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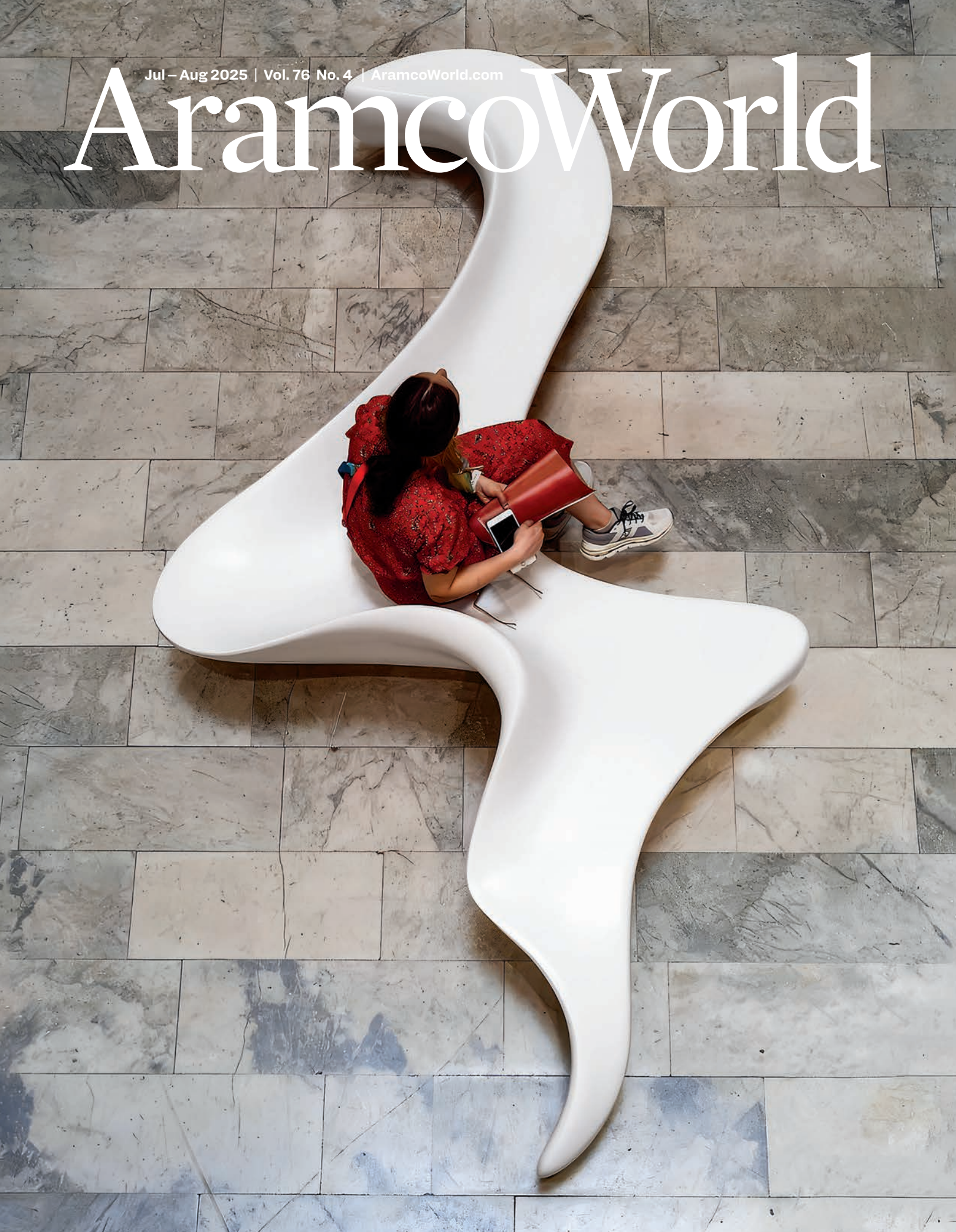

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aramcoworld@sfsdayton.com
or P.O. Box 292348, Kettering, Ohio 45429 USA

Editorial: editor@aramcoamericas.com
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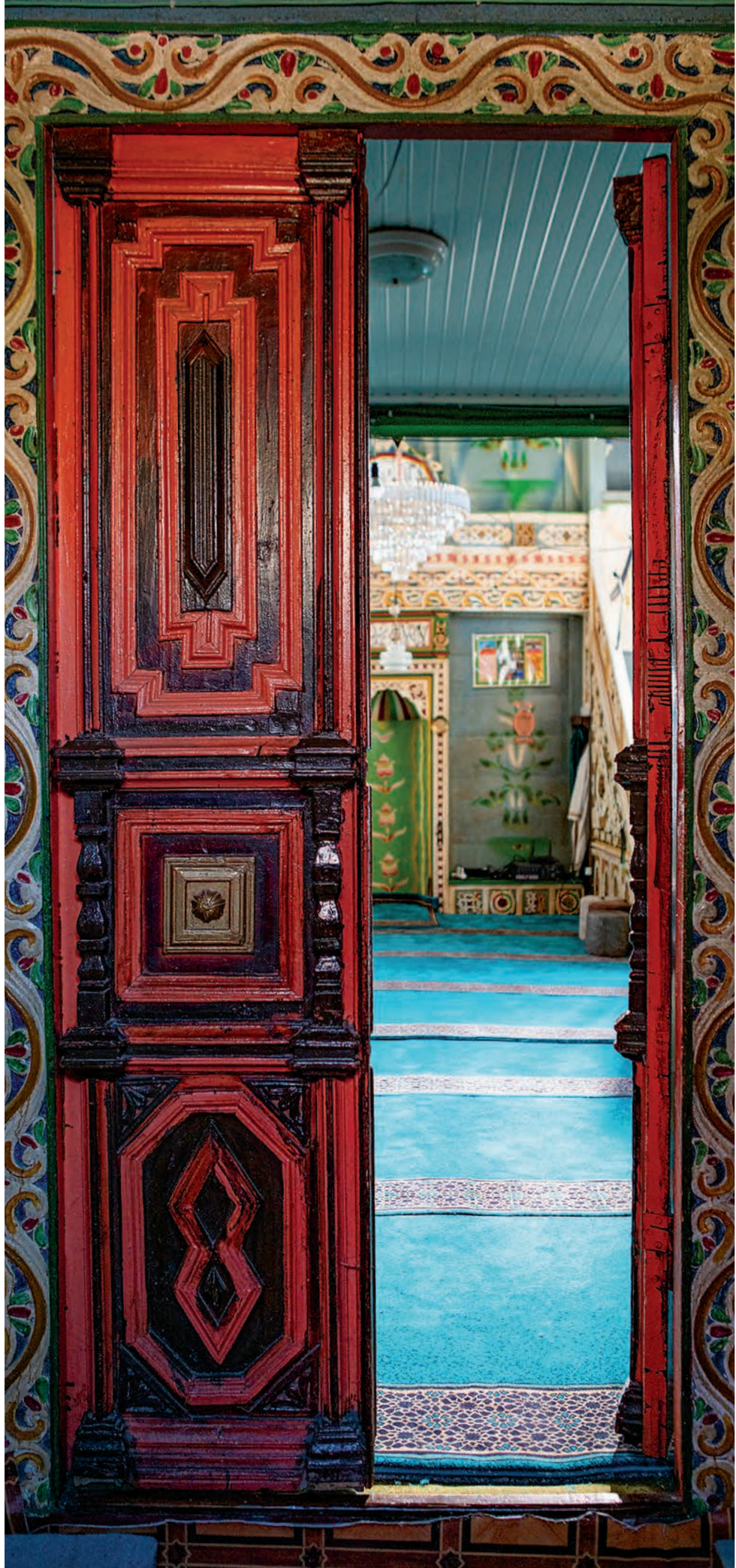


FEATURES

DEPARTMENTS

FRONT COVER Vancouver-based sculptor Marie Khouri's "I Love" acts as art, function and landscape. Its flowing calligraphic and arabesquelike hand-carved shapes hint at her Arab background and passion for language and connection.

Orion Through a 3D-Printed Telescope

Photograph by ZUBUYER KAOLIN

I had a keen interest in astronomy and the universe around us from an early age, and I crafted my first telescope from cardboard tubes and spectacle lenses when I was 12 years old. I remember looking at the Pleiades star cluster with it and seeing thousands of stars that were invisible to my naked eyes. I was awestruck, and promised myself that when I grow up, I'd make a better telescope!

In 2018 I started tinkering with electronics, robotics and 3D printing. I suddenly had the means to fulfill my childhood dream. In September 2019 I took my first image of a deep-sky object from my rooftop using nothing but a standard mirrorless camera on a tripod.

I had to overcome many technical challenges: tracking the sky precisely, building a reliable rig that can take very long exposures, modifying my camera to be more sensitive to the light emitted by the nebulae, etc.

In 2024, for three nights, I pointed my homemade telescope, made of PVC pipe and 3D-printed parts, at the most famous nebula in the winter night sky. I collected more than 11 hours of data and decided to use the best eight hours of it. After many hours of processing, this is my final image of the great Orion Nebula as seen from Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Zubuyer Kaolin is a Bangladeshi astrophotographer who captures breathtaking images beyond Earth's atmosphere. Learn more about Kaolin, his telescope and his passion for photography at AramcoWorld.com.

@THE.Z.AXIS
@ZUBUYER
ZUBUYERKAOLIN.COM

Flavors

Fennel and Potato Biryani

Recipe by SALLY BUTCHER | *Photograph by* YUKI SUGIURA

Biryani is a whole and very elaborate genre of rice dishes, not be confused with pulao or pilaf.

Pulaos are fairly dry steamed dishes with layered contrasting ingredients that are often cooked separately and usually served with a savory stock on the side. Biryani is more of an Indian concept—although versions of it appear in Kurdistan and Afghanistan—in which all the ingredients are cooked together. This makes for a very moist and flavorful dish, as every grain of rice is infused with flavor.

Sally Butcher is a London-based food writer and cookbook author. She runs Persepolis, the acclaimed Persian food store in London. Her most recent book, *The New Middle Eastern Vegetarian: Modern Recipes from Veggiestan* (also published by Interlink) has been hugely successful and was shortlisted for the Guild of Food Writers' Cookery Book of the Year Award. Her first book, *Persia in Peckham: Recipes from Persepolis*, was also published to critical acclaim and short-listed for the 2008 Andre Simon Award. It was also selected by *The Sunday Times* as its cookbook of the year. When Sally is not running her store, she blogs and tweets prolifically and has amassed a devoted online following.

(Serves 6)

1 ½ cups (300 grams) basmati rice

2-3 green cardamom pods, lightly cracked

2 bay leaves

Spoon of vegan ghee, plus a splash of oil, for frying

3 teaspoons fennel seeds

½ teaspoon cumin seeds

2-3 pieces cassia bark (or cinnamon)

2 cloves

2 red chiles, chopped

1 ½ big onions, finely chopped

2 garlic cloves, minced

2-centimeter piece fresh ginger, peeled and minced

1 large fennel bulb, chopped into 1-centimeter chunks

2 celery stalks, chopped finely

2 medium potatoes, peeled if required, and diced into 1-centimeter cubes

1 cup (150 grams) frozen (or fresh if in season) peas

3 tablespoons vegan yogurt (see below for homemade)

½ teaspoon saffron threads, ground then steeped in a splash of boiling water

2 tablespoons almond (or oat) milk

Zest and juice of 1 lime

1 handful fresh cilantro leaves

Soak the rice in water for 30 minutes or so before draining it in a sieve. Add the cardamom pods and bay leaves to a pot of water and bring it to a rolling boil before tipping in the drained rice. Cook for around 5 minutes before draining in the sieve again. Set aside.

Next, heat the ghee and oil in a large frying pan with a lid (I use a heavy-bottomed wok for this). Once hot, add 1 teaspoon of the fennel seeds plus all of the cumin seeds, cassia and cloves. Sizzle for a couple of minutes and then add the chiles, 1 onion (reserving the remaining half for later) and garlic. Soften the onion slightly and then add the ginger, fresh fennel and celery. Cook until the celery has softened and then add the potatoes and peas. Fry till the potatoes gain some color.

Mix the yogurt with the saffron and almond milk and spoon it gently over the vegetables, mixing a little. Finally, spoon the par-cooked rice over vegetables, add a dash of boiling water and stir once. Wrap the lid of the pan with a clean tea towel, cover the pan and simmer for around 30 minutes. The rice should be tender and the potatoes perfectly cooked. Stir the lime zest and juice in the rice.

Heat a small frying pan and dry-fry the remaining fennel seeds until they start to pop, then set aside. Add a little oil to the pan and fry the remaining chopped onion until it is brown and almost crispy.

Serve the biryani in a large bowl topped with the cilantro leaves, toasted fennel seeds and crisped onions. Yogurt and pickles are handy accompaniments.

Reprinted with permission from:

Veganistan: A Vegan Tour of the Middle East and Beyond
Sally Butcher. Interlink Books, 2023. InterlinkBooks.com.

YUKI SUGIURA

SCULPTOR EXPLORES LOVE THROUGH 3D

CALLIGRAPHY

At first glance it looks as if parts of a dinosaur skeleton have been laid out on the floor. Except this is a gallery, not a natural history museum. And the smooth white objects—which resemble alien figures, either reclining or curling up—are made of fiberglass, not bone.

WRITTEN BY JACKY ROWLAND, PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF MARIE KHOURI

Viewed from above, the perspective shifts. The enigmatic objects are huge, sculpted letters of the Arabic alphabet, which spell out in fluid calligraphy the word *baheb*: "I love."

This imposing installation is the work of Marie Khouri, a Vancouver-based sculptor. Born in Egypt and raised in Lebanon, she also lived in France for 30 years. Her work explores language and connection, fusing form and meaning in sinuous sculptures that ask to be touched.

"Baheb" is currently on view at the Arab World Institute in Paris, as part of a calligraphy exhibition this year.

"A distinctive feature of the Arabic alphabet is that a letter will take on different shapes depending on whether it is at the beginning, the middle or the end of a word," said Éric Delpont, one of the curators of the exhibition. "This opens up a range of artistic possibilities not available with the Latin alphabet, which is used by English and most European languages."

The exhibition explores the richness and diversity of Arabic calligraphy as a visual and cultural marker that unites the Arab and Muslim worlds. It aims to create a dialogue between the past and the present by displaying ancient pages of the Qur'an alongside vibrant, geometric calligraphy from the 20th century and photographs of contemporary street art.

AramcoWorld spoke to Khouri about her creative process and artistic influences.

RIGHT Marie Khouri uses traditional sculpting techniques and contemporary innovations such as 3D printing. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM** Khouri's work comes full circle in the country of her birth with a heartfelt message in "I Love," part of Art D'Égypte's "Forever Is Now" exhibition at the Pyramids of Giza in 2024.

TOP Working in diverse media, from bronze to charcoal, expanded polystyrene to wood, Khouri forms sculptures that reflect her multicultural experiences and connection to languages. **BOTTOM** Made of concrete and standing 3.6 meters (12 feet) tall in Burnaby, Canada, Khouri's "Vantage" has become part of the city landscape.

When did you decide that you wanted to become a sculptor?

I don't have any artists in my family, so there was nothing to tell me that one day I would go down that route.

I already had children by the time I decided to try my hand at art. I began with a drawing class because it seemed the easiest option, requiring only pencil and paper.

But it was the most frustrating experience of my life because I was unable to transpose onto paper what I was visualizing in my head.

So I switched to sculpting, and I never looked back. I took more and more classes at the École du Louvre.

I think sculpture opened a Pandora's box for me. Through the forms I was creating, I was able to speak about my inner life, about things that had been buried for a long time.

You originally worked as an interpreter. How did this involvement with the Arabic language feed into your work as a sculptor?

I spoke four languages when I lived in the Middle East and Europe: Arabic, French, Spanish and Italian. It wasn't until I emigrated to Canada as a teenager that I learned English.

In a way, sculpting brought me full circle.

As I worked the clay in my hands, I realized that the shapes I was forming were very much like the curves you find in Arabic calligraphy. It was happening almost subconsciously—these curves were almost directing my hands.

So clay became another language for me: a new way to communicate, through art.

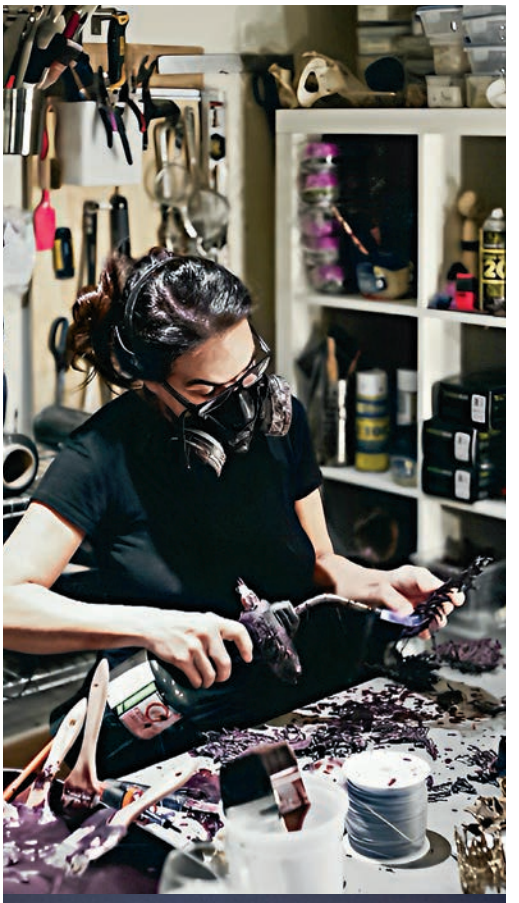
How do you go about creating sculptures on a public art scale?

I've been doing public art now for 20 years, and I have over 30 pieces of public art worldwide.

My process is always the same. I make small clay models by hand. Then I photograph the models and superimpose a scaled-up image onto a photograph of wherever the sculpture is going, to give an idea of how the piece will look in place.

We scan the models and 3D-print them, scaled up, in expanded polystyrene. I then recarve these forms because you inevitably lose some of the definition in the upscaling process. This takes time, but it's faster than if I were sculpting from a block.

Once I have finished recarving, we lay fiberglass



"This tactile connection to the work is very important to me. I wanted to get away from the old style of museum where you can look but not touch."

—MARIE KHOURI

Acting both as art and functional seating, "Let's Sit and Talk" is designed to bring people together. The piece is made of expanded polystyrene with a poly-urea hard coat.

EMA PETER

over the forms and then apply a hard coating on top. Finally, we spray the sculptures with a special white paint to give a matte finish, which looks and feels like talcum powder. This is all done by hand, so it's labor intensive.

I have made some sculptures in stone for private collectors. It's a similar process: I make a model, I print an intermediate size in polystyrene, then the stone is hand-carved in Italy.

I am closely involved throughout. They send me detailed photographs and ask specific questions. Do I want a certain angle to be sharp or rounded? Should they start at the top or the bottom? There is constant communication, and I travel there several times during the process.

As you are sculpting Arabic letters in clay, how do particular words or phrases come into your mind?

It is a conscious choice. In 2014 I sculpted a sentence that read, "Let's sit and talk." I wanted to send a message that dialogue was the way to resolve differences.

The sculpture brought together form and meaning: not only was it a readable sentence but also a series of benches that you could sit on. And they were white, a bit like waving a white flag. So all of these things had a meaning.

Today this sculpture has taken on a new significance, given the way that technology is changing our lives. Whether you're in a bus, a train or a plane, everyone is just looking at screens. We don't have time anymore to sit down and talk to each other in a human way.

I have now sculpted models of the whole Arabic alphabet that we have scanned into our system. So I can choose different sentences to create bodies of work, fusing language and sight and touch.

This tactile connection to the work is very important to me. I wanted to get away from the old style of museum where you can look but not touch. I wanted to democratize the experience. My sculptures are made of fiberglass, so they're strong and sturdy, which allows this interaction to happen.

Who are your artistic influences?

The French sculptor Auguste Rodin has been a big influence. His process involved making little models—of hands, feet and heads—and reusing these same elements in different works.

As someone who works with my hands, I love the way Rodin treated hands and other parts of the body. I really relate to his practice.

The British sculptor Henry Moore has also been a source of inspiration. I seem to share something of his ability to make a small model, place it on the grass and visualize it as several meters tall.

How did you get the idea for "baheb"?

I wanted to sculpt a phrase that has universal resonance.

"I love" is meant to carry weight.

It has become light and fluffy. I wanted to give it substance again.

"Baheb" was first exhibited in Vancouver. Then it was included in an open-air exhibition at Giza, with the pyramids as a backdrop.

This was a beautiful experience because I was born in Cairo, and to bring a body of work like that to Egypt was so meaningful to me.

"Baheb" began as a concept, but it has gone beyond that. My intention is for the work to travel through museums worldwide, spreading a message of hope and love.

The Arab World Institute is running a series of calligraphy workshops to coincide with the exhibition. The aim is to demonstrate that calligraphy is a practical skill as well as an art form.

"Each person's handwriting is as unique as their fingerprints," said Delpont, the curator. "Whereas the computer keyboard erases this diversity."

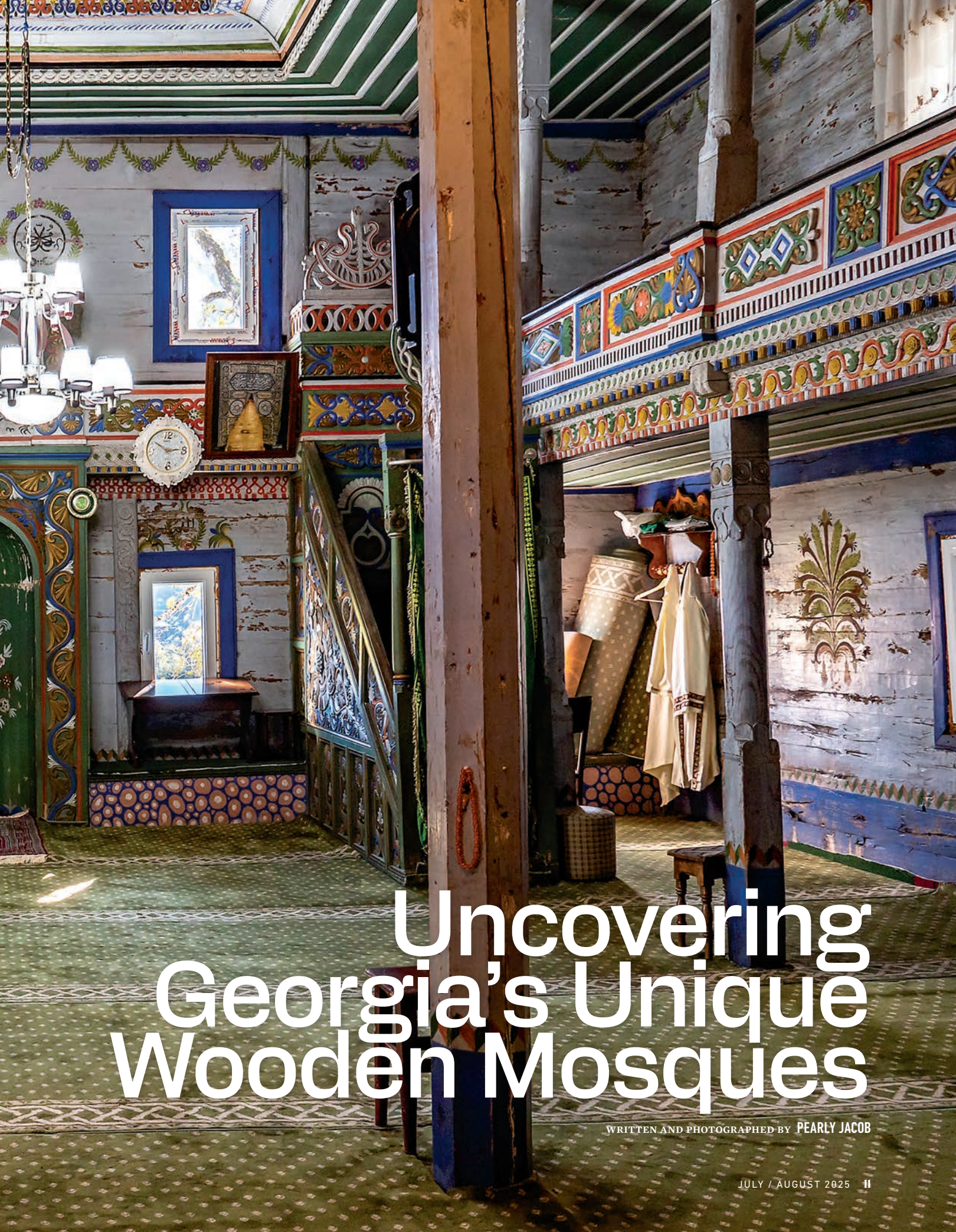
The importance of preserving calligraphy as a living craft is illustrated in the closing displays—photographs of huge murals by the French street artist Yann Chatelin, also known as Poze.

His work explores the tension between the individuality of handwriting and the uniformity of printed text. Human figures appear to dissolve while Arabic letters fly away.

A powerful evocation of the beauty of calligraphy—and a reminder that human expression would be poorer without it. AW

"Writing or calligraphy? The sublimated Arabic alphabet" exhibition is taking place at the Arab World Institute in Paris through September 25, 2025.

Based in London and Paris, **Jacky Rowland** is an actor, playwright and broadcaster who writes about art, theater, music and culture. She is a former correspondent for the British Broadcasting Corporation and Al Jazeera English.



Uncovering Georgia's Unique Wooden Mosques

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY **PEARLY JACOB**

A corrugated-metal minaret glinting in the late-afternoon sun is the only indication that the structure beside it is a mosque. The building, also clad in metal sheets, betrayed nothing of the centuries-old woodwork and rich decorations it sheltered.

RIGHT Metal minarets, like that of Beghleti mosque, were rebuilt post-Georgian independence to replace wooden ones destroyed by the Soviets in the 1930s. **PREVIOUS PAGES** Beghleti mosque's stunning interior woodwork and colorful ornamentation stand in sharp contrast to the corrugated-metal exterior of it and other wooden mosques in the region.

In sharp contrast to its drab exteriors, an explosion of colors greets visitors within. Orange, blue and yellow floral arabesques blossom on the wooden pillars flanking the central *qibla* wall that indicates the direction to Makkah. Blue-and-gold floral reliefs frame the deep-green central prayer niche, or *mihrab*, with swirling medallions in striking metallic hues that highlight the adjacent *minbar*, or pulpit, from where the imam delivers his sermon. The caretaker points to an inscription on the minbar that dates the decorations back to the Islamic calendar year of 1344, or 1926 in the Gregorian calendar.

This is Beghleti mosque, one of dozens of richly decorated wooden mosques built between 1814 and 1926 that survive in the highlands of Adjara, a region of Georgia. They bear witness to a chapter in the country's rich and complex history as vestiges of its little-known Islamic heritage that survived decades of Soviet rule.

Until recently, few outsiders knew of their existence, leaving many of these wooden shrines to deteriorate over time. Now their rediscovery has

TOP The details of the 1907 Dghvani mosque's central internal dome remain. **RIGHT** Nestan Ananidze, left, who campaigns to preserve Adjara's old wooden mosques, shares a love for the architectural gems with Aslan Abashidze, the religious legal adviser and community leader of the village of Khulo.

sparked a growing movement for their preservation.

Georgia, a nation nestled between Russia to the north and Türkiye to the south, is renowned for its deep-rooted Orthodox Christian heritage. However, in the Lesser Caucasus range along the Black Sea coast, Islam laid roots during three centuries of Ottoman rule that began in the late 16th century.

Starting with noblemen, the ethnic Georgian population of Adjara gradually converted from Orthodox Christianity to Islam, leading to a surge in mosques being built in villages toward the end of the 18th century, explains Ruslan Baramidze, an ethnologist at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University who has written extensively about the history of Adjara's Muslim communities. He notes that villagers continued to build mosques even after the Russian Empire reclaimed Adjara as a part of Georgia in 1878 and up until the Soviets took over in 1921 and restricted religious practice.

Aslan Abashidze, who serves as the *mufti*, or religious legal adviser, and community leader of the Khulo municipality, recalls stories from his childhood about authorities destroying the minarets of every village mosque to stamp out religious practice. But some of the main buildings themselves were spared because their modest exteriors resembled traditional houses.

"Villagers offered to turn the mosques into agricultural warehouses, and this helped save many of them," recalls Abashidze.

Following Georgia's independence in the 1990s, it was villagers like Abashidze who, with fellow

Ismail Beridze, 89, waits for Friday prayers to start at Ghorjomi, Georgia's largest wooden mosque.

believers, reopened some of these mosques, carrying out patchwork repairs with materials they could afford.

"We had to work with the resources we had. We get up to 4 meters [more than 13 feet] of snow in winter, and wood is very hard to protect," says Abashidze. This is how historical wooden mosques like Beghleti came to be covered in corrugated-iron sheets with metal minarets rebuilt alongside.

Today, surviving wooden mosques are slowly crumbling away while others have been replaced by concrete mosques.

RENEWED LEGACY

It is only in the past decade that historians, international researchers and local activists have begun to shed light on these architectural gems, highlighting their unique blend of Ottoman influence and Georgian craftsmanship.

"(T)hese buildings in their design and decoration are unmistakably Georgian mosques built under Ottoman influence rather than Ottoman mosques imposed on Georgian territory," writes Angela Wheeler, a Harvard University doctoral fellow and researcher in architecture, urban planning and cultural preservation, who co-authored a book on Adjara's wooden mosques in 2018.

She says that most mosques, new and historical, are immediately recognizable by their domes, minarets, arched entrances or gates.

"So it's quite striking to enter a completely unremarkable wooden building … only to find an interior alive with color, carvings and a decorated dome," she says, adding that locals built Adjara's mosques in the same style as traditional interlocking wooden cabins and that traveling artists would decorate them.

"Local masters from [former] Lazistan, from Adjara, from Artvin, from Shavsheti [present-day Şavşat in Türkiye] built and decorated these mosques using traditional methods of timber masonry common throughout the wider region," says Baramidze,

"(T)hese buildings in their design and decoration are unmistakably Georgian mosques built under Ottoman influence rather than Ottoman mosques imposed on Georgian territory."

—ANGELA WHEELER

ABOVE Cornstalks and an Ottoman steamship, signature murals left behind by Laz masters who decorated many of these mosques, flank the entrance doors of Ghorjomi mosque, which was completed in 1903. **RIGHT** Prayer beads hang at the mosque.

explaining that these medieval Georgian territories now lie within modern Türkiye and guilds of artisans would freely cross what are now international borders.

Masters from the Laz community, an ethnic Georgian group whose members now live primarily in Türkiye, became particularly sought after to decorate these mosques, working with local Adjaran carpenters and woodworkers.

"They [were] all Georgian masters who had the opportunity to know both the folk buildings of different parts of Georgia and the vernacular buildings of peoples living in Ottoman territory," concurs Maia Tchitchileishvili, an art historian and professor at Batumi Art State University.

Murals of cornstalks, a common Laz motif that also appears in the group's clothing, adorn many wooden mosques, serving as signatures of the Laz masters who decorated them, she says.

Murals of both cornstalks and Ottoman steamships prominently flank the entrance doors of the 1903 Ghorjomi village mosque, Georgia's largest wooden mosque. Its centerpiece is five richly decorated internal wooden domes supported by 8-meter (26-foot 3-inch)-tall elm pillars.

Until then, older wooden mosques typically featured a recessed square-shaped pyramidal ceiling with alternating layers of wood, an ancient architectural style common throughout the Caucasus and Central Asia, explains Baramidze.

Older mosques also incorporated many elements of ancient Georgian motifs found in medieval stone churches like the *borjgali*, a radiating spiral symbolizing the sun, as well as running braids and interlocking spirals. Grape vines, frequently seen in Orthodox church iconography, also appear in engravings and

TOP The abandoned Zvare mosque, which dates to 1834, exemplifies wooden mosques' resemblance to buildings with typical wooden masonry from the outside.
BELOW Tulips, a popular Ottoman-era motif, figure prominently in openwork detailing along a banister at the Zvare mosque.

murals alongside popular Ottoman ornamental motifs of the period, adds Tchitchileishvili.

Borjgali spirals are prominently chiseled into the supporting outer beams of Gulebi mosque, abandoned in the early 19th century.

In a neighboring valley, four borjgali motifs decorate the mihrab of Zvare mosque, built in 1834. Tulips, a popular Ottoman-era motif, feature prominently on the minbar's side wall and banister, while the gallery beams and columns bear Georgian braids and interlocking circles.

Despite these masterful carvings in both mosques, missing floorboards, gaps in rotting wood panels and moisture-laden beams indicate their fragile state.

PRESERVATION THROUGH CHALLENGES

Although state agencies officially listed Zvare, Gulebi and 25 other wooden mosques in the region as cultural heritage monuments in 2008, their condition points to the chronic lack of governmental funds to preserve them. But some believe there is a lack of will too.

Nestan Ananidze, codirector of Solidarity Community, a nonprofit that works on minority rights in Adjara, notes tourist signs for churches are visible everywhere, but one can't see signs for mosques.

As tourism makes inroads into the picturesque region that also hosts four UNESCO protected national parks, the village mosques remain invisible to most visitors, their presence rarely indicated.

In recent years, Solidarity Community has been working with local religious heads and heritage specialists to campaign for the proper rehabilitation and restoration of the mosques as unique examples of Georgian Islamic art.

Most Georgians identify as Orthodox Christian. While Adjarans are ethnic Georgians, other Muslim minorities in Georgia are descended from Azeri nomadic tribes or North Caucasian groups, and Islamic heritage is often seen as a product of foreign influence, according to Ananidze.

Solidarity Community's media campaigns and tours of these mosques have helped introduce them to fellow citizens.

"So many fellow Georgians are amazed when they see these mosques, and they start to understand these ornaments came from the Georgian people," Ananidze adds.

In late 2024, the Cultural Heritage Protection Agency of Adjara committed to restoring two

Osman Kakhadze, the 26-year-old caretaker of Beghleti mosque, demonstrates how the new chandelier is strung up to the mosque's original rusty iron pulley system. The mosque dates to 1870; its current decorations were added in 1926.

early-19th-century mosques in urgent need of rehabilitation. Zvare mosque now has a new roof to slow down water damage, while another, Dzentsmani mosque, was recently deconstructed to be restored and rebuilt.

Although hopeful about these recent updates, Ananidze remains pragmatic and says her nonprofit must continue pushing local authorities for a unified plan and strategy to protect and preserve all surviving wooden mosques.

"We are a developing country. There is little budget, but we have to do what is possible," she says.

Her nonprofit has assessed the rehabilitation needs of several mosques and published a list of low-cost interventions to restore and better protect them.

Turkish studies confirming the Georgian origins of the wooden mosques, also found across the border in Türkiye's Black Sea region, where they are called Çanti mosques, bolster these efforts.

"The presence of motifs frequently encountered in Georgian medieval Christian iconology and Eastern Christian stone art, such as braiding, two- and four-striped braiding, basket weaving and walking figure eights, alongside Turkish-Ottoman motifs … support[s] the viewpoint that the masters of these mosques came from Georgia," says Alev Erarslan, who teaches the history of architecture at Istanbul Aydın University.

"It is important to carry out joint projects in order to preserve these mosques, which represent the common cultural heritage of both countries, and to restore them and pass them down to future generations," she says.

Ananidze says Solidarity Community will continue its campaign for inclusivity and the recognition of Adjara's Islamic heritage as an integral part of Georgia's culture.

Scholars like Baramidze welcome the growing dialogue surrounding these long-overlooked mosques. He sees them as reflections of the country's multilayered and diverse past and is optimistic about their future.

"These mosques are part of our history. [They are] part of our rich culture … [and] local memory. They have to be preserved." AW

"It is important to carry out joint projects in order to preserve these mosques, which represent the common cultural heritage of both [Georgia and Türkiye]."

—ALEV ERARSLAN

Pearly Jacob is a multimedia journalist, photographer and filmmaker. She has traveled widely across Central and South Asia and Western Europe by bicycle and has produced stories on a wide variety of environmental, sociocultural and human-interest topics for clients ranging from Al Jazeera, BBC, DW, National Geographic, Voice of America and others.

The HANDY SECRET of Ohrid PEARLS

WRITTEN BY IAN BANCROFT, PHOTOGRAPHED BY ARMIN DURGUT

The Old Town of Ohrid—on the banks of a lake of the same name—is home to a gemstone filled with intrigue and mystery that has made North Macedonia famous beyond these shores.

With its cobblestone streets, Byzantine churches, Ottoman mosques and houses, this touristy town is filled with bookstores and souvenir shops, art galleries and jewelry stores. One such jewelry store, Ohrid Pearls Filevi, has been widely known for almost a century. What stands out are the portraits of various European royalty hanging behind the counter: Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Diana, Princess Catherine (of Wales) and Queen Margrethe II of Denmark—all wearing Ohrid pearls.

For these are no ordinary pearls. They are not formed inside oysters or mussels but rather handcrafted using a special emulsion formed from the scales of the Plasica—a small, silvery fish with a slender body. It is one of hundreds of endemic species in Ohrid, regarded as one of the world's most diverse lakes. And yet only two families, the Filevs and the Talevs, are the sole protectors of the pearl-making secret.

Ohrids' pearls represent a symbiosis between lake and town, the latter nurturing the wealth of the former to produce an artifact that has earned global fame. While the formula has remained within the two families for over a century, the pearls' fate depends not only on the future inheritors of the secret but their ability to remain a genuinely crafted

ABOVE A Filevi Ohrid pearl showroom is itself a gem in the Old Town of Ohrid, North Macedonia. **LEFT** Vane Talev, right, shows off his family's wares with his son Kliment Talev in their Old Town showroom. The Talev and Filev families are the sole keepers of authentic Ohrid pearlmaking.

Lake Ohrid, which straddles the border of North Macedonia and Albania, is named for the town of Ohrid. It is the source of the fish from which the famous freshwater pearls are made.

item in the face of mounting global demand. If they rely on a secret only two families possess and authentic production is handcrafted, how can Ohrid pearls keep pace with accelerating demand from tourists and jewelry lovers around the globe? Are they in danger of becoming a victim of their own success?

Ohrid is no stranger to external forces, as reflected in its historical and ethnic diversity. It is regarded by UNESCO, which inscribed the Lake Ohrid region as a World Heritage Site in 1979, as one of the oldest human settlements in Europe. Slavic, Byzantine and Ottoman influences are visible in its architectural, religious and cultural heritage. While a majority of the population are Macedonian Slavs, roughly 20 percent are Muslim, according to local estimates, mainly composed of Albanians and Turks, reflecting the country's broader composition.

As a local writer of thrillers, Jordan Kocevski, says, Ohrid is "the oldest town in the world with continuous life," beneath which "there are layers and layers of history—wherever you dig, you'll find something." Each layer has left its mark, including on the town's demographics.

With its scenic lake and historical town, more and more tourists flock to Ohrid every year. "The old town surprises everyone," Kocevski says. The constant presence of those serene waters continues to inspire musicians, artists and poets.

ABOVE The scales of the Plasica fish are used to make an emulsion essential to the closely guarded technique for making Ohrid pearls. **RIGHT** Street art celebrates the Plasica.

From a vantage point where Byzantine monks, Saints Cyril and Methodius, taught the first Slavic alphabet, Kocevski describes the serenity and spirituality that tourists want to carry with them when they leave.

For many, the influence of the lake is deeply personal. In 2014 in Ohrid, jewelry maker Marta Pejoska, who uses both Ohrid pearls and mother of pearl, opened Macedonia's first gallery for contemporary jewelry and filigree, the intricate working of metal threads into delicate tracery. "This is jewelry that confronts people with the sustainability of the lake," Pejoska explains. The lake's stocks of Plasica are essential for the Ohrid pearl. There is no substitute.

ORIGIN OF OHRID PEARLS

Ohrid pearls are handmade using scales of Plasica fish. The exact quantity required, however, is a closely guarded secret possessed by only two families, the Talevs and Filevs. They offer competing versions of how it came to be told in the first place.

According to local narratives, a Russian emigree of potentially Balkan roots, Jovan Subanović, arrived in Ohrid more than 100 years ago. He was supposedly drawn by the similarities of the area to Siberia's Lake Baikal, having served as a bodyguard for the Romanovs, the last dynasty to rule Russia, before the 1917 Revolution.

For Pavel Filev, an Ohrid native and one of the pearlmakers, it was his father who made Subanović's acquaintance in their family's traditional

restaurant. Filev says the secret of the pearl passed in the disarming atmosphere of typical Balkan hospitality. "My father learned the complete craft," Filev says with pride, his grandfather having been slower to realize its potential value. Vows of confidentiality were made.

For the Talev family, who own a shop a short walk away, it was a transactional acquisition of knowledge. "My grandfather paid 25 Napoleons for the secret in 1924," Vane Talev, the latest generation of pearlmakers, says, "and Jovan promised he would never give the secret of making the emulsion to anyone else." He says his grandfather worked with diamonds and was ready to embrace a new and, in their eyes, secret production

process. It has proved a shrewd investment.

While the two families dispute who learned about the pearls first, they agree that nothing in the process has changed in a century and that the craft is passed on within the families.

But both families remain reticent about describing or demonstrating the process. Talev reluctantly depicts some of it. A ground shell, literally "a single grain," forms the base. "The emulsion is stored in a small medicine jar," he says, lifting his fingers to demonstrate its size. "Then we apply layer after layer," holding up emerging pearls on either end of a toothpick. Get the formula wrong, and the pearls will lose their shine when confronted with perspiration.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF PEARLMAKING?

For Talev and Filev, their legacy is enshrined in family. "Every generation has added something new," Filev contends. "We had difficult situations, but we didn't lose our culture."

It is a pride that Talev also basks in. "We were sitting at a family lunch one Sunday, and my son said he wanted to learn the *zanat* [craft]," Talev recalls. "At that moment I could have flown," such was his happiness.

The following week, he took his son to work. "We only know our zanat," not the methods of mass production, Talev insists. "Big money in a small time—it doesn't interest me."

The mushrooming of shops proffering authentic Ohrid pearls aims to cater to tourists' wish for a meaningful souvenir. "We physically make eight 5mm necklaces in a day," Talev says, looking over his shoulder at his son, "Four each—maybe five or six at most—everything is handmade."

"Every generation has added something new. We had difficult situations, but we didn't lose our culture."

—PAVEL FILEV

Talev says the pearlmaking season runs from the end of October to early April each year, giving them a limited period. What they produce in this time frame is what they have to sell; there is no additional supply. "Our father still helps—he is 83 years old."

As they struggle to keep up with demand, there is a need to distribute the limited number of pearls to more people through new artistic expressions, where a single Ohrid pearl adds the finishing touch.

"Jewelry culture has been largely shaped by traditional filigree, an ancient craft passed down through generations," Pejoska explains. Though Ohrid was very well known for its filigree masters, the tradition was dying. "It was often dismissed as outdated, and many filigree masters had no successors," she says.

Pejoska and her gallery have inspired a new wave of contemporary filigree jewelry culture. "I was part of the ones who were paving the path for the others whilst shaping the Macedonian contemporary

OPPOSITE TOP The Filev family has made necklaces and other jewelry from Ohrid pearls for generations. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM** Pavel Filev says not only his son, Dimitrija (not pictured), but his daughter, Marija, will carry on the family business. **LEFT** Ohrid pearls are admired for their luster, unique craftsmanship and cultural significance.

> “[Filigree was] a reconnection with my cultural roots, my heritage and an awakening of my purpose.”
>
> —MARTA PEJOSKA

ABOVE Jewelry maker Marta Pejoska wears an Ohrid pearl necklace in front of her gallery. **RIGHT** Local writer Jordan Kocevski takes pride in the serene waters of Lake Ohrid.

jewelry scene.” Filigree was “a reconnection with my cultural roots, my heritage and an awakening of my purpose,” she adds, “while revitalizing the old, the new emerged.” Other filigree shops have opened, offering the Ohrid pearl novel ways of demonstrating its beauty.

Without this shift, the pearlmakers face a fundamental dilemma. Ohrid pearls are a handicraft held in the head and ultimately the heart. It is forged not only through training or practice but through deliberations around the family dining table, delimiting who can ultimately produce authentic Ohrid pearls. The pearls’

A store window displays Ohrid pearls for sale in the tourist town. Without a broader sharing of how they are made, the number of Ohrid pearls will remain limited.

innate value has persisted because of their preservation of the secret, now over a century old. Without a broader sharing of the secret, the number of Ohrid pearls will remain limited.

Both families are concerned about those intent on profiting from the new wave of tourists, who are sold pearls that aren't faithful to the Ohrid tradition, including the import of fakes that have no connection to Ohrid and its lake. "We received an award for our handmade work," says Talev, pointing to a certificate of origin from an agency in Brussels. Yet the nature of the process means that both families are limited in how many pearls they can produce annually.

The family names carry respect and value that guarantee a transfer of knowledge and tradition that can be traced back to the very first Ohrid pearl to Subanović and the time he spent with fishermen on Lake Ohrid.

For such family affairs, future generations are at the forefront, the secret passed from one to the next, though almost exclusively to the male family members. There is a clear delineation as to who will be the harbinger of the future. Talev's three sons stand ready to assume the reins.

The Filev family has taken a different course. He says his daughter, Marija, will inherit the practice along with his son, Dimitrija. "The process is closed within the family circle," he says.

While mass production of plastic, glass or shell pearls might threaten traditional crafts, Talev says it is important that Ohrid pearls survive. "The production technology is completely different from other pearls—it is 100 percent handmade." He remains convinced that Ohrid pearlmaking will survive and flourish. Yet his words are grounded in a conviction that authenticity will always trump replication.

Subanović's true origins and unresolved death are still a mystery. Like the secret of the Ohrid pearls, it will remain a source of endless speculation—and perhaps more inspiration for Kocevski's novels. In an age of conjecture, speculation and exposure, it seems unlikely that such secrets should persist. And yet they do. "I've had a productive life," Filev says, sitting back in his chair; a life that, like for Talev, was faithful to Subanović's wishes that his secret remain. AW

Ian Bancroft is a writer and former diplomat based in the former Yugoslavia. He is the author of a novel, *Luka*, and a work of nonfiction, *Dragon's Teeth: Tales From North Kosovo*. **Armin Durgut** is a freelance photojournalist and a documentary photographer. He is a regular contributor to Associated Press news agency and other publications. His book and an exhibition, "Mrtvare," poignantly documents the footwear of the Srebrenica genocide victims, and his work often highlights significant historical and social issues.

Cultivating Heritage

Moruga Hill Rice's Cultural Path from America to Trinidad

WRITTEN BY RAMIN GANESHRAM

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JEAN PAUL VELLOTTI

Rising every day before dawn, Trinidadian farmer Mark Forgenie prepares himself to go into the "hole"—the forested area in the town of Moruga where he grows a unique variety of rice from West Africa. Red upland rice, or "hill rice," as it's also known, arrived on the island two centuries ago with Forgenie's ancestors, formerly enslaved people from the Carolinas in the American South. Trinidad is, today, one of the only sites of its cultivation.

"My grandmother had three or four small plots behind her house [for] growing hill rice that she milled herself," said Forgenie, whose commissioned studies found it contains high amounts of fiber, protein, iron and even vitamin C, which is not normally found in rice. "Between that, 5 acres growing other food and hunting bushmeat, she raised up 14 children. I remember being told that the hill rice alone was the most nutritious thing you could eat."

Forgenie, a merchant navy captain, remembers eating his family-grown and -milled rice. Inspired by local lore that rice had curative properties, he began farming and selling it internationally under the name Moruga Hill Rice in 2016. It was only mass produced once before, during World War II, when the British government used it to feed its troops.

Beyond nutrition, hill rice boasts another, less quantifiable value: It stands as a powerful example of cultural heritage that connects those islanders who grow and eat it today to the customs, foods, language and religion—including Islam—of their forebears.

British naval records tell us that Forgenie's ancestors arrived in Trinidad during the high heat of August 1816, along with 700 British Colonial Marines. The climate, like the wetland-dotted landscape, would have felt similar to their former homes in the American South. Also familiar would have been the presence of African people, enslaved as they had once been.

According to the US National Park Service, they hailed from the Chesapeake in the Mid-Atlantic region to the Carolinas and Georgia from a tight necklace of small barrier islands hugging the shoreline of America's rice country. Today the descendants of such enslaved Africans from this region continue to be called Gullah Geechee, a group whose dialects and culture have largely been preserved. Some weeks before they departed from the largest among them: Cumberland Island in Georgia, today a designated national seashore inhabited only by wild horses, alligators and deer.

The men fought with the British during the War of 1812 between Great Britain and the United States in return for freedom and crown land in Trinidad, then a British colony ultimately settling in Moruga in the south. They carried few belongings, among them tiny seeds of a unique red rice that grew on dry land.

In Trinidad, they were called Merikins—pidgin for "Americans." Like their forebears who were captured from West Africa's Rice Coast and enslaved in the American South almost a century and a half earlier, they were expert rice farmers. The rice they brought was "red bearded upland rice," or "hill rice," and it kept them alive, along with the help of the indigenous Warao people who showed them where to hunt and fish.

UPLAND RICE GROWING UNCHANGED

Forgenie plants hill rice among trees on high ground. It is watered only by rainfall, as it still is in parts of West Africa today, according to Marguerite Agard, an Ashante princess and great-granddaughter of Ghana's King Prempeh I. She lived in Ghana until she was 8 before returning to the island with her Trinidadian mother, a Merikin. Known by

OPPOSITE "Hill rice" was initially planted by formerly enslaved men in Trinidad who fought for the British against the United States during the War of 1812. **LEFT** Mark Forgenie, a descendant of those men, has been growing the rice in the town of Moruga in Trinidad since he was a child. Today he sells it internationally under the brand name Moruga Hill Rice.

Hill rice connects those who grow and eat it today to the customs, foods, language and religion of their forebears.

her title Nana Abena, Agard recalls eating dryland rice in Ghana before experiencing it in Trinidad.

"It never occurred to me that it was special or different because it was both there and here," she said.

The manner of growing upland rice is dramatically different from that of the Carolina rice paddies in which Forgenie's ancestors labored, the vestiges of which still scar the low-country landscape. Satellite images available on Google Earth show the hard angles of irrigation ditches cut by enslaved people, according to historian Jim McKee, the site manager at North Carolina's Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson, a major 18th-century port and now a state historic site.

McKee said that the first Carolina rice was a West African white variety that grew as far north as Brunswick Town. He said these original varieties adapted to local soil and eventually became Carolina

TOP Hill rice used to grow in the fields adjacent to the Cape Fear River, seen in the distance, in the Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site in Winnabow, North Carolina. **RIGHT** In an albumen silver print mounted to a stereographic card, photographer O. Pierre Havens shows upland rice being grown and harvested in the 1880s in Savannah, Georgia.

LEFT Jim McKee, site manager at the Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site along North Carolina's southern coast, shows how a traditional rice trunk irrigated fields. **BELOW RIGHT** A historical map of rice planting in Savannah, Georgia, depicts former rice fields along the Savannah River.

Gold, the prized variety that built vast fortunes for planters whose operations were particularly lethal.

"Working in rice fields was deadly business," said McKee. "There were alligators, malaria and yellow fever, but those dangers also kept White planters away. And that led to preservation of culture."

RICE AND THE SLAVE TRADE

Like all stories of the Atlantic slave trade, the story of rice in the Americas is complex. A variety of West African rice (*oryza glaberrima*) was first planted in South Carolina in 1685 on dry land until flooding the fields produced greater yields. This was achieved through a system of floodgates and canals built with African know-how.

Historical evidence indicates that Portuguese slave traders witnessed rice growing prolifically in West Africa and purchased the grain to feed their human cargo. In 1594 trader and writer André Alvares d'Almada wrote a description of rice fields along the Guinea Coast, noting that the rice was started in inundated fields, then moved to drier land. Inland or "up land" variants of wild rice (*oryza barthi*) grew in forested areas—just as Forgenie plants Moruga hill rice. In 1678 the Anglo Irish botanist Sir Hans Sloane observed rice growing in the provision plots of enslaved people in Jamaica.

According to the International African American Museum in Charleston, South Carolina, people from Africa's Rice Coast of modern-day

PREVIOUS SPREAD, INSET: COURTESY MARK FORGENIE. OPPOSITE, LOWER: THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

LEFT Gullah Geechee chieftess Queen Quet Marquetta L. Goodwine traveled to Trinidad to view the rice fields planted by Merikins—whose ancestors were captured from West Africa's Rice Coast and brought to the American South before being freed and arriving in Trinidad. **RIGHT** Roosevelt Brownlee, a Gullah Geechee descendant and soul-food chef from Savannah, Georgia, is a local advocate of hill rice dishes.

Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone and Guinea were forcibly transported to develop what would become the American Rice Coast from North Carolina to Florida in the 17th century.

Due to the harsh environmental conditions that planters themselves avoided, enslaved rice farmers were left largely to themselves. This allowed for the preservation of several aspects of West African culture, including language, according to *Gullah Geechee Muslims in America* by Muhammad Fraser-Rahim. Their local dialect remains remarkably like English vernaculars in the Caribbean where people of African descent, including Trinidad's Merikans, far outnumbered European planters.

Rice was a calorically dense staple for enslaved people that they could grow in subsistence gardens. Although encouraged by enslavers to raise their own food to reduce upkeep costs, it's unlikely that valuable paddy land was given for this purpose. The West African dryland variety fit the bill.

But historian David Shields, distinguished professor emeritus at the University of South Carolina, said the red bearded upland rice variety—Moruga hill rice—can be traced to Thomas Jefferson, who sought West African dry land rice to replace "swamp rice," which, he wrote, "sows life and death with almost equal hand." In 1790, while serving as secretary of state in Philadelphia, Jefferson received a 30-gallon cask labeled "red rice" that he distributed to planter friends including James Madison and very likely George Washington.

Even with such a famous booster, red upland rice didn't catch on among the Carolina planters for commercial use. But it did thrive among enslaved people and planters alike, who grew it for their own kitchens. Jefferson wrote in 1808 that it had been "carried into the upper hilly parts of Georgia, it succeeded there perfectly, has spread over the country, and is now commonly cultivated: still however, for family use chiefly." In 1830 Anne Newport Royall, widely considered the first female American journalist, saw it growing in Alabama: "Upland rice grows here with success. It looks like oats, is sown in drills, and plowed and hoed like corn. It is of a reddish color when cooked. Every planter rears enough for his own use."

Shields said evidence of hill rice appears within six years of the Merikin arrival in Trinidad. He has no doubt that red bearded upland rice arrived with the Merikins along with other distinctly African-South Carolinian foods.

"In Trinidad, I saw benne variety [a type of sesame seed] and okra varieties that were identical to what is grown in the low country," said Shields, who is also the former chairperson of the Carolina Gold Rice Foundation. "There was a corn variety that looked close to a type of corn that is grown in the Southeast called Guinea Flint."

"The Moruga hill rice is a clear through line in the preservation of West African cultural heritage."

—BENJAMIN 'BJ' DENNIS

American chef Chaz Brown of Philadelphia shares the story of hill rice through his Afro Caribbean cuisine, including in his preparation with beef oxtails.

MORUGA HILL RICE TODAY

In modern Gullah Geechee communities, connections to dryland rice may be all but gone, but the intertwined history of rice and slavery is clear. For Gullah chefs like Benjamin "BJ" Dennis, who studies the historical connections among Africa, the Caribbean and the rest of North America, red upland rice represents a connection among people who are now strangers but whose shared legacy is hard-wired into their DNA. For Dennis, hill rice offers a compelling way to recast a solemn history of enslavement into honoring ancestors instead.

"The Moruga hill rice is a clear through line in the preservation of West African cultural heritage," said Dennis, who sees connections in Trinidadian dishes like pelau and the Gullah perloo, a one-pot dish of rice and meat like West African jollof.

Others in the Gullah community also see the Merikins' connection to both Africa and their own people with red bearded upland rice threading seamlessly into the present. In 2016, chiefteess of the Gullah Geechee nation Queen Quet Marquetta L. Goodwine traveled to Trinidad to view the Merikin rice fields and speak about the cultural ties between the two regions. She brought home to South Carolina a small sample of hill rice to grow in honor of her grandfather, who grew Carolina Gold on the land where she now lives.

"I never got to meet him," she said. "But I felt his spirit with me when my grains of rice came up. I was very proud of that moment."

Gullah Chef Roosevelt Brownlee, who lives in Savannah, Georgia, first experienced red bearded upland rice at a symposium a few years ago. He's had success growing a sample of hill rice decoratively in planters. "I was surprised because I thought rice only grew in the water," said the chef, a Rastafarian who can mark his 80-plus-year life's stages with rice. As a little boy, Brownlee's job was to buy quarts of Carolina Gold rice from the Savannah market for his aunt, who cooked hot lunches for Black men who couldn't eat at segregated restaurants.

Chaz Brown, a chef with both Southern and Merikin roots, has made it a priority to re-evangelize Moruga hill rice in America at the highest culinary level "for the culture"—in other words, the preservation of African diasporic heritage.

"I'm obsessed with it—it's calling me," said Brown, who has cooked at prestigious restaurants and appeared on reality TV's "Top Chef" and "Around the World in 80 Plates."

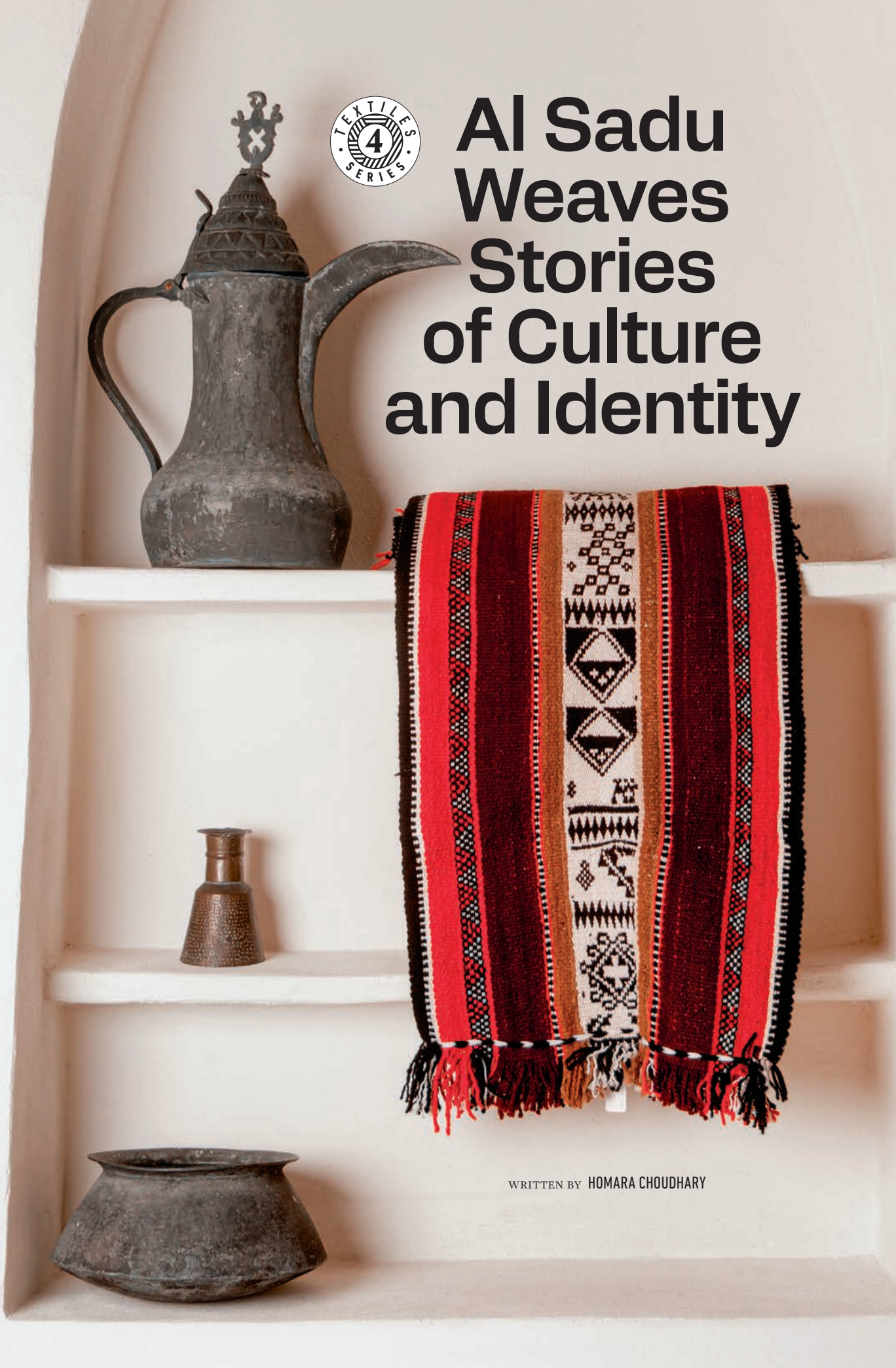
Back in Trinidad, hill rice continues to gain popularity—even outside the Merikin community. But for those who are tied to those original Gullah Geechee men, the drive to grow and eat these precious grains goes deeper.

"It's a link to our roots," said Agard, referring not just to her Merikin ancestry but her childhood in Africa. "It's a signifier of our culture." AW

Recipes and more online:

See instructions and read up on the history of one-pot Moruga Hill Rice Pelau and accompanying Benne Chutney, both adapted from the writer's *Sweet Hands* cookbook.

Ramin Ganeshram is an award-winning journalist and culinary historian focused on colonial and early-19th-century history of the United States and the Caribbean. She is also a professionally trained chef who has authored cookbooks including *Sweet Hands: Island Cooking From Trinidad & Tobago* and *Saffron: A Global History* and is working on various forthcoming books. **Jean Paul Vellotti** is a photographer whose work illustrated *Sweet Hands* and has appeared in *The New York Times*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *Caribbean Travel & Life*, *Islands* and more.



TEXTILES 4 SERIES

Al Sadu Weaves Stories of Culture and Identity

WRITTEN BY HOMARA CHOUDHARY

In the sanctuary of her bespoke workshop in Doha, Qatar, Al Anoud Al Subaie works a wooden loom with practiced hands. Strands of wool stretch across the frame, with unique patterns and shades that have colored desert life for generations. Around her rolls of woven fabric and tools sit neatly on shelves, a modern space rooted in tradition. She is making Al Sadu—an embroidery unique to the Bedouin culture of the Arabian Gulf.

For Al Subaie, a Qatari artisan, the craft has offered a profound way to reconnect with both her ancestry and inner stillness. "I was at a point in my life where I was looking for something more meaningful," she reflects. "When I found Al Sadu, it felt like it found me."

Centuries ago, Bedouin women of the Arabian Peninsula sat at ground looms, weaving more than just fabric. They were crafting the story of their people, connecting generations through wool, warp and weft. Mostly used in traditional tents and décor, Al Sadu nowadays has expanded to arts, décor and fashion and plays a significant role in preserving Gulf culture.

Al Sadu is more than a means of textile production. It's a form of storytelling, a visual language that records identity, migration and social heritage through geometric patterns and motifs.

"My favorite Sadu pattern is 'Shajara,' meaning tree in Arabic, because it allows me to weave designs alongside traditional ones by crafting different motifs each time. It allows me to be creative," explains Al Subaie.

Hailed as both functional design and cultural expression, Al Sadu offers a window into nomadic life and the enduring bond between people and the land in which they live.

Across the Arabian Gulf, efforts to revive the craft are gathering pace, in workshops, heritage centers, institutions and living rooms where grandmothers teach granddaughters.

In Qatar, the practice is more than a revival; it's a quiet act of cultural grounding.

FOUNDATIONS IN THE DESERT: UNDERSTANDING AL SADU'S LANGUAGE

Al Sadu, which means "weaving done in a horizontal style" in Arabic, draws inspiration from the Bedouin heritage and the desert environment. The textiles, traditionally made from the wool of sheep, goats or

ALSADU SOCIETY (2)

OPPOSITE AlSadu Society's Sadu House showcases traditional Bedouin artifacts alongside a handwoven Sadu textile, presenting Kuwait's weaving heritage in its authentic cultural context. **LEFT** A landmark public installation by AlSadu Society integrates traditional patterns into Kuwait's urban fabric.

camels, are known for their striking red, black and green arrowlike motifs and repeating bands. What sets Al Sadu apart from other weaving traditions is its use of geometric patterns as a form of visual storytelling, often reflecting the weaver's identity, environment and heritage.

"To those who understand its language," Sheikha Bibi Duaij Al-Jaber Al-Sabah of the AlSadu Society in Kuwait explains, "each design holds meaning, tribal affiliations, marital status, even invocations of protection. More than just a craft, Al Sadu is a cultural language passed down through generations."

The AlSadu Society was founded in 1979 by a group of Kuwaiti women intent on preserving Bedouin weaving traditions. Under the leadership of Sheikha Bibi, it has transformed into a nationally recognized institution, blending heritage with contemporary creativity.

Al Sadu was initially inscribed on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2011 as traditional weaving of the United Arab Emirates.

In 2020, Kuwaiti AlSadu Society efforts helped secure a joint UNESCO inscription for Al Sadu weaving with Saudi Arabia. Two years later, the society deepened its commitment through a separate UNESCO nomination for the Al Sadu Educational Program: Train the Trainers, which enables teachers to pass on their weaving skills to future generations.

"Each year we hold a student exhibition to help them take pride in their work. We have in-house training workshops and courses for both children and adults for different skill needs," Sheikha Bibi says.

LEFT Sarah Hannibal works on a traditional pattern using natural dye yarns. **BELOW** Woven textiles featuring regional motifs and Al Sadu-inspired patterns fill a vendor's stall at Souq Waqif Doha in Qatar.

ABOVE LEFT Sheikha Bibi Duaij Al-Jaber Al-Sabah shows the raw materials essential to Al Sadu weaving, including hand-spun wool and natural fibers. She says the AlSadu Society in Kuwait is committed to preserving heritage through education. **ABOVE RIGHT** A visitor peruses the Al Sadu exhibit at Ithra in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, in November 2024.

For Sheikha Bibi, the connection to Al Sadu began in childhood, carried by her mother, one of the founding figures of the Al Sadu Project, that predates the Society.

Sheika Bibi says the group also developed the Sadu Art and Design Initiative to encourage creativity and innovation. "It's a yearly residency program that allows artists to explore contemporary themes. I love seeing Al Sadu reinterpreted through their lens and draw in a fresh new audience to experience this craft in a contemporary manner."

The Society's efforts in preserving the craft paid off, as Kuwait City's recently became designated as "World Craft City for Al-Sadu Weaving," by World Crafts Council.

In neighboring Saudi Arabia, where the desert landscape has shaped the lives of its people for centuries, Al Sadu has always been more than functional. "It is a visual storytelling tradition, rich in symbolism and history," says Laila Saleh Al-Bassam, an expert in Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage and textiles and a professor of the history of clothing and textiles at Princess Noura bint Abdul Rahman University.

She's spent years studying how Al Sadu's motifs are passed down through generations of Bedouin women, carrying the legacy of their people. According to Al-Bassam, Al Sadu is "a record of life in motion," capturing not just the physical environment but the "social, familial and cultural landscapes that have defined Bedouin existence."

Al-Bassam says it's not enough just to teach Al Sadu's techniques. "Whether it's making carpets, bags or wall hangings," she says, "we must keep our tradition alive, and we must learn to innovate."

Al Sadu was popular with women, particularly of the desert, says Al-Bassam. "They needed a big space for the loom, for the weaving, for the dyeing. It was the life of women living in the Arabian desert, not in the cities. These women would carry their lives across the desert, so not all women in the Middle East or even the Gulf are familiar with Al Sadu. You had to be a woman of the desert."

But she notes young women today are keen to learn about the threads of their past. "They want to learn about all kinds of traditional arts, weaving, beading, including Al Sadu. It's important to them and is part of their identity."

AL SADU: ART, DÉCOR AND IDENTITY IN FASHION

Al-Bassam says the revival of Al Sadu ties in with the resurgence of traditional Saudi arts among the younger generation. "These arts are now being used as products for sale, particularly in tourism and hospitality sectors."

Abdulrahman A. Yousef is a co-founder of the unisex fashion label Own Design, which manufactures hoodies with Al Sadu designs in Saudi Arabia. The company's launch in 2009 was as much a statement of identity as a business decision.

"We wanted a fabric that speaks to Bedouin culture, to the tribes and to the women who traditionally wove it by hand," says Yousef. "It tells the story of how women contributed to our culture. It's more

"We wanted a fabric that speaks to Bedouin culture. ... It's more than fashion; it's art, history and pride."

—ABDULRAHMAN A. YOUSEF

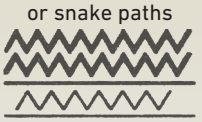
OPPOSITE: BADER ALBALAWI; ABOVE LEFT: COURTESY OF ALSADU SOCIETY; ABOVE RIGHT: WALEED DASHASH

Wafa'a Almotawa'a demonstrates how the textiles are woven during a workshop on a *nool*, or a special wooden rug-making frame, in Dammam, Saudi Arabia.

Symbols of Al Sadu

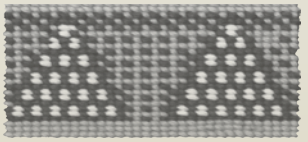
Al Sadu weaving features geometric shapes and distinctive patterns. Motifs vary across the region, but abstract and literal symbols of both desert life and manmade objects are common forms of expression. Here are some examples.

Zigzag lines: sand dunes or snake paths



Undulating diamond: water

Triangles: shelter/protection or mountains

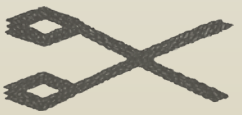


Intricate triangles: earrings

Elongated X: canopy (on top of kneeling camel)

Open diamonds: stars or constellations

Scissors



than fashion; it's art, history and pride."

And the appeal of Al Sadu is no longer limited to the Gulf. "We've got customers in Europe, America, Japan. Demand has skyrocketed. We've had to scale up production just to keep up."

For Yousef, the resurgence is deeply personal. "I see it in my own nephews; they're more connected to our heritage than ever before," he says. "Al Sadu isn't just fabric, it shows how our people adapted to the desert, turning what little they had into something beautiful, lasting and meaningful."

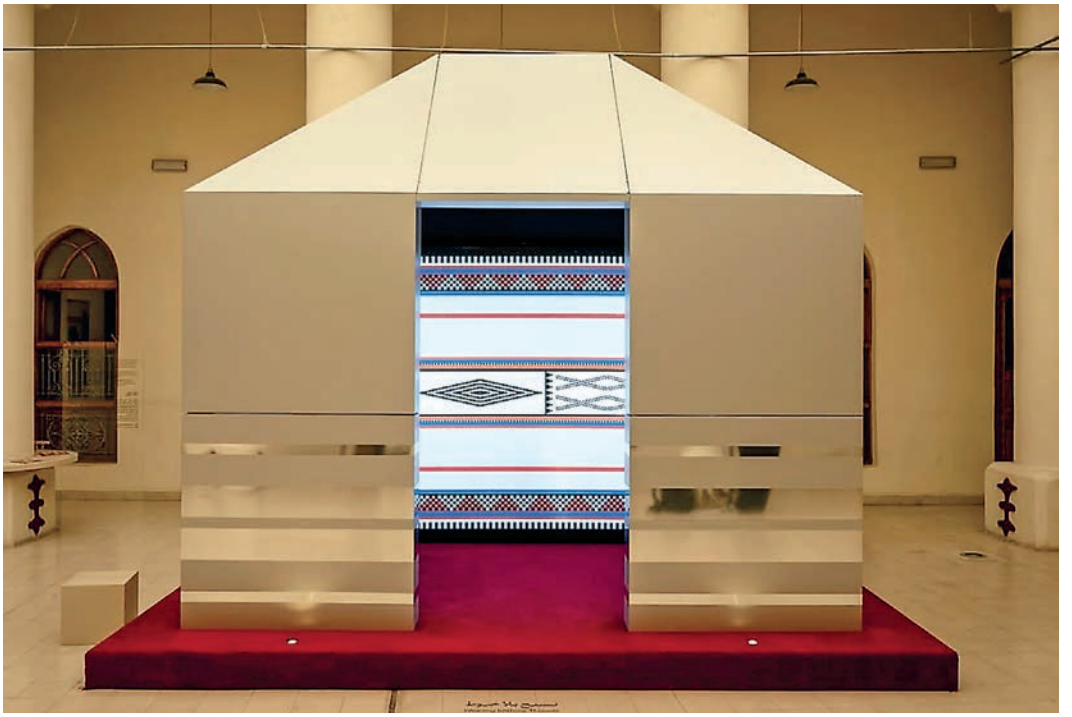
The craft has captured the interest of many who were not familiar with it.

For Sarah Hannibal, an American teacher in Doha, the path to Al Sadu began thousands of miles away. While studying special education in Texas, she enrolled in a weaving course—not drawn by artistic instinct but by the craft's mathematical appeal. "I can't draw stick figures," she laughs, "but weaving made sense—it's all numbers, graph paper, calculations."

Years later, married to a Qatari man and raising multicultural children, she sought to connect more deeply with their heritage.

A workshop at Doha's cultural district, Katara, introduced Hannibal to the traditional Bedouin form of Al Sadu, and there she learned the craft from the ground up. "We started with raw wool straight from the sheep. We washed it, combed it with boards full of nails, spun and dyed it over open fires. Every step was old school."

Today, Hannibal's loom sits in the middle of her living room, a conscious nod to the communal roots of Al Sadu. "Traditionally, women worked together. They'd weave side by side, switch in when one got tired. That's why I don't tuck my loom away. My kids used to sit next to me doing their homework." She



LEFT "Weaving Without Threads," a contemporary digital artwork by architect Abdulmohsen Al-Oraifan, was highlighted at Sadu House's seventh Sadu Art & Design Initiative (SADI) exhibition, "Ancestral Bonds." Al-Oraifan was part of a SADI mentorship program. **BELOW** A model wears a hoodie by the brand Own Design in Khobar, Saudi Arabia.

OPPOSITE TOP: WAFA'A ALMOTAWA'A

now weaves with modern tools, sharing techniques and troubleshooting in an active friends' group of regional enthusiasts. "It's still handmade. Still hours of patience. But more sustainable."

Hannibal says the majority of Al Sadu weaving is what's described as warp faced, a tight fabric that is thick and sturdy. "I enjoy making functional weaving pieces. The project I currently have on my loom will be a set of kitchen towels. My favorite things to make are baby blankets and towels, but the woven fabric can be transformed into other usable items such as scarves, rugs, table runners and embellishments for abayas."

Al Subaie says Al Sadu has become a bridge between her modern life and the cultural legacy she holds dear. "The patterns in Al Sadu represent people, places, memories," she notes.

Now she shares her passion for the craft by teaching others and spreading its meditative benefits. "Al Sadu became my meditation, my sanctuary," she shares. "When I weave, it's just me, the threads and my thoughts. Time slows down, she says."

Both Al Subaie and Hannibal acknowledge how easily the deeper meaning of Al Sadu can be lost beneath its decorative surface. "What people don't realize," Hannibal says, "is that patterns aren't just patterns—they're identity. Tribes had their own motifs. Women wove their names, their marks, into the cloth. It's how they said, 'I was here.'" AW

"The patterns in Al Sadu represent people, places, memories."

—AL ANOUD AL SUBAIE

Homara Choudhary is an international multimedia journalist, presenter and moderator who has worked for major networks like the BBC, ITV and Al Jazeera. She also moderates global summits and launched the UN COP29 Podcast.

Author's Corner

Looking Closer: A Conversation With Food Historian Nawal Nasrallah

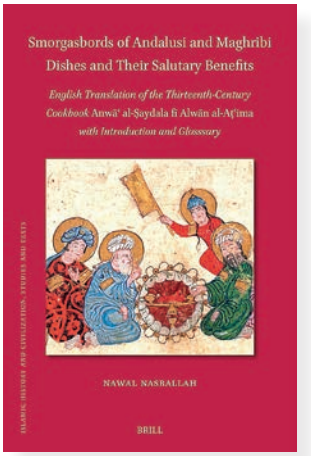
Written by DIANNA WRAY

In *Smorgasbords of Andalusi and Mahgribi Dishes*, Arab food historian Nawal Nasrallah breathes new life into what was originally known as *Anwā al-saydala*, a chaotic, anonymously compiled cookbook from around 1220 CE.

Long dismissed by historians as amateurish, the text had puzzled scholars for decades—its tone jarring, its structure incoherent. But Nasrallah saw potential. After completing her 2021 translation of Ibn Razin al-Tujībī's *Best of Delectable Foods and Dishes*, she turned to *Smorgasbords* and discovered its disorder wasn't a flaw but a clue: The manuscript had been copied out of order. Its recipes, she realized, had been curated buffet style from other now lost cookbooks, likely by a compiler collecting them during bookstore visits—an accepted practice in the medieval world.

By restoring its original flow, Nasrallah reframes *Anwā al-saydala* not as a failed cookbook but as a rich social document from al-Andalus's cultural height. Unlike al-Tujībī's later work, which mourned a fading Islamic al-Andalus, this earlier text reveals a society still flourishing, its kitchens shaped by multiple classes and faiths. From elaborate roasts for masters to humble dishes for servants, and even edible bracelets for children, the recipes reflect a world where food crossed boundaries. They recorded daily life in a society where food bridged divides, offering rare insights into coexistence.

AramcoWorld spoke with Nasrallah about how *Smorgasbords* reshapes understanding of medieval al-Andalus, why inclusive cookbooks defy stereotypes and her painstaking process.



Smorgasbords of Andalusi and Maghribi Dishes and Their Salutary Benefits
Nawal Nasrallah.
Brill, 2025.

Where did the title, *Smorgasbords*, come from?

It came from the book itself, the way it is laid out when you put all the recipes in the correct order. There had been other translations of the book before mine, but they were working from a text that had recipes out of order. People had dismissed the book as chaotic.

But once I figured out how it was meant to be presented, it became clear the author was compiling the book from different cookbook texts he liked, buffet style, with lots of different kinds of dishes and different ways of making similar dishes. The book itself was organized the way you might organize a buffet. So, when I was coming up with a title, I didn't want to call it "buffet," and I thought "Smorgasbord," a Scandinavian word that is more common now.

How did you realize that the book, long dismissed as having been badly written, was actually out of order?

When other people read the book, they saw it as a writer making a mess. The language would vary, the tone and way of presenting the recipes would change throughout the text, and they assumed it was someone who just didn't know what they were doing. But I started reading it, and it occurred to me that there was another possible explanation—that in fact this was someone pulling together chunks of other books. The language was changing because he was excerpting other works. Then there was the fact that the text itself had been transcribed out of order. For me, it was about asking myself what happened to the book. Three quarters of the way through, I realized the book had been transcribed out of order. It wasn't the writer getting it wrong, it was us.

ABOVE View of 16th-century fol. 11a of Jami's collection of seven poems details a busy marketplace.
OPPOSITE *Maqāmāt* by Harīrī, 1054-1122, dated 1337, fol. 56, depicts of a dinner scene comprising grammarians.

What do you think is the most probable methodology the author applied in compiling this cookbook?
He might have had the books himself, but it's more likely that he went to a bookstore and just copied the recipes he liked. At the time, it was possible to essentially rent a bookstore from the owner. Writers would arrange to stay there overnight for a few days or a week, copying whatever they found that they liked. It could be dangerous though. A famous medieval Muslim writer reportedly died when the shelves at the bookstore he was renting collapsed on him!

How does *Smorgasbords* differ from your previous 13th-century cookbook from al-Andalus?
The previous book was written about 40 years later by a man in exile. There's some bitterness in his tone, and he is most focused on recording his own vanishing culture. This book, by contrast, was probably composed around 1220 CE, when Muslims still ruled most of the Iberian Peninsula in what is modern-day Spain. Because of this, the anonymous author who compiled the book is more relaxed and more expansive. He includes recipes for people from all walks of life, from roasts that will please the master of the house to dishes that a benevolent master may have the household cook prepare for the servants to give them a special meal to enjoy. There are recipes for children, including one for edible bracelets that I think is so nice, the sick, the elderly.

How does the fact that these two people were working in different places and different moments of al-Andalusi history shape each book?
The tones of the books are completely different. In *Smorgasbords* we have recipes from different places, from chefs, from servants, and there's a variety of dishes. Al-Tujībī [author of the later al-Andalusi cookbook] had a tone of bitterness and urgency. He was already in exile, and he wanted to preserve the cuisine that he had known and that he believed was being lost. There was no real time in his work for exploring Jewish and Christian cuisine. There was no room for anything outside of his immediate culture in his book.

Why is what we see in *Smorgasbords* remarkable?
You don't see this kind of inclusivity often in this period. And it conveys an idea of what life might have been like there. It offers a glimpse of a community that had a relaxed tempo, where everybody was living alongside each other. Of course, everyone is still aware of the ruling class, and social class is still very present—there are still political pressures playing out—but you can get some ideas about how the community functioned day to day.

What can people learn from reading *Smorgasbords* and other historical cookbooks?
In the histories and chronicles of wars and sultans and kings, you don't get any idea of how people actually lived, but you can get some ideas from these books. *Smorgasbords* is even more special because it doesn't focus on the great and powerful. Because of *Smorgasbords* we know what kind of chicken a person living in *Balanssiya* [modern-day Valencia] might have cooked for a Friday meal, we have a recipe for *mukhallal* [meat soured in vinegar], which was commonly served at weddings in *Qurtuba* [Cordova] and *Ishbīliya* [Seville]. To me that's so much more interesting than what kind of cookies a certain sultan most preferred.

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OPPOSITE AND ABOVE: BODLEIAN LIBRARIES, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

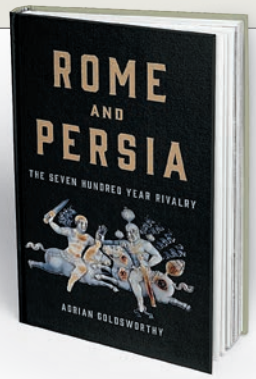
Reviews

From Samarqand to Toledo: Greek, Sogdian and Arabic Documents and Manuscripts from the Islamicate World and Beyond
Andreas Kaplony and Matt Malczycki, eds. Brill, 2023.

The painstaking work to recover history—one page at a time—is on brilliant display in this collection of essays focusing on early Arabic, Coptic, Greek, Hebrew, Latin and Sogdian manuscripts. Editors Andreas Kaplony, a professor of Arabic and Islamic studies, and Matt Malczycki, a professor of Islamic history, assemble articles by nine scholars in this volume. The compendium of essays reveals a network of relationships—both social and political. The book opens by reviewing a cache of accounting documents from Kom Ishgau in Middle Egypt to create a portrait of tax collectors during Umayyad rule (661 CE-750 CE). Another chapter examines legal correspondence, shedding light on the Arab conquest of Sogdiana, a civilization along the Silk Road in present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. As Muslim armies swept through Central Asia beginning in the mid-seventh century CE, they introduced an imperial Arabic writing style. The documents reveal Sogdian rulers selectively adhered to this new style in epistolary diplomacy as the two cultures adapted to each other. Likewise, another chapter delves into legal documents written after the conquest of Arab Toledo in 1085 CE. The documents, bear witness to the mixed population of Muslims, Jews and Christians navigating the shift in the balance of power. Taken together, the study of these seemingly unremarkable pages mends gaps in the tapestry of history. —KYLE PAKKA

Narrating the Pilgrimage to Mecca: Historical and Contemporary Accounts
Marjo Buitelaar and Richard van Leeuwen, eds. Brill. 2023.

Narrating the Pilgrimage to Mecca reveals how pilgrim stories actively reinvent the Hajj and Umrah, journeys to Makkah, across centuries. Edited by Marjo Buitelaar and Richard van Leeuwen, both experts in Islamic studies, the volume juxtaposes historical first-hand narratives of Hajj and Umrah journeys with oral interviews of contemporary pilgrims to show the transformative power of storytelling. The historical section features a 16th-century Spanish poem, Ottoman records and a historical novel of Tajik journalist Fazliddin Muhammadiev's extraordinary 1963 Soviet-era journey, among other accounts. These narratives contrast sharply with today's accounts. The ethnographic examination of Dutch Moroccan vlogs, African American conversion stories and Moroccan women's smartphone diaries reflect a welcoming exploration of how such narratives thrive on intended audiences, emotional responses and feelings of home. What emerges is a living tradition continually reshaped by its storytellers. Where 16th-century chroniclers framed Hajj as geopolitical theater, today's digital narratives turn it into intimate spiritual theater. The editor's thoughtful selection of 16 essays demonstrates this evolution. Muhammadiev's smuggled manuscript alongside an Indonesian nurse's text messages, proves pilgrimage survives through reinvention. Both editors' combined expertise ensures both the 18th-century Moroccan scholar's ink-and-parchment account and the 2020s social media posts receive equally nuanced readings—reminding us that every media format, from manuscripts to pixels, writes Islam's living tradition. —JAMIE S. SCOTT



Rome and Persia: The Seven Hundred Year Rivalry
Adrian Goldsworthy. Basic Books, 2023.

How do two contemporary superpowers thrive side by side for centuries? By cultivating peace and avoiding all out conflict with each other. In *Rome and Persia*, Adrian Goldsworthy, an Oxford-trained scholar of Roman history, reduces Persian and Roman longevity to simply an ever-evolving coexistence. The Persians, structured around dynastic rule, first led by the Parthians in the third century BCE for 400 years and followed by the Sassanians until the 7th, controlled a territory comprising much of West Asia, the Caucasus and parts of Central Asia. But they soon found a formidable rival with the ever-expanding Romans in the first century BCE. Although few coins and some pottery shards have turned up, Parthians and Sasanians lack the abundance of surviving evidential record for the Romans in the form of letters, legal documents, writings and artifacts. Despite this handicap, Goldsworthy balances a narrative history delving between two economic and political concerns underpinning why the Persians and Romans occasionally feuded. He demonstrates why and how they steered more toward "wary, watchful peace, based on the sense of each empire's military might," allowing the two entities to coexist without incurring the risk and expense of all-out war. It ultimately benefited both sides to remind the other that they possessed power and might without having to use it. The Romans would eventually emerge victorious, but the more-than 700 years of a shared, complex history testify to more subdued, mundane tales than oft written about. —DIANNA WRAY

"Simultaneously, a Roman emperor and a king of kings could each assure their own subjects that they were strong, and that the other man and his empire were weak and feeble without this requiring an attempt to prove it by going to war."

—Rome and Persia

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

CHRONICLE/ALAMY

Book Challenges Readers To Witness History Sans the Modern Lens

Written by DIANNA WRAY

The Ottoman Empire's 1516 encounter with Egypt's Mamluk sultanate ultimately led to the Levant, Egypt and the Hijaz, a stretch of land along the Red Sea, becoming part of the empire for the next 400 years. This multifaceted academic collection, curated by editor Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, reflects wide-ranging perspectives of historic thought from 14 scholars, from North Africa, the Levant, the Gulf and Türkiye. Each explore the consequences of the year that marked the beginning of Ottoman expansion across the region as custodians of Islam's holiest sites, informing Arab and Turk relations and perceptions of each other for centuries to come.

1516: The Year That Changed the Middle East
Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, ed.
American University of Beirut Press, 2021.

Throughout his decades-long career, Abu-Husayn, a Palestinian-born professor of Ottoman history at the American University of Beirut who died in 2022, challenged assumptions about Greater Syria during Ottoman rule. Drawing from December 2016 American University of Beirut conference submissions, Abu-Husayn selected 14 academic papers, including three in Arabic, that he felt offered interpretations of the Mamluk-Ottoman War without filters of modern-day politics, stereotypes or nationalistic assumptions. Each academic homes in on a facet of this crucial year in the region, examining tensions and power dynamics underpinning both conflict and outcome.

The Ottomans, as early as 1399 CE, had long cherished ambitions of conquering Mamluk-held Egypt. But it wouldn't be until August 1516 that the forces of Ottoman Sultan Selim I would best those of Mamluk Sultan al-Ashraf Qansuh al-Gawrhi at the Battle of Marj Dabiq, just north of Aleppo. This decisive moment led to the conquest of Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria), defeat of the Mamluk sultanate and the fall of the Abbasid caliphate, Turkish historian Feridun Emecen contends.

In his own contribution, Abu-Husayn examines how citizens of Damascus viewed Selim I's entry into the city after that battle via an eyewitness account from historian and Damascus resident Ibn Tulun. Although some modern historians describe the entry into Aleppo as that of conquerors, that's not what Tulun observed.

When Ottoman forces marched into the city, residents "were not deterred by the fear of the conquering army or the reputation of the sultan," Tulun recorded in his diary. Indeed, Tulun got close enough to Selim I to observe that he entered a *hammam* (Turkish bath) with a beard but left cleanshaven, Abu-Husayn points out.

Historians don't just focus on the war itself. German-based historian Christiane Czygan analyzes how Selim I put divan poetry, a Turkic literary tradition used for court and business purposes, to political use to "project a clear understanding of how a perfect ruler should be." Meanwhile, Italian historian Giancarlo Casale traces how the Ottomans, postconquest, encountered and decoded Egyptian antiques and the polytheistic culture they represented.

The resulting work mines every vein to glean a better understanding of what prompted Selim I to ride out of Istanbul at the head of the Ottoman army in early 1516, and how that and other decisions continue to reverberate through history.

"In short, it stands to reason that spontaneous and unforeseeable events converged and produced the Battle of Marj Dabiq, which proved to be a milestone for the Ottoman conquest of the Middle East."

—1516: The Year That Changed the Middle East

Find more reviews like this online at AramcoWorld.com.

Events

Biennale Celebrates Inclusivity in Architecture

Venice Architectural Biennale is the world's largest architectural festival. This year's theme, "Intelligens: Natural. Artificial. Collective.," capitalizes on the theme of intelligence across the sciences and arts—rethinking design in a time of climate adaptation. The biennale features more than 300 projects, 66 countries—including Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Uzbekistan—and, for the first time, over 750 participants, from engineers to mathematicians to chefs, farmers, fashion designers and more, to encourage inclusivity and collaboration.

Venice, Italy, through November 23.

ABOVE The Manameh Pavilion is designed with cooling fabrics for shade and ventilation.

Current / August

The European Qur'an documents the significant role played by the Qur'an in the lives of Europeans through historical artifacts, contemporary works of art, media installations and facsimiles of manuscripts and books. The exhibition examines the perceptions and uses of the holy text of Islam in Europe's religious and intellectual landscape from the Middle Ages to the present and illustrates the diverse ways in which the Qur'an has been experienced, read and interpreted in Europe. The special exhibition aims to stimulate reflection on the ways in which it can be read in modern European societies.

Weltmuseum Wien, **Vienna, Austria**, through August 24.

Highlights from AramcoWorld.com. Please verify a venue's schedule before visiting.

Events

Current / September

Draw is a collaborative effort between the Museum of Contemporary Art of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Chile and The Draw Project, a New York-based nonprofit collective dedicated to innovative drawing. What unites all of *Draw*'s exhibitors is the commitment to the discipline of drawing, and the resulting dialogue among these works demonstrates simultaneous divergences and convergences of artistic expression between the Northern and Southern hemispheres. The exhibition features more than 85 artists, including painter Kayla Mohammadi, visual artist Shahzia Sikander and contemporary artist Zorawar Sidhu.

Museum of Contemporary Art, **Santiago, Chile**, through September 7.

Current / January

Diary of Flowers: Artists and Their Worlds demonstrates how artists create their own worlds through their art–building networks, circles and mythologies. Audiences are invited to more intimately understand the environment that artists cultivate for themselves and one another through themes like friendship, love and intimacy. Featured participants include multimedia artist Mona Hatoum and sculptor Mohammed Sami.

Museum of Contemporary Art, **Los Angeles**, through January 4, 2026.

Coming / January

Nour Jaouda *Solo Exhibition* traverses the languages of painting, sculpture and installation to produce "landscapes of memory." The forms, colors and motifs within Jaouda's intricately textured works suggest different encounters across time and space, drawing on the artist's childhood in Libya and experiences of living between Cairo and London.

Spike Island, **Bristol, UK**, September 27 through January 11, 2026.

Exhibition Connects Artifacts Across Time and Place

The MET at the Louvre: Near Eastern Antiquities in Dialogue represents a synergy between the two titular institutions in which the Louvre's permanent galleries host 10 related pieces from New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Dating from the late fourth millennium BCE to the fifth century CE, the objects—statues, weapons, drinking vessels and more from Central Asia, Syria, Persia and Mesopotamia—are either being connected for the first time or complement each other via specific historical features.

The Louvre, **Paris**, through September 28.

LEFT Silver rhyton with forepart of a gazelle, c. 500-400 BCE, Eastern Anatolia. **RIGHT** Rhyton terminating in the forepart of a caracal cat, c. 150-50 BCE, Persian.

VENICE: COURTESY OF VENICE BIENNALE; DRAW: ZORAWAR SIDHU; HORNS: (LEFT) THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART; (RIGHT) MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

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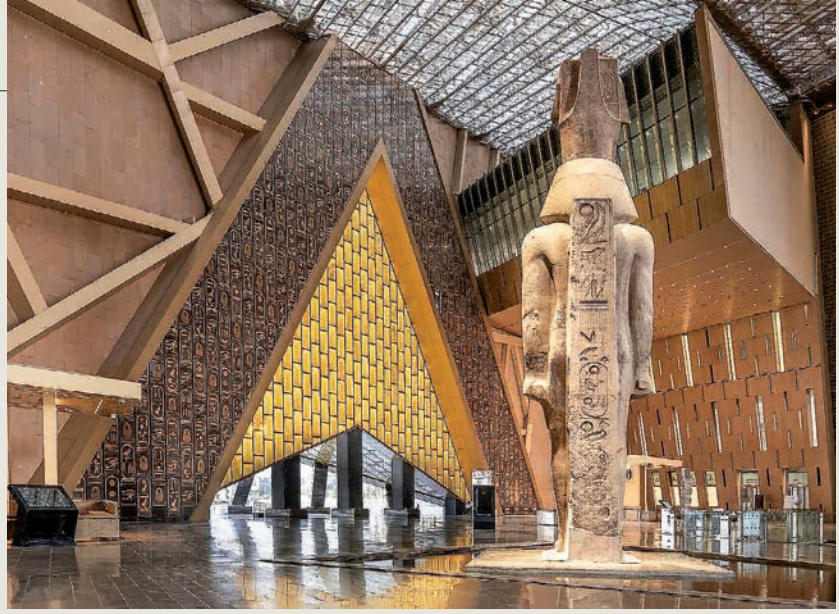

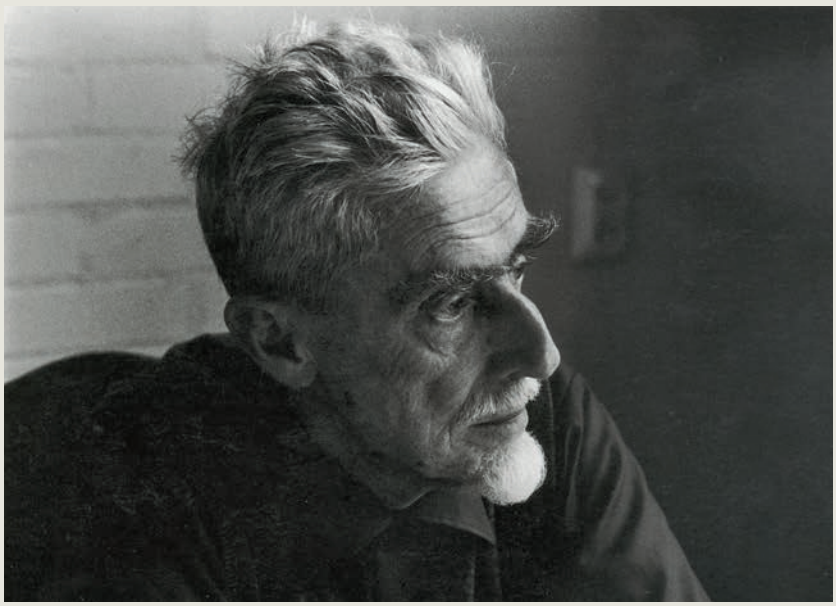

A Shining GEM for Egypt and Beyond

The long-awaited Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza will officially open to the public with the aim of playing an influential role in preserving the cultural heritage of Egypt and the greater region.

'Make It Your Own' in the Kitchen and in Life

One can customize toasted vermicelli, spiced milk, fruits and nuts into the sweet treat known as shemai. But this author's recipe for the Bengali dessert also blends tradition, resilience and self-expression.

Learning Center: Be Driven to Abstraction

Step inside the mind-bending world of M. C. Escher, where staircases defy gravity and architecture leads to infinity. Explore his fascination with design, math and visual paradoxes.

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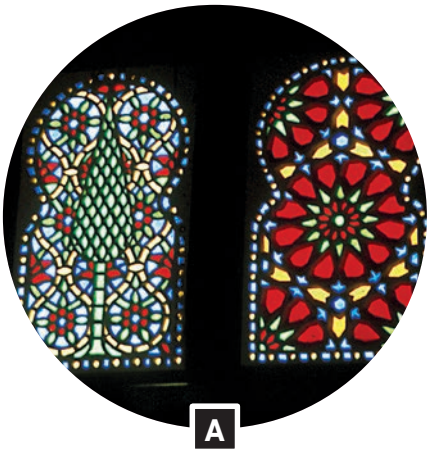
TOP TO BOTTOM: COURTESY OF THE GRAND EGYPTIAN MUSEUM; DIANNA WRAY; COURTESY OF THE M.C. ESCHER COMPANY

Quiz

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

What architectural feature of Spain's Grand Mosque of Córdoba inspired the designer of IslaminSpanish in Houston, Texas?



A

Stained glass

B

Open courtyards

C

Distinctive arches

D

Norwegian stucco

Answer: C. The cultural center's cofounder paid homage to Moorish Spain by replicating the arches in an entry hall. Discover how Islamin-Spanish serves the growing segment of Latino Muslim Americans at AramcoWorld.com.

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ABOVE A boat rests in North Macedonia's Lake Ohrid, from which unique pearls have been handcrafted for generations.

Read more on page **18**