eggplant, spices and particularly the combination of sweet and savory flavors. Serves 6 to 8.

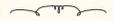
- 2 medium eggplants, washed and trimmed but not peeled
- 1/2 c. plus 3 Tbs. olive oil
- 3 large cloves garlic, chopped
- Salt
- 2 lbs. fresh tomatoes, peeled and chopped, or one 28-ounce can  
Italian plum tomatoes, drained and chopped
- 2 yellow or red peppers, cut into 1-inch squares
- 1/4 to 1/2 tsp. red pepper flakes
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 6 to 8 anchovy fillets, rinsed if packed in salt, and chopped
- 1/2 c. raisins
- 1 Tbs. capers, rinsed
- 1 lb. vermicelli

Cut eggplant into 1/2-inch cubes and layer in colander, salting each layer. Put a plate and a weight on top and let drain 1 hour. Rinse and squeeze gently with paper towels to dry.

Put 1/2 cup oil and garlic into a large sauté pan and cook over low heat until garlic is translucent. Add eggplant to pan and cook over medium-high heat until golden. Add remaining oil to the pan, and then stir in tomatoes and peppers. Season lightly with salt, add red pepper and cinnamon, cover and simmer for 15 minutes.

Stir in anchovies, capers and raisins, re-cover and simmer 15 minutes more.

Cook vermicelli in large amount of salted boiling water until tender, then drain and toss into pan with vegetables.



### Topping

- 1 Tbs. olive oil
- 1/4 c. shredded mint leaves
- 1/4 c. raisins
- 1/4 c. sliced almonds
- 3 Tbs. butter at room temperature

Wash mint and parsley and dry well. Put in the bowl of a food processor or blender and process until herbs are in small pieces. Add almonds, garlic, coriander and salt and process until almonds and herbs are very fine. With machine running, pour olive oil through the feed tube in a steady stream until well incorporated. Add the lemon juice. Transfer the sauce to a warm serving bowl.

Pour olive oil into a small frying pan and, when it is hot, toss in the mint, almonds and raisins. Cook, stirring and tossing constantly until almonds are lightly browned and raisins are plumped. Remove from heat and immediately swirl in the butter so it will melt.

Cook the pasta in boiling salted water until tender. Before draining, remove about 3 Tbs. of the boiling water and stir into the sauce. Drain and transfer pasta to serving bowl. Add sauce. Sprinkle on topping.

Arabic texts, they encountered these and many other books on dietetics and cuisine. One such work was the exhaustive *Taqwim al-Sibha (Maintenance of Health)* by Ibn Butlan, an 11th-century Christian physician from Baghdad. The book was translated into Latin in Palermo, at the court of Manfred, king of Sicily from 1258 to 1266. Later, in the 14th century, under its Latin title *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, a lavishly illustrated edition was published in Lombardy. Among the recipes was one for *trij*, or pasta, accompanied by a detailed image of two women making pasta—rolling dough and draping the long strands on a rack to dry, a method that remained largely unchanged into the early 20th century. (See illustration on page 19.)

Arab cuisine also added distinctive flavor to the earliest European text devoted specifically to Italian cuisine, the late 13th century *Liber de Coquina (Book of Cooking)*. In addition to lasagna, the inclusion of several dishes with names and recipes derived from Arabic indicate that the book's anonymous author may well have been transcribing recipes from an earlier Arabic text. These include *romania* (from *rummaniya*, or chicken with pomegranates); *sumachia* (from *summaqiya*, chicken with sumac and almond); and *limonia* (from *laymuniya*, meat with lemon).

In the 15th century, detailed recipes for pasta and pasta preparation appeared in *Il Libro de Arte Coquinaria (Book on the Art of Cookery)* by Maestro Martino of Como, dubbed Italy's "prince of cooks" by Vatican librarian and fellow Renaissance humanist Bartolomeo Sacchi. Yet even here, in what is generally considered to be the first modern Italian cookbook, the author indirectly acknowledged the Arab roots of pasta by referring to sheets of pasta cut lengthwise into strings as *triti* (i.e., *tria*). The book also included a recipe for "Sicilian macaroni" made with flour, egg whites and rose water, an ingredient found rarely in the West but used commonly in high-end Arab and Persian cuisine. The inclusion of this costly, perfumed ingredient was further evidence of pasta secca's value: Rose water was more likely found in a royal kitchen than a village one. Martino goes on to instruct the reader to cut the dough into long strips "the size of your palm and as thin as hay" and let them cure "under an August moon" when the air is warm and dry.

As delightful as this homemade pasta may sound, however, the common Renaissance manner of cooking it was almost abusive: Martino's recipe concludes that "these macaroni should be simmered for two hours." (Bartolomeo Sacchi disagreed on that point: In his own wildly popular *De Honesta Voluptate et Valetudine [Respectable Pleasure and Good Health]*, the world's first printed cookbook, published in 1475, he recommended that some pasta need only be cooked as long as it takes to say three Our Fathers, demonstrating the early Italian taste for pasta cooked *al dente*, a term which means, literally, "to the teeth.")

"So the English and German way of overcooking pasta is not a mistake, but really the old way, according to Martino," chuckles Andrea Gagnesi, cooking-school chef at Tuscany's Badia a Coltibuono, founded by Italian cookbook author and instructor Lorenza de' Medici. Another of Martino's innovations, says Gagnesi, was eating boiled pasta with a fork, as it was too hot to handle with bare hands.

Whether they prefer it well done or *al dente*, modern Italian food fans may find their beloved pasta easier to swallow than the idea of its possible Middle Eastern origins. Still, there is considerable evidence to indicate that the peoples of the Arab world played an essential role in the dissemination of pasta and pasta-making techniques in the West. This evidence also offers compelling



A 1970's roadside advertisement in Los Angeles shows pasta in its most common modern form: the family-sized, cellophane-wrapped bundle of spaghetti.

answers to the three questions posed earlier: Durum wheat, pasta's essential grain, was a common crop throughout the Arab world, from Mesopotamia to Syria, Egypt, North Africa and Muslim Sicily. Arab cookbooks were the first to mention forming semolina dough into dried, preserved shapes. And it was scholars writing in Jerusalem who provided the earliest known reference to cooking those shapes in water.

How is it that pasta, today so deeply identified with Italy, may have origins so far from Italian soil? Some food historians have suggested that the earliest pasta was an innovation of desert-dwelling nomadic Arabs, who relied on it as a handily portable food source. Others have questioned this hypothesis, pointing out that a regular supply of durum wheat, and the apparatus required to mill it, was beyond the capacities of nomads. Food writer Clifford Wright poses a compromise: Pasta secca may have made its way west with medieval Arab armies on the march across North Africa. It was, after all, a convenient and filling foodstuff and one easily transported, whether on camelback or, no less plausibly, in the holds of ships—some of which dropped anchor along the coast of Sicily some 12 centuries ago. 🌐



Freelance writer **Tom Verde**, a frequent contributor to *Saudi Aramco World*, holds a master's degree in Islamic studies and Christian-Muslim relations. Over the years, he and his sister, Nancy Verde Barr, have collaborated on many writing projects, not to mention homemade pasta dinners.



**Nancy Verde Barr** is a culinary writer and has authored numerous books, including three award-winning cookbooks: *We Called It Macaroni* (Knopf, 1991), *In Julia's Kitchen with Master Chefs*, with Julia Child (Knopf, 1995) and *Make It Italian* (Knopf, 2002). Barr has published numerous articles in *Gourmet*, *Food and Wine*, *Bon Appétit*, *Cook's Magazine* and *Fine Cooking*. She is Tom Verde's sister.



**Related articles** from past issues can be found on our Web site, [www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com). Click on "indexes," then on the cover of the issues indicated below.

Abbasid cooking: J/A 06  
 couscous: N/D 98, J/F 11  
 laksa: S/O 03  
 Muslim Sicily: N/D 78  
 rice (risotto) in Italy: M/A 10  
 semolina: N/D 12



## MALAYSIA'S NEW

# ART MIX

WRITTEN BY RICHARD COVINGTON  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY JIMIN LAI

The photographs in this article have been adapted to the printed page from digitally stitched 360-degree panoramic originals at [www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com).

The music pulses, and so does the country. In a hip-hop video shot in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur, Chinese and Malays in a tea shop, Malays in a mosque, Tamils in a jewelry store, conspicuously multi-ethnic throngs mingling in markets, schools, skyscrapers and parks, all urge one thing: *Undilah*—“Vote” in the Malaysian Bahasa language. Hip, catchy and nonpartisan, the video is a testament to diversity and optimism, aimed at rocking the vote in advance of the general election that Malaysia’s constitution requires by June 27, 2013.



Among the faces in the video is that of Nurul Izzah Anwar, a 32-year-old member of parliament, amateur guitarist and Radiohead fan who has parlayed her family connections as the daughter of former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim into a platform of tolerance and equal opportunity. Visiting her at home in the leafy Mont Kiara neighborhood of Kuala Lumpur, I've come to talk not about politics, but about the contemporary arts and culture scene.

It's been growing, she explains, at a dizzying pace, ever since elections in 2008 brought a "great opening for more freedom of expression," which, she adds, "unleashed the arts." The "Undilah" video, conceived by the country's best-known music producer, Pete Teo, is a

**The pulse of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital and, with nearly 2 million people, its most populous city, beats strong amid the malls, restaurants and galleries of Bukit Bintang "Star" Walk. Many are new in the past decade. "This is really the best time to be an artist in Malaysia," asserts Bernice Chauly, 43, an author, photographer and actress.**

prime example of Malaysian artists embracing politics, "bringing us together at a level that was unheard-of before," marvels Nurul Izzah, who, like many Malaysians, generally goes by her given names.

All across Malaysia, but especially in the capital, nicknamed KL, a younger generation of artists, musicians, composers, writers, performers, designers and filmmakers is redefining culture and

enlivening the landscape with an astonishing variety of imaginative verve. The energy is palpable. On a recent visit, I sat in on a feature film shoot, watched a fashion show, attended art openings and symphonic concerts, witnessed an experimental theater piece on river pollution, and stayed up late at a jazz club and even later at a memorable party where a saxophonist and singer belted out tunes to a hundred or more guests from KL's creative and financial communities—all in 13 days.

"This is really the best time to be an artist in Malaysia," asserts Bernice Chauly, 43, an author, photographer and actress. "People want to be heard, and they are willing to take risks, to use their own money to make it work."

I was speaking to Chauly on a lunch break during the filming of "Spilt Gravy on Rice," an adaptation of a hit play written by the popular Malaysian actor and comedian Jit Murad. The plot revolves around a family patriarch and his children's plans to manage his legacy after his death. Although the witty exchanges among siblings draw laughs, it's a generational conflict that also grapples with the challenges the increasingly middle-class, 54-year-old parliamentary democracy faces in sharing wealth and power and in making its ethnic diversity a source of strength.

A Muslim-majority state that became independent of British colonial rule in 1957, Malaysia has accomplished remarkable economic growth in a short time. Forty years ago, half the Malaysian population lived in poverty, and per capita income was US\$260 a year. Today, just four percent of the nation's 28 million inhabitants live in poverty, and income per capita is \$8400, according to the International Monetary Fund. The economy has benefited from substantial oil reserves and a thriving manufacturing sector, as well as—more controversially—exploitation of palm oil plantations and logging, at times in rainforests. But high-tech is also

**Nurul Izzah Anwar, 32, was elected to parliament on a platform of tolerance and inter-ethnic opportunity. National reforms in 2008, she says, have "unleashed the arts" in Malaysia, "bringing us together at a level that was unheard-of before."**

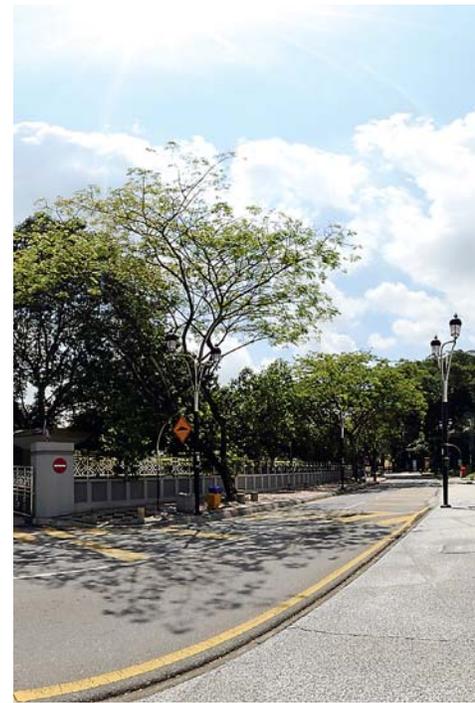
booming: A substantial proportion of Intel's global output of computer chips, for example, is produced 400 kilometers (240 mi) north of KL in Penang, on the Strait of Melaka. George Town, a well-preserved enclave of shophouses—storefront residences—mosques and colonial architecture on Penang, was named a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2008, along with Melaka, the 600-year-old

**Forty years ago, per capita income in Malaysia was \$260 a year. Today it is \$8400—a rise of 3200 percent.**

port city that lies south of the capital by some 130 kilometers (80 mi).

As robust as the economy has been in recent decades, the arts are largely a do-it-yourself struggle, making do with support mainly from banks and a handful of other corporate sponsors, modest government help, the commitment of some 50 leading individual art collectors and, perhaps most important, the sheer stubborn passion of the creative sector itself.

There are, however, a couple of notably well-funded exceptions: Possessing one of the most impressive collections of its kind in all of Asia, the Islamic Arts Museum of Malaysia is run privately by the Albukhary Foundation, which is financed by power plants, ports and mining companies. Penang's ThinkCity, which promotes arts, urban renovation, environmental and cultural enterprises, is underwritten by Khazanah Nasional, the investment arm of the Malaysian government. Apart from these and a sprinkling of others, the majority of





Opened in 1998, the Islamic Arts Museum of Malaysia is home to one of Asia's leading collections. Like most Malaysian arts institutions, it is privately funded.

today's defiantly cheering success stories in the arts and design industries survive on scant, usually private, money and abundant, usually personal, dedication.

A decade ago, Raman Krishna, now 63, was visited at his bookstore, Silverfish Books, by an American professor friend from a Japanese university. "When he asked where the books by Malaysian writers were, I was so totally embarrassed by the fact that I could only locate a dozen titles that I was shamed into becoming a publisher," Raman confides inside the small bookstore in KL's upmarket Bangsar neighborhood.

It wasn't the first time that Raman had indulged his inner Quixote to pursue an insistent quest. After 25 years making a living as a construction engineer, "I decided enough was enough," he recalls. "I told myself that I should get on with my secret ambition to open a bookstore." From his own savings, he plowed 250,000 ringgit (about \$80,000) into the scheme and, in 1999, opened the doors at Silverfish.

Moving into publishing was an equally seat-of-the-pants gamble. He put the word out through newspapers, the Internet, friends and customers that he was planning on issuing an

anthology of short stories. In a month, he received 250 submissions, so many that, after the first anthology appeared, he solicited entries for a second edition. More than 500 stories rolled in.

"I was astounded by the pent-up demand from writers wanting to express themselves," he declares. Although his authors write in English, because it has long been the common language of educated Malaysians from all backgrounds, it is in fact only the country's third most frequently used language, after Malay and Chinese, says Raman.

His bestseller so far is *I Am Muslim*, Dina Zaman's funny, questioning portrait of Malaysian Muslims. At 12,000 copies, it's a modest success by US standards, but "huge for an English-language book here," crow's Raman. He notes with obvious satisfaction that the volume has become class reading at both the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Chicago.

After 10 years in publishing, shepherding some 40 short-story collections, novels and non-fiction works into print, Raman believes



that Malaysian authors have become more “color-blind.” Whereas Indian, Chinese and Malay writers used to concentrate on characters exclusively of their own ethnicity, they now cross ethnic, racial and religious barriers with ease, he observes. For example, an ethnic Malay storyteller like Rumaizah Abu Bakar is now accurately convincing in delineating the aspirations and frustrations of an ethnic Chinese chef. Similarly, the policeman-turned-crime novelist Rozlan Mohammad Noor intertwines all levels of KL society in his tangled stories.

“It’s the same in the country at large,” opines Raman. “People are saying, no, they do not want to be divided by race or ethnicity. It’s no longer a question of merely tolerating differences: It’s acceptance.”



Parallel to this literary flowering is an uptick in film and visual arts. Around 1990, when Zarul Albakri initially

tried directing films, he stopped after his first effort. “There simply was not enough talent,” he recalls. “Now, however, there’s a new generation and a lot more talent,” enthuses the 52-year-old filmmaker, “with actors, cinematographers, set designers, technical crew, the whole lot.” He is producing “Spilt Gravy on Rice” with his younger brother Zahim, 48, as the director.

When I met Zarul, the “talent” he now so admires was all around us, with the movie’s actors, actresses and crew gathered at the Albakri home for a farewell party before the bulldozers arrived to clear the ground for condominiums. Surrounded by towering



trees and a lush garden, the estate was a holdout, one of the last single-family residences in central KL. “We shot part of the film inside and outside the house to document it for posterity,” says Zahim, who explained that his mother, brother, sister and he had decided to sell the place after his father’s death. “It’s sad, I know, but the party is kind of our New Orleans-style wake to celebrate family memories and mark a new phase.”

**An art collector and former diplomat, Malaysian National Gallery director Yusof Ahmad oversees the museum’s dual exhibition strategy that offers both crowd-pleasers for first-time visitors as well as specialized shows.**







Founded in 1989 “purely to promote our own work,” says painter Bayu Utomo Radjikin, the Matahati gallery now prospers sufficiently to help fund artist-in-residence programs both for Malaysian artists abroad and other Southeast Asian artists in Malaysia.

Bangsar gallery. “When you are a little scrap of land in the middle of the ocean, you can’t stop people coming to you,” he continues. “You can’t defend yourself, so why try? It’s better to say welcome, take what you want, and let the rest go. That has been our genius. We welcome everyone, and we take from the foreign influences to generate our own art and culture.”

Willie suggests that the country’s scrumptious cuisine is a perfect example of his point, launching without ado into a mouth-watering rendition of its eclectic, three-part harmony. “You’ve got the steaming, clear flavors of southern Chinese cooking and the wealth of Indian spices added to the rich coconut dishes of the Malay kitchen,” he riffs, making us both hungry.

A few minutes’ drive away, in the suburban neighborhood of Petaling Jaya, another gallery owner is taking this open-arms approach a step further. Shalini Ganendra, also a UK-trained lawyer turned art dealer, has inaugurated a lecture series where international authorities on art, ceramics, photography, textiles and design share opinions and expertise with local artists, curators, collectors and students. Despite the overwhelmingly positive effects of fostering these East–West cultural bridges, Ganendra acknowledges a certain amount of risk.

“The challenge for Malaysian artists is not to become overly

western-derivative, not to copy western styles,” she warns. Willie echoes her concern. “Artists here don’t have enough self-confidence,” he told me. “They think that who is good and who is not is dictated by western society instead of questioning standards for themselves.”

Cue an artists’ collective that appears to have self-confidence to spare—enough, in fact, to share its good fortune with dozens of emerging artists. Back in 1989, as newly minted graduates of the Universiti Teknologi MARA, the country’s largest university, the five colleagues banded together to form Matahati, a Malay expression meaning “eyes of the soul.”

“We formed the collective purely to promote our own work,” explains 42-year-old Bayu Utomo Radjikin, as art-student volunteers arrange paintings for an upcoming opening in the House of Matahati gallery, which occupies two floors above a printing shop off a busy road in KL’s Ampang neighborhood. After about 10 years of supplementing their income by painting sets for theater, film and television productions, they became well enough established that they decided to give something back to a younger generation and forge a pan-Asian arts network in the process.

In addition to paying for fledgling Malaysian artists to go to Yogyakarta and Manila, Matahati uses a part of its gallery income to bring to KL their counterparts from those cities for month-long exchanges. The collective also provides studio space for Malaysian artists, introduces them to gallery owners and collectors and stages exhibitions of their work. Artists from as far away as Brazil and Japan are invited for residencies to allow them to interact with

“We welcome everyone,  
and we take from the foreign  
influences to generate our own  
art and culture.”



native painters and sculptors. The group also sponsors a program that dispatches Malaysian artists into schools to devise collaborative projects with the students and introduce them to contemporary art.

Compared to Matahati's gradual ascendancy, the young designers of Ultra, all in their 20's, have become overnight sensations, making waves in the fast-rising business of "ethical fashion," which makes a point of using recycled materials. In a mere three years since launching the label in 2009, Ultra has already carried off the 2011 innovation award of the Ethical Fashion Forum in London, and wowed the fashion press in Paris. Despite their European acclaim, their elegantly minimalist styles are purely local Malaysian.

I met the company's chief designer, Tengku Syahmi, 22, at a

runway show by up-and-coming fashion designers that was held at MAP, a brand-new space for exhibitions and events at Publika, a mixed-use complex that combines apartments, galleries, restaurants, shops and offices in the hilly Hartamas neighborhood overlooking KL. Straining to hear Syahmi over the techno beat as models flounced past along the catwalk, I caught the gist of an invitation to visit the design studio the next day and readily accepted.

It turned out that Ultra's atelier was located a floor below MAP. "Don't look too closely at the designs for our next collection," Ultra co-founder Anita Hawkins playfully admonished me, as I glanced at the sketches taped to the walls. "They're supposed to be secret." But the decidedly unglamorous studio is so cramped—with four or five designers bent over tables in a space about the size of an elementary schoolroom—that I can't really avoid the drawings. They literally cover the walls.

"Touch this," offers the 26-year-old Hawkins, inviting me to squeeze a hooded white dress hanging on a rack of dresses, coats and wraps. It feels like velvet. "Bet you'd never guess the fabric is made of wood pulp," she teases, with a cheeky grin. She's absolutely correct. Nope, I confess, wood pulp never crossed my mind.

How about this, she asks, holding up a chic black outfit. "Recycled plastic bottle caps," she announces, relishing my astonishment. But why does it have the texture of wool, I wonder aloud.

"That's also our secret," she replies.

The idea behind Ultra and other ethical fashion labels is to mount a counterattack against throwaway consumer culture and demonstrate that recycled, sustainable materials can be used to conjure up knockout styles. "We want people to be more aware of what they are consuming," Hawkins asserts, "to buy what they need, not just grab everything they want." This sounds like marketing heresy. Aren't you afraid customers will buy less, I ask.

**"There's a new generation and a lot more talent," says film producer Zarul Albakri, left, whose recent "Spilt Gravy on Rice" takes place in a family whose generational tensions are metaphors for Malaysian culture. In his studio, he chats with post-production supervisor A. Samad Hassan.**



“Maybe,” she responds—“but if they are willing to pay more for fewer items of good quality, we can still turn a profit.” And in fact, several months after I spoke with Hawkins, Ultra stopped production altogether—at least for the time being—to concentrate instead on downloadable designs for do-it-yourself clothing. Hawkins and others were also touring schools in the UK and elsewhere to drum up support for recyclable fashion and sustainable design.

Like Ultra’s designers, who travel to London, Paris, Shanghai and other fashion hubs to promote their creations, the new generation of artists, writers, musicians, composers and dancers follows a long-standing pattern of migrating overseas, then returning to Malaysia to expand domestic cultural horizons.

“Historically, the country has always been a kind of crossroads, whether it’s for international trade or the spice route,” observes Hardeh Singh, a 35-year-old composer and producer of Internet video programs. “People leave searching for goods to exchange and bring knowledge and culture back. That’s just in our cultural DNA, to go abroad for a while and come back once you have spent your wanderlust. You contribute whatever seeds you’ve collected from elsewhere and sow them back here at home.”

As fate would have it, Singh and I are mulling over cross-cultural exchanges while sipping a frappuccino and a lowfat green-tea latte at a Starbucks. (The chain is another outsider welcomed to Malaysia with open arms.) He explains that music was always his passion, and so, after graduating from college with a fall-back degree in telecommunications engineering, he moved to San Francisco in the late 1990’s to study Indian ragas. Returning to KL around 2001, Singh began composing film soundtracks, and now he manages a recording studio, soundstage and digital production unit that spins out everything from advertising jingles to avant-garde concert music. One of his ventures, a network

of Web video channels, is an attempt to bypass government-controlled television and give voice to a more independent media. Among the Webcasts—along with underground bands—are a political satire similar to America’s “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart,” in which freewheeling interview segments, co-hosted by the 31-year-old actor and political commentator Fahmi Fadzil, make for a breath of fresh airtime.

Singh laments that Malaysian music is not better known outside the country. “We don’t have a distinctive Malaysian voice that you’d think would come out of this cultural melting pot,” he acknowledges a bit ruefully. “We haven’t been as successful as Thailand and the Philippines—and are certainly way behind Africa and Brazil—in inventing a recognizable sound.”

The standout exception is contemporary classical composition, he adds, brightening. “We are making a lot of headway overseas, with commissions from orchestras in Germany, the UK, Austria and elsewhere.” Although Singh is disappointed that most Malaysians have no idea about this growing acclaim, the Malaysian composers collective recently issued a CD with pieces by 10 of its members to give their recordings wider exposure. “Maybe this will help spread the word,” he says.





**"I see Malaysia as more like a salad than a melting pot," says composer Johan Othman of Penang's Universiti Sains Malaysia. "You recognize the lettuce, tomato and all the varied ingredients. They're not blended, but separate."**

Hindu mythology. His next opera, as yet untitled, is based on the Hindu epic "The Ramayana."

Drinking tea at Penang's venerable E&O Hotel, as distant ships steam along the Strait of Melaka, the world's busiest sea lane, Othman talks about the government's misguided campaign to erase rather than embrace ethnic differences, and how it affects his role as a composer. "There's no such thing as an overall Malaysian identity, in music or anything else," he protests. "There are several identities, and each one possesses its own exceptional character."

"I see Malaysia as more like a salad than a melting pot," he continues, chuckling at the image. "You recognize the lettuce, tomato and all the varied ingredients. They're not blended, but separate."

Penang wears its ethnic and religious diversity like a badge. Residents delight in pointing out that Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling, the half-mile-long thoroughfare in the center of the historic district, is known as the Street of Harmony because it boasts two mosques, a Hindu temple, several Chinese temples and clanhouses and an Anglican church; a Roman Catholic church is nearby.

"We're more than just Malay, Chinese and Indian," declares Joe Sidek, organizer of the annual July arts festival. "We are also Burmese, Armenian, Thai, Gujarati and European. Penang has been cosmopolitan since the 17th century, and there has never been any segregation here," he insists.

For the past dozen years, an arts educator named Janet Pillai has been running an eye-opening initiative that allows kids aged 10 to 16 to dig into this plenitude of interdependent communities and to stage performances based on the traditions, oral

**London lawyer, pioneer art dealer and great-grandson of a Borneo headhunter, Valentine Willie now runs galleries in four countries. The growth of his and some 20 other galleries shows a "maturing sophistication," he says.**



One member of the group, Johan Othman, 42, is a Yale-trained lecturer now teaching music and composition at the Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang. A Muslim Malay, Othman taps into Penang's cultural smorgasbord for his work: He's premiered an opera based on a 12th-century classic of Persian literature, "The Conference of the Birds," by the poet Attar, which was sung in English by ethnic Indian and Chinese performers. Other compositions have been inspired by Chinese opera and





histories, architecture, music, legends and crafts that they uncover within them. Over the course of six to eight months, groups of some 30 students probe the people and history of a Penang neighborhood. Making an analogy to the growth of a tree, Pillai sums up the half-anthropological, half-theatrical adventure as “a kind of academic journey to put out some fine roots and suck some of the water from the community.” I am conversing with Pillai in a tiny heritage center she’s established in an annex of the resplendent Khoo Kongsi, a 1906 Chinese clanhouse complex with an upswept temple roof, brightly painted porcelain dragons, carved gilt ornamentation and lion statues guarding the courtyard.

For the first four months of Pillai’s projects, the kids conduct research—recording spoken recollections in Malay, English and Chinese with a historian, gathering songs, music and ambient sound from the environment with a sound engineer, examining vernacular buildings with an architect, and experimenting with puppet-making with a traditional puppeteer and woodcarving with a master craftsman. After the research phase, they assemble a production—writing the text, composing music and lyrics based on the oral memoirs, constructing sets, designing costumes. Finally, they put on a number of performances for the communities, reflecting their cultures back to them and reinforcing the children’s links with their own backgrounds.

“What’s interesting is how the students contemporize traditions,” observes Pillai. They turn ancient legends into comic books or video games, for instance, or offer up paper iPads along with fake 500,000-ringgit bills among other gifts to be ritually burned to placate spirits during the Hungry Ghost festival. Pillai has helped drum up interest in children’s theater around the region, and similar programs are now under way in Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines.

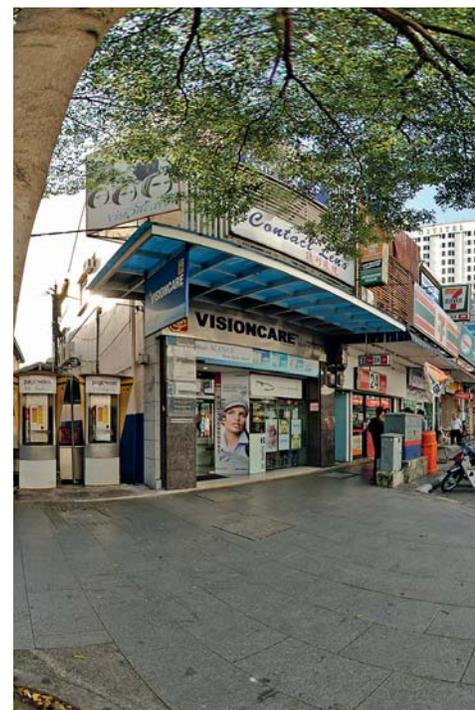
Across from Pillai’s office on Cannon Street, I stop off for a soft drink with Narelle McMurtrie in her café/crafts-shop/art gallery. Since migrating to Malaysia from Sydney some 26 years ago, the

energetic Australian has renovated several shophouses into tourist apartments and opened two luxury hotels on Langkawi Island, a half-hour flight from Penang. Most of the hotels’ profits go to finance an animal shelter McMurtrie founded on the island in 2004, and revenues from the Penang operations fund residencies for artists.

Unlike much of KL, Penang is walkable city, and this is a considerable boon for galleries, shops and architecture enthusiasts, reckons McMurtrie. “Thanks in part to its designation as a World Heritage Site, Penang is really starting to take off in the arts,” she adds. “Young people are looking into all sorts of outlets for their creativity.”

Later the same evening, that creativity gets a phantasmagoric outing at a rehearsal for “River Project,” an outdoor play and part of the July arts festival that is staged alongside the infamously polluted Prangin Canal. Accompanied by lawyer and arts activist Lee Khai, my indispensable guide to the cultural life of Penang, I stand gape-mouthed with amazement as an egg-shaped creature enveloped in plastic bottles, lit by strands of colored

**A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008, George Town, on Penang, is fast becoming a vibrant center for the mixing of contemporary arts and traditional cultures of Malaysia.**





Off the west coast of peninsular Malaysia, Penang Island “has been cosmopolitan since the 17th century,” says Joe Sidek, a local businessman and volunteer arts festival organizer.

The actors lead the audience back outside to witness a performer clutching the canal wall a foot above the smelly muck as he painstakingly inches his way along a narrow ledge like an alpinist. I can’t bear to look ... but I do. Above the madman, an actress declaims with seething indignation: “How long after the arteries are clogged can the heart of an island survive?” At last, a musician puts a long digeridoo made of PVC pipe to his lips, blowing a haunting lament to close the spectacle.

Lee reads my thoughts. “Okay, it’s agitprop, not Shakespeare, but the impulse behind the piece is very important,” he argues passionately after the performance. “We need to call attention to this pollution. The situation is truly desperate,” he urges. “Sometimes art has to be political to get change done.”



In addition to contributing regularly to *Saudi Aramco World*, Paris-based **Richard Covington** ([richardpeacecovington@gmail.com](mailto:richardpeacecovington@gmail.com)) writes about culture, history, science and art for *Smithsonian*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *U.S. News & World Report* and *The Sunday Times* of London.



**Jimin Lai** ([www.jiminlai.com](http://www.jiminlai.com)) has been a photojournalist for nearly two decades, much of which was spent traveling throughout Asia for Reuters and Agence France-Presse covering conflicts, politics, sports and daily life. He lives in Kuala Lumpur, where he shoots for editorial, corporate and private clients.

 [www.iamm.org.my](http://www.iamm.org.my)

 **Related articles** from past issues can be found on our Web site, [www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com). Click on “indexes,” then on the cover of the issues indicated below.

Malaysian cuisine: S/O 03  
 Melaka: J/A 01  
 artisanal kites: S/O 99  
 vernacular mosques: J/A 96

lights, scuttles across the ground. A woman extracts herself from this illuminated chrysalis and then drags the bottles behind her as singers lament the choking off of the canal. Other actors execute gymnastic stunts around them and then move into a covered warehouse that Lee tells me was a seafood-and-produce market abandoned a decade ago. “The city has yet to figure out what to do with it,” he grouches, shaking his head in frustration. Meanwhile, the acrobats become market sellers, melodically calling out prices for their produce to evoke a bygone era. Where life and commerce once thrived now sits an empty ruin, intones one.





Godah (Chobut.)

Pl. 45.A.



When he returned to his native France in 1822, a hero's welcome awaited Frédéric Cailliaud. Over the preceding seven years, his accomplishments as an explorer and scientist in Egypt had won him admiration both among his fellow scholars and in the popular press. He had rediscovered Roman-era emerald mines. He had braved intrigue, rebellion and the elements to become one of the first Europeans to explore both the Eastern and

Western Deserts. His crowning discovery, on the heels of an Egyptian invasion of Sudan, had come when he ventured south to the present-day border of Sudan and Ethiopia and rediscovered Meroë, the capital city of the ancient kingdom of Kush. In addition, Cailliaud compiled the most important collection of archeological and ethnographic artifacts to reach France in the century between Napoleon's invasion in 1798 and Auguste Mariette's excavations in Saqqara in the late 1800's.

Shortly after his return, he published *Travels in the Oasis of Thebes*, with never-before-seen information on the people and places of the Western Desert. His *Travels to Meroë* (mer-oh-ay) not only offered similarly pioneering information on the peoples and regions south of the Nile's first cataract, but also constituted the first scientific survey of Sudanese monuments. In addition, he brought back a large corpus of correctly copied textual material that, along with objects in his newly acquired collection, helped the historian Jean-François Champollion decipher the hieroglyphic language of ancient Egypt. So esteemed were Cailliaud's contributions to knowledge that in 1824 he was awarded the French Legion of Honor.

Cailliaud's origins, however, were humble. He was born in 1787, the third child of a master locksmith and municipal councilor in the Mediterranean port city of Nantes. Shying from his father's calling but showing aptitude for intricate detail, Cailliaud trained as a jeweler. To help him in this endeavor, he also studied drawing—a skill

## Cailliaud's first assignment from the Ottoman viceroy was to rediscover Roman-era emerald mines.

that would serve him well years later in Egypt. He left Nantes for Paris in 1809 to work as a jeweler, and he added studies in mineralogy and natural history to his résumé. Two years later, he embarked on travels in Europe and the Mediterranean in order to complete his training and to start a personal collection of mineral specimens.

While in Greece, Cailliaud made a contact that led to brief work in Istanbul for the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II, for whom he enriched the sword sheaths of foreign guests with precious stones.

From there, he set his sights on Egypt, which held great allure for scholars and explorers in the early 1800's. Napoleon's failed invasion had nonetheless opened the country to scientific opportunities, spurred on by such publications as the hugely popular *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, an account of Napoleon's invasion by his confidant, Dominique Vivant Denon, and the first volume of the encyclopedic *Description de l'Égypte*, which contained the first systematic and scientific survey of Pharaonic monuments.

Cailliaud arrived in Egypt in 1815. He quickly fell in with France's vice-consul, Bernardino Drovetti, who brought Cailliaud on his first journey south along the Nile to Wadi Halfa, close to the second cataract and today's Egyptian-Sudanese border. Drovetti also helped Cailliaud secure a post as mineralogist to Muhammad Ali, Ottoman viceroy and ruler of Egypt, who was keen to develop Egypt's economy, industry and military. Cailliaud's assignment was to rediscover emerald mines in the Eastern Desert, which had been depleted and abandoned by the Romans, with an eye to using more modern methods to extract gemstones and profit the viceroy. This official task also gave him the opportunity to undertake personal missions of exploration. He traveled first to Luxor to search for antiquities, which he acquired in abundance despite the limitations of his personal finances. It was also during these trips that Cailliaud began to record in his notebooks artwork and texts he found, most of them in tomb scenes in the Theban necropolis.

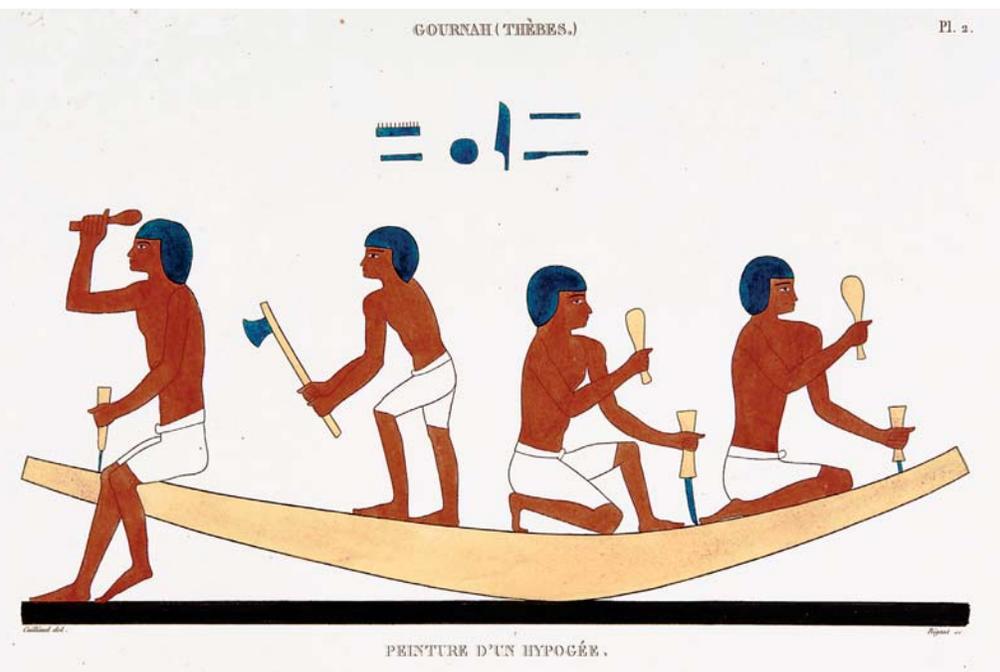
After charting the locations of potential emerald mines and their possible yields, Cailliaud struck out west of the Nile to the little-known oasis of Kharga, again in search of Pharaonic antiquities. In doing so, he became the first modern European to record the first-century-CE Roman temple of Dush. After a brief survey of the oasis, he decided to return to France to present his drawings and records.

Upon his arrival in Paris in November 1818, word of his accomplishments spread

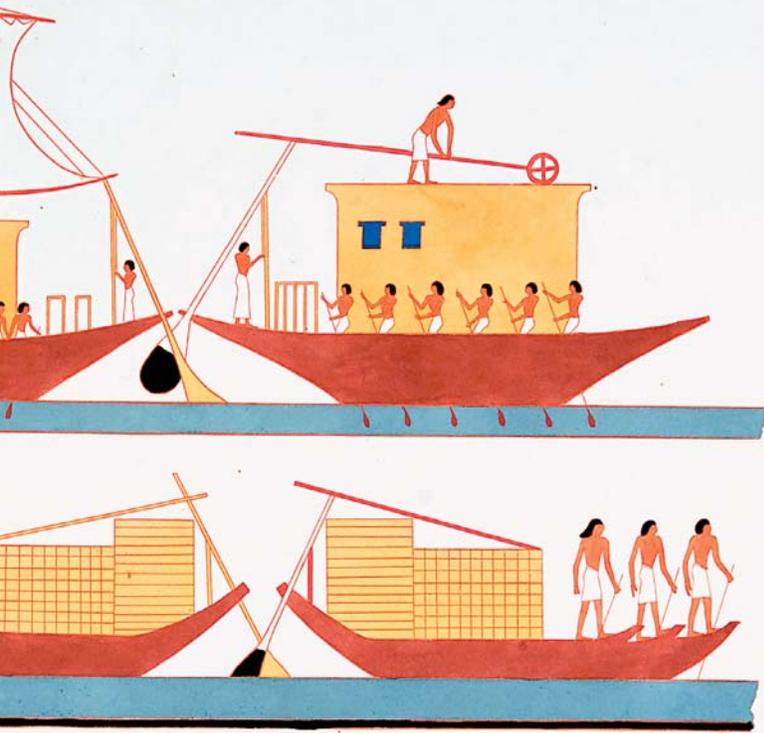
Selecting from among a multitude of tomb paintings, Cailliaud often showed an eye for practical aspects of daily life, such as these four boat-builders, together with their tools, left, which he copied from the tomb of Ibi in Luxor and published as Plate 2 in *Arts and Crafts*. He followed it with Plate 3, above, which comes from bas-reliefs in the tomb of Paheri, in El-Kab. It depicts four boats in almost technical detail. Opposite: Plate 36 in the first volume of *Travels to Meroë* included this lithograph that Cailliaud designed to show a general view of the site's steep-sided pyramids.



BAS-RELIEF



OPPOSITE: ANDREW BEDNARSKI



BATEAUX SCULPTÉS DANS LA GROTTÉ PRINCIPALE.

Some of the illustrations in this article were published between 1831 and 1837 in *Research on the Arts and Crafts of the Ancient Egyptians, Nubians and Ethiopians*. Only 100 copies of this book were printed and, soon afterward, the building in which they were stored collapsed; only some 50 copies survived. The intended subsequent volume of text, which would explain the images in the initial volume, was never completed. That manuscript, with its own original artwork, passed to Cailliaud's son, who also did not complete the project. The history of the manuscript's ownership thereafter is unknown until 2002, when it was acquired by Sims Reed, a London book dealer. In 2005 it was purchased by the second author of this article.

It comprises some 1000 pages of handwritten French, a nearly complete set of some 80 plates of Cailliaud's artwork and a collection of supporting material and personal sketches. It is all based on notes Cailliaud made during his travels, and the text underwent several revisions. Most of it is written in pencil, in standard-sized notebooks. Occasionally scrap paper from other tasks was reused. The first author of this article translated a large portion of the somewhat archaic French as part of his work at the American Research Center in Egypt, which plans to publish it, in both English and French, later this year.

ASSOUR.

PL. XXXVI.

Voyage à Méroé

L'œuvre, d'après le dessin original de M<sup>rs</sup> Cailliaud.

Foug. Lith. de C. Costant.

VUE GÉNÉRALE DES PYRAMIDES À UNE LIEUE DU NIL, PRISE DU NORD-EST.

quickly among the scientific elite. Edmé Jomard, who had accompanied Napoleon into Egypt 20 years earlier, was then editor of the *Description de l'Égypte* project. Jomard took a liking to the young Cailliaud and led him to greater opportunities. The government commission responsible for the *Description* recognized that Cailliaud could continue what Napoleon's scholars had begun. Upon the commission's recommendation, the French government bought both Cailliaud's drawings and his artifacts, which were allocated to Paris's Royal Library, and Jomard set about publishing the notes. In addition, the government formally charged Cailliaud to return to Egypt and visit places missed by Napoleon's savants: the Western Desert's five major oases and the lands of Nubia along the Nile to the south. He was given money, equipment and the cartographic assistance of a naval officer named Pierre-Constant Letorzec.

Cailliaud returned to Egypt in October 1819, and he quickly received permits from Muhammad Ali to explore and excavate. Shortly thereafter, he set out for the most distant of Egypt's oases: Siwa, famous for its Greek oracle, which had played a role in legitimizing the conquests of Alexander

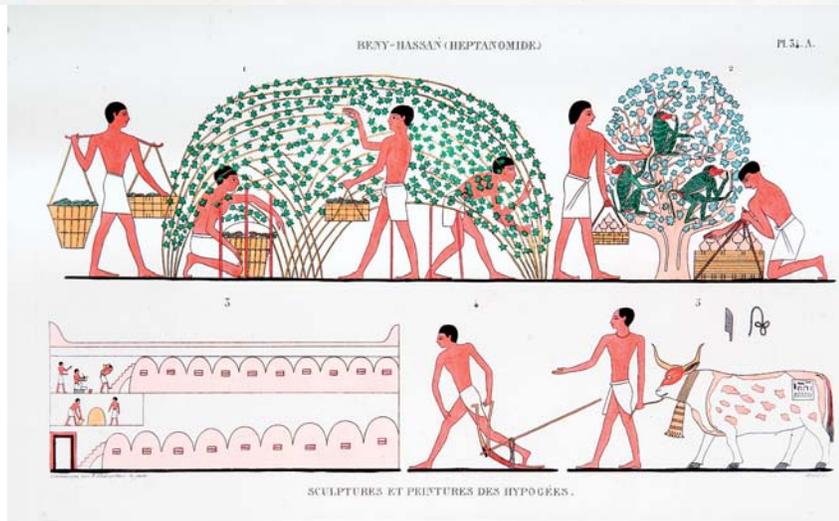
*In collecting as in sketching, Cailliaud preferred antiquities that represented daily life in Pharaonic times: clothing, cosmetics, tools and funerary assemblages.*

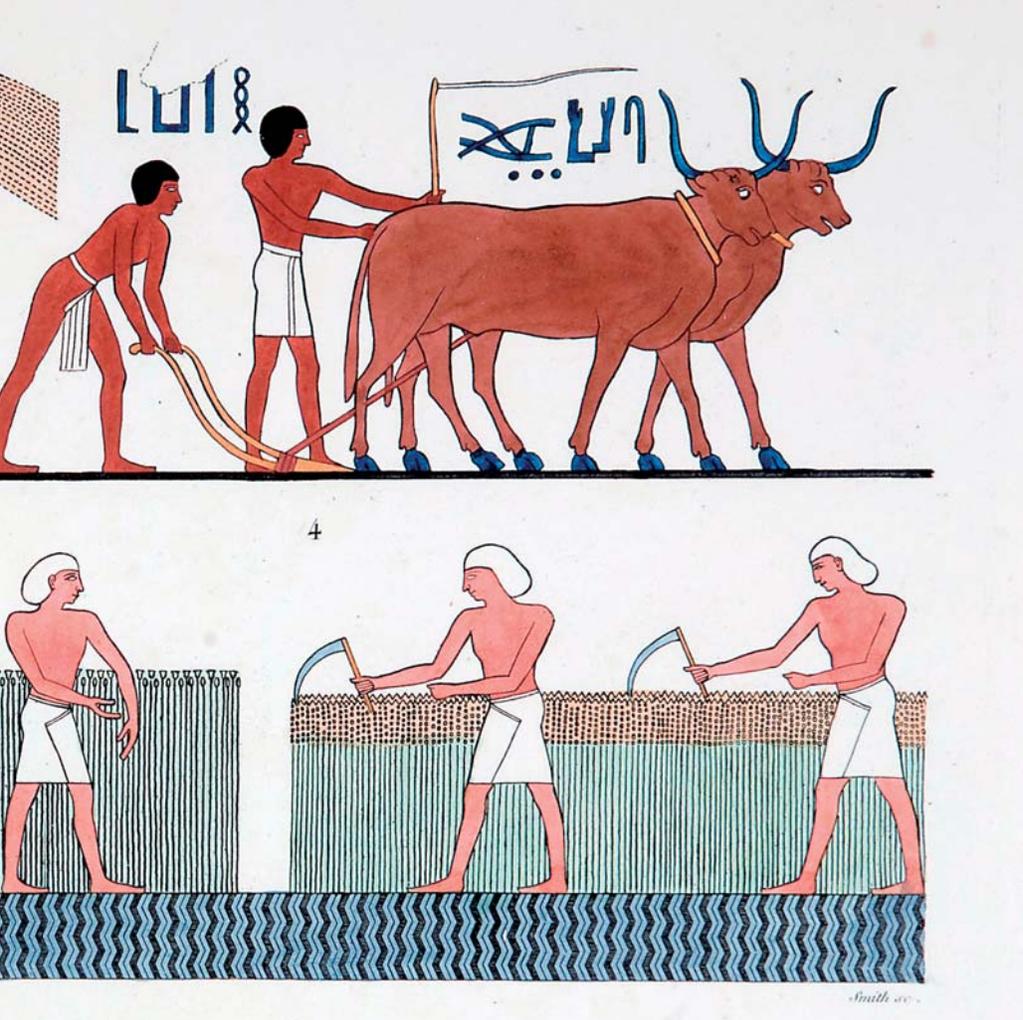
the Great. This was bold, as Siwa's distance from the Nile placed it well beyond the range of the viceroy's protection. The Frenchmen forged through the desert, unmolested by local tribes that had been known to shun and even kill earlier European explorers. They arrived in Siwa, and they successfully studied its temple of Jupiter-Amun. Turning south to Bahriya, they went on to traverse, over three months, the oases of Farafra, Dakhla and Kharga, recording all they encountered.

Near the end of their trek, in March 1820, in Kharga, Cailliaud learned of a military campaign being organized to secure for Egypt the rich resources of the Sudan—including minerals. It was to be led by Muhammad Ali's third son, Ismail Pasha. Cailliaud received the viceroy's permission to accompany the army, and he was charged with resuming his mineralogical duties by prospecting for gold once they got south of Khartoum. Finding all available transportation requisitioned for the army, Cailliaud bought his own boat and, with a

few months to spare before the campaign, the two Frenchmen sailed south to Luxor, where they amassed a further collection of antiquities. There, in the West Bank's necropolis, they built a small, mud-brick house to store their objects, roofing it with wood from a commonly available source: pieces of painted, Pharaonic sarcophagi.

The collection that Cailliaud amassed within this shelter was different from those of his contemporaries. He frequently chose items of little or no esthetic or market value, focusing instead on objects representative of everyday life in Pharaonic times: clothing, cosmetics, tools and complete funerary assemblages. No European to date had focused so intensely on these kinds of daily-life objects, and the resulting collection was of unique historical and ethnographic value. In addition, Cailliaud continued





**In Arts and Crafts, Cailliaud often compiled artwork from several sites into thematic plates. Above: Sowing, plowing and harvesting papyrus, from tombs in Giza, Beni Hasan and Luxor. Opposite: Fig-harvesting (note baboons in the tree), granaries and plowing from the tombs of Amenemhat and Khnumhotep III in Beni Hasan. Lower: Brickmaking, copied from the tomb of Rekhmire in Luxor.**

copying wall scenes in the Theban tombs.

In August, he and Letorzec traveled south to Aswan, where they joined the military expedition and were at once confronted with a nasty surprise: A conspiracy to discredit the authenticity of Cailliaud's permission papers—and thus to remove him from the expedition—had been hatched by other Europeans attached to the mission. Their goal was clearly to remove a formidable competitor to their own quests for antiquities. Racing against the clock, Cailliaud had no choice but to return all the way to Cairo, have his documents confirmed and undertake the journey south to catch up to and rejoin the expedition.

Traveling by themselves proved unexpectedly advantageous. Cailliaud and Letorzec crossed from Aswan into the lands of Nubia, where they visited the monuments they found in their path. These included the enormous Pharaonic fortresses of Semna and Kumma; the

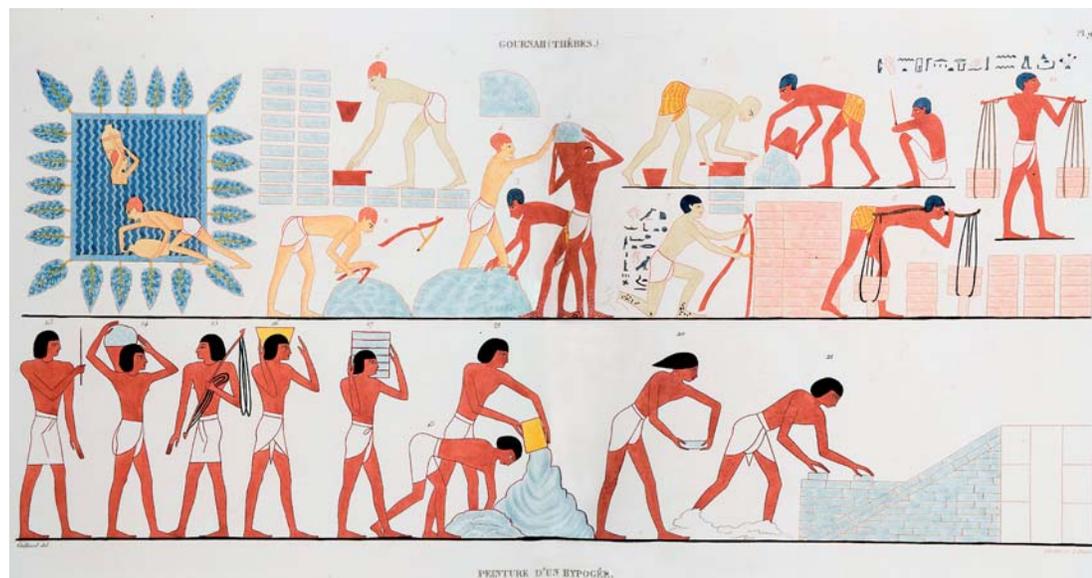
islands of Sai and Argo; the temples of Sedeinga, Soleb, and Sesebi and the city of Kerma. Had they remained with the Egyptian army, they would likely not have had the time to study the monuments as carefully as they did.

They eventually met the Egyptian force at Gebel Barkal, which in the 15th century BCE marked the southern limit of Pharaoh Tuthmosis III's realm. There, they were surprised to be welcomed by the European contingent, which to its own delight had just declared the ruins of Gebel Barkal to be none other than those of the famed and sought-after city of Meroë, known from classical sources as the capital of the kingdom of Kush. Cailliaud's rivals were certain that their discovery promised them immediate fame.

The army moved south again, and Cailliaud used his time to continue mapping the unrecorded lands and peoples of Sudan. Cailliaud and Letorzec received permission to leave the army's route to prospect for diamonds and gold near Shendi, on condition that they adopt Turkish dress, adopt aliases (Murad Effendi and Abdallah el Faqir) and be accompanied by an entourage. Not content to simply prospect for diamonds, Cailliaud ventured farther afield, lured by local stories of yet other great ruins. After a relatively short journey, the group spied tall, narrow pyramids rising

from a necropolis. The location was close to the 18th parallel, a fact that matched ancient sources' description of the location of Meroë. Quickly, Cailliaud dismissed the idea that Gebel Barkal might be Meroë and proposed this site in its stead. His identification was ultimately validated, and the European discovery of the capital of Kush was credited to Cailliaud and Letorzec.

Excitedly, the Frenchmen surveyed the monuments and mapped the town and cemetery to record all they could as quickly as possible. Cailliaud's elation at the discovery, however, was buried by the



brutal realities of the invasion—ambushes, battles and executions of prisoners—upon rejoining the army at Shendi. When the expedition moved to Omdurman, opposite Khartoum, Cailliaud remained there for the next five months as the Egyptian army subjugated the region. He continued his ethnographic studies, and he created a French–Arabic lexicon of the names of the places he had visited.

Cailliaud’s prospecting for gold bore some results, but not enough to warrant large-scale mining. As a result, in the spring of 1822, Ismail Pasha decided that Cailliaud should return to Cairo, deliver what gold had been found and ask the viceroy’s permission for the army, too, to return to Egypt. The timing proved fortuitous: In October 1822, shortly after Cailliaud left, Ismail and his entourage held a banquet to celebrate their imminent return to Egypt. During the banquet, a former king of the area of Shendi named Nimir surrounded the Egyptian force and burned the invaders to death in their tents.

Cailliaud and Letorzec used their return journey to continue their explorations, including the palace-town of Naga, the temple

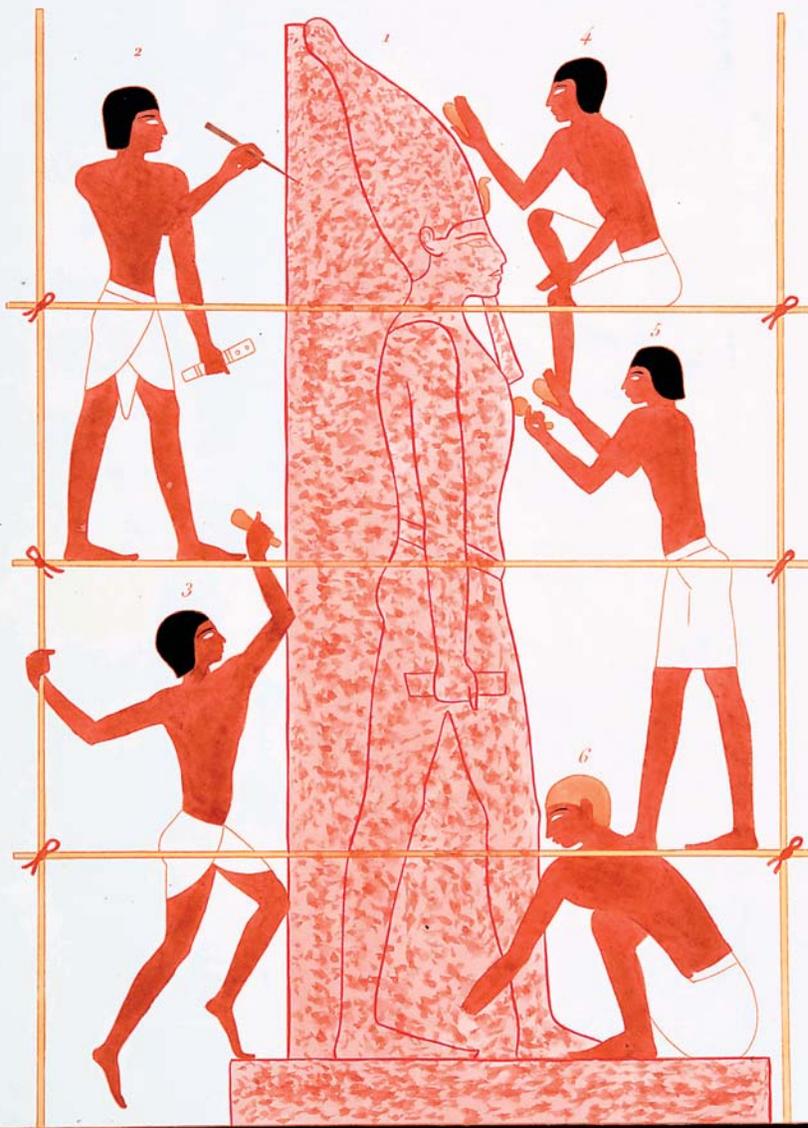
**Smelting of metal, blowing of glass and jewelry making, recorded from the tombs of Rekhmire in Luxor and Khety in Beni Hasan.**

of Musawwarat el-Sufra and returns to both Gebel Barkal and Meroë. The two crossed into Egypt in June and went directly to Luxor to recuperate, acquire still more antiquities and prepare for their return to France. Cailliaud once more threw himself into copying scenes from tombs on the West Bank and occasionally those from another burial site, El Kab.

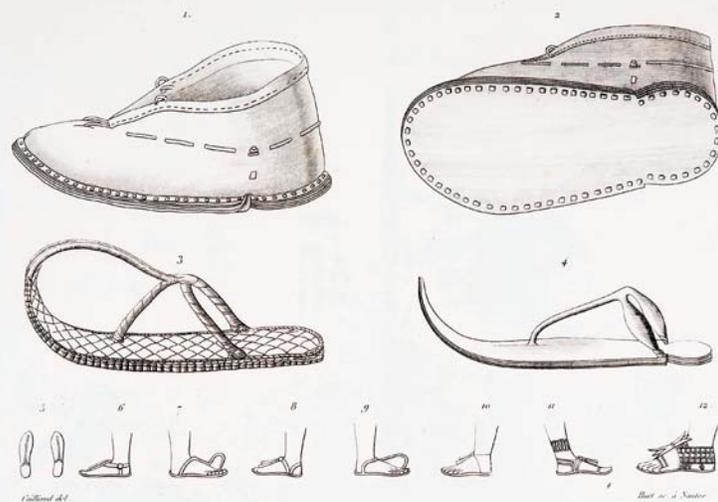
*Cailliaud’s contribution to the nascent discipline of Egyptology cannot be overstated. His importance lies in the quantity of data he brought back to France, the discoveries he made and the quality of the maps, plans and images that he created.*

It was during this period, too, that Cailliaud infamously crossed a line of archeological ethics. The tomb of Neferhotep had recently been rediscovered by a rival explorer working for the British. Cailliaud received permission to view and record the tomb’s lovely murals, but he used the opportunity to pry significant portions of a scene from its wall for shipment back to France. Caught in the act by a workman, Cailliaud was allegedly chased from the tomb, having plundered only a portion of the scene he sought. By the end of September 1822, the Frenchmen were





PEINTURE D'UN HYPOGÉE.



CHAUSSURES DE L'ÉGYPTE ET DE L'ÉTHIOPIE.

Cailliaud's interests ranged from far antiquity to his own immediate present. At left: Plate 15 from *Arts and Crafts*, from the tomb of Rekhmire, depicts sculptors using scaffolding and a variety of tools to outline, carve and polish a colossal statue, and Plate 21, above, which he did not color, is a compilation of visual notes on shoes he saw in his travels in Egypt and Nubia.

publication delays, Cailliaud himself edited his second masterpiece, *Travels to Meroë and the White Nile*.

As Cailliaud's reliance on Jomard diminished, his relationship with Champollion grew. Champollion and his brother, Jacques-Joseph, gave Cailliaud copies of the drawings of monuments they had created during their own Franco-Tuscan Expedition of 1828–1829. These images, along with a multitude of Cailliaud's, formed the basis for what was supposed to be a third great publication, similarly divided into two volumes, one a visual account and the second one an explanatory narrative, titled *Research on the Arts and Crafts of the Ancient Egyptians, Nubians, and Ethiopians*. While the visual account was published in the 1830's, Cailliaud died in 1869 before finishing the text.

His standing in the history of Egyptology had a similarly sad fate. His antiquities collections, quickly overshadowed by objects acquired by Europeans with more money, were broken up and dispersed to a number of museums instead of remaining intact where the entire collection might bear his name. Finally, Cailliaud turned his own attentions to the study of minerals and mollusk shells, two fields in which he also became a luminary, in addition to his Egyptian exploits. All of these factors conspired to relegate his name among Egyptologists from headline to footnote. With the forthcoming publication of his *Arts and Crafts of the Ancient Egyptians, Nubians, and Ethiopians* by the American Research Center in Egypt, we hope it will not always be so. 🌐



**Andrew Bednarski** (abednarski@arce.org) is an historian and Egyptologist who works for the American Research Center in Egypt. He is the editor and translator of Frédéric Cailliaud's last great work on Egypt, the forthcoming *Arts and Crafts of the Ancient Egyptians*. The book, which is augmented by contributions from Philippe Mainterot, forms the basis for this article.



**W. Benson Harer, Jr.** is a retired physician and amateur Egyptologist. He has worked with the Brooklyn Museum Expedition to the Temple of Mut in South Karnak for 30 years. He also was an adjunct professor of Egyptian art at California State University San Bernardino. He has published extensively on medicine in Pharaonic Egypt.

back in Cairo, and to this day the purloined mural fragment resides in the Louvre. After a visit to the recently opened Step Pyramid of Djoser in Saqqara, during which they produced one of the first maps of its underground passages, they left for France on October 30.

Tales of daring and deceit aside, Cailliaud's contribution to the nascent discipline of Egyptology cannot be overstated. His importance lies in the quantity of data he brought back to France, the discoveries he made and the quality of the maps, plans and images that he created. Edmé Jomard set to formatting Cailliaud's *Travels in the Oasis of Thebes* as a reference work (much like the *Description de l'Égypte*); however, the publisher's perfectionism long delayed publication, and, on publication of the first volume, the book was heavily criticized. It was regarded as an over-ambitious imitation of the now-famous *Description*. At the same time, the value of the first of two intended volumes—text and illustrations, respectively—was vastly decreased while the second remained forthcoming. Unfortunately, that second volume did not appear until 1862, just before Jomard's death and when Cailliaud was 75. At that point, the work's relevance was greatly diminished, as the objects in Cailliaud's collection had been forgotten. In the meantime, recognizing the danger of lengthy



## 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

## Curriculum Alignments

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

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

## CLASS ACTIVITIES

This Classroom Guide has students looking at both the form and content of articles in *Saudi Aramco World*. The first theme is *Genres*, in which students can improve their reading comprehension and writing by analyzing how an author organizes content. The second theme, *Hubs*, is geography-based. In it, students explore, in a physical way, how being a geographic hub affects the people who live there.

### Theme: Reading and Writing Different Genres

Have you ever read something and found it like reading a collection of paragraphs randomly thrown together on a page? Most of us have, and there's one of two reasons for the confusion. It could be that it's not good writing—that what you're reading really is a bunch of random paragraphs thrown together. But it could also be that you're not recognizing the structure of what you've read, and so you're having trouble putting the pieces together. Good writers put a lot of thought into how they organize their writing. They make lots of decisions about how to say what they want to say so that readers will understand it—because the purpose of writing is to communicate. If readers don't get it, then the communication process isn't working!

In the following activities, you'll read some examples of good writing, and analyze how that writing is constructed. Doing so will help you in two ways. First, you'll walk through the process of figuring out what kind of structure an author used. That will help you understand more of what you read. And second, you'll get some ideas about how to organize your own writing so that readers will understand it. Put them together, and you can become a better communicator yourself.

Let's start with the definition of the word *genre* so that you know what this theme is about! A genre is a category, or a type, of writing. Genres can be either fiction or non-fiction. Non-fiction genres include biography, autobiography and different types of essays. Common fiction genres include fable, science fiction, mystery, fantasy and many others.

### Outlining What You Read

Your teachers have probably told you about writing an outline before you start writing. An outline is a way to organize what you're going to say. But you can use outlines in another way: You can write an outline of something you read. Your teachers would call this a "reverse outline." That's because you're working backward—reading what someone else has written and then writing an outline of it to help you recognize how it's organized.

Read one of this month's well-written articles, "Pasta's Winding Way West." It covers a lot of ground, and so it's a good model for

identifying organization. To get you started: Early in the article—in the sixth paragraph on page 15—writer Tom Verde asks three questions that he (and we) will need to answer in order to unravel the mystery of where pasta came from. Write each question at the top of a piece of paper. Think of these three questions as the three big organizing categories of the rest of the article. (If you were doing a formal outline, they would be Roman numerals I, II and III.) Spread the three pieces of paper out in front of you. You can be sure that everything you read in the rest of the article will help answer one of the three questions. And you can guess that by the end of the article, Verde will have answered them.

Now read the article again. But this time, instead of reading it straight through, you're going to look for how different segments of the article answer the three questions. Most likely, Verde organized the article in the same order in which he listed the questions. So start reading, looking for answers to the first question. If you think it would help to work with another student or students—so that you can share insights and talk through any questions that come up for you—do so. If you prefer to work alone, that's fine, too.

Read one paragraph at a time, and write notes on your page with the first question on it. Stop when you start to read things that relate to the second question. Study the notes under question one. You'll find that Verde has been presenting evidence to help you answer that question. What evidence has he presented? What conclusion has he reached based on that evidence? At the bottom your first page, write an answer to the question. Then move on to the second and third questions, reading and taking notes in the same way, and answering the question at the bottom of each page.

### Identifying the Genre

Your notes on the three questions are summaries of the article's content. And they provide a window for you to see the genre in which this article has been written. Discuss it with your classmates: What kind of story is this? Here are a few hints. First of all, we know it's non-fiction. But beyond that, the question-and-answer format offers a big clue to the genre. What type of writing (or movie, for that matter) poses questions and then guides the reader (or viewer) to figure out the answers? Spoiler alert: The answer follows. If you haven't figured it out yet, stop here, and don't read any further until you have.

It's—a mystery.

### Changing the Genre

Why do you think Tom Verde decided to write about pasta as a mystery? One way to get at the answer is to think about how else he might

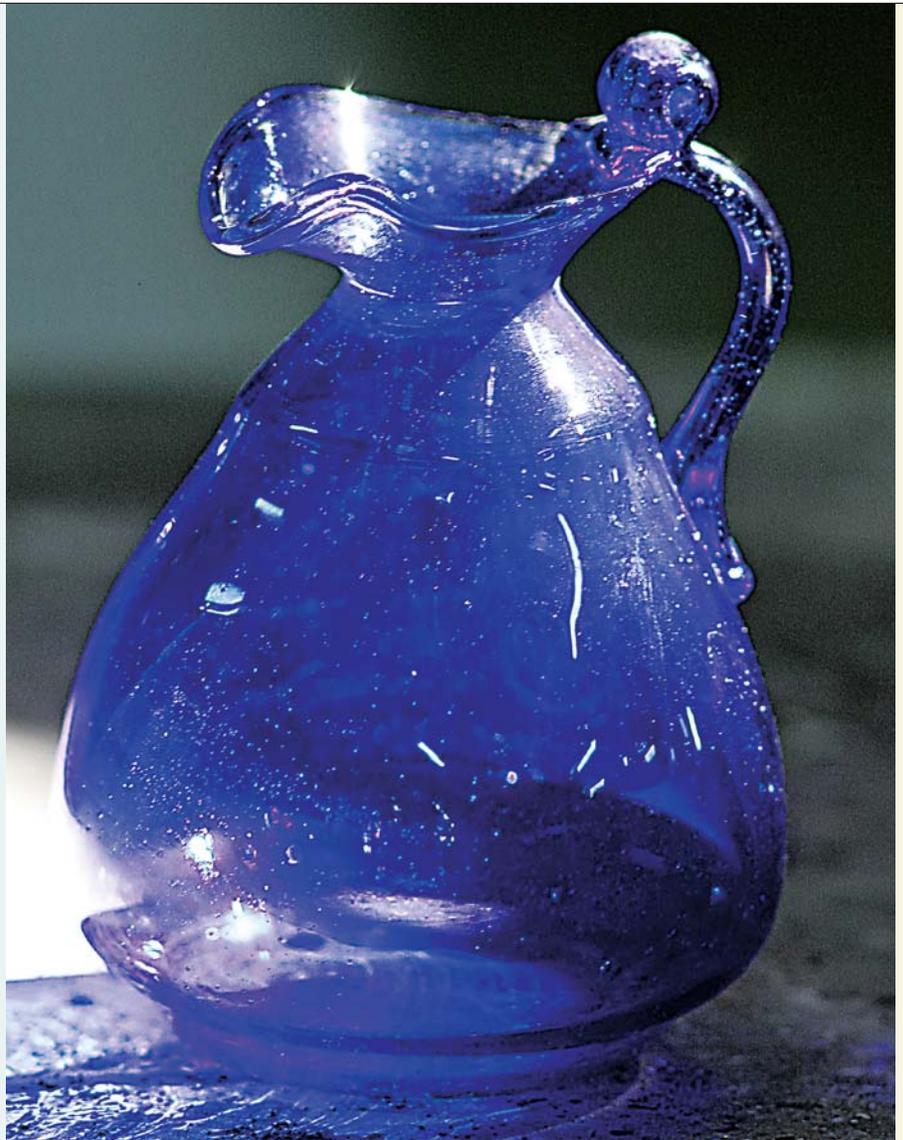


### IF YOU ONLY HAVE 15 MINUTES...

Write a reverse outline of “Interpreter of Treasures: A Menagerie.” It samples and comments on stories about animals written over the course of nearly a millennium. How did author Tim Mackintosh-Smith organize such wide-ranging information? One way to figure it out is to look for transitional phrases that let readers know when the writer is moving from one section of the piece to the next. Go through the article and circle the transitional phrases. Here’s an example: “To return to cats...” signals to the reader that the article is shifting from one topic to another. Locating the transitions should help you figure out what kind of structure the author has used. Then, look at the notes in the margins: Why do you think he chose to present additional information this way, instead of in the main part of the story? Once you’ve figured these out, think about other ways Mackintosh-Smith could have organized the article. Share your thinking with another student. Explain your thinking.

### If you have time and want to continue...

Imagine you have been asked to bring “A Menagerie” up-to-date with a recent example of human-animal interaction. You can use either something written or something visual, such as a YouTube video. Here are your guidelines: Your example can’t be more than one typewritten page. That’s because it needs to fit in with the format of the article as it’s been written. If you choose a video clip, it can’t be more than two minutes long. Write the text that introduces your example, and the text that explains its significance, using the article as your model. Share your examples with the class.



have written it. Think about how you’ve learned to write essays. You state your thesis—the main idea that you want to prove. Then you organize supporting evidence and come to a conclusion. Try that with this subject. What is the main point of the article? Write the answer—it will be your thesis—on another sheet of paper. Then make a list of the evidence that supports that thesis. Write a one-sentence summary of each piece of evidence. When you’re done, you’ll have a streamlined summary of the article. Trade your summary with another student (or group) and read each other’s work.

Discuss with the other student or group the different ways of telling the history of pasta’s origins. Which way was more interesting to read? What made it more interesting? To bring this closer to your own experience, think about how you tell a story. Do you tell it in the order in which events happened, revealing the conclusion like the punch line of a joke? Or do you start with the overall point (like a thesis) and then go back and fill in the blanks? Share with the people you’re talking with an example from your experience.

### Theme: Hubs

These activities are more about the content of articles than about the form in which they are presented. They are based on “Hebron’s Glass History” and “Malaysia’s New Art Mix.”

#### Defining and Mapping a Hub

Begin by defining the word *hub*. List anything that comes to mind when you hear the word. (For example, what is a “hubcap,” really?) Then look up the word and read the definitions. In this activity, you’ll be working with the definition of *hub* that is related to a place.

“Hebron’s Glass History” describes how that city’s location has contributed to its becoming an important regional hub. Find a map that includes Hebron and the various places with which it has been connected over the years. As a class, you’re going to make a large copy of that map either on the floor of the classroom or on concrete or a paved (non-road) area outside. Use tape or chalk to make your map. Put Hebron in the center, and put the other places where they belong. Have a

person stand in each location holding a sign that identifies that location.

Take turns walking along the routes that connected Hebron to the other places. Before each person takes a turn, have someone read aloud where that person comes from and is going, and why. Then walk the paths to get a feel for Hebron’s location as a hub. As a class, talk about the many reasons that people passed through Hebron, and the many effects their passing through had on the city and its people. You might also want to look at a map to locate Kuala Lumpur and discuss how being a hub has affected the people there.

Think about an example of a hub in your area or in your experience—for example, the center of a small town, an airline hub city, a city bus station where all the buses stop and so on. Map your hub, showing and identifying all the routes that converge there. Describe in writing, or create a diagram to show, all the ways that the hub affects people, the culture and the economy. Share your map and description with the class.

**Safar/Voyage:** *Contemporary Works by Arab, Iranian and Turkish Artists* takes viewers from the planet Earth, down to maps, and further to such specific cities as Cairo or Tehran, where it reveals internal and meditative spaces, from emotional and existential to spiritual imaginings. The journey acknowledges the realities of war, revolution and diaspora as well as the artists' engagement with cultures outside the Middle East. Their personal and political perceptions are juxtaposed to provide insights into the great variety of voices that characterize the art of the region. Presenting a wide range of media—from painting and sculpture to video and audio installations—the artists celebrate their individuality and our common humanity. Museum of Anthropology at UBC, Vancouver, April 20 through September 15.

**"Oh Persepolis II, 1975–2008"** is a bronze about six feet high by Parviz Tanavoli, who lives in Vancouver and Tehran. "Like my ancestors, when spring arrives, I pack up and move to my other land," he says. "I cannot separate myself from my past."



**Current January**

**Arabick Roots:** *The Untold Story of How Arabic Knowledge Inspired the Scientific Revolution in Europe.* From prized horses and coffee to luxury fabrics and literature, eastern style took Europe by storm 400 years ago. The exhibition shows that this was much more than a passing fashion and that western scholars were intensely interested in the science, knowledge and philosophy of the East. At every opportunity, they searched out manuscripts in "Arabick," the term they used to refer to languages that use Arabic letters—mainly Arabic, Persian and Ottoman. Their enthusiasm helped feed the 17th-century scientific revolution that underpins modern life. The exhibition displays more than 100 items from Qatari and British collections in a variety of media, ranging from the ninth to the 19th century, to tell the story of the shared eastern and western roots of today's hi-tech world. Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar, through January 19.

**City of Gold:** *Tomb and Temple in Ancient Cyprus* explores the history and archeology of Polis Chrysochous, a town in the Republic of Cyprus that is the site of the ancient city of Marion and its successor city, Arsinoë. The exhibition features 110 objects lent by the Cypriot Department of Antiquities, the British Museum and the Musée du Louvre, including splendid gold jewelry and a rare marble *kouros*; it marks the conclusion of more than two decades of excavations at Polis by the Princeton Department of Art and Archaeology. Note the related exhibition **Cyprus Between Byzantium and the West**, below. Princeton [New Jersey] University Art Museum, through January 20.

**Gaze:** *The Changing Face of Portrait Photography* sheds light on the 160 years of portrait photography through the works of 54 photographers, tracing the social and artistic transformation that has taken place from the emergence of photography to the present. The gaze of the portrait's subject reaches not only the lens of the camera but the future viewer as well. The sitter poses consciously to leave a message to the future from his/her own time. Boundless possibilities for communication and meaning arise from the relationship the subject establishes with future viewers through the photograph. At the point where gazes intersect, the portrait stands at the very center of a network established between different times and spaces; each gaze opens the door to another existence. Istanbul Modern, through January 20.

**Diadem and Dagger:** *Jewish Silversmiths of Yemen* celebrates Yemeni Jewish silverwork dating from the 18th and the 19th centuries, highlighting the ways Jews both shared and contributed to Islamic art and culture while maintaining their Jewish identity. From the revelation of Islam in the seventh century, Jewish and Muslim communities coexisted in Yemen, although few Jews live there today. Yemeni Jewish craftsmen created superb silver pieces characterized by elaborate granulation and filigree for Muslim and Jewish clients: headpieces, bracelets, necklaces and belt buckles as well as *khanjars*

(daggers) for the Muslim elite. Many of the 25 objects on display are dated and bear the name of both the Jewish silversmith and the Muslim ruler of the time. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, through January 21.

**Lasting Impressions:** *Seals From the Islamic World* displays for the first time more than 80 artifacts: seal matrices, made of semi-precious stones or metal, and sealed documents or manuscripts, which reveal the beauty and significance of the art of the seal in the Islamic world. The exhibition's first section uncovers the beginning of seal culture in Islam, as recommended by the Qur'an and prophetic Hadith. This is followed by a study of the significance of inscriptions and decorations. The third section covers the different functions of seals, revealing how and where they were used. The exhibition concludes with emphasis on the seal culture of Southeast Asia, particularly its courtly connotation, as well as the history, esthetic and symbolism of Malay seals. Seals were and are used, among other purposes, as proof of a person's consent, or to symbolize authority and ownership. Seals from the Islamic world were also decorative and talismanic, reflecting religious invocations and good wishes. Whether owned by a commoner, high-ranking official or ruler, each of these seals is a testimony of the people who commissioned and used them, as well as an enduring historical record of the Islamic civilizations in which they were produced. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, through January 27.

**Fair Play:** *Heroes, Athletes and Princes in Islamic Art* highlights sport in paintings and objects from the Islamic world, from the 13th to the 21st century. Soccer is today the most popular sport in Islamic countries. In the medieval period, however, prominent sporting activities at Islamic courts from Spain to the Indian subcontinent included polo, horse racing, hunting and falconry. Equestrian sports were enjoyed by men and women both as exercise and royal entertainment. They also featured in military training,

reaching notable high points in Spain and Egypt between 1300 and 1500. Wrestling, a sport rooted in Persian tradition, was also practiced in medieval times and today is the national sport of Iran and is similarly popular in Turkey. British Museum, London, through January 27.

**Central Nigeria Unmasked:** *Arts of the Benue River Valley* is the first major international exhibition to present a comprehensive view of the arts produced in the Benue River Valley, source of some of the most abstract, dramatic and inventive sculpture in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet compared to the majority populations living in northern and southern Nigeria, the diverse groups flanking the 1000-kilometer river—and their fascinating arts—are far less known and studied. The exhibition includes more than 150 objects used in a range of ritual contexts, with genres as varied and complex as the region itself—figurative wood sculptures, masks, figurative ceramic vessels, and elaborate bronze and iron regalia—and demonstrates how the history of central Nigeria can be "unmasked" through the dynamic interrelationships of its peoples and their arts. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, through January 27.

**Cyprus Between Byzantium and the West** features more than 180 objects, including illuminated manuscripts, icons, sculpture, jewelry, metalwork and ceramics that together shed light on the history and cultures of an island, thwarting major Mediterranean trade routes, from the fourth century when it became part of the Byzantine Empire to 1570, when the Ottomans conquered it. Occupied in addition by Persian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman overlords at different times, serving as a meeting place of cultures and religions, Cyprus became a rich and unique cultural palimpsest. Among the exhibits are several silver "David plates" depicting scenes from the life of the biblical king, and a 13th-century fresco from the Monastery of Kykkos on Cyprus. Note the related exhibition **City of Gold**, above. Musée du Louvre, Paris, through January 28.

## Current February

**Maharaja:** *The Splendor of India's Royal Courts* displays nearly 200 treasures spanning 250 years to trace the shift in political control of India from the early 1700's, as the power of the Mughal Empire waned, through the rise of strong regional powers and colonization by Great Britain, to the emergence of the modern independent nation in 1947. Through paintings, costumes, jewelry, weapons and a golden throne—all objects that the maharajas used, commissioned, collected and loved, and through which they realized their roles as military and political ruler, religious leader and cultural patron—the exhibition explores the concept of kingship in India, and illuminates the world of the maharajas and their extraordinarily rich culture. Field Museum, **Chicago**, through February 3.

**Shadow Sites:** *Recent Work by Jananne Al-Ani* explores enduring representations of the Middle Eastern landscape. "Shadow Sites II," her most recent video installation, is inspired by both archival photographs and contemporary news reports, and is exhibited alongside a selection of extraordinary original prints by renowned archeologist Ernst Herzfeld (1879–1948). Separated by nearly a century, these works pose fascinating questions about the impact of photography on views of the Middle East. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through February 10.

**Buddhism Along the Silk Road** illuminates a remarkable moment of artistic exchange, drawing together objects from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the western reaches of Central Asia—regions connected in the sixth century CE through trade, military conquest and the diffusion of Buddhism. At the root of this transnational connection is the empire established at the end of the fifth century by the Huns, which extended from Afghanistan to the northern plains of India. Over the next century, trade routes connecting India to the western reaches of the Central Asian Silk Road continued to link these distant communities, facilitating ideological exchange. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through February 10.

**Lalla Essaydi:** *Revisions* brings together selections from the artist's photographic series, her rarely exhibited paintings and a multimedia installation. Moroccan-born, Essaydi now lives in the United States and believes that her work, with its intimate portrayal of Moroccan women, would not have been possible without distance from her homeland. While each work and genre speaks volumes, from the ensemble—subversive and challenging, yet refined—emerges Essaydi's critical reflection on her experience as a liberal Moroccan, Arab, African and Muslim woman living across cultures. National Museum of African Art, **Washington, D.C.**, through February 23.

**Turkmen Jewelry From the Wolf Collection** shows objects produced in the 19th and 20th centuries by nomadic and town-dwelling craftsmen in Central Asia and Iran. While Turkmen nomads had lived for centuries in the region now divided among Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and northeast Iran, in the 19th century, in response to a loss of pasture land, they increasingly joined settled populations. Nonetheless, Turkmen craftsmen continued to work in

their traditional modes. Though some jewelry, such as whip decorations, was used by men, and silver ornaments were made for horses, most jewelry was for women: crowns, caps, headbands and braid ornaments; pendants attached to headdresses; earrings; pectoral and dorsal ornaments; amulets; appliques for clothing; armbands and rings. Different styles of decoration were preferred by specific tribal groups. The Turkmen took and traded slaves—Persians, Cossacks and Russians—to exchange for the gold and silver used in their jewelry. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through February 24.

**Roads of Arabia:** *Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. An eye-opening look at the largely unknown ancient past of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, this exhibition draws on recently discovered archeological material never before seen in the United States. "Roads of Arabia" features objects excavated from several sites throughout the Arabian Peninsula, tracing the impact of ancient trade routes and pilgrimage roads stretching from Yemen in the south to Iraq, Syria and Mediterranean cultures in the north. Elegant alabaster bowls and fragile glassware, heavy gold earrings and Hellenistic bronze statues testify to a lively mercantile and cultural interchange among distant civilizations. The study of archeological remains only really began in Saudi Arabia in the 1970's, yet brought—and is still bringing—a wealth of unsuspected treasures to light: temples, palaces adorned with frescoes, monumental sculpture, silver dishes and precious jewelry left in tombs. The exhibition, organized as a series of points along trade and pilgrimage routes, focuses on the region's rich history as a major center of commercial and cultural exchange, provides both chronological and geographical information about the discoveries made during recent excavations, and emphasizes the important role played by this region as a trading center during the past 6000 years. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through February 24.

## Current March

**The Sultan's Garden:** *The Blossoming of Ottoman Art* chronicles how stylized tulips, carnations, hyacinths, honeysuckle, roses and rosebuds came to embellish nearly all media produced by the Ottoman court beginning in the mid-16th century. These instantly recognizable elements became the brand of an empire that spanned seven centuries and, at its height, three continents, and was synonymous with its power. Incredibly, this revolution in style can be traced to one man, Kara Memi, working in the royal design workshop of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566). His nature-inspired stylized tulips, carnations, hyacinths, honeysuckles, roses and rosebuds immediately gained popularity across a broad range of media, carrying connotations of Ottoman court patronage, luxury and high taste. The floral style continues to embody Turkish culture: Turkey's tourism bureau today markets the nation with a tulip logo. The exhibition unveils the story of this artist's influence and traces the continuing impact of Ottoman floral style through the textile arts—some of the most luxurious and technically complex productions of the Empire. Related lecture: "In the Sultan's Studios: Recreating Ottoman

Textiles," January 17. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, through March 10.

**Light and Shadows:** *The Story of Iranian Jews* explores the rich and complex history of one of the world's oldest Jewish communities, displaying archeological artifacts, illuminated manuscripts, musical instruments, paintings, photographs, videos and historical documents that showcase a complex story and the beauty of the community's traditions. The exhibition concludes with Hasan Sarbakshian's photographs of Jews remaining in Iran today. Fowler Museum at UCLA, **Los Angeles**, through March 10.

**Petra:** *Splendor in the Desert* marks the bicentenary of the rediscovery of the long-forgotten "rose-red" Nabataean city by the Swiss adventurer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, alias Shaykh Ibrahim. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site in the Jordanian desert, Petra was the capital of a thriving trading and commercial civilization 2000 years ago, a city built in hidden sandstone canyons whose remarkable architecture testifies to close contacts with Greek and Roman civilizations, and whose highly sophisticated water storage and management systems in one of the world's driest regions is evidence of a high degree of engineering skill and ingenuity. The exhibition presents the results of recent archeological excavations at Petra along with 150 artifacts lent by Jordanian museums, virtual reconstructions and models that illuminate the Nabataeans' origins, their history and the writing system. Antikenmuseum **Basel, Switzerland**, through March 13.

**Gems of the Medici** delves into the history of Florence's renowned Medici family, which dominated city affairs and steered the course of Italian art history for almost 300 years. Medicis funded many celebrated artists, goldsmiths, silversmiths and engravers, commissioned and collected their masterpieces, and traded widely for other objects of art and craft, including with their counterparts in the Ottoman Empire. The exhibition includes antiquities dating from the first century BCE as well as a carnelian that was part of Emperor Nero's seal. **Houston** Museum of Natural Science, through March 31.

## Current April

**Light from the Middle East:** *New Photography* features 30 photographers from 30 different countries offering creative and thought-provoking responses to the major social and political issues which have affected the Middle East over the past 20 years. The exhibition covers a wide range of techniques and subject matter, from photojournalism to staged and digitally manipulated imagery, presenting multiple viewpoints of a region where collisions between personal, social, religious and political life can be emotive and complex. Victoria and Albert Museum, **London**, through April 7.

**Amarna 2012:** *100 Years of Nefertiti*, an extensive special exhibition on the Amarna period, allows Nefertiti's time to be understood within its cultural-historical context. All aspects of this fascinating period are illuminated and explained—not only the period's theology and art, but also everyday life in the city, ancient Akhetaton. Founded by the monotheist Pharaoh Akhenaton (Amenhotep IV)

to establish a new capital with places of worship for his own "religion of light," the city was built within three years and populated in the year 1343 BCE. At the beginning of the 20th century, extremely successful excavations took place there under the direction of Ludwig Borchardt, and the finds were shared between Cairo and Berlin. The exhibition illuminates the context of the discovery of the bust of Nefertiti in the workshop of the Egyptian sculptor Thutmose, along with numerous related objects, including even the pigments and tools used by the sculptors. Along with the exhibition's main focus on archeology, it also critically examines the history of the depiction of the bust of Nefertiti both as an archeological object and as a widely marketed ideal of beauty. Visitors can experience the Amarna period as a social, cultural-historical and religious phenomenon. Neues Museum, **Berlin**, through April 13.

**Little Syria, New York:** *An Immigrant Community's Life and Legacy* documents the rich history of New York's first Arab-American community. From the late 19th century through the mid-20th century, an area of Manhattan's Lower West Side was the home to a vibrant and productive community of Arab-Americans. Dubbed the "heart of New York's Arab world" by *The New York Times*, the Washington Street neighborhood was where many participants in the first wave of Arab immigration to the United States got their start. Their experiences, all but lost to living memory, parallel those of other immigrant groups of the Great Migration period. Arab American National Museum, **Dearborn, Michigan**, through April 21; 3LD Art + Technology Center, **New York**, May 4–26; Immigration History Research Center, Andersen Library, University of Minnesota, **Minneapolis**, Fall.

**The Thousand and One Nights**, one of the masterpieces of world literature, is also an exceptionally strong cultural link between East and West, and this exhibition of some 300 works of art brings visitors as close as possible to the personality of Sheherazade. Beginning with the tales' Indo-Persian origins and carrying them through their manifestation as ninth-century Arab tales, the exhibition includes some of the oldest known manuscripts, culminating in their translation into European languages, of which the first was French. Other exhibits demonstrate that all the arts— theater, fashion, music, film, painting, opera, photography and literature—have embraced these tales as rich sources of materials, and their characters—Harun al-Rashid, Shahriyar, Aladdin, Sindbad and Sheherazade herself—live on in modern-day forms, from graphic novels to the Internet. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, through April 28.

**Love and Devotion:** *From Persia and Beyond* celebrates the beauty of Persian manuscripts and the stories of human and divine love they tell, featuring more than 60 rare Persian, Mughal Indian and Ottoman Turkish illustrated manuscripts from the 13th to the 18th century, as well as related editions of European literature, travel books and maps. These works come from one of the richest periods in the history of the book and shed light on the artistic and literary culture of Persia, showcasing classic Persian tales and revealing the extent to which Persian language and culture influenced

neighboring empires, as well as parallels in the work of European writers dating back to Shakespeare, Chaucer and Dante. Bodleian Libraries, **Oxford** [uk], through April 28.

**The Antikythera Shipwreck:** *The Ship, the Treasures, the Mechanism* presents the objects recovered in 1900–1901 and 1976 from the legendary shipwreck off the islet of Antikythera, the focus of the first major underwater archaeological expedition. The wreck dates from 60 to 50 BCE, though items in its cargo go back to the fourth century BCE. The luxury glassware, the statue of Hermes and other items shed light on trade in the eastern Mediterranean and the taste of the rising Roman elite near the end of the Hellenistic Era and Rome's democratic period. Most exciting, however, is the so-called Antikythera Mechanism, a device that comprised at least 30 gearwheels as well as dials, scales, axles and pointers. It is the earliest preserved portable astronomical calculator, and displayed the positions of the Sun, the Moon and most probably the five planets known in antiquity. Used to predict solar and lunar eclipses, it showed an accurate multi-year calendar and displayed the dates of the recurring Pan-Hellenic games that took place at Nemea, Isthmia, Delphi, Dodona and Olympia. National Archaeological Museum, **Athens**, through April 28.

**Disappearing Heritage of Sudan, 1820–1956:** *Photographic and Filmic Exploration in Sudan* documents the remnants of the colonial experience in Sudan from the Ottoman, Egyptian and British periods. This photographic and video project by Frederique Cifuentes explores the mechanics of empire, highlighting colonial architecture, design and construction—official buildings, private residences, cinema houses, railways, irrigation canals and bridges—and the impact they had on Sudanese society before and after independence in 1956. It also helps us understand the ways in which people appropriated and used the buildings after the end of the colonial period. Oriental Museum, **Durham** [uk] University, through April 30; University of **Khartoum, Sudan**, June through December.

**Current May**  
**Darling Hair:** *Frivolity and Trophies* uses the hairdo and hair undone to explore intimacy, social signaling and self-definition. Hair is socially significant in almost every culture, whether hidden or displayed,

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

Copyright © 2013 by Aramco  
Services Company. Volume 64,  
Number 1. Periodicals postage  
paid at Houston, Texas and  
at additional mailing offices.

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

## Middle East Patterns:

*Places, Peoples, and Politics*

illustrates the emergence and explosive development of the Middle East between 1957 and 2005, displaying more than 250 photographs taken by author and Middle East geographer Colbert C. Held during his 14 years as a us diplomat in the region as well as during later visits. The photographs are geographical in the broadest sense, and present all 17 countries of Southwest Asia in separate displays in four Baylor libraries. The main exhibit comprises 17 thematic sets, each with eight or more images of landscapes, ancient sites, peoples, dwellings and settlements, agriculture and fishing, transportation, oil and other resources, industries and universities. Many views taken in the 1950's serve to record neighborhoods, caravan tracks and traditional *suqs* and houses since replaced by high-rises, four-lane freeways and shopping malls. Main exhibit is in Poage Library, Baylor University, **Waco, Texas**, February 7 through June.



**This photograph of the Eastern Anatolian Mountains, just west of Turkey's Lake Van, was taken in 1958 from a us Air Force C-47 aircraft.**

often linked with intimacy, decency and sexuality, sometimes symbolizing masculine strength, sometimes femininity. Highly constructed, shaved off, colored, covered with ashes or clay, hair can have ceremonial functions and can express individuality or group adherence. The exhibition begins with rivalry among blond, dark or red hair and among straight, curly and frizzy, drawing on a wide range of classical paintings, sculptures and photographs; it continues through the notion of hair as a human raw material, and closes with hair as a symbol of loss, of the passing of time, and of illness and death. Musée du Quai Branly, **Paris**, through July 14.

**Current June**  
**Beyond the Surface:** *Scientific Approaches to Islamic Metalwork* examines key examples of Islamic and pre-Islamic metalwork from the fourth through 14th centuries to investigate the ways that craftsmen adapted the technological and stylistic legacies of Roman, Byzantine and Sasanian precursors. Photomicrographs and x-radiographs illuminate the composition of the exhibits, two major manufacturing technologies (casting and sheet metalworking) and techniques of decoration. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, through June 1.

**Images of the Afterlife** brings two Egyptian mummies from the museum's collections face-to-face with the public. Recent CT scans and the latest 3-D imaging have revealed the mummies' secrets and enabled an artist to recreate realistic sculptures portraying how these two individuals looked in life, thousands of years ago. No longer merely mummies #30007 and #11517, visitors can envision them as a woman in her 40's and a teenaged boy named Minirdis. Field Museum, **Chicago**, through June 9.

**Current July and later**  
**Unveiling Femininity in Indian Painting and Photography** considers the depiction of women in Indian court paintings and photographs from the 17th to the 19th century. Women are

often depicted as archetypes from Indian literature and poetry—the devoted heroine awaiting the return of her lover, or the *ragini*, a personification of classical musical modes. Other paintings offer a rare view into the *zenana*, where court ladies lived in seclusion, showing them unveiled and enjoying music, poetry, dance and food. The allure of Indian femininity—and of the “exotic other”—continued into the colonial period, when photographic portraits were made of dancers or courtesans. **Los Angeles** County Art Museum, through July 28.

**Alia Syed:** *Eating Grass* comprises five overlapping narratives, filmed in Karachi, Lahore and London, each representing different emotional states experienced throughout the day that correspond to the five daily prayers of Islam. The film captures the ebb and flow of urban dwellers as they move between bustling streets and quiet interior spaces. A soundtrack that includes Syed's prose, in English and Urdu, adds a further narrative dimension. **Los Angeles** County Museum of Art, through July 28.

**Between Heaven and Earth:** *Birds in Ancient Egypt* explores the role of birds in ancient Egyptian life and religion and in the state. More than 40 artifacts trace how birds affected people at every stage of life. Objects include statues of falcon-headed gods, bird coffins and objects of daily life decorated with avian motifs. Bird mummies, presented with the newest forensic research, demonstrate their importance in religious cults. Catalog. Oriental Institute Museum, **Chicago**, through July 28.

**Objects From the Kharga Oasis**, where the museum excavated for 30 years, includes late Roman and Byzantine textiles, ceramics, and grave goods from an intact tomb. Kharga and the neighboring Dakhla Oasis have yielded evidence of human habitation in the Middle Paleolithic (300,000 to 30,000 years ago), and close contacts with the Nile Valley as far back as the Old Kingdom (2649–2150

BCE). Vital to Egypt's trading network, the oasis towns were access points for Saharan and sub-Saharan trade, as well as producing numerous crops and manufactured goods—ceramics and glassware—for export to the Nile Valley. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through August 4.

**Coming January**  
**Syriat:** *101 Artworks for Syria*. Fifty artists from Middle Eastern countries have donated works—paintings, photographs, videos and other media—to be exhibited and then auctioned off for the benefit of civilian victims of the violence in Syria. The goal is not only monetary: The event is intended to show the non-political solidarity of civil societies across the Arab world with Syrians, as well as to display, once again, the immense and varied creativity of Arab-world artists. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, January 17–20.

**In Harmony:** *The Calderwood Collection of Islamic Art* showcases some 150 works ranging in date from the first millennium BCE to the mid-20th century, including luxury glazed ceramics from the early Islamic era and illustrated manuscripts of medieval epic poems, including the *Shahnama*. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, January 31 through June 1.

**Coming February**  
**Beauty and Belief:** *Crossing Bridges With the Arts of Islamic Culture* aims to bridge differences and inspire insight through beauty, and address the question, “What makes Islamic art Islamic?” Tunisia-born project director Sabiha Al Khemir has assembled over 250 works from 40 lenders in the US and nine countries in Europe and the Middle East, including unique manuscripts from the Royal Library in Morocco. The exhibition represents a journey through Islamic culture from the seventh century onward, combining historical and geographic background with successive sections of calligraphy, figurative imagery and pattern, but it makes a point of touching on the present day, also including works by contemporary artists. **Newark [New Jersey]**

Museum, February 13 through May 19, 2013; **Portland [Oregon] Art Museum**, June 15 through September 8.

**New Blue and White.** From East Asia through the Persian and Arab lands and finally to Europe and the Americas, blue and white porcelain was a cultural marker of certain times and places, and it is now one of the most recognized types of ceramic production worldwide. Today's artists refer to those markers and continue the story, creating works that speak to contemporary ideas and issues, and working not only in ceramics but in glass, fiber and furniture. Museum of Fine Arts, **Boston**, February 20 through July 14.

**Evening Ragas** gathers more than 60 photographic portraits, interiors and landscapes by British photographer Derry Moore that form an inspiring portrait of pre-modern India. Tasveer Galleries, **Delhi**, February 22 through March 5.

**A Chaque Stencil Une Revolution** is titled after a quotation from Yasser Arafat, referring to the power of carbon paper as a duplication technology that was central to the abilities of political groups of earlier generations to disseminate information and opinions. Moroccan-born artist Latifah Echakhch pays homage to the uprisings of the 60's and 70's, but her work also rings with melancholy as it links abstract art with politics. Hammer Gallery, **uCLA, Los Angeles**, February 23 through July 18.

**Thukral and Tagra: A Solo Exhibition** in fact presents a duo: The Indian artists have been working collaboratively since 2004. Their inspiration begins with the reality of old values mixed with their idea of modern time in the culture of Punjab. Art Plural Gallery, **Singapore**, February 27 through April 13.

Coming **March**

**Threshold to the Sacred: The Ark Door of Cairo's Ben Ezra Synagogue** focuses on a work of exceptional historical importance: an intricately decorated and inscribed wood panel believed to come from the Ben Ezra Synagogue of Old Cairo (Fustat), which has captured public imagination for more than a century. Walters Art Museum, **Baltimore**, March 2 through May 26.

**Cairo to Constantinople: Early Photographs of the Middle East.** In 1862, the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) was sent on a four-month educational tour of the Middle East, accompanied by the British photographer Francis Bedford. This exhibition documents his journey through the work of Bedford, the first photographer to travel on a royal tour. It explores the cultural and political significance Victorian Britain attached to the region, which was then as complex and contested as it remains today. The tour took the Prince to Egypt, Palestine and the Holy Land, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and Greece. He met rulers, politicians and other notable figures, and traveled in part on horseback, camping in tents. On the royal party's return to England, Francis Bedford's work was displayed in what was described as "the most important photographic exhibition that has hitherto been placed before the public." Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, **Edinburgh**, March 8 through July 21.

**Resplendent Dress From Southeastern Europe: A History in Layers** presents 57 beautiful 19th- to 20th-century

women's clothing ensembles from Macedonia, Croatia, Albania, Montenegro and neighboring countries—all formerly parts of the Ottoman Empire—and more than 100 additional individual items such as vests, aprons and jewelry. These colorful and intensively worked garments were often adorned with embroidery, lace, metal threads, coins, sequins, beads and—most important—fringe, which has been a marker of virginity in women's dress for more than 20,000 years. By 1900, a southeast European village woman's clothing and its historically accreted layers could be read at a glance, informing the viewer of her marital status, religion, wealth, textile skills and more—all part of her suitability as a bride. Fowler Museum at **uCLA, Los Angeles**, March 10 through July 14.

**Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum.** The two cities on the Bay of Naples, in southern Italy, were buried in just 24 hours by a catastrophic volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. This event ended the life of the cities but also preserved them until their rediscovery by archaeologists nearly 1700 years later. Herculaneum was a small seaside town, Pompeii the industrial hub of the region. Work continues at both sites, and recently uncovered artifacts include such treasures as finely sculpted marble reliefs and intricately carved ivory panels. The exhibition gives visitors a taste of the cities' daily life, from the commerce of the bustling street to the domesticity of the family home, and explores the lives of individuals in Roman society—businessmen, powerful women, freed slaves and children. Thus a beautiful wall painting from Pompeii shows the baker Terentius Neos and his wife holding writing materials to show they

are literate and cultured and posed to suggest they are equal partners. Other evocative items include six pieces of carbonized wooden furniture, among them a linen chest and a baby's crib that still rocks on its curved runners. British Museum, **London**, March 28 through September 29.

Coming **April**

**Birth of a Museum** displays recent acquisitions intended for display at the forthcoming Louvre Abu Dhabi Museum on Saadiyat Island, ranging from antiquities to paintings to historic photographs, including the oldest photograph known of a veiled woman, a daguerreotype by Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, April.

**PERMANENT / INDEFINITE**

**Greenbox Museum of Contemporary Art From Saudi Arabia** is a small private collection exhibiting works by artists living and working in Saudi Arabia, including Ahmed Mater, Abdullnasser Ghareem, Maha Malluh, Reem Al Faisal, Lulwah Al-Homoud and Ayman Yossri Daydhan. Open Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sunday afternoons and by appointment. Admission €5. Phone 420-92-69 before visiting. Korte Leidsedwardsstraat 12, **Amsterdam**.

**Feast Your Eyes: A Taste for Luxury in Ancient Iran** displays luxury metalwork dating from the first millennium BCE, beginning with the rule of the Achaemenid kings (550–330 BCE), to the early Islamic period, exploring the meaning behind these objects' overarching artistic and technical characteristics. Highly sophisticated Iranian metalwork, especially in gold and silver, was created in an area extending from the Mediterranean to present-day

Afghanistan. Favored with an abundance of natural resources, the region became known for works ranging in shape from deep bowls and footed plates to elaborate drinking vessels ending in animal forms, largely associated with court ceremonies and rituals. Others objects, decorated with such royal imagery as hunting or enthronement scenes, were probably intended as gifts to foreign and local dignitaries. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**

**The New Islamic Art Galleries of the Louvre** provide a permanent home for the museum's renowned collection of Islamic art, considered the greatest outside the Islamic world. More than 2500 objects, many never on public display before, are shown in rooms totaling 3000 square meters (32,000 sq ft). The galleries present the entire cultural breadth of the Islamic world, from Spain to India, spanning the seventh to the 19th centuries; their \$127-million renovation was financed by the French state, supplemented by donations from a Saudi prince, the King of Morocco, the Emir of Kuwait and the Sultan of Oman. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, from September 22.

Information is correct at press time, but please reconfirm dates and times before traveling. Most institutions listed have further information available at their Web sites. Readers are welcome to submit information eight weeks in advance for possible inclusion in this listing. Some listings have been kindly provided to us by *Canvas*, the art and culture magazine for the Middle East and the Arab world.

*Saudi Aramco World* is published bimonthly in print and on-line editions. Subscriptions to the print edition are available without charge to a limited number of readers worldwide who are interested in the cultures of the Arab and Muslim worlds, their history, geography and economy, and their connections with the West.

**To subscribe to the print edition** electronically, go to [www.saudiaramcoworld.com/about.us/subscriptions/new.aspx](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/about.us/subscriptions/new.aspx). Fill out and submit the form. To subscribe by fax, send a *signed and dated* request to +1-713-432-5536. To subscribe by mail, send a *signed and dated* request to *Saudi Aramco World*, Box 469008, Escondido, California 92046-9008, USA, or mail the subscription card bound into the printed magazine. If requesting a **multiple-copy subscription** for a classroom or seminar, please specify the number of copies wanted and the duration of the class. All requests for subscriptions to **addresses in Saudi Arabia** must be mailed to Public Relations, Saudi Aramco, Box 5000, Dhahran 31311, Saudi Arabia.

**Change of address** notices should be sent electronically to [www.saudiaramcoworld.com/about.us/subscriptions/change.aspx](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/about.us/subscriptions/change.aspx), or by fax or mail to the addresses above. In the latter cases, please be sure to include your customer account number, or an address label from a recent issue, or your complete old address.

**Back issues of Saudi Aramco World and Aramco World** from 1960 onward can be read on-line, downloaded and printed at [www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com). Click on "Indexes." The issues are available in text form through September/October 2003, and with photographs and illustrations for subsequent issues. Printed copies of back issues, to the extent they are still in print, can be requested by e-mail ([saworld@aramcoservices.com](mailto:saworld@aramcoservices.com)), fax (+1-713-432-5536) or postal mail (Special Requests, *Saudi Aramco World*, Box 2106, Houston, Texas 77252-2106, USA). Bulk copies of specific issues for use in classrooms, workshops, study tours or lectures will also be provided as available.

**Indexes:** A cumulative index is available on-line at [www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com). It is fully text-searchable and can also be searched by title, subject or contributor.

**Permissions:**

**Texts** of articles from *Saudi Aramco World* and *Aramco World* may be reprinted without specific permission, with the conditions that the text be neither edited nor abridged, that the magazine be credited, and that a copy of the reprinted article be provided to the editors. This general permission does not apply, however, to articles identified as reprints or adaptations from other sources, or as being copy-righted by others.

**Photographs and illustrations:** Much of *Saudi Aramco World's* photo archive can be accessed through the *Saudi Aramco World* Digital Image Archive (SAWDIA). Go to [www.photoarchive.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.photoarchive.saudiaramcoworld.com). You can search for and order images without charge.

**Unsolicited Material:** The publisher and editors of *Saudi Aramco World* accept no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photographs or illustrations submitted for any purpose. Article proposals should be submitted in writing, with patience, and following the guidelines for contributors at [www.saudiaramcoworld.com/about.us/guidelines.htm](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/about.us/guidelines.htm).

 Find us on  
**Facebook**



► **Young Reader's  
World**

Young Reader's World, at [www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com), offers 18 of our most popular feature articles, abridged and adapted for readers aged 9 to 14.

