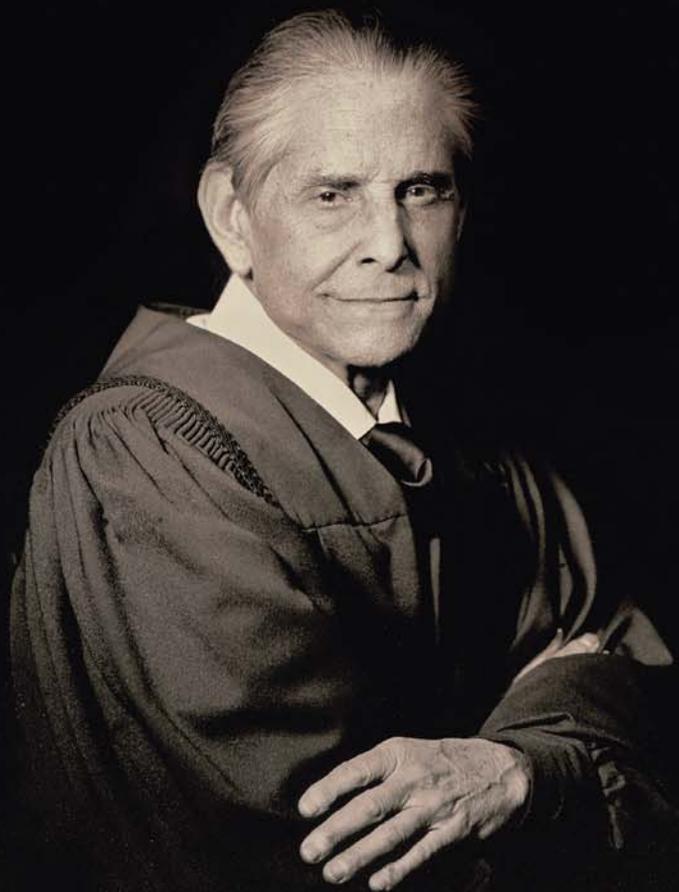


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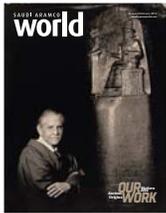


**OUR** Modern  
Jobs  
Ancient  
Origins **WORK**

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Justice John B. Simon of the Illinois Appellate Court poses alongside a cast of a stele inscribed in 18th-century BCE Iraq. "Past and present are fused by the similarity of the Code of Hammurabi and the laws of today. Both make the law the sublimator of conflicts." Photo by Jason Reblando.

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Nabeel M. Amudi

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**Public Affairs**  
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**Back Cover**



Fresh-faced and insouciant under a doorway that hints at the wear of centuries, a boy poses in the Casbah of Algiers. "For a kid like me," says Kader Benamara, who grew up to work as an economist, "the Casbah was a magical place day and night." Photo by Kevin Bubriski.

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



**Our Work: Modern Jobs — Ancient Origins**

Portraits by Jason Reblando  
Interviews by Matthew Cunningham

The University of Chicago's Oriental Institute selected 24 working professionals—from a real estate broker to a cowboy, from a taxi driver to community farmer Erika Allen (above)—and asked them to be photographed with and interviewed about ancient artifacts that hark back to the beginnings of their professions. The results bridge a gulf of time that stretches the imagination.



**10  
From Saudi  
Arabia With  
Love**

Written by Leila Al-Habbal

Winning hearts and prizes around the world, *Wadjda* is a middle-class Riyadh girl pursuing her dream in the debut feature film by Saudi director Haifaa Al Mansour—now the first film submitted by Saudi Arabia for nomination to the Oscars.



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## Senegal's Shepherds of *Tabaski*

Written by Jori Lewis  
Photographed by Ricci Shryock  
Video by Ricci Shryock and Jori Lewis

Each year at 'Id al-Adha, the Muslim feast of the sacrifice that in Senegal is called *Tabaski*, "sheep fever" takes hold as each family shops for the best it can afford, and breeders show their finest at the West African nation's sheep pageant.



## 20 Pietro della Valle: Pilgrim of Curiosity

Written by Caroline Stone

400 years ago, in 1614, linguist, book collector and intellectual polymath Pietro della Valle set out from Rome on a dozen years of travel as far east as India. His volumes of correspondence contain some of the best observations of his era—from amirs and archeology to his devotion to the woman he married in Baghdad, whose name, he noted, meant "intelligence."



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## The Spice Routes on a Plate

Written and photographed by Felicia Campbell

Millennia of maritime-trade fusions, immigrant influences and sultry spices make Oman's cuisine both global and local, whether it's seafood soup, slow-cooked *shuwa* or any of the three recipes online at [saudiamramcoworld.com](http://saudiamramcoworld.com).

## The Casbah of Algiers: Endangered Ark

Written by Louis Werner  
Photographed by Kevin Bubriski

Often mythologized and even caricatured, the real, hillside Casbah is a flesh-and-stone cradle of Algerian independence and home to 80,000 people, some of whom are working tirelessly to preserve it.

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Written by Julie Weiss

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# OUR Modern Jobs Ancient Origins WORK

Portraits by JASON REBLANDO // Interviews by MATTHEW CUNNINGHAM  
Adapted from the book of the same title, edited by JACK GREEN & EMILY TEETER



## POLICE OFFICER

Leo Schmitz is deputy chief of Englewood 7th District for the Chicago Police Department. He started as a patrolman and was promoted to patrol and detective division sergeant, then to lieutenant in patrol and Area 4 Gangs.

“Basically my job—and it’s probably the same for the Medjay chief of police back then, though we can’t ask him—is that we are both in charge of individuals who report to us and we’re charged with protecting the people. Protect people who are weak. Take care of the children and the elderly. Our job is to make things safe to ensure people

can have a good life. I am sure that they were doing the same back then that we are doing now. In general terms, police are police no matter where they are in the world. He was doing the same thing I’m doing. It’s good to hear that the police profession has been going on that long. There’s a lot of things that we can do with technology that help us clear cases, but it really comes down to getting the bad guy. It probably took longer back then to find the bad guy or it might have taken a shorter time, but we all strive for the same thing: We’re going to find out who did it, and we’re going to go after them. In the end, it’s still the same theory, same idea.”

**POLICE** From at least 1600 BCE, the Egyptians had a professional police/desert patrol/security force called the Medjay. Initially, they were made up of Nubians, a people famed for their archery skills and as trackers in the desert. The weapons they carried consisted of a bow and arrows, battle axes, slings and spears. They carried rectangular shields. The Medjay were divided into ranks. The entry-level Medjay appear to have been patrolmen. Men with supervisory titles had greater responsibilities, including reporting crimes, sitting on the local court, testifying against those accused of crimes and attending interrogations, as well as more ordinary administrative duties. Police were state employees. The chiefs reported to the vizier (akin to a prime minister), or to the highest official of the temple.

**Shown with:** Brown granite statue of a chief of police, from the Ramesside period, Dynasty xx, ca. 1127 BCE, Medinet Habu, Luxor, Egypt. (28.7 cm / 11¼") This statue depicts a man seated on a cushion with his robe pulled over his knees. The inscription on the front and back of his garment identifies him as the “chief of the Medjay of Western Thebes, Bakenwerel.” This Bakenwerel is probably the same Medjay chief who was part of the team that investigated the robbery of tombs in Western Thebes in about 1110 BCE.

## REAL ESTATE BROKER

Margie Smigel has been a broker for residential and investment real estate for nearly three decades. She is owner of the Margie Smigel Group, LLC real-estate brokerage in Chicago. She is also a graphic designer, photographer, filmmaker, poet and writer.

“I know that [the stone] has something to do with a real-estate contract, and when I saw it, I thought, ‘This must be what they mean by “it hasn’t been written in stone,”’ because this *is* written in stone! Today, everybody gets a survey at closing, so they actually have a pictorial representation of what they’re buying. It all probably comes from this. They just keep changing the required documentation over the years. But the survey is something that hasn’t essentially changed. Everything is still on paper at closing.... But this is so much more elegant than all those papers—this is so beautiful. It would be nice if at least your deed were in stone. Wouldn’t it be lovely to carry home the tablet of your deed from your closing? The irony is that I just started a new real-estate business, and my goal is to make it completely paperless.... What artifacts will remain of our present-day transactions thousands of years from now?”

**LAND AND PROPERTY** Most documents from Mesopotamia in the Early Dynastic period (ca. 2700–2350 BCE) concerning land and property relate to the temple and palace, including agricultural estates and houses in the city owned by these institutions. The “Chicago Stone,” described below, is probably a rare example of a declaration of property acquired by an unnamed elite individual in this period.

**Shown with:** The basalt “Chicago Stone” from the Early Dynastic period, ca. 2600 BCE, Iraq. (25 x 32 x 5.5 cm / 9¾ x 12½ x 2”) Written in the Sumerian language, this rectangular stone slab is called the “Chicago Stone” because of its current home. It is one of the oldest known display documents relating to real-estate transfers in Mesopotamia. The nine columns of text written on each of its two sides record the sale of a number of fields, probably to a single buyer, who is unnamed. Land-sale records of the period usually record acquisition of property by single buyers from several sellers, collections of individual and separate transactions. In the Chicago Stone, the buyer makes a grand account of many distinct purchases. Purchases were paid in silver as well as oil, wool, bread and sheep fat. The signs on the stone represent early cuneiform (“wedge-shaped”) writing that still resembles pictographic signs (picture-writing). Typical of early texts, the signs are organized into “cases” (ruled boxes) that include personal names and quantities of items. This text was read vertically from top to bottom, beginning with the leftmost column on its front (flat side).



“OUR WORK” represents a considerable change from the typical exhibit presented at the Oriental Institute, which usually focuses on presenting scholarly research from the Institute’s archeological expeditions or on specific researcher-led projects. This is the first exhibit to present the commissioned work of a fine-arts photographer, and one of the first that permits non-specialists to take the lead in the exhibit by recording their thoughts and ideas, in contrast to the usual didactic, top-down, curator-led approach. In this sense, although co-curated by us, the “Our Work” exhibit has really been curated and developed by the portrait subjects themselves. By giving the non-specialist both voice and image, we hope that our collections may become

more accessible to our visitors—that some new ways of viewing and learning about the objects have been created.

Objects do not get into museum displays by themselves—curators, preparators, registrars and conservators interact with objects every day. Objects can take on a life of their own through research and publication, which play such an important role in the Oriental Institute Museum; however, objects mean nothing without visitors, and they come to life only through their interpretation and study by living people. Objects have life stories or biographies, just like people.

—JACK GREEN AND EMILY TEETER

## FASHION DESIGNER

Diane Mayers Jones is a Chicago fashion designer who specializes in custom formal wear for women. She was initially self-taught, but later formally trained. She also gives introductory and advanced sewing courses in her studio, Dzines by Diane. She has been in business for more than 20 years.

“As I look at her, she’s wearing this dress and I’m blown away, because I am a dress person. I am always wearing a skirt and blouse or a dress, so as I look at her, I think, ‘Wow,’ you know, ‘She’s got on this beautiful wrapped dress.’ ....I love making beautiful dresses, beautiful

prom and wedding dresses; some of the garments that I make are just so—you know—with the times, a lot of wrapping, a lot of draping. When I see her, she’s got a little draping going around the front with the low-cut collar, it’s just wonderful. I feel like we are so bonded here. If I did a little tweaking, it could be worn by the women of today. The work that actually goes into a garment of this style took so much longer in the past because they had to do everything by hand. These people worked hard at what they did. You can see her hands are cupped together in reverence to God. I’m a very religious person, and it makes me think of myself.”

**TEXTILES AND COSTUME** Textiles made in ancient Mesopotamia were traded widely and were much in demand. Old Akkadian cuneiform texts (ca. 2220 BCE) from Tell Asmar (ancient Eshnunna) mention institutions where women and orphaned children produced high-quality textiles, mainly using sheep’s wool. Flax, used to make linen, may also have played an important role in the textile industry. Plain-weave linen has been found in the Royal Cemetery at Ur (ca. 2500 BCE). It could take many weeks to produce a high-quality piece of cloth on a loom, depending on the material, the weave count and elaborations. The material of the cloth represented on the female statue shown here is unknown; it was most likely sheep wool rather than linen, which was apparently reserved for priests, high officials, rulers or statues of deities.

*Shown with:* Limestone female statue from the Early Dynastic III period, 2650–2550 BCE, Sin Temple IX, Khafajah, Iraq. (36.1 cm / 14¼") This standing female figure is depicted wearing a shawl, likely one piece of cloth roughly the size of a single bed sheet. It was probably wrapped around the body and draped over the left arm, leaving the right arm and shoulder and lower legs and feet exposed. The figure represented here is likely to have been a woman of relatively high status.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

As the curators selected the artifacts and the people to be featured in the exhibition, I, too, wanted an engagement with history through my choices as a photographer.

The wet-plate collodion process was invented in 1851, 12 years after the invention of the daguerreotype. This process can be used to make negatives for various printing processes, but I used it to produce tintypes, a positive mirror image on a lacquered aluminum plate. Each plate needs to be prepared, exposed and developed within a 10-minute window, while the plate is still wet. To create the photographic image, syrupy collodion is carefully poured onto a thin, flat surface—in my case,

a piece of black, lacquered aluminum. The collodion provides a tacky surface to which light-sensitive silver can adhere. The chemicals react so slowly to light that an exposure can take anywhere from several seconds to a few minutes. So that our sitters would not have to sit paralyzed during a lengthy exposure, I used high-powered strobes to pump out a powerful burst of light in a fraction of a second. The finished tintype is a one-of-a-kind object that can be viewed within minutes of the exposure, much like a Polaroid. The tintypes themselves are very much like the sitters—each plate has its own individual character.

—JASON REBLANDO





## COWBOY

Ron Vasser has been involved with horses on the competitive level for over 20 years. He has been associated with riding groups and is certified in mounted search-and-rescue operations.

“Looking at a piece like this reinforces my understanding that I am doing something that people did thousands of years ago. The bit I use may be a little flashier, or the metal may be different, but the concept is the same, so I am living part of that history at this moment. First thing you want to know when

you’re on a horse is, can I make him stop? You want to know where the brakes are, you want to know where the steering is. After that, you’re golden. Having that bit is a way of controlling the horse. Any person who is into horses can look at that and say, ‘Oh, that’s a bit’—a bizarre-looking bit because of how it’s designed, but basically they could see that’s probably a snaffle bit.... It appears to have some ridges,... something that would give the horse rider a little bit more control in the horse’s mouth.”

**HORSES** Horses appear in ancient Mesopotamian textual sources by around 2100 BCE, and the earliest images of people riding horses appear in the Near East around 1800 BCE. Horse-drawn chariots were introduced to Egypt via the Levant soon after, during the Hyksos era, and were highly prized status symbols. By the first millennium BCE, horses were more commonly used for cavalry by the Assyrians, and subsequently by the Medes and Persians. Classical sources mention that the Achaemenid Persians (550–330 BCE) developed body armor for both their horses and their riders.

**Shown with:** Bronze horse bit from the Achaemenid period, ca. 550–330 BCE, Persepolis, Iran. (22.4 x 2.3 cm / 8¾ x 1") This horse bit is one of several found in the so-called Treasury and Garrison Quarters at the royal city of Persepolis. It has bar-shaped cheek pieces and a flexible snaffle (jointed) bit made in two sections linked in the center. Double loops on the bars were used to attach the headstall straps. The larger rings at the ends of the bit would have been attached to the reins.



## MATHEMATICIAN

Robert Zimmer joined the University of Chicago in 1977 and became the University's 13th president in 2006. He is known for establishing the University of Chicago's "Zimmer Program," which involves understanding of symmetry and the relationship of geometry and topology to certain algebraic structures.

"If you look at this tool, which is a kind of multiplication table, in spite of various views to the contrary, I do believe that the kind of basis of understanding that you get from actual drill and mastery [of times tables] is an important thing.... One of the beauties of the structure of mathematics is that it becomes multi-layered, so that at any moment you create a degree of mastery that gives you a capacity to now think about the next thing. So if you never establish foundations, if you never establish mastery at a foundational level, it inhibits your capacity to think about the next things. When one thinks about what mathematics is actually about at a fundamental level, it really does go back to thinking about counting.... about measurement, to thinking about shape, and understanding those in increasingly sophisticated ways.... The way that they connect other sorts of phenomena ... that you see today in mathematics you see reflected in this object right here. Living without zero is difficult, but obviously, people were able to do a great deal without it, which is really kind of impressive."

**MATHEMATICS** The Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000–1600 BCE) was a time of intense scribal activity; we know the most about scribal education. Much of what we know today about Mesopotamian mathematics comes from the cuneiform tools and textbooks that instructors used to teach their students, and the provision of practical mathematical and metrological skills necessary for scribal bureaucracy. Mesopotamian mathematics used the sexagesimal system of notation, with calculations based on the number 60 rather than the base-10 system that we use today. The concept or notation of zero was not established until much later by mathematicians of the early Islamic world.

**Shown with:** Mathematical tables inscribed on a clay cylinder from the Old Babylonian period, ca. 2000–1600 BCE, Iraq. (13.9 h. x 11.2 cm. dia. / 5½ x 4½") This object is one of the earliest known collections of mathematical tables written on a cylinder. It was suspended with a cord or held upright on a post that passed through the hole at the center. The scribe could spin the cylinder to the column he wanted to read. The text begins with a table of reciprocals and continues with 37 separate multiplication tables.

## POET

Haki Madhubuti is an author, educator and poet. He is one of the founding members of the Black Arts Movement, and the founder and publisher of Third World Press (established 1967). Now retired, he writes full-time.

“Any people who are in control of their own cultural imperatives are about the healthy replication of themselves and their communities. This replication starts with language and writing. Gilgamesh obviously was an activist, in terms of trying to find a worldview that he could understand and explain and bring back to his people. What I understand from Gilgamesh, on one level, is that we make our lives essential not only to our civilization but to the furthering of civilization. And writing is about that. Storytelling is about that. All too often cultures are not recognized unless they create something, unless they leave a legacy.... The oral tradition is passed down from generation to generation, but in the written tradition, we see more permanency. With the oral tradition, interpretations keep changing. You give one story to a child, and it goes through the grandfather, but by the time it gets to the next generation, it’s changed several times. When you have the written tradition, you have something that’s going to stay; you have something to build upon, and obviously you can interpret it also.”



**THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH** Gilgamesh was probably a historical figure, a king of the city of Uruk (in southern Mesopotamia, in what is now Iraq) in about 2800 BCE. The legends that grew up about him in both Sumerian and Akkadian (languages of ancient Mesopotamia) probably began as oral traditions, later collated by scribes to form what we today call the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the most elaborate and popular of Mesopotamian literary compositions. In the poem, Gilgamesh, who is described as part god, part man, tyrannizes his subjects in the city of Uruk. The gods create the wild man Enkidu to distract him. Gilgamesh and Enkidu fight, then become great friends and join forces to defeat the monster Humbaba in the Cedar Forest. Upon their return to Uruk, they are met by the goddess Ishtar (Inanna in the Sumerian version), whose advances Gilgamesh spurns. Punished by the gods for attacking Ishtar, Enkidu dies, leaving Gilgamesh to consider his own mortality and to seek immortality, which he cannot attain. Gilgamesh realizes that although he will not live forever, his monuments and exploits will continue after his death. The most complete copy of the Akkadian version was written on 12 tablets and formed part of the library of King Ashurbanipal (reigned 668–627 BCE) at Nineveh, Iraq. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is recognized today as a literary classic and the oldest known epic poem.

**Shown with:** Clay tablet from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, from the Old Babylonian period, ca. 1800–1600 BCE, Ishchali, Iraq. (11.8 x 6.2 x 3.0 cm / 4½ x 2½ x 1¼") This corresponds to the contents of the third tablet (of 12) in the later version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* found in the library of Ashurbanipal, and contains part of an early version of the story of Gilgamesh and Enkidu’s journey to the Cedar Forest. **And with:** Clay plaque depicting Gilgamesh, from the Isin-Larsa period to the Old Babylonian period, ca. 2000–1600 BCE, Iraq. (28.2 x 8.5 x 5.2 cm / 11 x 3¼ x 2") This depicts what may be Gilgamesh standing on the head of the slain Humbaba, monster of the Cedar Forest. Gilgamesh was a semi-divine character who is said to have reigned for 126 years and was 11 cubits tall (equivalent to more than five meters, or 16’).



## MANICURIST

Gloria Margarita Tovar is a nail technician at the Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon in Chicago.

“They [the Egyptians] probably had to look presentable for other people, to make them see who they were. They knew there were kings, so they had to look nice—the same

as today. Even when you have a job, and you go to an interview, you have to look nice. Color makes them feel good. Like when I’m done, and I put on a color, they’re like, ‘Oh my god, my hands look gorgeous, the color just makes me feel like a new person,’ and that’s what I see, and that’s what I enjoy—seeing the expressions on their face. Well, first of all, when I heard about [how long there have been manicurists], I thought it was amazing. It’s amazing because I have always said that back to the earliest times, we always took care of ourselves. You know, our hair, our skin, so when I saw this piece, I said, ‘It’s still here, it’s just a different way.’”

**MANICURISTS** Both men and women in ancient Egypt were very concerned with their appearance, and they lavished special attention on grooming. Scenes in private tombs dating to the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties (ca. 2450–2181 BCE) show men giving manicures and pedicures. The scenes are accompanied by short texts giving the men’s titles, indicating that they were organized into ranks, from simple manicurists to managers and supervisors of manicurists.

*Shown with:* Limestone relief of a manicurist from the Old Kingdom, Dynasty V, ca. 2430 BCE, tomb 19, Saqqara, Egypt. (75 x 32 x 4 cm / 29½ x 12½ x 1½") This is a section of a door lintel from the tomb of a man named Kha-bau-Ptah, who gives his title as “overseer of the palace manicurists.” He is shown seated on a chair, holding a staff that was the mark of an elite man. Kha-bau-Ptah’s tomb, with its stone portico and expensive decoration, indicates that he was a wealthy man.

## INTERVIEWS

Nearly every Friday for three months, my colleague Jason Reblando and I would head to the basement of the Oriental Institute. There we would find ourselves among artifacts of the ancient Middle East. To our friends hosting us at the museum, it was nothing to walk swiftly past shelves and cases full of jewelry, pottery and other objects 5000 or more years old. Jason and I would walk a little slower, looking longer.

We would eventually make our way to the heavy-objects storage room to set up for that day’s guests. My job was to sit with the portrait subjects and interview them on camera

for their reflections on the artifact they had been paired with and the origins of their chosen occupation. Each week, I would start the same way, asking the subjects to tell me about their work and to describe an average day. I would then ask them what they knew about the artifact next to them. From there, the questions and answers differed from person to person. Some had gone above and beyond, researching their artifact and the time period it came from, and putting a lot of thought into the connections. Other answers were less thought out, but just as honest.

—MATTHEW CUNNINGHAM

## TAXI DRIVER

Kofi Nii has been a taxi driver in Chicago since 1989. His cab is equipped with a good sound system that features the music of reggae greats such as Bob Marley. A native of Ghana, he worked as a merchant seaman before settling in Chicago.

“Those wheels date back to ... an age that I wasn't even born, and they look very interesting. I know that in those days people had to have more stuffing for their ears because [the wheel is] metal, it will make some noise, a lot of noise.... It would wear out quick [on Chicago's streets]. In those days, they were using the

wheel to transport merchandise, you know, wheat, and something to go and sell; so it's transportation, and right now that's what I'm doing, transporting people, from point A to point B. Without the wheel there won't be transporting, because you can't find a square block and put it on the car; it's got to be a round wheel.... Yeah, I say amen to those who invented it. I guess that's how they derived the 'horsepower' for the cars, from the horse pulling,... you know,... mechanical horsepower ... how many [horsepower] your car get?



**WHEELED TRANSPORTATION** Transportation in the Near East was important for trade, communication and warfare. The earliest wheeled wagons were in use from around 3500 BCE in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe, and the earliest wheeled transportation in Mesopotamia is known from depictions of four-wheeled wagons dated to around 3300 BCE. They were usually made of hardwoods like elm and tamarisk, with rawhide as a tire and metal fittings or bandings for the axle and securing pin. Wheel size was important for maneuverability and speed; the larger the wheel, the faster the vehicle.

**Shown with:** Iron wheels with bronze hubs from the Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Sargon, ca. 705 BCE, Iraq. (23.1 x 0.8 cm / 9 x 1/2") These miniature wheels were found at the Neo-Assyrian capital at Khorsabad, ancient Dur Sharrukin ("Fortress of Sargon"). They probably came from a ceremonial cart or wheeled stand that did not survive its burial. During the Iron Age (ca. 1200–586 BCE), as iron working became more widespread, metals such as bronze or iron were used as bands or hoops around wooden wheels to add strength and durability without compromising speed. 🌐



**Jason Reblando** (jason@jasonreblando.com) received a BA in sociology from Boston College and an MFA in photography from Columbia College, Chicago. His photographs are part of the collections of several museums, and he teaches photography at Illinois State University.



**Emily Teeter** (eteeter@uchicago.edu) received her doctorate from the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. She is an Egyptologist, research associate and coordinator of special exhibits at the Oriental Institute and the editor of exhibit catalogs.



**Matthew Cunningham** (matthewbcunningham@gmail.com) is a multimedia producer with more than 15 years' experience producing stories for Chicago Public Media's daily news and weekly arts programming. He is currently the creative producer and principal at Truthful Enthusiasm in Chicago.

 oi.uchicago.edu

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**Jack Green** (jdmgreen@uchicago.edu) is chief curator of the Oriental Institute Museum and a research associate of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. He is co-editor of the Oriental Institute Museum publication *Picturing the Past: Imaging and Imagining the Ancient Middle East*.

*"I was motivated to write this story for all the girls I grew up with who had so much potential but never had the opportunity to realize it."*

— HAIFAA AL MANSOUR

It is 10-year-old Wadjda's usual morning walk to school through her Riyadh neighborhood when Abdullah—her neighbor and best friend—pedals up on his bike and playfully snatches her headscarf. "Come get it!" he teases. "I would if I had a bike!" she calls after him. "Don't you know girls don't ride bikes?" he replies. Watching him ride off, Wadjda's dream is born. She later tells Abdullah that she will save enough money to buy her own bike, and then she will challenge him to a race. Her quest, against the disapproval of both her mother and her school, sets in motion a rich, layered plot that illuminates Saudi culture and customs, and our common humanity.



*From Saudi Arabia*

WITH LOVE

*Written by*

LEILA AL-HABBAL

Released last year and winner, to date, of 16 awards around the world, *Wadjda* is the first feature film by 39-year-old Saudi director Haifaa Al Mansour, the first feature to be filmed entirely in Saudi Arabia with an all-Saudi cast, the first by a female director and the first film ever to be submitted to the Oscars from Saudi Arabia.

Al Mansour gives much credit to social changes in the kingdom for the success of her production. "I never could have shot this film in Riyadh 10 years ago," she says. "There are so many reasons to be excited and optimistic about the future of the kingdom, and I hope this film reflects that."

*Wadjda* takes viewers inside the life of a middle-class Saudi family. Wadjda is an only child, and she attends a traditional religious girls' school, where she is sharply shamed by her headmistress for her subtle rebellions—tomboy Converse sneakers, pop mixtapes, braided bracelets with sports-team colors and, most of all, for her outlandish dream of owning a bicycle. Wadjda's mother is an endearing woman whose long,

hot commutes to her job are made worse by her driver's impatience, and though she is still smitten with her husband, she is wounded by his deep yearning for a son—by a second wife. Abdullah is sweet, loyal and charming as Wadjda's friend, and he becomes her ally when he secretly teaches her to ride his bicycle on the rooftop of her house, both oblivious of what their genders imply in their world, portrayed as one in which triumphs and defeats transpire realistically, and tradition and progressiveness interact thoughtfully.

"The events surrounding the story are real, raw and authentic to the point that it shocks me as a Saudi, because there is none of the sugar-coating or glossing over that you find



Actress Waad Mohammed's performance in her title role has received nearly universal acclaim. Left: She finds the green bicycle that becomes her dream. Above: Al Mansour advises Abdulrahman Al-Gohani, who plays Abdullah, and Mohammed during shooting in Riyadh.

in many movies," says artist Manal Al Dowayan, who, like Al Mansour, grew up in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province.

Al Mansour explains that the bicycle "is a metaphor for an unrealized dream. I hope that anyone who has ever worked to realize an impossible goal will be able to relate to Wadjda's journey." For Al Mansour, the bicycle—which is painted green, perhaps coincidentally the color of the Saudi flag—represents freedom of movement, both physically and socially. Youthful yet traditional, "the bicycle is also a toy in



## Haifaa Al Mansour

Born in 1974, Haifaa Al Mansour grew up in Al-Hasa, in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, as the eighth of 12 children. Her father, Abdulrahman Al Mansour, was a legal advisor and a well-known poet who regularly exposed his children to Hollywood movie screenings at home—fairly unusual in his conservative town. Her mother, Bahia Al-Suwaiyegh, is a social worker from a progressive family. After finishing her bachelor's degree in comparative literature at the American University in Cairo, Egypt, Al Mansour returned home to work at Saudi Aramco in media production. Meanwhile, on the side, she began her filmmaking career with three short films, *Who?*, *The Bitter Journey* and *The Only Way Out*, followed by an award-winning and internationally acclaimed documentary, *Women Without Shadows* (2005), about the *niqab*, the woman's veil that covers all of the face but the eyes. In 2007, Al Mansour married US diplomat Bradley Neimann. The couple moved to Australia, where she began working on the screenplay for *Wadjda* and, in 2009, earned her master's degree in directing and film studies from the University of Sydney.

Asked about the storyline of her next film, Al Mansour replies: "Yes, I am a feminist, but that does not mean all my movies will be about women. The story depends on how I feel. What is important is for the story to be honest and sincere, and capture a feeling.... I am a storyteller, and I want to engage people."



## Awards and Nominations

**BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE**  
Sutherland Trophy (nomination)

**DUBAI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**  
Muhr Arab Award  
Best Actress — Feature  
Best Film — Feature

**DURBAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**  
Best First Feature Film

**FRIBOURG INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**  
Audience Award  
Grand Prix (nomination)

**GUILD OF GERMAN ART HOUSE CINEMAS**  
Gold Guild Film Award

**GÖTEBORG FILM FESTIVAL**  
Audience Award for Best Feature Film

**LOS ANGELES FILM FESTIVAL**  
Audience Award for Best International Feature

**OSLO FILMS FROM THE SOUTH FESTIVAL**  
Films from the South Award (nomination)

**PALM SPRINGS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**  
Directors to Watch Award

**ROTTERDAM INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**  
Dioraphte Award

**SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL**  
Official Competition Award (nomination)

**TALLINN BLACK NIGHTS FILM FESTIVAL**  
Don Quixote Award — special mention  
Netpac Award  
Grand Prize (nomination)

**TROMSØ INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**  
Norwegian Peace Film Award

**VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**  
Most Popular International First Feature

**VENICE FILM FESTIVAL**  
CinemAvvenire Award  
CICAE Award  
Interfilm Award

**THE OSCARS**  
Foreign Language Film (under consideration  
for a nomination to be announced January 16)



some ways, so it should not be seen as something threatening or harmful.” Wadjda’s perseverance is heroic, and her smile is infectious. Audiences empathize with Wadjda’s struggles and ordeals, which are ultimately resolved by a surprising act of maternal love that tenderly triumphs over fears of judgment.

And then there is the bike race, as gentle and symbolic as the rest of the film. Wadjda speaks for herself and perhaps her generation when she calls back to Abdullah, “Catch me if you can!”

*Wadjda* is in these ways a serious film that sheds newly candid, thoroughly empathetic light on marriage, family, education, work, religion and love. The universal emotion that touches audiences blurs nationality, race and religion. On the popular us-based film website [www.rottentomatoes.com](http://www.rottentomatoes.com), the overall reviewer rating is 99 percent positive. “It’s a movie that’s almost miraculous in the way it subverts our images and expectations of Saudi life,” wrote Marc Mohan for the *The Oregonian*. Duane Dudek of the Milwaukee, Wisconsin *Journal-Sentinel* observed that Wadjda “is not so much consciously rebelling against authority as expressing individuality, like a Saudi Lisa Simpson.” At the *Detroit News*, Tom Long wrote, “Yes, this is a movie about Saudi Arabia. But more importantly, it’s a movie about life.”

To Saudi women viewers, however, *Wadjda* is a more personal film. Dina Juraifani, from al-Qassim in the Eastern



In his first gesture of what will become admiring support of *Wadjda's* determination to learn how to ride, Abdullah gives her a helmet. Opposite, far left: Waad Mohammed receives the Dubai International Film Festival's 2012 award for best actress in a feature film from HH Sheikh Mansour bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum.

commercial cinemas? While this baffles many, Sultan Al-Bazie, director of the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts, is delighted that his organization's non-governmental nominating committee, which he also chairs, chose *Wadjda* as Saudi Arabia's first official submission to the Oscars. Al-Bazie believes *Wadjda* has a chance there. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences wants local and independent films, he says, and *Wadjda* "is a very good movie with an important story that has a palpable presence. It has won many awards at film festivals around the world, and this challenge, in addition to Haifaa's courage in dealing with the situation in Saudi Arabia, a country without cinemas, is impressive." Al Mansour, he adds, has opened new and exciting opportunities for Saudi filmmakers.

Might those opportunities one day include the opening of commercial cinemas? "Saudi Arabians have always been open to cinema, fashion and other art forms via satellite, travel abroad and other means," says Al-Bazie. "And all Saudis have opinions about movies." DVDs are available to rent or buy, Saudis download movies via satellite and Internet, and they visit cinemas during travels abroad. Al Mansour, however, is pensive on the matter. "It is like the ban on women driving. It is a high-profile issue, and both sides are passionate about it, so it lingers without being solved.... When it is time, it will happen." Most important, she adds, is that now, "there is a large platform for women, who can come forward while still being sensitive to cultural norms." She does not believe aggressive protests or campaigns are an effective way to win change in a traditional, tribal and conservative country that is only 80 years old.

And so it was that, like many Saudis, Abdullatif Abdulhadi enjoyed a digital download of the film recently at a friend's home. "This is an excellent movie that touches on many of the social issues that exist in Saudi Arabia, and it's presented in a very casual and simple script."

Although this story carries so much subtext, Al Mansour underlines her simple desire that audiences enjoy the story and feel hopeful and motivated. "I want people to walk away with the power of dreaming and being happy. Change happens by working hard." This is a theme that has no borders. ☺



**Leila Al-Habbal** (leila@alhabbal.net) grew up as an "Aramco brat" in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, went to school at Phillips Exeter Academy and earned a BA in journalism from George Washington University. She now lives in Dhahran and works as a freelance writer and editor specializing in regional social issues.

Province, admits, "It happened to us, just like the movie exactly, and it still happens today, but it all depends on how your family thinks." Similarly, fashion designer Daneh Buahmad, proud aunt of Abdulrahman Al-Gohani, who plays Abdullah in the film, admits that "during some parts of the movie, I was worried what 'the West' would think of us [Saudis], but it is a touching story about a girl and her mother, and I think every woman can relate. It shows a true side of Saudi Arabia and touches on so many issues while revealing a very human side. I had tears rolling down my face, and I think it was the same for many people who watched the movie. I am so proud of Haifaa because she has succeeded to make a movie that happened in Saudi Arabia but tells a story everyone can somehow relate to."

Al Mansour explains that in Saudi Arabia "people wear jeans and teenagers roll their eyes at their parents just like everywhere else. There are so many stories to tell that people don't know." Ahd Kamel, a Saudi film director herself who also acts the role of the coldly pious headmistress, adds, "We are humans. We love and we fear. Saudi Arabia is not black or white. It is a very complex culture with many different ethnic groups and cultural traditions."

With *Wadjda* showing in world cinemas and film festivals and submitted for nomination for an Oscar, is it poignant that it is not showing publicly in Saudi Arabia, where there are no



# Senegal's Shepherds OF TABASKI

Written by JORI LEWIS

Photographed by RICCI SHRYOCK

Video by RICCI SHRYOCK and JORI LEWIS

Yaya Camara still remembers what happened to him in 1988. It was *Tabaski*, what people here in Senegal call 'Id al-Adha—the feast of the sacrifice. Tabaski commemorates Ibrahim's willingness to follow God's order to sacrifice his beloved son Ismail who, when saved from the knife, was replaced on the altar with a ram. Every year, Muslims around the world sacrifice an animal in remembrance.

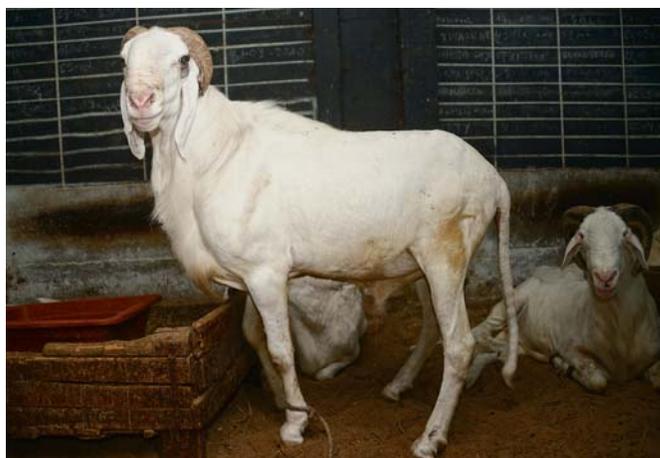
So, in 1988, Yaya Camara bought his sheep a few days before the holiday in the capital city, Dakar. Camara, who then worked as a night-time security guard, went off to work, leaving the animal tied up outside his apartment building in the care of his wife. She fell asleep, though, instead of looking out for the sheep. In the morning, the sheep wasn't there. He asked all the neighbors, "Ana sama khar?" ("Where is my sheep?") But the neighbors hadn't seen anything, or so they said. "There are so many sheep circulating, that you can't tell if the sheep is stolen or not," says Camara. That year his family relied on meat from their neighbors, but he still gets a little sad thinking of it.

After that he learned his lesson: Buy the sheep at the last possible minute—the night before or even the morning of the

holiday. He tells me this when I ask him, a few days before Tabaski, if he has already bought his sheep. The answer is a resounding "no": He'd have nowhere to put it. "You risk spending the night with the sheep in your bedroom," he says.

Still, Camara says, when all goes well and he buys a good sheep for the family, he feels so much pride. "You come in and the wife is going to say, 'Ah, my husband bought a good sheep!' And the children even bring their friends over to show them what kind of sheep their father bought," he says.

In Senegal, a country that is more than 90 percent Muslim, buying that sheep is what every Senegalese family works for in the days leading up to Tabaski. The country becomes gripped by what might be called sheep fever. Colorful billboards adver-





In Dakar, Alioune Badara Dieng is a sheep breeder as well as a plumber, mason, carpenter, fishmonger and, during Tabaski season, a roadside sheep vendor. His business, he says, is bittersweet. “I love them,” he says. “If you sell them today, when you wake up and don’t see them, it does something to you.”

tising everything from margarine to money transfers feature images of sheep or appetizing lamb chops. The phone company sends messages about contests to “win a sheep for Tabaski.” And sheep themselves appear everywhere: riding on the tops of cars and sometimes inside them; grazing in traffic circles and medians; bleating from doorsteps and balconies all over the city.

Mamoudou Ousseynou Sakho is the Senegalese director of livestock and is in charge of the government’s Operation Tabaski, a program to provide enough sheep for each Senegalese household to sacrifice one for the holiday. It is 10 days before the big holiday and Sakho is spending his days fielding calls about the sheep. “Where are they?” is the question on every caller’s mind. “For the moment,



Sheep breeds popular with high-end buyers at Tabaski include, from far left, a mix of *bali-bali* and *touabir*, *azawad* and *ladoum*; the *ladoum* is both the largest and the most expensive.

Senegal is not self-sufficient in sheep,” he explains. They are waiting for the imports from neighboring countries, facilitated by the government’s temporary suspension of import taxes on livestock. “It’s the problem of supply and demand,” says Sakho. Without the imports, nervous observers are watching the sheep stands and worrying about high prices.

At the sheep markets, only a few sellers have the small—but not too small—sheep that are most in demand because they usually sell for a moderate price, between 60,000 and 80,000 francs CFA (the monetary unit of the West African Financial Community), or approximately \$120 to \$160. But at one sheep stand, on a grand boulevard in the middle of the city, the sellers are having none of it. A man swathed in royal blue robes and an indigo turban says that these sheep are going for 110,000 francs CFA (\$220).

Sakho at the Operation Tabaski headquarters hopes that fresh imports and saturation of the sheep market will help bring down the prices. He has just received word that 180,000 sheep are en route to Dakar; the sheep have already crossed the borders of Mauritania and Mali by truck, car and pirogue and will arrive in the next few days. Sakho reassures me that in the next week there will be an explosion of sheep across Dakar and in the other big cities of Senegal. In a few days, everything will be in place.

**A**cross town, it's 10 days before Tabaski and Alioune "Bada" Badara Dieng has already set up his sheep stand. Bada, who has many nicknames, including Cash Money and Beugg Ligeey ("Wants to Work"), also has many jobs—plumber, mason, woodworker, sheet-metal worker, screen printer, merchant (of fish and imported goods) and, finally, during the Tabaski season, sheep seller. He sets up shop on a spot next to the bridge over the canal that moves the city's sewage to the ocean. As the days pass, more sellers arrive with more sheep until most open spaces and boulevards are clogged with them. Wandering street sellers toting Tabaski essentials, like sharp knives and the occasional grill, march back and forth along the canal, searching for customers.

But in the early days, Bada is mayor of the street; everyone calls out to him as they pass by. Bada has an assortment of sheep that he shows off, stepping on a hoof or pulling a tail to get them to stand up. He has a little bit of every breed and an encyclopedic knowledge of the breeds that he is selling. The *peul-peul* is a small local sheep, with no distinguishing features, that sells for a modest price for a modest family; the *touabir* is a thick sheep from Mauritania; the *bali-bali* is known for its long ears and hails from Niger; and the *warale* is a peul-peul and touabir mix, celebrated for its

colorful coat—sometimes white, gray and brown.

He rounds out the collection with a couple of *ladoums*, the Ferrari of the sheep breeds, although his are a little past their prime. Ladoums are an improved variety of touabir sheep and famous for their height and their ability to put on the pounds. One passerby stares at the larger ladoum and says, "He's a champion!" Why? It's in the way the sheep stands, in his size and the shape of his head, the man replies. Bada's price for the champion has been fixed at more than \$1000 and the passerby shakes his head, saying that the price is too hot. It is early, though, so Bada is being picky. "If I don't get the price I want [for the ladoum]," he says, "I'll take it back to the house." At the \$1000 price, Bada is looking for ladoum collectors, not people searching for a sheep to sacrifice for the holiday.

In fact, Bada sells all the other sheep to support his stable of ladoums, who live on the rooftop of a building in the Fann Hock neighborhood and enjoy a panoramic view of Dakar and the Atlantic Ocean beyond. Bada bought his first sheep years ago, after a relative died and left him a small inheritance. Although he was only about 10 years old at the time, Bada decided that he wanted to buy a sheep; his father let him. Working with a friend, he started breeding sheep—first just average run-of-the-mill breeds, then building up to the ladoums. His ladoums are a good size, but still can't compete with the high end of the high end.

That honor goes to someone like Pape Magatte Diop and his brother Ibou, who live just a few blocks away from Bada's sheep stand. They have several stables of ladoums, some on the roof of

**Shepherded south from Mauritania to near Saint Louis in northern Senegal, these sheep are among hundreds of thousands that are imported to Senegal by road and boat in the weeks before Tabaski, when the Senegalese government temporarily suspends livestock import tariffs.**





Also in the weeks leading up to Tabaski, the Khar Bii (sheep competition) scours the country for prize-quality sheep, which can sell for up to 100 times the price of an ordinary sheep. Here, semifinalists await judging in Saint Louis. The winners will go to the finals in Dakar.

the apartment building their family owns and others in a pen in an empty lot next door. Diop claims that his prize sheep, Usain Bolt (named after the famous Jamaican sprinter), is the tallest sheep in Senegal at 113 centimeters (44½"). At the pen, Usain Bolt walks right up to the bar and shoves his face at me; he's used to being petted. Diop bought Usain Bolt last year for more than \$4000 from another breeder. It was worth the investment, he says. "Ladoum sheep, they are the stuff dreams are made of," Diop tells me. Diop's goal is to breed Usain Bolt with his female ladoums and see if he can produce an incomparable sheep—the most beautiful, the tallest, the longest, the fattest and the best sheep in Senegal. Maybe he'll produce a sheep that could compete in the nation's annual televised sheep beauty contest, Khar Bii.

Every year, in the lead-up to Tabaski, the Khar Bii competition scours the country for Senegal's most beautiful sheep. The sheep become famous in their own rights. Last year's winner, a ram named Boy Serere, was so highly prized that one of his offspring (called United Nations) was sold for almost \$16,000.

This year, though, because of a longer than usual rainy season, Khar Bii's search for beautiful sheep in the

far-flung regions of the country has just begun. The weekend before Tabaski, Khar Bii holds a semifinal in the northern city of Saint Louis. In the afternoon, everyone—men and women, old people and children—visit the nine pre-selected contestants. Some people snap photos of the sheep; other people snap photos of themselves with the sheep.

Mas Thiaw, a brown sheep who is unique among a line of white sheep, sticks out. Pape Seck, his handler, stays with him while Khar Bii veterinarians weigh him and measure him before his turn on the catwalk (or sheepwalk). "Raising livestock makes me happy," he says, as he strokes Mas Thiaw's horns. He does it for the love.

In some countries, people buy dogs; in others, people buy sheep. Pape Demba Fall, a geographer at Dakar's Cheikh Anta Diop University who has studied the nation's love affair with sheep, says that the animal has many functions in



# A WORD ON THE *Ladoum*

The origins of the ladoum breed are shrouded in legend.

On the website [ladoum.sn](http://ladoum.sn), an online portal for ladoum aficionados, a creation myth is recounted that involves a herd of ewes that become pregnant after visits from a mystical being in the hills around a Mauritanian village called Fra'ladoum.

In reality, the ladoum is a variety of the touabir, selectively bred over the years to concentrate its best traits: its height, its capacity to grow quickly and certain other physical characteristics like coat and eye color. Veterinarian René Karim Ndiaye says that ladoum breeding, as we know it now, took off in the 1990's with a few dedicated breeders in the city of Thiès, about 70 kilometers (43 mi) east of Dakar.

Ndiaye was, in past years, a judge for the televised Khar Bii sheep competition and is himself a devoted ladoum breeder. "If you give me just the name of a sheep and his owner," he says, "I can tell you who that sheep's mother was and who his father was and his whole genealogy." For Ndiaye, as for many other ladoum lovers, their breeding practice is a passion with a goal: that of creating the super-sheep that can, eventually, also improve Senegal's local sheep varieties.

Senegalese society. "It's an animal that protects you," according to Fall. It protects you economically by functioning as a living savings account that is easy to liquidate in case of sudden financial difficulty or an event like a wedding. Fall says that, culturally, people also see sheep as good luck. "An all-white sheep might protect the household from bad fortune," says Fall, explaining the sheep's role as a mystical protector.

**A handler guides a reluctant ladoum—tallest and largest of Senegal's breeds—out before judges' eyes at the Khar Bii semifinal. In addition to providing cash rewards to breeders, the contest helps improve the nation's ovine bloodlines.**



The ladoum obsession, Fall muses, is a natural, albeit expensive, extension of the centrality of the sheep in Senegalese culture, where many people raise sheep in their homes. In Dakar and other cities, they have to stash the animals in courtyards, on sidewalks, in makeshift pens and on rooftops, but they do it all the same. Sheep eat a lot, too, but even if owners have to pay to feed the animal every day, they might get something out of it eventually. And "eventually" means Tabaski, the day when they kill it and get to eat its meat, grilled with onions and served with a bit of mustard and hot sauce on the side.

That day comes all too soon. The morning of Tabaski dawns and back at Bada's stand on the canal, there is nothing left. All the sheep are gone. It was touch and go for a while, though. Just a couple of days before Tabaski, Bada still had more than 20 sheep at his stand. I saw him negotiate with a woman about a ram for more than an hour, before she finally left—without a sheep.

Bada finally sold his last ram at 4:00 a.m. on the morning of Tabaski. At the end, instead of lowering his prices for the smallest and skinniest sheep, he raised them; buyers, panicked by the late hour, accepted.

A few hours later, steady streams of children lead their sheep to the ocean for one last bath. The neighborhood tailors are still hard at work on the women's outfits for the day, but most of the men have started to put on their colorful *grands boubous* in brilliant white and jewel tones with intricate embroidery. The sheep clog the sidewalks and the alleyways behind the houses, ignorant of their fate.

At Bada's house, there are three sheep and one goat waiting. Bada gave his father a stocky ram with brown spots to sacrifice, not a ladoum but a good-sized animal all the same. Soon, the men of the house go to the mosque; the women stay behind mincing bowls of onions and pounding garlic with mortars and pestles.

After prayers, Bada's father changes out of his big white boubou into old pants and a tattered shirt. It takes four or five people to subdue the biggest ram and turn it on its side while Bada's father cuts its throat. The blood spills out onto the sand, a bright red. Eventually, there is a final gasp, a convulsion, a death rattle and it's done. The





Early in the morning of Tabaski, boys and men bring sheep to Yoff Beach in Dakar to wash the sheep before morning prayers, the sacrificing of the sheep and the cooking of family festive meals.

family dispatches all four animals in the space of 10 minutes, and then all the men and most of the boys start peeling off the skins, taking out the organs and butchering the animals. The women fire up the grills.

They will use everything: all the meat, the heart and liver, the brain and lungs, even the intestines, once they clean them well. The hooves and head can flavor a soup. Artisans troll for the horns and the skins, to make furniture and leather shoes and bags. The ram's vocal cords are left to hang over the door for good luck. And beggars go house to house and get a little meat from most families.

Every house in the neighborhood is doing the same thing. Across the bridge, at the house of a rich merchant, they sacrifice eight sheep, all large ladoums. Samba Sarr lives in that house and tells me that Tabaski meat has a special flavor. "It's not at all the same," he says. "I can't explain it, but it's better than regular meat. Maybe it's something spiritual."

Maybe it is that something that transforms the animal from man's best friend to man's best meal. After all, when the ram is sacrificed, it is killed with reverence and shared among family and friends. And, everyone, rich or poor, eats well for at least one day on Tabaski. 🌐



**Jori Lewis** ([www.jorilewis.com](http://www.jorilewis.com)) is an independent writer and a radio journalist based, mostly, in Dakar, Senegal. She writes about food, the environment and agriculture in Africa.

**Ricci Shryock** ([www.riccimedia.com](http://www.riccimedia.com)) is a photo and video journalist based in Dakar, Senegal. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and more. This is her first assignment for *Saudi Aramco World*.



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'Id al-Adha: N/D 03, M/J 02, J/F 02, M/A 92  
Senegal: J/F 97, M/A 90



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# PIETRO della Valle

## *Pilgrim of Curiosity*

Written by CAROLINE STONE

The Italian book-collector, linguist and avid correspondent Pietro della Valle is one of the most important, yet least known, Middle Eastern travelers of the 17th century. In spite of his very active contribution to western knowledge of the Islamic world and his romantic personal history, he has been relatively ignored, largely because there has never been a standard, easily available edition of his voluminous letters in either Italian or English. Tracing his travels from Turkey to Egypt, the Levant, Persia and the west coast of India, his writings run to more than a million words.



Pietro della Valle spent a dozen years, from 1614 to 1626, traveling in the East. His detailed letters from the journey, meant to inform his compatriots about little-known lands, were published in three volumes in 1650, 1658 and 1663.

Della Valle's great value lies in his lively, detailed descriptions and his ceaseless curiosity: He really was interested in everything. Where possible, he compared what he saw with earlier accounts, both classical and those of such travelers as the French naturalist Pierre Belon (1517–1564), as well as information gleaned from the Turkish, Persian and Arabic texts to which he had access.

In addition to recording what he found, he exhibited a healthy skepticism about what he learned secondhand, noting, "I was told this, but have no way of establishing whether or not it is true," or "I tried to find out more about this, but could find no one whose information seemed at all reliable."

He collected books, plants and information of all kinds and even took along an artist to record his travels. He wished to give his compatriots a clear idea of eastern lands, for both mercantile and diplomatic reasons, although his own interests were largely intellectual. Unfortunately, none of the numerous sketches and paintings he mentions has survived.

Della Valle was born in 1586 to a wealthy, aristocratic Roman family. In his mid-20's, he joined a Spanish naval expedition against corsairs on the coast of North Africa. After that, disappointed in love, he moved to Naples where, depressed to the point of considering suicide, he was advised by his close friend and physician, Mario Schipano, to travel.

He determined, therefore, to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. To give his journey more point, della Valle planned to send back detailed letters to his friend, who would, he wrote, "extract a clear

and well-composed account of my entire pilgrimage." That, in fact, Schipano failed to do, but della Valle completed his part of the bargain—and much more. He returned home a dozen adventurous years after setting off, and *il Pellegrino* ("the pilgrim"), as he was often called, published one volume of his letters during his lifetime, while two more appeared posthumously.

Della Valle embarked for the Holy Land in June 1614, sailing from Venice to Constantinople (today's Istanbul). In the Ottoman capital, he made a point of seeing not only monuments, but also events ranging from the *bayram* festivities marking the end of Ramadan, with features like swings and *'ajalaat*, an early version of the Ferris wheel, to the military parades that took place as Sultan Ahmad I and his troops marched out against Persia's Shah Abbas I. Then, to gain a better understanding of what he would see on his travels, he stayed in Constantinople for a year, studying Turkish, Arabic and Persian and, for academic purposes, Hebrew.

"Much to my annoyance," he reported in February 1615, "for more than two months my Turkish language teacher ... has abandoned me, because he has been busy with his own affairs, but now he has returned to giving me lessons, at which I am delighted and am studying like a mad dog, and to good purpose."

In Constantinople, della Valle also began trying to acquire texts, both for Schipano, a competent Arabic scholar, and for

himself, ultimately building the core of a fine library.

He sailed to Alexandria, Egypt, in September 1615. In a letter from Cairo dated January 25, 1616, he described his sightseeing, remarking on the beauty of Mamluk architecture, especially the tombs at al-'Arafa, the famous City of the Dead. Naturally, he visited the Pyramids, making an exhausting exploration of the inside passages of the Great Pyramid.

Della Valle was very keen to acquire an intact mummy to bring back to Italy. Examples were not easy to find, for they were often looted of their jewelry and then ground up, since the resulting powder, called *mummi*a, was believed to have medicinal properties. Typically, he wanted to see exactly how mummies were excavated and even went down into the pit himself. His account of this activity is fascinating, as are his descriptions of the finds.

It is again typical of della Valle that he paid attention to everyday life, as well as the great tourist sites. He noted that some houses had paintings and inscriptions on the walls indicating that the owner had been on the Hajj. Having a very Italian interest in clothes, he described not only the costume of the upper classes, but also the blue *jellabas* worn by peasants of both sexes—a very long, wide-sleeved robe, which sounds like the *thobe* still worn by certain settled Bedouin groups in the Bethlehem region—and the various ways of wrapping a turban.

Della Valle described his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where he spent Easter and where, although very devout, he exhibits a certain skepticism about some of the celebrations. Then he traveled north to Damascus, where he was delighted to find several rare Samaritan manuscripts, including one with explanatory notes in Arabic. He wrote to Schipano from Aleppo to give him the good news and debated the best way to ensure that his collection was made available for its prime purpose: to spread knowledge.

From Syria, della Valle decided to journey to Persia via Baghdad, for he was very curious to meet Shah Abbas, who had been engaged in diplomatic discussions with European rulers about trade and about containing Ottoman imperial ambitions. With his usual energy, he explained how he had special cases built to transport his kitchen equipment easily by camel and protect the contents if dropped. In addition, he ordered

special containers to “give the water a very pleasant smell and taste and even keep it cool.” Everything was to have a “most elegant” look. Finally, on September 16, 1616, he shaved his head, donned a turban and dressed himself and his retinue “in the Syrian manner so as not to be recognized” and departed.

In Iraq, he gave a long description of the Bedouin way of life, noting that the women did not cover their faces. He was also fascinated by the Bedouins’ tattoos and apparently even got one himself—something exceedingly daring for a Roman gentleman at that date. Indeed, he liked to wear local dress, both for convenience and to experience different fashions. However, he was very annoyed when his fine Italian underwear was stolen, though relieved that the thieves had not gone for his books and papers.

Della Valle was much impressed by the desert guides. They “have a mental image of every place, the water sources, the various roads, both long and short,” he wrote. “At night they observe the stars, but by day they go by land marks, noting whether it goes up or down, the color, the kinds of plants that grow there and—and at this I really marvelled—the smell, so that they easily find whatever roads they wish.” All the more remarkable, the guides always led the caravan directly to wells

*Della Valle was much impressed by his desert guides. They “have a mental image of every place, the water sources, the various roads, both long and short.”*

**Della Valle was thrilled by the Pyramids of Giza when he first saw them in 1615, and he spent a great deal of time and effort exploring the Great Pyramid himself. This engraving is from *Les Six Voyages de Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*, published in 1676, six decades after della Valle’s visit.**



when they were needed, even though they had no parapets and were completely invisible at a distance.

He traveled through the territory of the powerful and famous Amir Fayyad who, to della Valle's surprise and pleasure, maintained such control of his domains that caravans could cross the desert in reasonable safety. Describing him and his lands, della Valle added: "... this Emir claims to be able to show his unbroken descent from Noah, something which I find hard to believe but, if true, would be a nobility possibly without equal in this world. Certainly, I am of the opinion that if any nation can boast of a true and ancient nobility of lineage over a long period of years, it is indeed that of the Arabs, in spite of the rough life they lead in the desert, firstly because they live free, which is a very important point—and this is the sole reason why they do not wish to be subjected to life in cities—and then also because since the beginning of the world they have never mixed with any other nation but always marry among themselves, not only among equals, but almost always with those of the same blood."

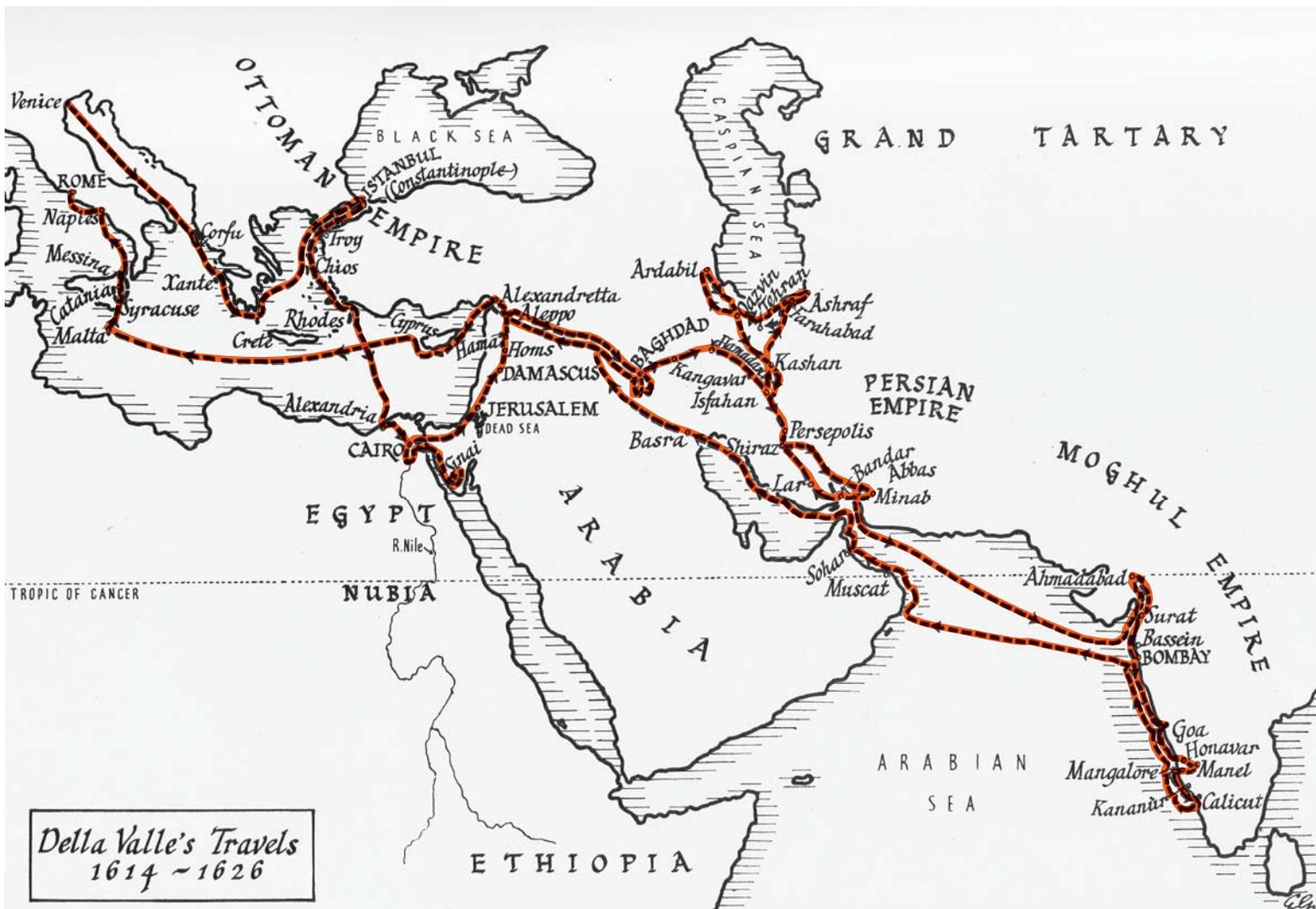
As always when traveling, della Valle visited every archeological site he could. He described the ruins, for example, at "Isrijuh" and "al-Taijbeh" (Isriyah and al-Taybah) in the desert on the way from

Aleppo to Baghdad, as well as what he believed to be the Tower of Babel. His tendency to compare places to sites in Italy that would have been familiar to Schipano and his potential readers may seem a little parochial, but in fact "larger than Piazza Navona" in Rome or "ruins higher than the tallest palace in Naples" give a useful order of magnitude for monuments that no longer exist.

At Ur and Ctesiphon, he noted that he picked up pieces of tile, brick and samples of bitumen—to the amusement of the locals, "who do not understand our taste for such curiosities." He also pointed out that Baghdad was obviously not ancient Babylon, as was commonly believed, "for one can see clearly from ... the architecture, the Arabic inscriptions in numerous places, carved or moulded in stucco ... that this is modern construction and, without the slightest doubt, Muslim...." He added that he hoped his Arabic would soon be good enough to check what he has been told against the Arab histories.

On della Valle's arrival in Baghdad, disaster struck: One of his Italian servants killed the other in a stupid brawl over precedence, and della Valle described in detail the maneuvering necessary to prevent his entire household from being arrested. On the other hand, it was in Baghdad that perhaps the most important event

Della Valle traveled several thousand kilometers, as shown in this 1953 map from William Blunt's *Pietro's Pilgrimage: A Journey to India and Back at the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century*. His first stop was in Constantinople (Istanbul), where he spent a year studying Turkish, Arabic, Persian and Hebrew.



Voici le plan de la ville de Bagdat, dont le tour, tant par terre que par eau, se fait en deux heures.

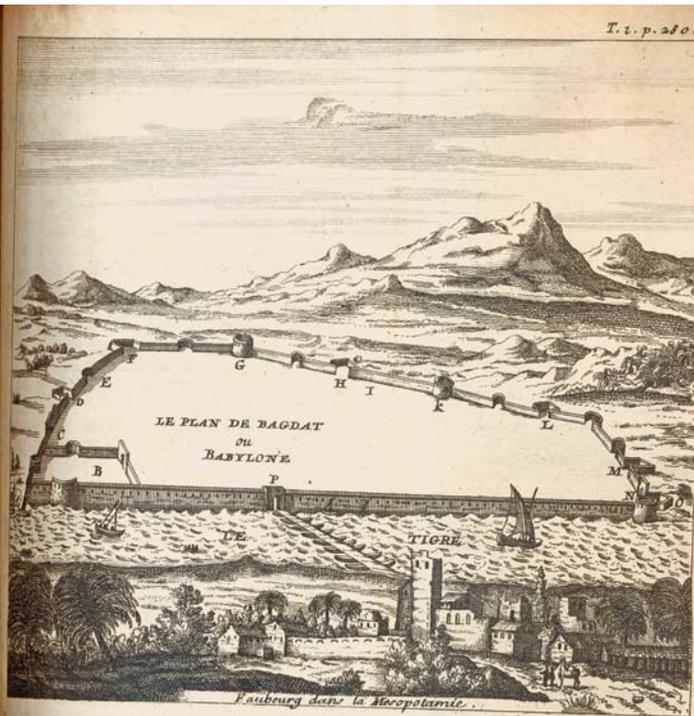
## Le plan de la Ville.

- B. La Forteresse.
- C. Porte appellée Maazan-capi.
- D. Le boulevard neuf.
- E. L'endroit où le Grand-Seigneur Amurat dressa sa premiere baterie, lors qu'il assiegea Bagdat en 1638.
- F. Vieux boulevard.
- G. Porte murée.
- H. Vieux boulevard.
- I. L'endroit où le même Amurat dressa sa seconde baterie qui fit la brèche quand il prit la ville.
- K. Porte murée.
- L. Vieux boulevard.
- M. Vieux boulevard.
- N. Cara-capi, ou la porte noire.
- O. Vieux boulevard.
- P. Sou-capi, ou la porte de l'eau.

## CHAPITRE VIII.

Suite de la même route depuis Bagdat jusqu'à Balsara, où il est parlé de la Religion des chrétiens de saint Jean.

Le quinziesme de Mars nous primes une barque pour descendre sur le Tigre de Bagdat à Balsara. Ce fleuve au dessous de Bagdat fait deux bras, dont l'un court le



Tavernier's engraving of 17th-century Baghdad, alongside the Tigris River, may resemble what Pietro della Valle saw as he approached the city in 1616. It was here that della Valle met his "Babylonian love," Ma'ani, whom he married.

Della Valle wrote that Ma'ani dressed in the Syrian manner—although she very much liked the idea of Italian fashion—and covered her head "as the Bedouin women do ... a similar effect to the veils of our nuns, or Spanish widows...." He admitted that some things about her seemed a little barbarous, such as wearing a nose ring, and said he persuaded her to remove it, although her sisters refused.

Della Valle concluded this long missive, dated December 16 and 23, 1616 (many of his letters are in the form of a diary, written over several

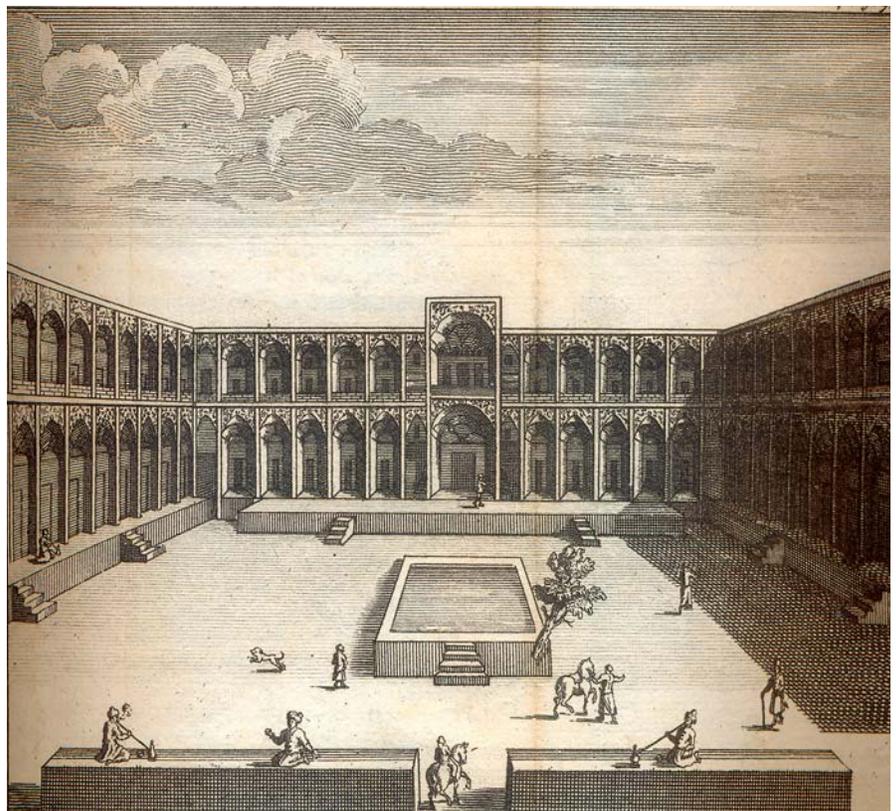
of his life took place: He announced, quite out of the blue, that he was married to his "Babylonian love," a girl named Ma'ani—"an Arabic word meaning 'significance' or 'intelligence'...."

The story was a romantic one. He had heard of Ma'ani on the journey from Aleppo and decided that he had to meet her. A mutual acquaintance provided an introduction. Her parents welcomed him with the warmest hospitality, helping him establish himself and his suite in appropriate lodgings. Before she ever saw him, Ma'ani dreamed of him, and at their first meeting she handed him a quince, a ritual wedding offering in Greece and across the Levant since classical times. On both sides, it was love at first sight.

"Although it is not well seen for husbands to exaggerate their wives' beauty," wrote della Valle, he could not resist describing Ma'ani at length, even explaining how her eyes were elongated with kohl. He described her as of excellent family, Christian, born in Mardin, Turkey, her mother Armenian, and "Arabic is her native tongue, but she also speaks Turkish well, as she usually does with me, since I still only know a little Arabic...." He went on to say how much he appreciated her intelligence and high spirits—and fearlessness. Even when under attack by bandits, she preferred to stay and watch, guarding the men's coats and bundles, rather than flee.

Della Valle and his entourage would have stayed in a khan like this during their travels from city to city.

days or weeks), with the wish that Schipano should start editing his letters, because he hoped that before long they would be able to sit down together and put the finishing touches to them, since he planned to return shortly, as soon as he had visited Isfahan.





Isfahan was undergoing extensive reconstruction under the eye of Shah Abbas I when della Valle visited in 1617. He had long wished to see the city, but his greatest interest was in meeting Shah Abbas himself.

After Christmas, the young couple left for Iran. “I set about changing my clothes from Syrian to Persian,” della Valle wrote. He also found a country barber to shave off the beard he had cultivated during the previous 16 months. “I wanted him to make me look completely Persian, in other words with cheek and chin shaved and with long moustaches...,” he noted. Ma’ani was “heartbroken” when she saw him, and was only placated when he explained that when “traveling to different countries, it was necessary to adapt to different customs.”

Three months later, they were in Isfahan, the city that della Valle had so wanted to visit and which Shah Abbas was in the process of remodeling with the great mosques and monuments that can be seen today. He described the place and its inhabitants in detail; he was particularly struck by the great variety of people and their customs, especially the Indian community and the Christian quarter at New Julfa. This had been established by Shah Abbas for the Armenians whom he had forcibly deported from their country, largely in the hopes that they would stimulate the economy through manufacturing and trade. Della Valle described the terrible suffering they endured along the way, although conditions when they actually reached New Julfa were generally good.

At Isfahan, della Valle met a number of interesting people, including scholars of various nationalities. Among them was Muhammad Qasim ibn Hajji Muhammad Kashani, known as Susuri, who later sent him a copy of his encyclopedic dictionary, the *Majma’ al-Furs Susuri*, on its completion in 1626. Dedicated to Shah Abbas, this was a standard reference work for much of the 17th century. It must have

been of particular interest to della Valle, who was working on his Turkish dictionary at the time. Unlike a number of his other projects, this was completed and prepared for the press, although it was never published. He was also interested in religion, and a copy of a letter to him from “Mir Muhammad el Vehabi [al-Wahabi], a nobleman of Isfahan,” continuing their earlier discussion on religious topics, survives.

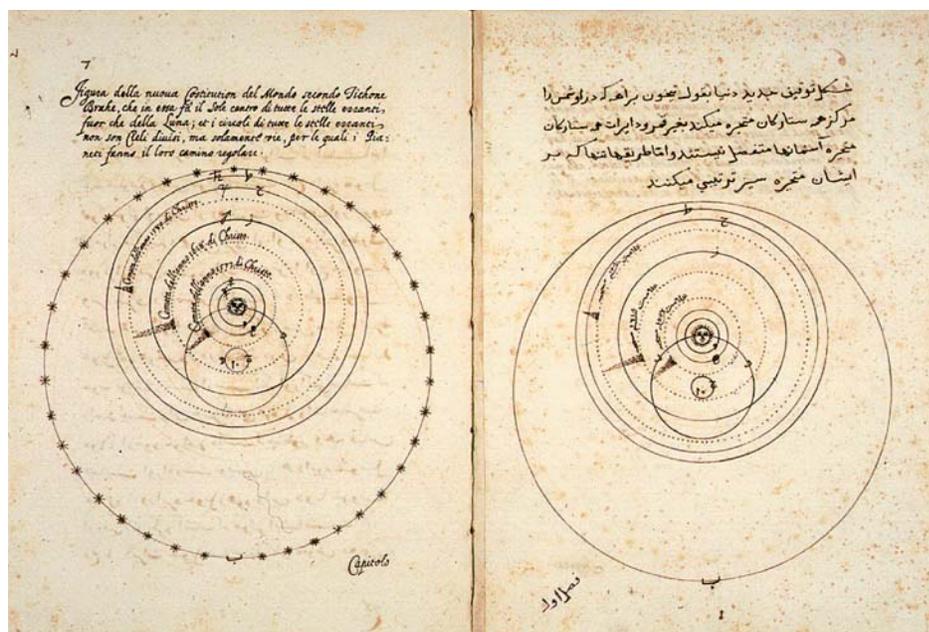
As Shah Abbas traveled about his kingdom, della Valle followed him. Their meetings and conversations shed a rare, unofficial light on being entertained by that monarch.

At Qazwin, in the winter of 1618, Shah Abbas met with foreign ambassadors, and della Valle set out to gather as much information as he could. He considered the Russians very uncouth, but he was fascinated by the menagerie brought as a gift by the Indian ambassador. The elderly Spanish ambassador, Don Garcia da Silva y Figueroa, also attended, and his diaries offer an interesting complement to della Valle’s account.

The gathering broke up and della Valle, though ill, managed to make his way back to Isfahan with Ma’ani, arriving in December. There, they met some of her family, including her parents, who had come on a visit. For the first time, della Valle mentioned Mariuccia, a Georgian girl, about eight years old, orphaned at the time of the Persian conquest of Georgia, whom Ma’ani had adopted, perhaps partly as consolation for not yet having a child.

In June 1619, there was another great conclave of ambassadors, and della Valle gave a vivid, often amusing, account of the festivities, including those organized for the ladies, of which Ma’ani provided a full report. We learn, too, how in the evening the shah wandered about the town visiting coffeehouses and

Della Valle’s treatise on the heliocentric cosmology of Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, written in Italian and Persian, included Brahe’s model of the solar system. Della Valle wrote the paper in Goa for a scholar he had met in Lar, Persia.



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## ACADEMIC *Bridge-Building*

After the death of his wife, Ma'ani, in 1620, Pietro della Valle stopped at Lar on his way to Hormuz. There, a doctor named Abul-Fath cared for him and cheered him by introducing him to his own intellectual circle, composed of *qadis* [judges], academics, a prosperous merchant trading with the Portuguese and several mathematicians and astronomers, including one named Zayn al-Din.

Della Valle appreciated their discussions. Zayn al-Din, for whom he had great respect, was passionately interested in scholarly developments in Europe, especially in mathematics and astronomy. Indeed, he wanted to learn Latin so he could have access to the latest research; della Valle invited him to Italy and promised to send books on his return.

In fact, he went one better. At Goa, he wrote a treatise in Persian for Zayn al-Din on the most recent thought concerning the heliocentric cosmology of Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, considered in the West to be the greatest astronomer of the age.

This was no easy task. Much of the information came from Christopher Borrus, a mathematician and astronomer from Milan who had written a book on the subject, which was unfortunately lost at sea as he traveled to India from Siam. Della Valle therefore had to reconstruct the theory from notes taken in conversation with Borrus.

He was also very concerned about his ignorance of accurate technical terms in Arabic and Persian, so he added Latin glosses where he was unsure and exhorted Zayn al-Din to find a learned foreigner, or possibly a member of the Jewish community—Lar was known as a center of learning—who might be able to help perfect the translation.

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of Hormuz at the southern end of the Arabian Gulf, making that route uncertain and dangerous. Nevertheless, they set out.

On the way, they stopped at Persepolis, which, as usual, della Valle described in detail, though not always accurately, for he was in an uncharacteristic hurry.

From Persepolis, they journeyed to Shiraz and then headed for the coast. They were in high spirits, for Ma'ani at last was pregnant, when news came that hostilities had begun around Hormuz, where they were hoping to embark for Europe via India.

They decided to wait at nearby Minab, where there was a group of English merchants, one of them an old friend of della Valle's, and see what developed. The place, however, proved unhealthy. Mariuccia fell ill first, followed one by one by all the party, and on December 30 his beloved Ma'ani died. She was 23 years old.

Della Valle hardly knew what to do next. He felt he could not bear to leave Ma'ani in such a place and had her embalmed—something the local women were, surprisingly, competent to do—and sealed in a coffin to take with him for burial in Italy. Then, very ill himself, he and his entourage continued on their way. He said he remembered almost nothing of the journey until a month after Ma'ani's death, when he reached Lar, nearly 300 kilometers (180 mi) to the west, and collapsed. There, he slowly recovered under the care of an exceptionally competent doctor and in the companionship of his erudite friends. "Nowhere," he wrote, "that I have been in Asia, in fact nowhere in the whole world, have I found as many learned men and distinguished scientists as at Lar."

shops, including that of an Italian art dealer who sold, among other things, "portraits of the kind they sell for a crown at Piazza Navona..., but which here cost ten sequins and are considered cheap at the price." A crown (*coronato*) was a Neapolitan silver coin and a sequin (a Venetian *zechinno*) was a gold coin weighing about 3.5 grams, so the markup was substantial.

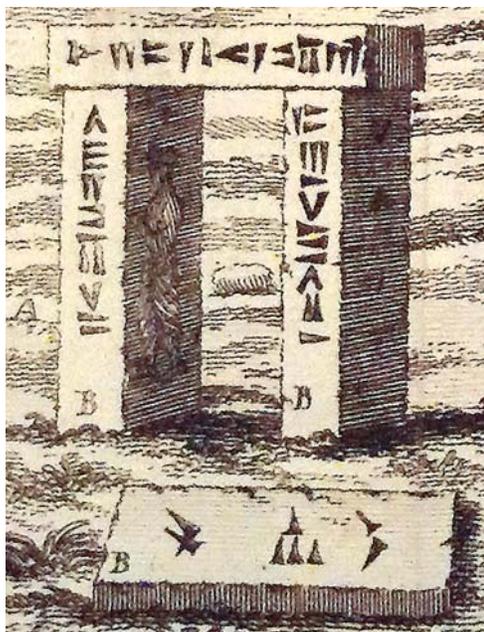
Lingering in Isfahan, Della Valle covered innumerable topics, from serious to more frivolous: his growing taste for the local cuisine and how he will readapt to food at home; the different techniques for storing ice; and his plans to export Persian cats, of which he kept a great number, to Italy. His descriptions are scattered with Arabic and Persian words, especially technical terms and dialect expressions, meant for Schipano, but still of interest today.

*In the evening the shah wandered around Isfahan visiting coffeehouses and shops, including that of an Italian art dealer.*

One thing among many others is striking at this date: the efficiency of the mail system across the Islamic world. It is difficult to determine the exact number of della Valle's letters to Schipano, given his habit of writing diary letters and sometimes beginning and ending sections with greetings, but it appears there were at least 36. Of his missives, only one is missing and that was lost by Schipano himself. Conversely, when della Valle complained that he had received letters from Venice, Sicily, France, Spain, Constantinople, Baghdad and India, but none from his friend, that was because Schipano had not written for more than two years, not because of a failure of the postal service.

Ma'ani's family wanted to return to Baghdad. Della Valle's health was bad, affected by the bitter winter of 1620–1621, believed to have been the coldest since 1232, and his thoughts likewise turned to home. International politics, however, affected his plans. The war between Persia and Turkey meant the Aleppo route was blocked, so he and a number of other Europeans were effectively trapped.

Furthermore, Persia had joined with the British to drive the Portuguese out



En route from Isfahan to Hormuz on the coast in 1621, della Valle stopped at Persepolis, copying and later publishing the first cuneiform inscriptions to be seen in Europe. He correctly deduced that the writing was read from left to right, but could not decipher it.

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## BOOK *Collecting*

Throughout his travels, Pietro della Valle was very keen to collect books and manuscripts—as well as antiques and curiosities, as was the fashion of the time. The books were for his own use, and for his friend Dr. Mario Schipano—a scholar of Greek and Arabic who was eager to expand his collection, particularly of scientific texts—and also to increase the knowledge of the Muslim world available to his compatriots.

With this in mind, della Valle set out to track down specific titles, and to buy books in general, wherever he was. Learning a language such as Arabic without dictionaries or standard texts was formidably difficult, and this explains della Valle's delight at finding an excellent dictionary still in use today.

Della Valle was well connected and rich, and he traveled in the style expected of a nobleman. This undoubtedly made his life much easier as he went east and also gave him the opportunity to meet many of the important people in the cities he visited. His wealth and status also allowed him to buy what he wanted—and it is remarkable that in all his travels he never seems to have had problems receiving money. This speaks very highly for the international banking system of the time, which was largely in the hands of Armenian merchants.

### **Constantinople: Arabic, Turkish and Persian Manuscripts**

Della Valle wrote from Istanbul on September 4, 1615: "...I will tell you about the Arabic books which you asked me to find. I already have the Mircat, and furthermore the Mirah with the Izzi and Macsud in one volume and in another the Bina emthelesi. I will add to this, although you have not written to me about it, another which I have heard will be coming up for sale and which is called, if I remember aright, Siga emthelesi. All these, from the Mirah on, I have as plain texts without commentaries, which I understand come in a separate volume.... I don't have it yet, but

it is being looked for and I will have it soon, as likewise all the others that you have told me about, if they can be found.

"Let me also tell you that the Camus which you have praised so highly, saying that if I would bring a copy to Italy, I would be bearing a treasure of the Arabic language, has also been sought out. The Turks tell me that in all Constantinople there are only four or five of the most learned men who have a good knowledge of this book, which means there are very few copies. However, I did not lose hope and went on having it searched for and finally I have found a copy written on Persian silk, in the most beautiful calligraphy, a very accurate text [which is rare among Turkish books], well bound with a most attractive cover, all in one volume, although it is usually in four, with illuminations in gold and similar decorations. And both from its perfection and its reputation, I consider it certain that this book belonged to Nasuh Pasha the First Vizier, who brought it from those parts toward Persia where they write

*Della Valle's wealth and status allowed him to buy what he wanted, and he never seems to have had problems receiving money ... which speaks very highly of the banking system of the time.*

much better than here. But after the said Nasuh was put to death, as I told you, this book ... ended up in the Bezistan. It was offered to a secondhand dealer who bought it and I, who was hunting for it, saw it in his hands. Now! To finish with this: I bought it and got it for a good price, since it did not cost more than 25 gold sequins.... I have it at home in my chest, wrapped in a good covering, as it well deserves."

On the following day he added:

"...Today, I need to tell you more, since my teacher has brought me many Arabic books which are for sale to show me, namely a Giami, which I think has a commentary by Kafia and two authors annotated by Mirah, one of whom is called Dineuz and I don't remember the other one. He also brought me a book on medicine by a Turkish author who I think is called Sinan Ben...."

Unfortunately, Mario Schipano's

considerable library was sold after his death, and it is not known exactly what it contained. However, he would surely have been pleased that his native city was to host the first school of Oriental studies in Europe: The Università degli Studi di Napoli "l'Orientale," formally founded in 1732.

### **Damascus: Samaritan Manuscripts**

In a letter written at Damascus and Aleppo, dated June 15, 1616, della Valle described his delight at finding some very rare Samaritan manuscripts, one of them with glosses in Arabic, for sale. He described them in detail and explained that he sent one to his friend the French ambassador at Constantinople, who was very eager to have a copy, so that it could be studied and eventually published in Paris. He decided to keep the others, including the most precious one,

"...although that is not what I had originally intended, for it to be an ornament among the other foreign books in my little library.... I am sure

there is nothing like it in Italy, perhaps not even in the Vatican Library. Some people have advised me to give it to the Vatican Library as a rarity, but I, above all because it is rare, have decided, thinking it best, to keep it with me during my lifetime, not least because few

have access to the Vatican Library and among such a multitude of books it would in a certain sense be buried and almost unknown. In my hands, however, it would be constantly on view to the public benefit of every scholar who wishes to make use of it and study it .... But I also want to have it published, if I can ever find someone to make a good translation into Latin to go with it, for without that I feel that printing it would not be of much use...."

After a number of efforts, della Valle gave up the project of having the Samaritan manuscript printed in Rome and sent it to his friend Giovanni Morin in Paris, where it was published. Morin later returned it to him, and it eventually ended up in the Vatican Library after all, along with more than 80 of della Valle's other manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, donated by one of his grandsons long after his death.

[The books mentioned above are identified online at [www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com)]



Above: The coat of arms created for Ma'ani della Valle, who died in Minab, near Hormuz, in 1621 at the age of 23, opens the memorial volume produced for her funeral in Rome in 1626. The inscription, in Syriac, reads "The servant / of God / Ma'ani." Right: Ma'ani is portrayed in this edition of della Valle's travels published in 1982 in Baghdad.

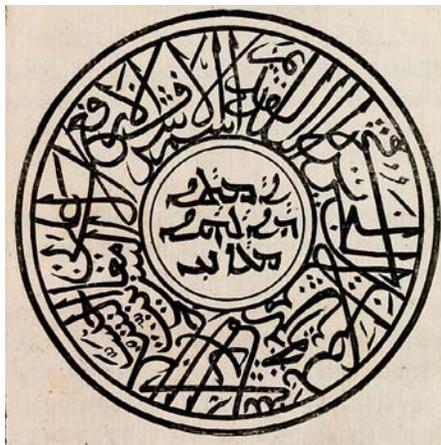
Some months later, della Valle found himself again at Shiraz and at last, in the winter of 1623–1624, he and 12-year-old Mariuccia set out for India. Della Valle's letters are largely concerned with his experiences in Goa, but there are also some very interesting and unusual accounts of the smaller kingdoms to the south, between Goa and Calicut. Even there, he hunted for manuscripts and managed to add a palm-leaf book and the stylus used for engraving it to his collection, as well as an accurate description of the production process.

He did not have much opportunity to travel in the Mughal regions of India, and what he did tell added little to the much fuller accounts of other travelers. At Goa, however, he continued to correspond with his learned friends at Lar and Isfahan, and worked on various literary projects.

On November 4, 1624, della Valle wrote his final letter to Schipano from India and on December 17 he set out for Basra via Muscat. After pausing at Naples to stay with Schipano, at last, on April 4, 1626, he arrived back in Rome. With his usual sense of drama, he wrote that he entered his house by the back door, "as is fitting for a widower."

Della Valle lived out the rest of his life in Rome, en-

The seal of Ma'ani della Valle, which appears in her multilingual memorial volume, repeats the Syriac wording on her coat of arms.



الست معاني جوريدة البغدادية

كانت مترددة لا تعلم بماذا تحبب اما انا فاعتبرت جوابها على ما فيه من تردد وغموض قبولا فشكرتها واعتبرتها حماتي في الحال فمقت وعانقتها وقبلت جبينها لكن الامر لم ينته عند هذا الحد وكان لا بد من اخذ ورد فبالرغم من اطلاعهم على حالتي المالية ومكانتي الاجتماعية من الاخبار التي وردتهم من حلب مصحوبة بوثائق من تفاسل الدول الاوربية، اضافة الى شهادات الكثيرين من الذين اتصلوا بي في بغداد نفسها، وكانت لهم مكانتهم المرموقة، وشهادة الرجل الذي كلمني عن معاني اذ كانت اسرتها على اتصال به وتفق بكلامه بالرغم من كونه ايطالياً..

gaged in a variety of intellectual and musical activities, and remained in correspondence with major oriental scholars, east and west. Signora Ma'ani was buried in the Church of the Ara Coeli, and when Mariuccia—whom Ma'ani had entrusted to della Valle on her deathbed—had reached a suitable age, he married her. They had 14 children.

The first volume of della Valle's letters was published in 1650 and, after he died in 1652, four of his sons brought out the remaining two volumes in 1658 and 1663. They were quickly translated into French, German and Dutch, and partially into English, and came to be considered, as *il Pellegrino* had wished, a major source of information on the Muslim world. 🌐



**Caroline Stone** divides her time between Cambridge and Seville. Her latest book is *The Curious and Amazing Adventures of Maria ter Meetelen: Twelve Years a Slave (1731–43)*, translated with Karen Johnson and published by Hardinge Simpole in 2011.

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Henry Maundrell: J/A 64

# The SPICE ROUTES ON A PLATE



WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY FELICIA CAMPBELL

A FEW MONTHS AGO, I KNEW CLOSE TO NOTHING ABOUT THE COUNTRY EAST OF YEMEN AND SAUDI ARABIA, SOUTH OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES AND ACROSS THE GULF FROM IRAN. I'D TRAVELED AND STUDIED FOOD CULTURE THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST, AND I KNEW MUCH ABOUT ITS NEIGHBORS, BUT I COULDN'T IMAGINE WHAT OMAN LOOKED LIKE, SOUNDED LIKE OR—ESPECIALLY—WHAT IT TASTED LIKE. I BEGAN DIGGING, DISCOVERING OMAN'S HISTORY AS AN INTERNATIONAL TRADING EMPIRE AND, SOON AFTER, ITS CUISINE, RICH WITH MILLENNIA OF FUSIONS, SULTRY SPICES AND FLAVORS, UNLIKE ANYTHING ELSE I HAD ENCOUNTERED IN MY TRAVELS.





**T**he story of modern Oman is not much older than I am, beginning as it did in 1971 with the ascent to power of Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id, but the story of Oman as an empire, with Muscat as its hub, is thousands of years old. Since the sixth century BCE, Muscat's strategic position, at the intersection of maritime routes to India and Asia and overland caravan routes to the Eastern Mediterranean, made Muscat not merely powerful but also coveted. The Portuguese, on their way to India, mounted a bloody invasion in 1507 and achieved complete conquest in 1514. The Ottoman navy and the Persians fought alongside the Omanis in an uprising in 1546, but the Portuguese maintained their supremacy until 1650, when they were expelled by Sultan bin Saif al-Arubi. The Ya'arubid Dynasty also expanded the Omani empire to East Africa by taking over the Portuguese garrison of Fort Jesus in Mombasa in 1698 and expelling the Portuguese from the rest of the coast in what is today Mozambique and Zanzibar. A civil war in 1718 weakened the empire, and Oman came under Persian rule for less than a decade, but by 1749, Ahmad ibn Sa'id, the governor of Suhar, drove them out too, and was elected Imam. Sa'id went on to establish the hereditary sultanate that continues today.

The 18th-century sultans continued to expand the empire by establishing trading ports in Persia and along the Makran coast, in what is now Pakistan. By the early 19th century, Oman had become the most powerful state in Arabia. Trade flourished from the Far East to the British Isles.

But in 1856, when Sultan Sa'id bin Sultan Al-Busaid died, conflict broke out over his succession. His two sons divided the state, one ruling the East African holdings from Zanzibar and the other ruling Muscat and Arabian Oman. In the early 20th century, the former empire was further weakened by rebellions in the interior; separatist revolts followed in the 1960's, fueled by a poor economy and the unpopular social and economic restrictions of Sultan Sa'id bin Taymur.

In July 1970, Sa'id bin Taymur's son, Qaboos bin Sa'id, overthrew his father in a bloodless palace coup. The new sultan established a

modern monarchy, and appointed a cabinet and an elected consultative council. He began an aggressive modernization campaign, building public schools, roads, hospitals and clinics and opening opportunities for economic growth. The last 40 years have been prosperous, and yet the need to preserve Omani culture and art has been recognized.

As a result, the skyline of modern Muscat could not be more distinct from those of the capitals of other Gulf states. Muscat's buildings uniformly gleam white or reflect a tawny sand color, with no steel-and-glass, and none more than six stories high.

The sense of history and esthetics carries over into fashion, as all male government employees dress in the *dishdashab*, the Omani style of the long white robe worn throughout the Gulf region. Many—but not all—wear a single tassel hanging off the right side of their collars and round, colorfully embroidered hats atop their heads. Women walk and shop in a mix of black *abayas* and blue jeans. The national ethnic mix is apparent immediately, too: At any given table, a dark black Omani might be sitting with two countrymen who appear South Asian or Persian. The calm streets, quietly buzzing with conversation and laughter, are enough to make anyone feel relaxed—and hungry. Though restaurants

**None taller than six stories, Muscat's white, neotraditional buildings give its downtown a feeling that visitors and residents alike find pleasant for strolling, shopping—and eating.**



Left, from top left, clockwise: **a silky, tomato-based hot sauce called daqus; subtly Omaniized biryani; broth-cooked mandi rice; daqus; boiled goat; the richly spiced shuwa (which can take a day or more to cook); and qabooli rice, which uses at least eight flavorings. All are served on plates-to-share at a banquet hall specializing in traditional foods.** Far left: **Top Omani spice staples include** (clockwise from lower left) **black peppercorns, turmeric, cardamom, cloves, cinnamon and a mix of ground cumin and coriander.**



Dining on traditional fare that has been adapted to Oman from Baluchi origins, the Lashko family enjoys goat meat pan-fried with tomatoes and onions in an Omani spice mix heavy with black pepper, served with date *chapati* (flat-bread) and a salad of local vegetables.

Al Fazari, an instructor in culinary studies who also hosts a televised Ramadan cooking show about traditional holiday dishes; its name translates to “Dishes and Taste.” It is important, she explained, because today “fewer and fewer children want to learn from their mothers. It is only later, when they have left home or gone abroad, that they realize how special those flavors and foods are. We must preserve these traditions, write them down and

offering international cuisine, from pizza to sushi, abound, I was here to gain a deeper understanding of the city and the country through its own food.

Three years ago, Sultan Qaboos began sponsorship of an Oman food festival, which became part of the annual Muscat Festival that celebrates and shares Omani heritage. There students from the Oman Tourism College cook traditional foods for up to 50,000 festival visitors. At the college, I met Zuwaina

teach them, so that we will never lose that aspect of ourselves.”

Al Fazari told me that in Muscat, there are four major ethnic groups that influence Omani cuisine. There are the Baluchi, whose ancestors were Persians from the city of Gwadar, now in western Pakistan; Liwatiyyah traders, who came from coastal towns in northern India and southern Pakistan; Zanzibaris, who came from East Africa; *jabalis*, or “people of the mountains”; and tribes from the interior, who are “the ones who have always

At the Lashko home, Omani chicken coconut curry, left, is smooth and mild, and it lacks the lemongrass and hot peppers that are familiar in the recipe's better-known counterparts from Thailand. Right: Served with a scoop of white rice, traditional *paplou* is a bright, flavorful soup made with fish stock, lemon juice, cilantro, fennel, turmeric and garlic together with soft, sautéed chunks of onion and fresh-caught tuna.





been here.” In this way, she said, “All the foods we eat are traditional Omani. They just draw on different pasts.”

Most Omani food

is cooked and eaten at home, but for large events such as weddings, families often turn to caterers. In Barka, about an hour outside Muscat, I visited a catering and event hall that specializes in traditional Omani cuisine. In the outdoor kitchen, metal vats the size of Jacuzzis were set on gas burners, and men were making stacks of the crispy, paper-thin Omani bread called *khubz rakhal*, made with only flour, water and salt. In pits, burning embers cooked whole goats and lambs through a slow smoking process for the heavily spiced celebration dish *shuwa*.

At the dining tent, I stopped at the entrance to remove my shoes, and then stepped onto a red-carpet floor where Asian screens sectioned off family-size dining areas. A waiter spread a plastic tablecloth on the floor, and I sat at the edge and watched as dish after dish appeared, each one offering subtle clues to its origin.

Two small bowls appeared first: *Daqus*, a silky red hot sauce made from tomatoes, garlic and ground red chiles and thinned with vinegar, has its origins in the Dhofar Governorate in the southernmost part of Oman, where cooks long ago integrated the New World tomatoes and chiles that arrived in the holds of ships from South Asia. The *daqus* was placed next to a yellow bowl of lentil soup with vermicelli noodles and chopped carrots, the noodles a Muscati addition to the Arab staple—also courtesy of trade with the Far East. Next came a sampling of the Omani rice triumvirate, at least one of which almost always appears on the dinner table. *Biryani* is a sweet dish of white rice topped with chickpeas and caramelized onion, layered with spices, nuts and dried fruit, and laced with saffron soaked in rosewater for a subtle “Omanization” of the ubiquitous South Asian specialty. *Qabooli* is a complex, subtly flavored rice made by frying tomato, onion and chile paste, then boiling the paste with rice, chicken, shredded cardamom, cinnamon, ground turmeric and black pepper. Topped with chickpeas, it is

a perfect dish alongside spicier meat dishes but hearty enough to eat on its own—an important factor in its place of origin in the Omani interior. *Mandi*, the plainest-looking but most savory of the rice dishes, is white rice boiled in meat broth with pepper and cinnamon. It is served alongside crisp-skinned chicken quarters whose pan-fried, salty skin tastes of cardamom, cloves, black pepper and cinnamon. Pieces of boiled goat, whose broth very well may have helped flavor the *mandi*, sit in a bowl next to the most famous Omani dish of all: *shuwa*.

A task usually reserved for ‘Id celebrations, making *shuwa* requires rubbing a whole lamb or goat with a wet mixture of oil and ground spices, often a combination of red pepper, black pepper, cloves, cardamom, cinnamon, cumin, dried lime and turmeric, then wrapping it in palm or banana leaves and placing it in a pit over hot embers. It cooks very slowly for 24 to 48 hours, until the smoke and spice and fat have penetrated the meat, the rub has charred to a crisp crust, and the flesh pulls easily off the bone. This is a dish whose cooking method originates with the Bedouin tribes in the interior of Oman and whose spices tell of the many peoples they have interacted with over the centuries, from the Zanzibari cloves, to the South Asian cardamom, peppers and cinnamon and the New World capsicums, and on to the Persian cumin and coriander and the local Omani specialty, black lime. (See sidebar at [saudiarabiamcworld.com](http://saudiarabiamcworld.com).) In the most traditional of dining rooms, eating the most traditional of foods, I felt I was tasting the entire network of spice routes on my plate.

The next morning, at the fish market in Mutrah, fishermen



**Exploring “nouveau Omani” cuisine, Ubhar restaurant founder Ghada Al Yousef plies her diners in Muscat with creative appetizers that include, from left, a roast meat (*shwarma*) “money bag,” *samosa* filled with cheese and mint; a “Zanzibari potato puff” and a mini-kebab—alongside popular crowd-pleasers of hummus and babaganoush.**

hawked baby shark, which is used in specialties of the eastern coastal region, like *awal*, a fresh-shark soup, or dried for use in stews. There was *hamour* (grouper) and king fish, possibly destined to be salted or ground into fish kebab, and tuna, most likely to be thrown on the grill or salted and set aside to make *al-malih*, a dried saltfish, with some fresh pieces finding their way into *paplou* soup or biryani. There were sardines, which might also be grilled, or might be crushed into *madqouka kashie* (pounded dried sardines) with red chiles and cardamom, or might be pressed with oil to make the Gulf-wide delicacy *mebyawa*, which is served spread on flatbread for a crispy, funky snack. Finally, I found *koffer* fish, specific to the Arabian Sea and a delicious meal on its own, grilled or pan fried or tossed in any of the many Omani versions of fish curry.

Later that evening, I followed an invitation to taste one seafood delicacy at the suburban home of Sarah Lashko, whose mother has faithfully preserved the family's Baluchi recipes. North out of Muscat, passing miles of tranquil beaches and palm trees, I arrived at her gracious home, surrounded by a sprawling lawn, just as the sun was setting. She led me inside to a long dining table already set with a spread of dishes made from her mother's traditional recipes. As I had hoped, the meal began with *paplou*, a bright, flavorful soup made with fish stock, lemon juice, cilantro, fennel, turmeric and garlic and soft, sautéed chunks of onion and fresh-caught tuna. Eaten with a scoop of white rice, it was both refreshing and comforting.

While we savored the soup, Sarah's father talked about the fish market in Mutrah I had visited, explaining that although the fish caught on the Omani coast are some of the best in the world, foreign export demand had driven up the prices, thus reducing the domestic fish market to a shadow of its once bustling self. Nonetheless, fish remains one of the staples of the Muscati diet.

We then moved on to the main dishes, using savory, date-flavored *chapatis* (flatbreads) to scoop up goat meat that had been pan-fried with tomatoes and onions in a black pepper-heavy Omani spice mix. The unsweetened date flavor of the bread—an interesting local twist on the South Asian specialty—beautifully complemented the slight heat of the meat. On



**Ubhar often approaches local specialties playfully. For example, above, camel biryani is demurely served on fine white china instead of the traditional large communal platters. At Kargeen Caffe in Muscat, shuwa is presented more elaborately (right): leaf-wrapped and set on a bed of rice in a traditional brass bowl.**

another serving plate there was chicken coconut curry that was neither like a Thai dish (no lemongrass, no hot green pepper) nor like an Indian curry: Instead, it was mild, with a subtle, silky richness. The finale of the meal was a carrot dessert, not unlike a bread pudding, but made by boiling shredded carrot in milk for hours to extract a delicately sweet taste and custardy texture—similar to Indian *gajar halwa*. It was served with mint tea and light Omani coffee, which looks and tastes a lot like tea because it's made with barely roasted coffee beans.

The meal acknowledged the Lashko family's South Asian roots while being firmly planted in, and informed by, the Omani ecology, history and palate. Underlying the ethnic inflections and origins of the dishes, all I tasted was Oman: the unusual twists on the ubiquitous chapati and chicken curry only made

**Left: Shown here with her siblings, Sarah Lashko has preserved her mother's recipes. Right: Shark meat in an onion and tomato curry.**





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Long after frankincense and long before petroleum, black limes were Oman's hottest commodity.

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the Omani distinctions clearer. I began to feel that I was discovering the magic of Omani cuisine. I wondered, however, about contemporary Oman: Was the spirit of adventure and discovery still here, or were young Omanis content to look to their parents and grandparents for a purely historical culinary identity? I hoped to find out the next day at Ubhar, Muscat's first and most prominent "modern Omani" restaurant.

Dressed casually in a velvet tracksuit, her long brown hair moving with her as she leaned back in a rose-pink upholstered chair, Ghada Mohammed Al Yousef explained the origin of her sleek, downtown eatery's name. In the southern desert, at the edge of the Peninsula's Empty Quarter, an entire, intact city was discovered under the sand and limestone in 1993. "There had been stories of Ubar in legend," she said, "of people from frankincense traders to the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon all passing through the city, but until it was uncovered, it remained only legend. Now, it is part of history." In the same way, she wants to offer a taste of a "real, but long-hidden Oman," modern, true representations that also draw on the past.

When Ubhar opened in 2009, Ghada expected primarily tourists but, to her surprise, it was locals who crowded her dining room. "I realized my generation is like me. We have global tastes from traveling abroad; we are educated professionals," she explained. "We love our country and our heritage, but also crave new tastes and experiences.

"We Omanis have mixed with the world for centuries, from intermarriage to food; why would that change now?" In today's ever more globalized world, the influences on Omani cuisine simply come from farther away. Examples at Ubhar are Ghada's Chinese-inspired fish dumplings floating in her variation on paplou soup, or the French puff pastry encasing *shwarma* meat in her "money bag" hors d'oeuvres, or Omani walnut-and-date *halwa*, also wrapped in puff pastry and served with chewy frankincense ice cream. She even takes house-made shuwa and presses it between slices of flatbread

like Italian *panini*. Other global trends present in more subtle ways, like her commitment to promoting Omani home businesses by purchasing pickles from housewives and using fresh, local ingredients whenever possible, such as the Omani eggplant she mashes to make a light baba ghanoush without sesame tahini. She also isn't afraid to play with local dishes as inside jokes, for example, serving camel biryani—tender and more subtly flavored than either goat or lamb—elegantly on white china, in delicate portions rather than on the traditional large communal tray. Every dish, she said, is a refined version of a classic, with the foreign twists somehow rendering them no less authentic. It is, she added, the oldest Omani technique: artfully absorbing foreign influences and naturalizing them.

Later, I met Miad Al Bulushi, an international-relations specialist and former US State Department legislative fellow, at a seaside café. We enjoyed fresh-pressed juice and talked about the culture and food of this city at the intersection of the spice routes. Miad's flowing headscarf and her exposed wisps of red hair fluttered beautifully in the breeze. "We don't rush toward change," she said, "but always try to engage in balanced exchange with newcomers, learning all we can from them, without trying to become anything we are not. We cherish our identities, and no outside force can change that." The result is food that, whether served at home, on the floor of a banquet tent or in an urban-chic restaurant, is just as confident, adventurous and curious as the Omani people themselves. 🌐



**Felicia Campbell** (k.felicia.campbell@gmail.com) is an associate editor at *Saveur* magazine. She holds a master's degree in Middle Eastern food culture from New York University, and she is currently working on her first book, a memoir about her transformative experiences as a young US soldier in the Iraq war.



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PAPLOU, KABULI SAMAK, HALWA AL JEZAR: DAWN MOBLEY



# *The Casbah of Algiers:* **ENDANGERED** **ARK**

WRITTEN BY LOUIS WERNER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY KEVIN BUBRISKI

The Casbah of Algiers, spilling down the hillside to the Mediterranean coast, has been compared to Noah's ark—teeming with life—and with the seeds in a pinecone—tightly enclosed. A nostalgic English sailor imprisoned within the walls of the whitewashed district 300 years ago recalled, "From the sea, it looks just like the topsail of a ship." The 16th-century traveler Leo Africanus noted its many bakeries, while 600 years earlier the geographer Ibn Hawkal praised the limpid water pouring from its many fountains.

**T**he site was inhabited as early as the sixth century BCE by Phoenician traders, followed by Carthaginians who traded on the islands just offshore; then "various Berber tribes, Romans, Byzantines and Arabs (beginning in the seventh century CE) took turns coveting and ultimately taking the city," notes the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Periods of Spanish and Turkish authority followed, capped by 13 decades of French rule, beginning in 1830.

The fort—*al-qasaba*—overlooking the



Left: Viewed from the sea in an engraving dated four years after the 1682 end of the last war between Algiers and England, the dense, trapezoidal, hillside Casbah could indeed appear "just like the topsail of a ship." By 1880, above, the French had cut boulevards in what is known as the lower Casbah.

quarter lends the area its name, even though it was once a place of gardens and palaces and now contains mostly the tumbledown homes of ordinary citizens. The French cut wide boulevards through the Casbah's lower half after they arrived, and named its streets after their own people and places: Charlemagne, Chartres and the like. Meanwhile, Algiers expanded along the bay and a new European district filled up the territory next to the old town.



Taking its name from *al-qasbah* (the fort) that overlooked the harbor, today the Casbah is home to some 80,000 people amid the 3.5 million who live throughout greater Algiers, the capital of Algeria.

The Casbah thus forms the right ventricle of the city's beating heart, through which flows the blood of the nation, and where—during the Algerian War of Independence—much of it was shed. Always a small and contested space at the center of Algeria's history, it comprises some 60 hectares (150 ac) of densely built houses, laced through with 350 winding *rues* (streets), *ruelles* (alleys) and *impasses* (dead ends), which, if laid end to end, would add up to a 15-kilometer-long (9.3-mi) opportunity for getting terribly lost.

The Casbah's population is reckoned at a tightly packed 80,000, within a city of more than 3.5 million residents.

Perhaps the most grandiose appraisal of the Casbah comes from the Englishman Samuel Purchas, who published travel accounts from around the world in the early 17th century. He called it "a Whirlpoole of these Seas, the Throne of Pyracie, the Sinke of Trade and the Stinke of Slavery ... the Receptacle of Renegadoes of God and Traytors to their Country."

In a nutshell, it was a safe harbor on the shore of a turbulent sea; the home port of a corsair fleet, where Europeans, including Miguel de Cervantes—who made the remark about Noah's ark—were imprisoned and held for ransom, but rarely enslaved and sold; and a place where some Christians "turned Turks," as Shakespeare put it in *Othello*, and many fought against their own countrymen.

One of the more unusual captivity stories is that of the 15th-century Florentine painter Fra Filippo Lippi, who earned his free-

dom by painting his captor's portrait. "One day, seeing that he was thrown much into contact with his master," wrote Giorgio Vasari, the biographer of Italian artists, "there came the opportunity and the whim to make a portrait of him; whereupon, taking a piece of dead coal from the fire, with this he portrayed him at full length on a white wall in his Moorish costume. When this was reported to the master (for it appeared a miracle to them all, since drawing and painting were not known in these parts), it brought about his liberation from the chains in which he had been held for so long."

For any given year throughout the 17th century, there were hundreds of European captives being held in Algiers, many kidnapped directly from their own coasts by corsairs. Historian Linda Colley suggests that the English Civil War of

**"Too many people live here now with no memory of what came before, neither its culture nor its history," says Zubir Mamou, 78. A resident of the Casbah nearly all his life, he often speaks to groups of visiting students.**



1642 was partly caused by the unhappiness of the populace with the Stuart kings for not protecting Britain's seaside. The dey of Algiers scolded Charles II in 1672 for not buying his countrymen's freedom, as the Spanish kings ransomed theirs. The final war between England and Algiers, between 1677 and 1682, resulted in 3000 hostages taken from 500 English ships.

Not the least of these was a Genoan sea captain named Piccinini, who converted to Islam in 1622, took the name Ali Bitchnine, married the daughter of a Berber sultan, became admiral of the corsair fleet and sponsored the construction of a mosque.

Calling such a story a "whirlpoo" is scarcely an exaggeration.

Troubles between Algiers and European powers—as well as America—over the predations of the privateers based there lasted into the early 1800's. In 1816, an Anglo-Dutch fleet

bombarded the city and extracted a pledge from the dey to rein in the privateers.

The construction of the Casbah's perimeter walls and gates, including the western Bab al-Oued and the eastern Bab Azzoun, began in the early 16th century when Baba Aruj ("old man Aruj") and his brother Khayr al-Din, Turkish pirates from the Aegean island of Lesbos, were invited by the amir of Algiers to evict his Spanish occupiers. When the one-armed Baba Aruj died in battle in 1518, Khayr al-Din took control, putting both the city and its corsair fleet at least nominally under the Ottoman aegis.

Khayr al-Din later became the top admiral of the Ottoman navy and the scourge of European sailors, who had misheard the name Baba Aruj and dubbed both him and his brother "Barbarousse" in French and "Barbarossa" in Italian—or "Red Beard" in English. Khayr al-

*In 1622, a Genoan sea captain named Piccinini converted to Islam, took the name Ali Bitchnine, married the daughter of a Berber sultan, sponsored the construction of a mosque and became admiral of Algiers' notorious corsair fleet.*

Using painted goal nets, boys play in a small plaza as a woman descends one of the stone-paved streets in the upper Casbah, where the steepest street has 472 steps.



Din's statue, standing just outside the Casbah walls near a notorious French prison that used to bear his name, is now the butt of misplaced mockery: It shows him with both arms, but to Casbah residents, just as to the French, one Barbarousse is much like another, so they say he has one arm too many.



case, which became a rallying cry for anti-colonialism.

The desire for freedom ran deep in the family: After being beaten and imprisoned, Houria's mother, Fatiha, won fame for coolly playing a double game: She posed as

an informer while brazenly harboring Saadi Yacef, leader of the Algiers military wing of the FLN (National Liberation Front), and Ali la Pointe, Yacef's chief Casbah operative, in her house on Rue de Caton. La Pointe is the hero in Italian director Gillo Pontecorvo's prizewinning 1966 film *The Battle of Algiers*.

In Yacef's memoirs of the Battle of Algiers, he calls his 12-year-old nephew—who served as a lookout and who died at Ali's side—not "Petit Omar," as he is called both in the film and on the portrait wall at the Place des Martyrs, but rather simply *très jeune*, very young. Houria remembers Omar not only as a heroic child but also as an expert player of marbles and other street games.

"I became an architect for a simple reason—because of the Casbah of my childhood," she says, in a similar vein. "It represented freedom, a place I could play on the terraces, hide in the alleyways and learn to be myself. And, I thought, if a town plan can make me feel that way, then of course I want to be an urban planner."

**T**oday, when architect Houria Bouhired leads a tour through the streets of the quarter where she grew up, she often starts in the Haute Casbah and descends the 472 steps of the Rue de la Casbah, which drops straight from top to bottom. *Houria* means "freedom" in Arabic, and her name was not a random choice, for she comes from a family of great Casbah patriots who defied the French during the early years of the war for independence (1954–1962).

French soldiers killed her father, Mustafa, and dumped his body on the ruelle where she played. As a 20-year-old militant, her cousin Djemila was arrested and condemned to death in a trial that made news around the world, though she was finally released. In 1958, while Djemila was still in prison, Egyptian director Youssef Chahine made the biographical film *Jamila the Algerian* about her

**To architect Houria Bouhired—whose first name means *freedom*, and whose family was instrumental in the Algerian war for independence from 1954 to 1962—the Casbah itself "represented freedom, a place I could play on the terraces, hide in the alleyways and learn to be myself. And, I thought, if a town plan can make me feel that way, then of course I want to be an urban planner."** Right: Inside her house, false walls and this air vent connect to a hiding place used by liberation leader Ali la Pointe.





The Casbah “has a future because it has a past, and we must fight to hold onto our past simply in order to move forward,” says native son Belkacem Babaci, president of Fondation Casbah, which provides social services and repairs for homes, roads, plumbing and more. Right: On a street outside the Casbah’s old walls, across from what was once a French prison, stands a statue of Khayr al-Din, the Turkish pirate who, at the invitation of the amir of Algiers, drove out the Spanish in the early 16th century.

Houria’s sense of physical freedom echoes in the words of Cervantes’s friend and fellow captive Antonio de Sosa, who likened the Casbah to a pinecone and wrote in his 1612 account, *Topography of Algiers*, that it was “so dense and the houses so close that ... one could almost walk the whole city via the rooftops.” In the “Captive’s Tale” chapter of *Don Quixote*, based on Cervantes’s own memory of the place, he describes “the windows of the house of a rich and important Moor, which, as is usual in Moorish houses, were more like loopholes than windows, and even so were covered by thick and close lattices.”

The Bouhired family home fits that description, and has an interior patio—the *wasat al-dar*, or center of the house—surrounded by three upper galleries, all tile-encrusted and horseshoe-arched, and a flat roof. It is also something of a shrine. A sign at the front door says it all: “The House of Shahid [“martyr”] Mustafa Bouhired, Restored in Memory of the November 1954 Martyrs.” A false wall over the stairs gives access to Ali la Pointe’s hiding place. An air vent in the bedroom of Houria’s tenant Zubir Mamu, a jaunty 78-year-old who has lived in the Casbah nearly all his life, connects to it. “I cannot help but think of him whenever I look there,” he says.

Mamu’s own house on Rue de Lyon is now, as he

sadly says, *disparu* (“disappeared”), and the Cinema Étoile of his youth is *fermé* (“closed”). On Rue Bleu he passes the former home, now abandoned, of the late Mostefa Lacheraf, author of the study of Algerian nationalism *L’Algérie—Nation et Société*, in which he called the Casbah a *monde aboli*, an “abolished world.” “The Casbah,” says Mamu, “is not as it once was. Too many people live here now with no memory of what came before, neither its culture nor its history, nor of what happened



On the site where, in 1957, French paratroopers blew up the house on Rue de Caton, killing Ali la Pointe and more than a dozen companions, there now stands a memorial with the Algerian flag and memorabilia.



Aït Aoudia, president of a cultural-revitalization group called the Friends of the Rampe Louni Arezki. (*Rampe* is the French word for a steeply pitched street, and Louni Arezki is the name of another guillotined freedom fighter.) “As a child, my bedroom window was just below the prison walls,” remembers Aït Aoudia. “On days when an execution was to take place, I would wake up before dawn to the raised voices of the prisoners. They would sing our freedom anthem, ‘From our mountain, the voice of liberty is rising!’ My mother would cry, my father’s face would turn pale, and they would tell me to go back to sleep. But I heard that same song 90 times, for the 90 prisoners who were executed that year.”

Aït Aoudia recently brought another native son of the Casbah, Vienna-based economist Kader Benamara, author of the autobiography *Éclats de soleil et d’amertume* (*Sparkles of Sun and*

## THE CASBAH as Orientalist Cliché

**The West has always viewed the Casbah of Algiers as a place for learning secrets, getting lost and making—and sometimes keeping—asignations. Miguel de Cervantes’s play *The Bagnios [Baths] of Algiers*, based on his years of captivity from 1575 to 1580, featured both religious intrigue and swooning maidens. The Englishman Joseph Pitts, held there 100 years later, published a memoir whose lengthy title began *A True and Faithful Account...*, which was indeed much closer to the truth than the work of the renowned Spanish fabulist.**

**In the 19th century, French orientalist painters landed thick as flies all over the Casbah, often paying top prices to access domestic interiors populated by supposedly representative female residents, who were in fact often more adept at playacting than tea-making. One praised his subjects’ “jugglery and deception.” Eugène Delacroix’s three-day stay in Algiers in 1834 resulted in his celebrated canvas *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*, which inspired paintings by many others, including Pablo Picasso’s 1954 series of the same name, which commemorates the Algerian War of Independence.**

**The 1937 French film *Pépé le Moko*, about a Casbah jewel thief played by Jean Gabin, is said to have inspired the character Rick in the later film *Casablanca*, and may or may not have also inspired the suave skunk Pépé le Pew, who starred in the 1954 Warner Brothers’ cartoon *The Cat’s Bah*. But it did prompt the 1938 Hollywood remake *Algiers*, as well as the 1948 musical version entitled simply *Casbah*, which featured goggle-eyed character actor Peter Lorre as the police inspector Slimane.**

here at independence and during our struggle.”

The fact that Mamu calls the Casbah’s streets by their French names indicates a generational gap. When the French arrived, the streets were known simply by a nearby landmark like a well, gate or market, so they painted colored lines along the exterior walls to help them trace their way through its maze; Mamu knows the streets by their French color names. After independence, the streets were renamed in honor of Algerian heroes, many of them killed on those very walkways. Plaques mark those locations, such as the one on Rue Rachid Khabash where Abdel Rahman Arbaji was shot on the roof and fell to his death outside the door of number 39.

At Bir Djebah, “the well of the beekeeper,” one of the six public fountains still operating in the Casbah—there were once more than 150—a plaque commemorates four brothers in arms Touati Said, Radi Hmi-da, Rahal Boualem and Bellamine Mohamed. “Condemned to Death,” it reads with grave precision, “Guillotined at Dawn June 20, 1957 between 3:25 and 3:28 in the Morning at Barbarousse Prison.”

The prison has a special place in the memory of Lounis

**Played by Brahim Haggiag in a scene from the 1966 classic film *The Battle of Algiers*, Ali la Pointe listens to the young cousin of rebel leader Saadi Yacef.**





**Folklorist and director of the Dar Khedaoudj, or museum of popular arts and traditions, Aziza Aïcha Amamra remembers songs of Ramadan and other traditions that were unique to the Casbah.**

*Bitterness*), back home for a book-reading. “Only 10 percent of the Casbah’s homes are occupied by their owners—all the other residents are squatters from the countryside,” says Benamara. “Our job is to teach them some history, teach them that the Casbah was a place of our nation’s new beginning, of its wealth and pride.”

Benamara was born in the cellar of 17 Rue Randon during the German aerial bombing of the joint American–British landing force of December 1942. Named for French general Jacques Louis Randon, who “pacified” Algeria’s mountainous Kabylie region on the coast in the 1850’s, it has since been renamed Rue Amar Ali, the real name of Ali la Pointe.

“For a kid like me,” says Benamara, “the Casbah was a magical place day and night, a neighborhood of ordinary people, of flesh and bone, but also filled with the ghosts of everyone who had ever lived there. I can still see, as if I’m dreaming, the sweets seller pass through the streets, shouting loud enough to blow your head off: ‘My sweets will erase all your troubles!’ And we children would salivate as soon as we heard him.”

Perhaps no one works harder at the Casbah’s urban revival than Belkacem Babaci, president of the Fondation Casbah, which provides social services to residents and advocates for the repair of its infrastructure. If

**Seven medallions, framed by floral and shell motifs, decorate a carved and painted panel above a doorway. The medallions on the panels flanking it repeat “[there is] no victor but God.”**

*While UNESCO called the Casbah “a unique form of medina, or Islamic city” and placed it on its World Heritage List in 1992, and Algeria designated it for protection in 2003, its deterioration threatens its future.*

create public plazas or turned into museums. The most prominent park in the Casbah—Place des Martyrs, named for our war heroes—was once the most beautiful palace in all Algiers.”

The Dar Mustafa Pasha calligraphy museum and the Dar Khedaoudj museum of popular arts and traditions, both restored to the sparkling gems that most private homes in the Casbah once were, help to knit the quarter’s history together. Aziza Aïcha Amamra, director of Dar Khedaoudj, was

born in her mother’s house on the *jabal*—the mountain, as she calls it—in the Haute Casbah. A trained folklorist, she remembers the songs of Ramadan, sung when those fasting were awaiting the cannon’s signal for their first meal of the day: “Call, call us to

a house is in danger of falling down, or neighbors cannot agree to fix a plumbing leak in a common wall, they come to him. Babaci was born in the sumptuous Palais des Raïs, the seat of the Algerian admiralty and, formerly, of the Barbary corsairs. “My grandfather was a captain,” he says, “which entitled us to living quarters there. So I know how beautiful the Casbah’s architecture once was.

“In 1830, before the French came, you could say that the city of Algiers *was* the Casbah. Now the Casbah is simply part of the city, just a little piece, in fact. What was once the citadel has grown to encompass everything—from the residential quarter up high to the modern city down below, where the French cut through to the seaside with wide arcades and commercial streets. They knocked down the city’s walls and gates, from Bab Azzoun to the east to Bab al-Oued to the west, and converted mosques into churches. Palaces were knocked down to





Boys play below the ruins of Ali la Pointe's house, part of which has been left unrestored as a memorial to the sacrifices of independence. Among the Casbah's other houses, today only 10 percent are occupied by their owners, says Fondation Casbah director Belkacem Babaci.

prayer, oh Shaykh! The cannon has sounded its 'boom boom!'" So I'm ready to eat! Yum yum!"

Belkacem Babaci's childhood memories are not always so benign. "I remember the terrible discrimination of the French," he says. "Regardless of my grades in French language class, which were always 'superior,' I had to sit behind even the laziest French student. The teachers couldn't accept that an *indigène*, or native, as they called us, could speak more perfectly than one of their own—even though Algeria was supposedly an integral part of France, and we were theoretically its full citizens."

Babaci notes that the Casbah residents would mock their French colonizers with dry humor. "Donkeys were our delivery boys and garbage haulers," he remembers, "and just like bus drivers, they knew

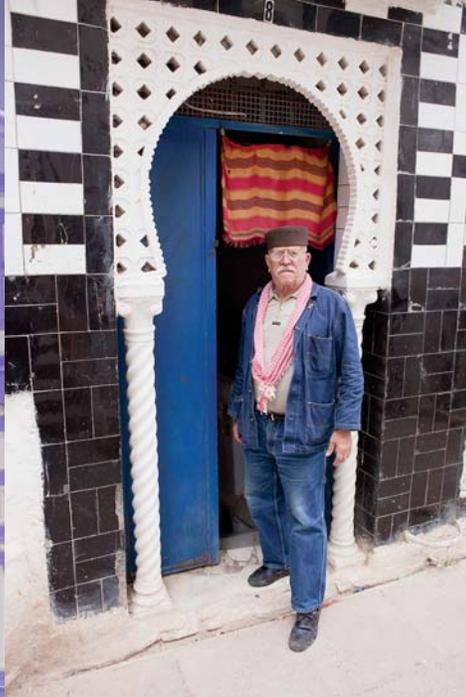
every house. We gave them satirical names—like Isabella and Ferdinand, the Spanish sovereigns who drove many of the Casbah's first residents from Iberia in 1492, or Charles v, whose 500-ship navy failed so disastrously to take Algiers in 1541. So the donkey drivers would holler: 'Turn left, Isabella, turn right, Charles.'"

Babaci says that the Algerian revolution's aftermath—when some 10,000 residents left—as well as the civil strife of the 1990's, shredded the Casbah's social fabric. With irony, he notes what was once a prison for Europeans, and later, during the war of independence, a concentration camp run by the French, has now become the dead end of squatters. Nonetheless, he firmly believes that the Casbah "has a future because it has a past, and we must fight to hold onto our past simply in order to move forward."

UNESCO calls the Casbah "a unique form of *medina*, or Islamic city," highlighting its "considerable influence on town planning ... in North Africa, Andalusia and sub-Saharan Africa" in the 16th and 17th centuries. In 1992, it placed the site on its World Heritage List, and in 2003 Algeria designated the Casbah a protected sector, in light of what UNESCO calls the "continual need to forestall the deterioration of the urban fabric." Lately, however, because of inattention, it has been threatened with decertification by the UN body.



Where once some 150 public water fountains could be found, today only six still flow.



Clockwise, from left, this page: **A girl poses against a column at her home. Outside the horseshoe arch that leads to his home, Miraoui Smain wears a *chechia*, the close-fitting Algerian cap of an older nationalist generation. “Many do not even know what my cap means. I was part of our freedom struggle,” he says. Boys pose in the upper Casbah. Brass-smith Hachemi Benmira is holding onto his business selling trays and coffeepots despite the scarcity of visitors to the upper Casbah.**

Zekagh Abdelwahab oversees the Algerian Ministry of Culture’s Plan to Protect the Casbah, which provides emergency repairs to houses in danger of collapse. Indeed, many structures today seem almost to be tent-pegged in an erect position, with jerry-rigged wooden timbers supporting leaning walls, cracked balconies overhanging the streets and sagging arches framing courtyard arcades.

Some 700 homes have already received Abdelwahab’s urgent attention. “The Casbah has been hit hard by many insults—everything from earthquake damage to stone foundations that dissolve because of leaking water pipes,” Abdelwahab says. “Most homes are occupied by tenants who refuse to leave during repair work, but our job is to work around them.” The consequences of neglect are ever-present: litter-strewn voids in the irregular urban grid where homes have collapsed—like empty sockets in a mouthful of crooked teeth.

Abdelwahab and his team of architects are especially chagrined by the almost haunting presence of the Centenary House in the Haute Casbah, a kind of artificial show house constructed by the French in 1930 from the bits and pieces of the many historic palaces and other homes that they had knocked down, or allowed to fall down, over the previous 100 years.

It is not enough that woodworker Khaled Mahiout, who moved from the Basse Casbah to the Haute Casbah in search of lower rents, still ekes out a living by turning spindles on his lathe to make the same latticed window screens described by Cervantes, or that brass-smith Hashmi Benmira still holds onto his business of selling trays and coffeepots near the 11th-century minaret of Sidi Ramdane mosque. These upper precincts are not well trafficked, and certainly not by tourists.

Eighty-year-old Miraoui Smain stands outside his house on Rue Ben Chenab, which cuts east to west, separating the



Clockwise, from top left: **Woodworker Khaled Mahiot's** lathe-turned, lattice window screens are so traditional they might feel familiar to Spanish author Miguel Cervantes, who was captive briefly in the Casbah in the 16th century. Along Rue Ben Chenab, the market street that divides the upper and lower Casbah, a young man sells oranges. Halim Ouaguenouni tends his family sweet shop that is adorned with decorative tiles and soccer-fan paraphernalia. A boy poses in front of a door that reflects the Casbah's long history.

Haute Casbah from the Basse. He wears a *chechia*, the close-fitting Algerian cap of an older nationalist generation, a far cry from the T-shirts and backward-turned baseball caps of young people today. "What bothers me most about them is not that they are poor, but rather that they understand things poorly," he says. "Many do not even know what my cap means. I was part of our freedom struggle; I was a witness to our attempt to rid the Casbah of its foreign vices. It is not a bad thing to go back to some things from the past."

The Casbah's steeply stepped view over the lower flank of Bouzaréah Hill, encircled by the remains of Ottoman-period walls and itself overlooked by a citadel that is similarly in need of repair, may not inspire confidence that our new century will be kind to this aging quarter. But what Antonio de Sosa wrote in 1612 is still true today: "Little by little this hill creeps upwards to the very top so that the houses keep rising on an uphill

slope, the higher ones jutting over the lower..., each one helping its neighbor remain standing, despite the downward pull of gravity and historical forgetfulness. ☹

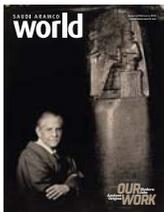


**Louis Werner** ([wernerworks@msn.com](mailto:wernerworks@msn.com)) is a writer and filmmaker living in New York City.

**Kevin Bubrski** ([www.kevinbubrski.com](http://www.kevinbubrski.com)) is a documentary photographer and professor of photography at Green Mountain College in Poultney, Vermont.



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Algeria: J/A 10, N/D 07, S/O 07, M/A 06



## 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

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—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

In today's world, we find out a lot about places that are far away from us and people whose lives are very different from our own. We may watch YouTube videos online, or movies made in other countries, or read stories or books written in places we can only imagine. In each type of situation, someone has created something—a video, a film, a story—to try to help us understand something that we might otherwise never understand, or even know about. How do they do it? What techniques do they use to help us understand? Those are the questions that this edition of the Classroom Guide asks.

### Analogies and Metaphors in Writing

Writers write in order to communicate with people, and they have tools in their writers' toolkits that they often use to help them. Two of these tools are analogies and metaphors. You may have been introduced to analogies and metaphors at some point in your schooling, but revisit the terms to make sure you understand them. You can start with a dictionary; then look deeper. Read at least three sources that define and describe what *metaphor* and *analogy* mean. Then put the sources away and write your own definitions of the terms. As part of your definition of *metaphor*, give an example of a metaphor and explain what makes it a metaphor. Do the same as part of your definition of *analogy*. Divide the class into groups of three. Have each person in your group share his or her definitions. Note the similarities, and discuss any differences among them, until you have reached a consensus and feel confident that you understand the concepts of metaphor and analogy.

Now that you know what analogies and metaphors are, take a look at how a writer uses them. Read "The Casbah of Algiers: Endangered Ark." Writer Louis Werner quotes some past writers and pens some of his own expressive language to help readers get a feel for the Casbah. As you read, underline or highlight some of these descriptions. Here's

an example to get you started. Take a look at the first paragraph of the article, in which the Casbah is compared to Noah's ark and the seeds in a pinecone—two vivid comparisons. You take it from there: Find other ways that Werner and others describe Algiers in general and the Casbah in particular. When you're done, have

class members share some of the analogies and metaphors they found. Discuss how they help you know the Casbah—or if you don't find that they deepen your understanding, talk about why they didn't, and what might work better for you as a reader.

Having looked at analogies and metaphors in your role as reader, it's time to step into the role of writer. Choose a place that you want to describe for your readers. It can be any place—your classroom, your school, your neighborhood, your town. Write a paragraph describing the place. Include in your paragraph at least one analogy or metaphor—more if you think that would be helpful. Keep in mind that you're writing for someone who might not know the place, just as you might not have known the Casbah of Algiers before you read the article. Keep in mind, too, that you need to compare your place to something your readers will be familiar with. Otherwise you won't help them understand. If, for example, you don't know the story of Noah's ark, or you've never seen a pinecone, then the phrases in the first paragraph of the article will just confuse you.

### Analogies and Metaphors in Film

Like writers, filmmakers create something that they hope will be meaningful for their viewers. Haifaa Al Mansour, for example, has made *Wadjda*, a film about a 10-year-old Saudi girl who wants to own a bicycle. Al Mansour says that the bicycle in her film "is a metaphor for an unrealized dream." Based on the article, why do you think she chose a bicycle to represent an unrealized dream? What characteristics does a bicycle have? What do those characteristics suggest about how Al Mansour thinks of the unrealized dream? What if she had chosen, say, a turtle? Or an apple tree? What characteristics do turtles and apple trees have? If you think of them as symbols—as metaphors—what would each of them suggest about an unrealized dream?

Al Mansour goes on to articulate what she would like viewers to get from watching





## IF YOU ONLY HAVE 15 MINUTES...

With another student, watch a news story about something that happened in a faraway place. Discuss with your partner how the presentation helps you understand what is happening in this place you have probably never seen in person. Pay attention both to the visual images that are shown and to the words that the reporter has chosen to tell the story. What do you find is most effective for helping you understand? What else might help enhance your understanding?

the film: “I hope that anyone who has ever worked to realize an impossible goal will be able to relate to Wadjda’s journey,” she says. Remember that metaphors aim to help readers and viewers understand something. Another way to say that is that good stories go past the details of a particular situation and affect people whose experiences may be different from those in the story. For example, Wadjda’s experiences may be different from your own, but Al Mansour hopes that you can relate anyway. Think about a film or play you’ve seen, or a book you’ve read, that tells a story that isn’t at all like your own experiences but that you found meaningful anyway. What in the story made it possible for you to relate to it?

### Understanding the Past

Stories and movies help us understand unfamiliar people and places. Museums can do the same. Like you, the curators at the Oriental Institute have been thinking about how people can relate to something extremely different from their own lives and thus find meaning in it. They tried an unusual way of helping museum visitors understand the past—and the past is certainly an unfamiliar place populated with unfamiliar people where we can never actually go. In their exhibit “Our Work: Modern Jobs—Ancient Origins,” the museum curators paired individuals with ancient artifacts, and asked the people to look for and talk about connections between their own work experiences and those depicted in the sculptures. Read the article. Choose one of the people. What does that person say about his or her job and a similar job that someone did in the ancient world? The curators at the Oriental Institute say that by having ordinary people (as opposed to museum professionals) share their connections to the objects,

they “hope that our collections may become more accessible to our visitors—that some new ways of viewing and learning about the objects have been created.” Based on what the people have said, do you think they have succeeded? Why or why not?

Now try it yourself. Go to a museum website (or even better, a museum if you can!), and locate an object that interests you. Find a way that you can relate to the object, similar to the way the people in the article related to the sculptures at the Oriental Institute. Working with a partner, articulate the connections by interviewing each other about the objects you have chosen. Make a presentation of the dialogue. You might do what the article did, creating an image of your classmate and the object, accompanied by your classmate’s thoughts. Or you might make an audio-visual recording of the person discussing the object. Display your work for your classmates.

### Using Photographs to Enhance Understanding

Photographers, too, aim to communicate with viewers, and you may find that photos are one of the best tools for helping you understand others. Read either “The Casbah of Algiers” or “Senegal’s Shepherds of *Tabaski*.” Select one or more (you might even select all) of the photos that accompany the article you chose. Think about how the photo(s) help you understand the Casbah or the Senegalese sheep. What do the photos tell you? What do the photos help you understand that you wouldn’t understand without them? How do they add to the written text of the articles? Make a display of your photo(s) and your explanation of how they add to your understanding. Post the displays around the classroom and look at each others’ work.

### The Setting

So far you’ve looked at how written words and visual images convey information. For this exercise, shift your attention to the setting in which readers or viewers see them. For example, you are reading “Our Work” in a magazine that is on paper or on a screen. But the magazine is based on a museum exhibit. How do you imagine your experience of the content would be different if you saw it in a museum, rather than reading it from a page or screen in school or at home? Discuss the question with a small group of your peers. Start with the most basic factors: For example, if you were in a museum, you would probably be standing up while you looked at the photos and read the words, and the images would most likely be larger than they are in the magazine. Other people around you would probably be looking at the images with you, and they might be talking. You take it from here. Identify what the differences would be, and then discuss how those differences might affect how you understand the content of the exhibit. Which type of experience would you prefer? Why?

The last part of “From Saudi Arabia With Love” discusses the fact that there are no public cinemas in Saudi Arabia, so to watch *Wadjda* there, one would have to watch it digitally, on disc, as a download or online. How do you think the location where you see the movie affects the experience of understanding it? To answer the question, compare your own experience watching a movie in one setting—at a theater on a big screen, for example—with watching a movie on a home screen, computer, tablet or smartphone. As you did comparing the magazine to the museum viewing experience, compare the movie viewing experiences. How does each viewing experience affect you? Does one help you understand—really feel—the movie better than the other?



## Ferozkoh:

*Tradition and Continuity in Afghan Art* showcases works created by Afghan artists who were inspired by masterpieces from the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) in Doha, Qatar. It is the result of a yearlong collaboration between students and teachers from the Turquoise Mountain Institute for Afghan Arts in Kabul and the MIA, in which Afghan master craftsmen were given access to some of the greatest examples of historical Islamic art from the Ghaznavid, Timurid, Mughal and Safavid empires and, in response, created a series of extraordinary works of their own. The purpose of the collaboration was the preservation in modern times of the traditional arts of the Islamic world in both themes and materials. The ongoing conversation between historic and contemporary Islamic art is revealed through 18 confronted pairs of beautiful objects. Leighton House Museum, London, through February 23.

**This turquoise-glazed fritware bowl, 178 mm (7") in diameter, was molded in Afghanistan in the 12th or 13th century. It stands before a *shamsa*, or sun symbol, painted in blue and silver by Rita Wafa in 2012. Both compositions are based on radiating lines, heavily elaborated, around a central well.**

### Current January

**Pearls**, an exhibition of the V&A and the Qatar Museums Authority, explores the history of pearls from the early Roman Empire to the present day. Their beauty and allure, across centuries and cultures, have been associated with wealth, royalty and glamour—but also with the brutal and dangerous labor of the divers who bring them to the surface. Natural oyster pearls were fished in the Arabian Gulf from as early as the first millennium BCE until the decline of the trade by the mid-20th century, caused largely by the development of cultured pearls. Yet natural pearls have always been objects of desire due to their rarity and beauty, and goldsmiths, jewelers and painters have exploited their symbolic associations, which ranged from seductiveness to purity, from harbingers of good luck in marriage to messengers of mourning. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, through January 19.

**An "Industrial Museum":** *John Forbes Watson's Indian Textile Collection*. Watson (1827–1892), a Scottish physician who traveled to India as part of the Bombay Army Medical Service, created books of Indian textile samples, which he called "Industrial Museums" or "Trade Museums," because they were portable collections intended to inspire the textile manufacturers of both the British Isles and India. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, through January 20.

**Damien Hirst:** *Relics*, the artist's first solo show in the Middle East, incorporates pieces from every major Hirst series over the past 25 years, including his "spot" and "spin" paintings, the natural history sculptures and medicine cabinets and his diamond-encrusted human skull titled "For the Love of God." The exhibition is said to be "the largest collection of Hirst's work ever assembled." Al Riwaq Art Space, Doha, Qatar, through January 22.

**Realms of Wonder:** *Jain, Hindu and Islamic Art of India* includes more than 200 paintings, sculptures, textiles and decorative art objects dating from the eighth century to the present day. The

exhibition features art inspired by the three great spiritual traditions of India: Islam, Hinduism and Jainism. Muslim artists excelled in the production of decorative arts, and the exhibition features a 17th-century inlaid marble panel produced in one of the workshops that decorated the Taj Mahal, along with iconic images of Shiva Nataraja and delicate Jain hand-drawn illuminated manuscripts. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, through January 27.

**Tea With Nefertiti** surveys the controversial stories of how Egyptian collections have found their way into numerous museums since the 19th century. Organized as part of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the bust of Nefertiti, the exhibition is organized around three themes that reflect on the processes of appropriation, de-contextualization and re-semanticization that an artwork undergoes as it travels through time and place. In doing so, it unpacks the complex relationships that exist among such artworks, the artists who first made them and the institutions that exhibited them. Visitors can see over 100 works of art dating from 1800 BCE to the present day, including paintings, sculptures, photographs, video installations and mixed techniques. Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Spain, through January 26.

**The Long Journey** is the first part of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's newly digitized archive, which includes

more than half a million negatives, prints, slides, films and videocassettes covering all aspects of the life and history of Palestine refugees from 1948 to the present day. Both the archive and the exhibition are intended to help preserve Palestinians'—and the world's—collective memory of one element of Palestinian identity: the refugee experience. Al-Ma'mal Center, East Jerusalem, through January 28; thereafter cities in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Europe.

### Current February

**Akram Zaatari:** *On Photography, People and Modern Times* presents celebrated Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari, among the most influential artists of his generation, who has played a critical role in developing the formal, intellectual and institutional infrastructure of Beirut's contemporary art scene. He is also a co-founder of the Arab Image Foundation, whose growing collection now includes more than 600,000 images and whose mission is to preserve and study vernacular and studio photography from the Middle East, North Africa and the Arab diaspora. Thomas Dane Gallery, London SW1, through February 1.

**Ahmed Alsoudani:** *Redacted* showcases 20 recent works by the celebrated New York-based Iraqi artist and will include a number of new paintings and drawings that chart the artist's unique and powerful visual vocabulary of violence, survival,

and history. Alousdani's artistic process involves layering charcoal drawing and a bright paint palette, creating passages of beauty amid distorted and disturbing imagery. While his work focuses on various aspects of war that he himself has experienced in his past, Alousdani's works are not a first-person account of war. Instead, they encompass the universal aspects and atrocities that war entails. **Portland (Maine) Museum of Art**, through February 2.

**Afritecture: Building Social Change.** Contemporary architecture in Africa presents many innovative approaches in the field of public buildings and communal spaces, such as schools, marketplaces, hospitals, cultural centers, sports facilities and assembly halls. In many cases, the future users are directly involved in design and construction; in addition, many of the projects are developed with local materials and utilize dormant local building traditions. The exhibition spotlights those projects, with particular emphasis on those that incorporate global relationships in addition to those with local culture and individual social groups. It comprises 28 projects from 10 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and South Africa. Bilingual catalog. Pinakothek der Moderne, **Munich**, through February 2.

**The Roof Garden Commission: Imran Qureshi's Miniature Paintings** pairs works on paper by Imran Qureshi with historic miniatures from the Metropolitan's collection. The exquisitely detailed paintings created for the Mughal emperors (1526–1857) and other courts inspired these miniatures. At Lahore's National College of Arts (NCA), Qureshi studied the rigorous techniques of this tradition, which range from gilding and handcrafting the thickly plied, carefully burnished paper supports to the careful application of color with tiny handmade brushes of squirrel fur. Qureshi now teaches this practice to a new generation of students at NCA, yet he continues to find room to experiment within the well-defined strictures of this traditional discipline: In some works, he layers the pages of old textbooks found at a flea market with drawings of scissors or plantlike forms. In others, such as his ongoing series "Moderate Enlightenment," detailed portraits of friends and family in contemporary dress are set in sumptuously gilded landscapes, replete with the meticulous detail found in folios commissioned by the Mughal emperors. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through February 2.

**Amar Kanwar: The Sovereign Forest + Other Stories** centers on "The Sovereign Forest," an inquiry into crime, politics, human rights and ecology in a constellation of moving and still images, texts, books, pamphlets, objects and seeds. Kanwar is known for his film essays, which evolve from documentary practice and explore the political, social, economic and ecological conditions of the Indian subcontinent. "The Sovereign Forest" continuously reincarnates as an art installation, an exhibition, a library, a memorial, a public trial, a call for more evidence and an archive, and is also a proposition for a space that engages with political issues as well as with art. Yorkshire Sculpture Park, **Wakefield, West Yorkshire, UK**, through February 2.

**Emperor Charles v Captures Tunis: Documenting a Campaign.** In 1535, Emperor Charles v set sail with a fleet of 400 ships and more than 30,000 soldiers to reconquer the Kingdom of Tunis from the

Ottomans. To document the campaign and his expected victory, he brought along historians, poets and also his court painter, Jan Cornelisz. Vermeyen. In 1543, the Flemish artist was commissioned to paint the cartoons for 12 monumental tapestries celebrating the campaign. His designs were informed by the countless drawings and sketches he had brought back from North Africa. The cartoons—full-size paintings in charcoal and watercolor or gouache, intended to guide tapestry-makers—are appreciated as autonomous artworks; their topographically exact rendering of locations and their detailed depictions bring the turbulent events of 1535 to life. Kunsthistorisches Museum, **Vienna**, through February 2.

**Nur: Light in Art and Science from the Islamic World** explores the use and significance of light and demonstrates that *nur*—which means "light" in both the physical and metaphysical sense—is a unifying motif in Islamic civilizations worldwide. The exhibition spans more than 10 centuries and includes 150 objects whose provenance ranges from Spain to Central Asia. It is organized into two major sections: one includes gold-illuminated manuscripts, luster-glazed ceramics, inlay metalwork in silver and gold, and objects made from precious and semiprecious stones. The second shows such objects as equatorial sundials, astrolabes and anatomical instruments. The exhibition also highlights Spain's role as a bridge between Europe and the Islamic world, and notes the idea of light as a metaphor shared by Muslim, Christian and Jewish cultures. Focus-Aben-go Foundation, **Seville, Spain**, through February 9; **Dallas Museum of Art**, March 30 through June 29.

**Creative Dissent: Arts of the Arab World Uprisings** is an immersive multimedia exhibition that displays the creative vitality released by the so-called Arab Spring. Freedom of speech merged with artistic expression to capture the anger, elation, frustration and hope of those months through call-and-response chants, graffiti, video, blog postings, cartoons, music, photography, posters and even puppetry. Arab American National Museum, **Dearborn, Michigan**, through February 9.

**Allegory and Illusion: Early Portrait Photography** from South Asia presents some 120 photographs and a selection of albums, glass plate negatives, cabinet cards, *cartes de visite* and postcards illustrating the rich tradition of portrait photography in India, Burma, Sri Lanka and Nepal from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. The exhibition explores the democratizing aspect of photography by presenting royal court portraits alongside photographs of the middle class that were often circulated as *cartes de visite*, cabinet cards or postcards. The photographs reveal an alternate history of 19th-century India that reflects a transition between Mughal culture and British rule, as seen, for example, in late 19th-century photographs that reference miniature painting esthetics. The exhibition looks at the form of the painted photograph, popular and idiosyncratic in India and Nepal in the 19th century, for both artistic purposes and as a gesture toward realism. Rubin Museum of Art, **New York**, through February 10.

**Sacred Pages: Conversations About the Qur'an** offers visitors a way to broaden their understanding of the Qur'an, Islam and Islamic art. Drawing on the museum's collection of loose pages from copies of

the Qur'an, the exhibition showcases 25 examples, illustrating their significance as masterful and sacred works of art but also exploring how they are understood by individual Muslims living in the Boston area today. These beautiful works of Arabic calligraphy, made as early as the eighth and as recently as the 20th century, were created in Egypt, Morocco, Iran and Turkey, and the diversity of time and place of production is mirrored by the manner in which they are displayed, as the exhibition pairs curatorial interpretation about developments in Islamic art with personal statements by members of Boston's Islamic communities who were invited to share their comments and reactions to the pages. Museum of Fine Arts, **Boston**, through February 23.

**Our Work: Modern Jobs—Ancient Origins**, an exhibition of photographic portraits, explores how cultural achievements of the ancient Middle East have created or contributed to much of modern life. To show the connections between the past and today, artifacts that document the origins or development of such professions as baker, farmer, manicurist, brewer, writer, clockmaker or judge in the ancient world are paired with a person who is the modern "face" of that profession. The resulting photographic portraits by Jason Reblando represent the diversity of Chicago residents, ranging from ordinary workers to local luminaries. They are accompanied by information on the specific contribution of the ancient world and remarks from the modern representative, resulting in fascinating new insights into how members of the public view their relationship to the past. Oriental Institute Museum, **Chicago**, through February 23.

**Current March Art & Textiles: Fabric as Material and Concept in Modern Art from Klimt to the Present** encompasses some 200 works by 80 known artists—among them Klimt, van Gogh, Dégas, Matisse, Klee and Pollock—and 60 whose names have not been preserved. Visitors encounter not only works of art made out of textiles, such as knitted pictures by Rosemarie Trockel, but also paintings illustrating textiles, like the hanging laundry in Dégas's "Woman Ironing" or the sumptuous Ball-Entrée that envelops Marie Henneberg in a textile cloud in her portrait by Klimt. Videos deal with the notion of the textile, and more ethnographic objects are also on show, such as fine African Kuba cloth. The exhibition also considers the role of textile techniques in the birth of abstraction, as the orthogonal fabric structure of warp and woof finds its equivalent in the rectangular grid pattern that conquered modern painting in the late 1920's. **Art & Textiles** also features exhibits from Africa, South America and the Orient that exemplify intercultural dialogue: The universality of textiles makes them a kind of world language. Kunstmuseum **Wolfsburg, Germany**, through March 2.

**The Countenance of the Other: The Coins of the Huns and Western Turks in Central Asia and India** offers a new look at a little-known civilization. The Huns, more than any other people, symbolize the menace of migrating nomadic hordes from the steppes. Contemporary historians called the Huns "two-legged beasts"; Indians claimed they had destroyed monasteries and other religious institutions. This reputation was undeserved: Hunnish coinage documents the willingness of the new masters of Central Asia and northern India to conflate and amalgamate the many

cultural and religious influences to which they were exposed, creating a unique culture both touchingly strange and familiar to the modern eye. Kunsthistorisches Museum, **Vienna**, through March 2.

**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. Museum of Fine Arts, **Houston**, through March 9; Nelson-Atkins Museum, **Kansas City**, April through July 2014; Asian Art Museum of **San Francisco**, October 17 through January 18, 2015.

**The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia: A New Beginning** focuses on a document sometimes referred to as the first "bill of rights," a football-sized, barrel-shaped clay object covered in Babylonian cuneiform that dates to the Persian king Cyrus the Great's conquest of Babylon in the sixth century BCE. Almost 2600 years later, its remarkable legacy continues to shape contemporary political debates, cultural rhetoric and philosophy. The text on the cylinder announces Cyrus's intention to allow freedom of worship to his new subjects. His legacy as a leader inspired rulers for millennia, from Alexander the Great to Thomas Jefferson, and the cylinder itself was used as a symbol of religious freedom and the hope for peace in the Middle East. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (formerly Prince of Wales Museum of Western India), **Mumbai**, through March 10.

**Silver from the Malay World** explores the rich traditions of silver in the Malay world. Intricate ornament drawn from geometry and nature decorates dining vessels, clothing accessories and ceremonial regalia. The exhibition features rarely seen collections acquired by three prominent colonial administrators in British Malaya at the turn of the 20th century. Victoria and Albert Museum, **London**, through March 16.

**The Life and Afterlife of David Livingstone: Exploring Missionary Archives** brings together archives, photographs, maps and artifacts relating to one of the best known British explorers and humanitarian campaigners of the 19th century. He is famed for his extensive travels through Africa, his campaign against the

slave trade and the rich archival legacy he left behind. A controversial figure, Livingstone was criticized for failing to make converts on his travels, and ultimately died evangelizing. Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London, through March 22.

**Count Your Blessings** exhibits more than 70 sets of long and short strings of prayer beads from various Asian cultures, many with flourishes, counters, attachments or tassels. Some are made of precious or semiprecious stones, others of seeds, carved wood, ivory or bone. Collectively, they reveal sophisticated and complex arrangements and structures based on symbolic meanings. Rubin Museum of Art, New York, through March 24.

**Echoes: Islamic Art & Contemporary Artists** explores how contemporary artists respond to Islamic art and culture in their own work, through a series of visual conversations that make connections across cultures, geography and time. The installation juxtaposes historical objects and architecture with contemporary works that draw on traditional Islamic styles, materials and subject matter. The achievements of traditional Islamic art are represented by works in the museum's collection dating from the ninth to the 21st century from Islamic cultures across the globe, including examples of calligraphy, ceramics, paintings, carpets and architecture. Contemporary works include sculpture, video, photography, paintings, ceramics and digital collage by such internationally recognized artists as Shahzia Sikander and Rashid Rana. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, through March 30.

#### Current April

**Hiwar: Conversations in Amman** is the exhibition resulting from a program of residencies and talks that brought 14 artists from the Arab world, Africa, Asia and Latin America together in Amman. The program was born out of the necessity to promote exchanges between artists from the margins, not solely by juxtaposing their works in this exhibition but also by giving them the possibility of learning from each other's practices and experiences. Also featured are works from the Khalid Shoman Collection by Abdul Hay Mosallam, Ahlam Shibli, Ahmad Nawash, Akram Zaatar, Amal Kenawy, Emily Jacir, Etel Adnan, Fahrelnissa Zeid, Hrair Sarkissian, Mona Hatoum, Mona Saudi, Mounir Fatmi, Nicola Saig, Rachid Koraichi, and Walid Raad. Darat al Funun, Amman, Jordan, through April.

**The Lightning Testimonies** is a disturbing eight-channel video installation exploring the often repressed, always sensitive and

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## Nilima Sheikh:

*Each Night Put Kashmir in Your Dreams* features nine banners painted by revered Indian-born artist Nilima Sheikh for a series focusing on the magical history and contentious present of Kashmir. Completed between 2003 and 2010, these scroll-like works, once scattered across India and Southeast Asia, have been brought together in Chicago alongside two additional works that Sheikh will create especially for this installation. The exhibition's title is derived from a line in the poem "I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight" by the Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali. His work initially inspired Sheikh's interest in Kashmir, a region she has visited since childhood. Sheikh's scrolls combine Ali's poems with excerpts from myriad sources—from medieval poetry to Salman Rushdie's books. Her image references are just as wide-ranging: miniatures, wall paintings and magical Kashmiri folktales. While the paintings focus on the cosmopolitanism of the ancient Silk Roads that linked Kashmir to Central Asia and China, they are also imbued with a contemporary perspective that encourages viewers to reflect and think afresh about this contested territory. Art Institute of Chicago, March 8 through May 18.



Nilima Sheikh. *Each night put Kashmir in your dreams*, 2003-2010. Nitin Bhayana Collection.

newly urgent subject of sexual violence against women on the Indian subcontinent. The work is a complex montage of simultaneous accounts, with stories ranging from wide-scale abduction and rape during the partition of India in 1947 to the powerful anti-rape protests in Manipur in 2004. Throughout the piece, Kanwar explores the many ways in which narratives of sexual violence are enmeshed within Indian social and political conflicts. Art Institute of Chicago, through April 20.

**Jameel Prize 3** exhibits works of the short-list contenders for the third round of the international award, which focuses on contemporary art and design inspired by Islamic tradition. Of almost 270 nominations, this year's short list includes artists from Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Morocco, India, Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and France, and the works on show range from Arabic typography and calligraphy to fashion inspired by Hagia Sofia in Istanbul, and from social design and video installation to delicate and precise miniature drawings. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, through April 21.

**Uruk: 5000 Years a Megacity** presents a comprehensive overview of the discoveries resulting from 100 years of excavation and study at the site of humankind's first metropolis, located at Warka in today's southern Iraq. Even 5000 years ago, Uruk boasted many of the features that we associate with modern megacities: municipal water supply, intensive commerce, cultural exchange and—once writing had been invented—extensive bureaucracy. Today, the city is best known as the seat of the legendary king Gilgamesh, subject of the world's first written epic, in which such now-familiar cultural elements as city walls, lion hunting and worship of the goddess Ishtar are mentioned. LWL-Museum

für Archäologie, Herne (Ruhr), Germany, through April 21.

**Wise Men From the East: Zoroastrian Traditions in Persia and Beyond** explains this ancient but living religion through objects and coins from Persia and beyond, including Islamic coins from Mughal India that follow the Iranian Zoroastrian calendar adopted by the emperor Akbar. Modern objects show the ongoing legacy of this ancient Iranian religion and its significance as a symbol of national identity for Iranians in modern Persia and beyond. British Museum, London, through April 27.

#### Current May

**In Focus: Ara Güler's Anatolia.** Throughout his career, acclaimed and prolific photojournalist Ara Güler, Turkey's best-known photographer, took more than 800,000 photographs documenting Turkish culture and important historical sites. This exhibition reveals a selection of his never-before-shown works of Anatolian monuments, taking the viewer on a historical journey through the lens of one of the world's legendary photojournalists. The 24 works on view also challenge Güler's self-definition as a photojournalist rather than an artist, and engage visitors in a critical debate about whether photography is an art form or a means of documentation. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C., through May 4.

#### Current June

**Perspectives: Rita Bannerjee** draws on the artist's background as a scientist and her experience as an immigrant. Her richly textured works complicate the role of objects as representations of cultures; by juxtaposing organic and plastic objects, she concocts worlds that are both enticing and subtly menacing. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C., through June 8.

#### Current July and later

**When the Greeks Ruled Egypt** explores the confluence of two cultures through more than 75 artworks. Gilded mummy masks, luxury glass, magical amulets and portraits in stone and precious metals demonstrate the integration of foreign styles while also paying tribute to the enduring legacy of ancient Egypt's distinctive visual culture. Despite centuries of cultural contact with Greece, the art and architecture of the Egyptian kingdom retained its distinct style, uninfluenced by Greek tourists, traders, diplomats and soldiers. So when Ptolemy, one of Alexander's generals, came to rule Egypt, he found it wise to adapt to the older culture, whose unique art forms had persisted for more than 3000 years. He installed himself as "pharaoh," built a new capital at Alexandria and united the two major gods of each nation to form a new universal deity, Zeus Amon. The era of Ptolemy's dynasty was an age of profound curiosity and rich experimentation, as the Greeks, and later the Romans, met an established culture far older than their own and exchanged artistic, social and religious ideas with it. Art Institute of Chicago, through July 27

**Kader Attia**, the renowned French-Algerian artist, unveils a new site-specific commission. The work revisits the biblical story of Jacob's Ladder with a towering floor-to-ceiling structure of rare artifacts and books. Hidden inside this library is a cabinet of curiosities filled with items ranging from old scientific measuring devices to books by such authors as Descartes and Alfred Russel Wallace. At the center of the work, a beam of light shines up to a mirrored ceiling. Attia's multimedia installations reflect on anthropology, politics and science and are rooted in history and archival research. His works explore ideas

around identity in an age of globalization. Whitechapel Gallery, **London**, through November.

#### Coming **December**

**Cleopatra's Needle** celebrates the Central Park Conservancy's upcoming conservation of the obelisk of Thutmose III, popularly known as "Cleopatra's Needle," explores the meaning of obelisks in ancient Egyptian divine and funerary cults, and considers how these massive monuments were created and erected. An equally important part of the presentation shows the significance of this ancient architectural form in western culture. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, December 3 through June 8.

#### Coming **January**

**Threads of Light and Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here** is a two-part exhibition featuring paintings by Iraqi artist Hanoos Hanoos interacting with a selection of art books and broadsheets from the project "Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here." "Threads of Light" refers to a poem by the pioneering Iraqi poet Abdel-Wahab al-Bayati, whom Hanoos cites as a "spiritual influence." The series seeks to celebrate and introduce contemporary audiences to the cultural work of previous generations in order to inspire the next. Hanoos's investment in the power of poetry and script and their relationship to memory chimes with "Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here," a project that collated hundreds of visual and textual responses by artists and writers to the tragic 2007 bombing that destroyed Baghdad's cultural and intellectual hub, Al-Mutanabbi Street. These works reflect both the strength and fragility of printed matter, and the endurance of the ideas within them, using Al-Mutanabbi and its printers, writers, booksellers and readers as a touchstone. Mosaic Rooms, **London** SW5, January 7 through February 22.

#### Coming **February**

**Mona Hatoum: Turbulence** brings to the forefront the diversity of Mona Hatoum's work over the last 30 years. The exhibition's premise builds on the artist's topical work "Turbulence" (2012), a 4 x 4-meter square composed of thousands of glass marbles laid directly onto the floor. Placed exactly at the center of the exhibition, this installation lies at the heart of a linear but non-chronological trajectory whereby a number of unexpected juxtapositions echo the complexity through which the artist has managed to challenge, and at times disturb, our experience of the ordinary. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, **Doha, Qatar**, February 7 through May 18.

**Court and Craft: A Masterpiece from Northern Iraq** examines one of the most rare and beautiful objects in the collection: a precious metalwork bag made in northern Iraq around 1300. Decorated with a courtly scene showing an enthroned couple at a banquet as well as musicians, hunters and revelers, it ranks as one of the finest pieces of Islamic inlaid metalwork in existence. The exhibition explores the origins, function and imagery of this little-known masterpiece, as well as the cultural context in which it was made, probably in Mosul. The exhibition also includes rare contemporary manuscripts in which similar bags are depicted, a life-size display evoking the court banqueting scene on the lid and related metal objects. Courtauld Gallery, **London**, February 20 through May 18.

#### Coming **March**

**Lost and Found: The Secrets of Archimedes**. Archimedes—mathematician,

physicist, inventor, engineer and astronomer—lived in the third century BCE. In 10th-century Constantinople, a scribe copied Archimedes' treatises onto parchment. In the 13th century, a monk erased the Archimedes text, cut the pages along the center fold, rotated the leaves 90 degrees, folded them in half and reused them to create a prayer book. This process of reuse results in a "palimpsest." In 1999, the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore and a team of researchers began a project to read the erased texts of the Archimedes Palimpsest—the oldest surviving copy of works by the greatest mathematical genius of antiquity. Over 12 years, many techniques, novel and traditional, were employed by more than 80 scientists and scholars in the fields of conservation, imaging and classical studies. This exhibition tells the story of the resulting rediscovery of new scientific, philosophical and political texts from the ancient world. The manuscript demonstrates that Archimedes discovered the mathematics of infinity, mathematical physics and combinatorics—a branch of mathematics used in modern computing. Huntington Library, **San Marino, California**, March 15 through June 8.

#### Coming **July and later**

**Egypt's Mysterious Book of the Faiyum** is an exquisitely illustrated papyrus from Greco-Roman Egypt, one of the most intriguing ancient representations of a place ever found. The papyrus depicts the Faiyum Oasis, located to the west of the Nile, as a center of prosperity and ritual. For the first time in over 150 years, major sections owned by the Walters Art Museum and the Morgan Library & Museum, separated since the manuscript was divided and sold in the 19th century, will be reunited. Egyptian jewelry, papyri, statues, reliefs and ritual

objects will illuminate the religious context that gave rise to this enigmatic text, which celebrates the crocodile god Sobek and his special relationship with the Faiyum. Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum, **Hildesheim, Germany**, Fall 2014; Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, **Mannheim, Germany**, Spring 2015.

#### PERMANENT / INDEFINITE

Benjamin-Constant and Orientalism, **Montreal** Museum of Fine Arts and Musée des Augustins, **Toulouse, France**. 2014 and 2015.

#### Divine Felines: Cats of Ancient Egypt

explores the role of cats, lions and other felines in Egyptian mythology, kingship and everyday life through nearly 30 different representations of cats from the museum's Egyptian collection. Though probably first domesticated in Mesopotamia, cats were revered in ancient Egypt for their fertility, valued for their ability to protect homes and granaries from vermin, and associated with royalty and a number of deities. On public view for the first time is a gilded "Leonine Goddess" from the middle of the first millennium BCE—a lion-headed female crouching on a papyrus-shaped base—and other cats and feline divinities that range from a large sculpture of a recumbent lion (305–30 BCE) to a diminutive bronze sphinx of King Sheshenq (945–718 BCE) and a cast-bronze figurine of a cat nursing four kittens (664–30 BCE). Also included are furniture and luxury items decorated with feline features. **Brooklyn** Museum.

**Muslim Worlds**. In four showrooms totaling 850 square meters (9150 sq ft), this exhibition brochures subjects that continue to play an important role in contemporary Muslims' perception of themselves and others: Using the example of the

richly decorated wall of a guest house from Afghanistan, the gender-specific use of space is addressed, as well as the pronounced association of women with private space and men with the public sphere—attributions that have become the subject of controversial debates. Using the museum's outstanding collection from Turkestan, the exhibition explores such questions as: What can historical objects reveal about the identity and self-perception of their source communities? What is the significance and meaning of such objects in these societies today? The complexity and many facets of Islam, both its orthodox and mystic dimensions, as well as phenomena related to everyday religious practice are illustrated by objects of very diverse Muslim provenance. Ethnologisches Museum, **Berlin**.

#### The Museum at the Arabian Coffee Tree

occupies the upper floors of a building that in 1711 became one of Germany's first coffeehouses. The museum provides information about the modern-day coffee trade, but also about coffee's beginnings as a cultivated crop and its advance from Arabia into Europe. Besides a replica of an Ottoman kitchen, it boasts coffee-roasting, —grinding and brewing implements from different eras—and places, and photographs of early Leipzig coffeehouses. Museum zum Arabischen Coffee Baum, **Leipzig, Germany**.

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.

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