Sep – Oct 2025 | Vol. 76 No. 5 | AramcoWorld.com

AramcoWorld

AramcoWorld

September / October
Vol. 76, No. 5

2025

AramcoWorld inspires global connections that broaden the appreciation of diverse cultures. We believe in celebrating our shared experiences through engaging and educational stories and content.

AramcoWorld.com

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Print design: Graphic Engine Design Studio

Printing: RR Donnelley / Wetmore

Web design: eSiteful Corporation

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Editorial: editor@aramcoamericas.com or P.O. Box 2106, Houston, Texas 77252-2106, USA

AramcoWorld (ISSN 2376-1083) is published bimonthly by the Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi Aramco), Box 5000, Dhahran 31311, Saudi Arabia

aramco

8: KHAULA JAMIL; 14: VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON/PETER KELLEHER; 22: TARA TODRAS-WHITEHILL; 32: COURTESY OF GHAZI AL-MULAIFI

FEATURES

DEPARTMENTS

FRONT COVER The town of Ramacca rises among the hills and valleys of east-central Sicily. Artichokes, grown and celebrated in the fertile area of Italy, share DNA with those grown in North Africa. They are among Sicilian foods of Arab origin.

FirstLook

Playing Peekaboo

Photograph by NURUL YAZID

For as long as I can remember, I've been drawn to the ocean—learning to swim at 3, snorkeling by 5 and dreaming of becoming a dolphin trainer. After a stint in the corporate world, I became a dive instructor and later fell in love with underwater photography.

At first I was what you would call a hard-core hobbyist, always desperate to get back in the sea with my camera. But the ocean's wonders proved too beautiful to keep to myself, so I began shooting professionally.

While a lot of my peers may look down on photographing clownfish because of how common they are, I couldn't resist shooting this one in Anilao, a popular dive spot in the Philippines, south of Manila, while vacationing with friends in 2014. I was drawn to the color contrast: the green anemone with the reddish clownfish. Though anemones sting, clownfish are immune to their venom. This protection allows clownfish to live safely among the anemones' tentacles.

Today my work has been featured in numerous magazines and websites. From swimming with sharks in the Bahamas to viewing the acrobatics of manta rays in Indonesia, I strive to tell compelling stories through my photography.

Nurul Yazid is a professional underwater photographer based out of Bali, Indonesia, and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She is known for any shoots in water—be it a swimming pool, lake, river and, of course, the ocean.

NURUL_YAZID

Punjabi Chole Masala

Recipe by ZAYNAH DIN
Photograph by CHARLOTTE NOTT-MACAIRE

Chole Masala is a popular breakfast dish of chickpeas.

Chole Masala is a popular breakfast dish of chickpeas that are quickly cooked in a thick tangy curry. Serve with a simple fried flatbread like bhaturay for a proper Punjabi breakfast experience—tear off a piece and use it to scoop up chole.

Zaynah Din is an award-winning digital marketer, content creator and passionate home cook. She started Zaynahs-Bakes in 2016, and in one year, it transformed from a local cupcake business into an Instagram page with more than 25,000 followers. Din's ethos is to create recipes that are convenient and quick to make—perfect for those fasting but also handy throughout the year for an easy meal.

(Serves 4)

2 tablespoons ghee

3 cloves

2 green cardamom pods

2 black cardamom pods

2 bay leaves

1 teaspoon cumin seeds

2 red onions, finely diced

5 garlic cloves, grated

1 thumb-sized piece ginger, grated

3 tomatoes, diced

1 tablespoon garam masala

1 tablespoon ground coriander

2 teaspoons chile powder

1 teaspoon mango powder (amchoor)

½ teaspoon ground turmeric

2 cans (400 grams) chickpeas

1 handful fresh cilantro, to serve

½ lemon

Heat the ghee in a large saucepan, then add the cloves, green and black cardamom pods, and bay leaves and fry for 2 minutes, until fragrant. Add the cumin seeds and red onions and cook for up to 15 minutes, until the onion has completely changed color and turns golden brown.

Push your onions to one side of the pan, then add the garlic and ginger and sauté for 4 minutes, until the garlic starts to change color. Stir in the tomatoes and 1 cup (225 milliliters) of water, cover with a lid, then simmer over low heat for 15 minutes. The tomatoes should break down into a sauce that will form the base of your curry. Add the ground spices and stir well.

Add 1 entire can of chickpeas (including the liquid), along with another scant ½ cup (100 milliliters) of water. Cook for 10 minutes, until the chickpeas are soft, then roughly smash them down with the back of a wooden spoon. This will help thicken the sauce and give texture. Add your second can of chickpeas (again including the liquid) and cook for a further 10 minutes with the lid off, allowing any extra moisture to evaporate.

Finish with a generous sprinkle of cilantro and a squeeze of lemon.

Reprinted with permission from

Desified: Delicious Recipes for Ramadan, Eid & Every Day
Zaynah Din. Interlink Books, 2024. InterlinkBooks.com.

CHARLOTTE NOTT-MACAIRE

Mariam Issoufou Elevates Local Heritage to Global Scale

Written by REBECCA ANNE PROCTOR
Photographs courtesy of MARIAM ISSOUFOU

Architect Mariam Issoufou grew up amid the captivating mud-brick structures of the famed West African city of Agadez, Niger. As a young girl, Issoufou and two friends dreamed of being architects. They even had a plan of starting a firm together. She and her friends loved art, but they were also interested in science. After they graduated high school, none studied architecture. Issoufou obtained her degrees in computer science and ended up working in tech jobs, but her childhood dream remained.

Issoufou's hometown of Agadez is known as the gateway to the desert. According to UNESCO, the Sultanate of Aïr was established during the 15th century, leading to the city's development as a major center for cultural and economic exchange. In 2013, the Agadez Historic Center, famed for its unique mud-brick architecture, was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Grand Mosque of Agadez, built in 1515, is renowned for its minaret that shoots 27 meters (88½ feet) into the sky, making it the tallest ever constructed from mud brick. For hundreds of years, it has served as a lighthouse for caravans crossing the perilous sands of the desert.

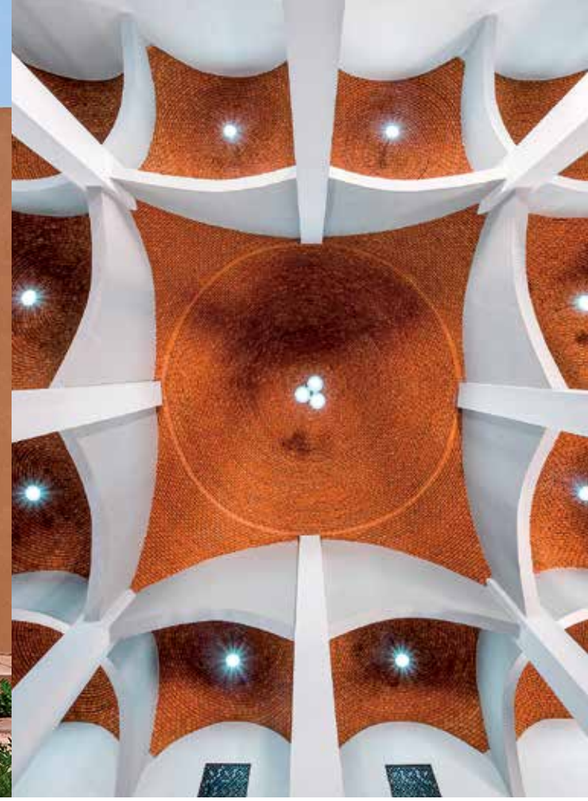
Issoufou desires to preserve the country's heritage, largely by reviving Niger's use of traditional mud-brick structures and transforming them into modern, sustainable edifices.

In the 10 years since Issoufou left the world of tech, she obtained her master's in architecture and established Mariam Issoufou Architects (formerly atelier masōmī) in Niger's capital of Niamey and now has offices in New York and Zurich. She has built Hikma, an award-winning library and mosque complex in the Niger village of Dandaji, and an earth-walled housing complex in Niamey, shortlisted for the Aga Khan Award.

Issoufou is now working on a museum in Senegal and a presidential center in Liberia. In Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, she is developing the Hayyan Lifestyle Center, a housing development. For the 19th International Architecture Biennale in Venice, Italy, this year, she designed the Rolex Pavilion, focusing, as she has in her other projects, on local production and upcycling to uphold local heritage.

She spoke with *AramcoWorld* about her passion for architecture and local focus in her work.

Mariam Issoufou keeps a local focus in her work.



What are some of the innovative architectural traditions that you learned growing up in Niger, and how can they make a global impact today?

I like to think that I make an architecture that always reflects the place it is for. What began as a more single-minded way to think about Niger and its materials, socioeconomic dynamics, architectural history and narratives has developed into a process of making architecture that I could apply anywhere.

Growing up in Niger, my parents always took us to a village for a month every summer. I always noticed these clay jars at the entrance of a home. They would be in the shade and there would be water inside them. The water from the jars felt as if it had come out of the fridge because the porous nature of the clay cooled and purified the water in the jar, acting as a natural filter.

My first project, Niamey 2000, was a series of homes for low-income families that seeks to balance [population] density with a need for privacy. It led to this intimate exploration of what a home means within a specific context, the desire for privacy but also to have your home feel like an open space that anybody can come to visit. Most of the buildings in Niamey 2000 look orange because in Niger, the soil is orange, and I use earth as a primary material because it is 115 degrees Fahrenheit (46 degrees Celsius). Using concrete is absurd in these conditions because concrete is a conductive material that imprisons heat. I use earth because it drops indoor temperatures by 15 to 20 degrees. This is why it is a local and historically used material.

One of your latest projects is the Rolex Pavilion, which is being exhibited at the Venice Architecture Biennale. How did you come up with its design?

I was asked to create a pavilion that was sustainable in the classic manner in which we think about sustainability, meaning energy consumption and using certain materials. I told them I was really interested in sustainability but that it has to go beyond that. What are we sustaining? We are sustaining people, economies, cultures, skills and expertise in a globalized world. For the pavilion, I delved into the narrative of Venice as a place for incredible craftsmanship. I went to the workshops of glassmakers, woodworkers and various artisans to understand their methods and then designed the pavilion using their skills and locally produced and sourced materials.

What was the inspiration behind the forthcoming Bët-bi museum in Senegal, and what do you wish the building to convey?

I wanted to explore what a museum means for a place like Senegal, and the greater African region, where going to a museum was not necessarily common. This is why the museum is a public place first, so people do not necessarily have to go inside the building to enjoy the space. I started by looking at what art meant at specific sites in the country, particularly the Senegambian stone circles consisting of thousands of megalithic structures spread across parts of Senegal and Gambia. Dating to between the 3rd century BCE and 16th century CE, they point to an ancient, organized society that flourished at the time. I began thinking about how the artifacts we see as art now reflect the height of human ingenuity and creation and have always been considered as divine.

This triggered the idea of designing a museum with the galleries underground. I made my own megaliths in the form of a triangle instead of circle to refer to the triangular relationship between the living, the constellations and the dead. The structure has been made using laterite soil, which is high in iron and aluminum, which gives it a red color.

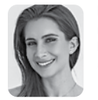
Above ground, there is a collection of pavilions where people can gather. It is connected by a ramp that seduces visitors to going underground to the galleries as if they were on a journey. When they come back up, they can continue socializing with others.

In our current global climate, what are the ways architecture can make a positive impact to connect people locally and globally?

I hope that architecture can move in a more productive and responsible direction, particularly regarding our environment. We are facing massive challenges from rapid urbanization to spatial justice to affordability; all these are problems that architecture is uniquely positioned to address.

COURTESY OF ROLEX NEWSROOM (3)

ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT Issouffou designed the Hikma Community Complex in Dandaji, Niger, with temperature-friendly compressed earth bricks and natural ventilation.



Rebecca Anne Proctor is an independent journalist, editor and broadcaster based in Dubai and Rome. She is a former editor-in-chief of *Harper's Bazaar Art* and *Harper's Bazaar Interiors*.

Read more articles like this online at AramcoWorld.com.

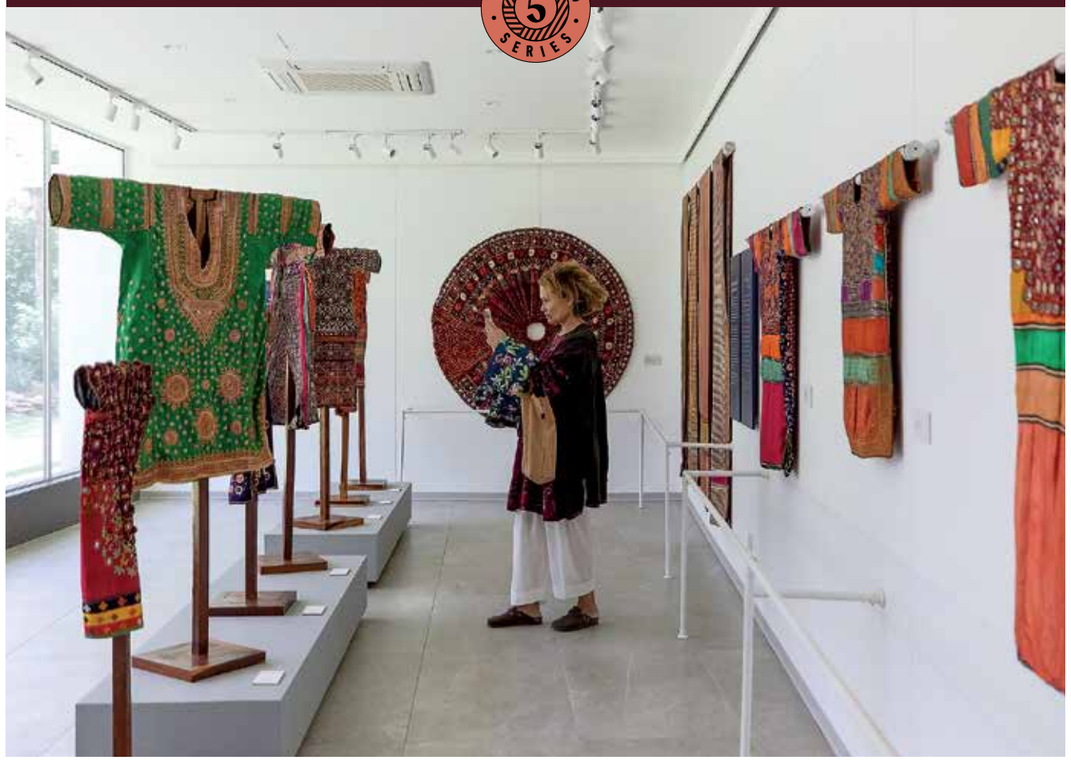
NASREEN KI HAVELI

A Tapestry of HERITAGE AND HOPE

Pakistani Textile Museum Opens as Collector's Dream Come True

WRITTEN BY SUNNIYA AHMAD PIRZADA, PHOTOGRAPHED BY KHAULA JAMIL

TEXTILES 5 SERIES



On a semiresidential street in Karachi, behind the gates of an elegant family home, a revolution in cultural preservation is quietly taking shape. Pakistan, a land known for its diversity of textiles across regions, from the mirrorwork of Sindh to the muted weaves of Balochistan and the fetching *phulkari* embroidery of Punjab, now has a textile museum to call its own.

And at the heart of this labor of love is Nasreen Askari: curator, collector and custodian of stories stitched into cloth. The museum is called Nasreen ki Haveli, built in the home she shares with her husband, Hasan Askari. It opened its doors in December 2024.

Nasreen's journey as a textile enthusiast began in a hospital ward in Jamshoro where, as a young medical student, she first encountered the profound symbolism of Sindhi textiles.

"In Jamshoro, we'd see patients from all over Sindh," she recalls. "The women who came wore the most striking, almost arresting garments. Colorful, embroidered, printed, quilted—every single textile art was visible. Their garments were their identities."

This wasn't a fleeting curiosity. For Nasreen it was a revelation. "You had to look at a woman's *chadar*, at her blouse front to know whether she was from the mountainous west of Sindh or from the plains or from the delta," she says.

One encounter in 1972 left an indelible mark. A Khosa Baloch woman, from the west of Sindh, handed Nasreen a red handkerchief, delicately embroidered with flowers—black for her sons and red for her daughters. One black flower represented her son who was dying of cancer. "She intended to unravel it after his passing and replace it with a new flower when God would give her another son," Nasreen remembers. "I still have that handkerchief." It is the piece that started her collection.

GEOGRAPHY INFLUENCES DESIGN

Z.T. Bilal, a Lahore-based design educator and researcher, explains textiles' design language is deeply local. "Folk textiles are spontaneous expressions of the artisan's environment. That's where their design sense comes from—the balance of color, the textures, the composition. It's embedded in their way of life."

Bilal recalls an exhibition at Karachi's Mohatta Palace Museum, of which Nasreen has served as a director since its 1999 founding, that brought textiles into geographic context. "It was like walking through Pakistan."

That regional specificity and history are exactly

OPPOSITE The vibrant textile legacy of minority communities in Pakistan's southeastern province of Sindh are among those on display at Nasreen ki Haveli in Karachi. **BELOW** Also highlighted is a *bujhki*, or traditional dowry purse, bearing intricate embroidery and mirror work.

ABOVE The museum is the brainchild of Nasreen Askari. **LEFT** Hasan Askari, her husband and the cocurator, says Nasreen ki Haveli's mission is "to preserve, protect, conserve, document and display Pakistan's textile heritage."

"Colorful, embroidered, printed, quilted—every single textile art was visible. Their garments were their identities."

—NASREEN ASKARI

what Nasreen ki Haveli seeks to preserve.

Nasreen's commitment to cultural preservation is deeply personal, rooted in her lived experience as a doctor in training.

Despite pursuing a career in medicine after qualifying as a doctor, including postgraduate studies in England, where she met her husband, her love for textiles endured. On a return trip to Pakistan, she joined a friend working in Sindh's cultural department on a field visit. That trip cemented her calling.

She would later work on a project at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, laying the groundwork for a career in textile curation. "I was very unfit for the task," she says modestly, "but in those days it was easy for somebody off the street to express rabid interest in a particular item and be allowed to handle it."

The couple began collecting seriously, eventually amassing 800 to 1,000 pieces. These cultural artifacts were obtained directly from the communities that made and wore them. "It was a very slow accretion," Nasreen says. "Some women sold them to me, others gave them."

Hasan Askari, her partner in life and curation, adds, "There are lots of people who collect textiles, but Nasreen fostered relations with these women. She names villages instead of the wider region. That was unique then and still is."

ABOVE The home that boasts the museum was designed by Habib Fida Ali, a pioneer of modernist architecture in Karachi. **RIGHT** A display notes that textile adornments are also for prized animals, including camels.

WHAT'S IN THE NASREEN KI HAVELI MUSEUM?

The oldest piece in the collection is a mid-19th-century *lungi*, a handwoven fabric traditionally worn in Sindh as a shawl or turban. "It has gold-wrapped thread with cobalt blue, red and white details. In Sindh, if you want to give a gentleman the ultimate accolade, you give him a lungi."

Nasreen's intimate knowledge of these pieces goes far beyond esthetics. Her fieldwork traced the roots of embroidery styles and weaving techniques to specific communities and villages. "Sindhi embroidery is about the best in the world," she says with pride.

The collection ranges from traditional dowry purses called *bujhki*s decorated in the *pakkoh* style of embroidery to the Meghwar community's late-19th-century *parha* (skirt) made from resist-printed handloomed cotton with embroidery and mirror work.

In the museum's display from Sindh, a Rabari woolen shawl with yellow embroidery takes center stage. "Even though they live in hot climates, they wear wool," Nasreen explains. "Their leader was killed one winter centuries ago, so they went into mourning wearing black wool and have continued to wear it ever since.

"It is a very rustic piece that is close to my heart. The shawl is a very dark brown, almost black. It has three different adornments—it is tie-dyed, it has a woven pattern on its borders, and it's also embroidered with the yellow mimosa flower, the flower of the desert," she adds.

The Askaris had long discussed how best to preserve these precious pieces. "If we were to ask our children to take these, they will gladly take five pieces

TOP Visitors are able to get close to Nasreen ki Haveli's items. **MIDDLE** A *lungi*, or sashlike cloth worn by men in Sindh and Balochistan and popular during the Talpur dynasty (1783-1842), is on display. **BOTTOM** "The Coat of Many Colours" exhibition includes this embroidered Sindhi outfit.

each. They don't have the means or the space to accommodate the collection. So what choice did we then have?" Hasan says.

Giving it to an international museum meant the pieces would rarely be seen. Donating locally seemed risky. "We could've sold them," he says, "but some decorator would cut them up to make cushions. We didn't want that."

The idea of a museum is recent. "We decided to open a museum as a gift for the city of our birth," Nasreen says. So, they transformed the home her parents built in 1966. "It occupies the ground floor and we live on the first floor; it is not such an imposition. It's a very happy marriage," she laughs.

TEXTILE MUSEUM TURNS FAMILY HOME INTO PUBLIC HAVEN

Architect Ali Alam remembers the call vividly. "Hasan Askari cold-called me and explained the vision. We were in from the get-go."

Alam, who runs a small design studio in Karachi, had never designed a museum. But he was struck by the opportunity and the responsibility. "It's not just any house," he explains. "It's one of Habib Fida Ali's first projects, one of the pioneers of the modernist movement in Karachi. ... So as an architect, I had to keep my ego in check."

Alam knew the home's architectural legacy couldn't be compromised, but the needs of the museum were unique. "The biggest challenge was the amount of display needed for this museum," he explains, "because the collection is spectacular. What's on display is just the tip of the iceberg."

The original plan was to use about 1,500 square feet (139 square meters). "We ended up not just doing a renovation," he says. "We also took over their garages, parking space and some storage areas. Now it's about 3,500 square feet [325 square meters]."

The collection still strains against its physical limits. "The pieces need their own space to be seen from the right distance, in proper light." Alam chose a neutral palette to ensure that the exhibits stand out.

The museum's layout flows organically through five galleries, allowing visitors to walk seamlessly from one space to another. Alam feels proud the renovations don't make it "look alien or like someone has imposed a style. It feels like this was always there."

MAKING TEXTILE COLLECTIONS ACCESSIBLE

Experts say the timing of this project couldn't be more urgent. "When you look at the crafts even from just 60, 70 years ago, they were of a different quality," says Iram Zia Raja, dean of the faculty of design at the National College of Arts in Lahore. "They were created when life was slow, before industrialization; hence, a unique purity of design."

Raja, herself a collector, has a deep personal connection to textile crafts, especially vintage *phulkari*s.

To her, these older pieces hold lessons that no design school can teach. "They were created by people who didn't go to art college, or even to school. Yet their color sense, rhythm, compositions are flawless."

Bilal also highlights the importance of having such collections accessible. "We don't get to travel to the provinces. The museum becomes the site where you're exposed to textile collections from across Pakistan," she says.

The museum's mission is ambitious: "to preserve, protect, conserve, document and display Pakistan's textile heritage," Hasan explains. "We want to proclaim what Pakistan has to offer to the world." And that offering is vast.

The museum, still in its early days, is grappling with logistical hurdles. "We're still figuring out lighting and conservation," Hasan acknowledges.

The redesign and renovations were also driven by budget constraints. "I would have loved for all of these pieces to be behind museum glass," says Alam, the architect. "There is provision to do that only for some pieces placed within niches."

Despite these limitations, the impact is immediate. "I see people walking by discovering that there is such a museum," says Alam. "It's an eye-opener. More people need to be aware of how rich this land is."

In addition to five seamlessly connected galleries, the museum includes two gardens, once intended to be closed off to the public. "But then it was decided to let the public move through it," says Alam. "Having a lung like that in Karachi, as a public space, is really precious."

Yet even in its nascent state, Nasreen ki Haveli has begun to draw international visitors. "Footfall is the lifeblood of any museum," says Hasan, "so the gates are open and will welcome everyone."

Even the name of the museum was chosen with care. "We wanted an Urdu word," Hasan explains. "A *haveli* can be an old house or a haven. We wanted people to feel it was a place of refuge, and it is a refuge for these textiles."

As a solid initiative for cultural preservation, Nasreen ki Haveli offers a model rooted in love, labor and identity. It is, as much as anything else, a promise to the past and a gift to the future.

"The mission," Hasan says simply, "is to keep the flame alive." AW

Nasreen Askari's fieldwork traced the roots of embroidery styles and weaving techniques to specific communities and villages in Pakistan.

Sunniya Ahmad Pirzada is a Peabody Award-winning journalist whose work focuses on the intersection of race, class and gender and how it impacts people and societies around the world. **Khaula Jamil** is an independent photographer, photojournalist and filmmaker from Pakistan whose work has been published in The New York Times, The Guardian, The Economist, Global Citizen, Rest of the World and more. Passion projects include documentaries highlighting positive movements in her hometown's marginalized communities.

Sparkle of Inspiration

Cartier Looked to Islamic Design To Create Striking Jewelry

WRITTEN BY JACKY ROWLAND

ABOVE Cartier's "Oriental" bandeau from 1911 shares the zigzag pattern of its inspiration, the facade of the Mshatta Palace. **OPPOSITE**, an eighth-century CE Jordanian desert castle now housed in the Pergamon Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin.

OPPOSITE: DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND TOURISM—ABU DHABI//PHOTO: ISMAIL NOOR/SEEING THINGS; TOP: ALAMY/RIGHT PERSPECTIVE IMAGES

An exquisite diamond and platinum bandeau is suspended in a glass case, sparkling as light hits it from different angles. A distinctive zigzag runs around the curve of the headband, punctuated by large diamonds, while spaces within the platinum form intricate patterns.

This regal headpiece was made in 1911 by the Cartier jewelry house. Described as an "oriental bandeau," it draws inspiration from Islamic architecture and looks strikingly modern for its time.

The bandeau is on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London as part of a major Cartier exhibition of more than 350 pieces of jewelry and other decorative items. It is just one example of how the heirs to the jewelry house—Louis Cartier, along with his brothers Jacques and Pierre—looked to the Islamic world for inspiration as they sought to create new, modern jewelry in tune with the times.

"Louis Cartier was obviously fascinated by the art and culture of the region and had an extensive library containing virtually every major publication on Islamic art," said Helen Molesworth, one of the curators of the exhibition. "He was also a collector in his own right—Persian manuscripts, Mughal artifacts,

OPPOSITE TOP: JONATHAN JAMES WILSON; OPPOSITE BOTTOM: COURTESY OF FRANCESCA CARTIER BRICKELL; ABOVE: JONATHAN JAMES WILSON

Indian jewelry. Lots of dealers were putting on exhibitions of Islamic art in Paris and other European cities at the beginning of the 20th century, and we see these exhibition catalogs in Louis Cartier's library."

Established in 1847 by Louis-Francois Cartier, the business was inherited by his son, Alfred, later that century. In its early days, the House of Cartier, like other European jewelers, was inspired by 18th-century French decorative arts. This gave rise to the Garland Style, featuring bows, ribbons and wreaths.

By the dawn of the 20th century, these elaborate designs were beginning to feel old fashioned.

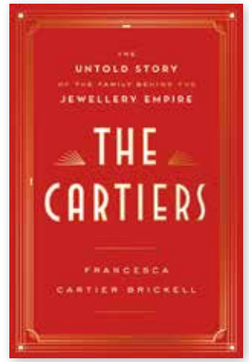
HOW DID ISLAMIC DESIGN INSPIRE THE CARTIERS?

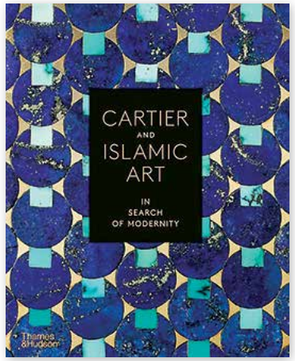
Cartier only became an internationally recognized brand after Louis and his brothers took over at the turn of the 20th century. While Louis stayed in Paris, Jacques was dispatched to London, and Pierre crossed the Atlantic to New York.

This new generation had global ambitions for the House of Cartier that would require innovation in design, materials and craftsmanship.

In 1911, Jacques Cartier, the gem expert, embarked on an expedition to the Middle East, India and Sri Lanka. What began as a simple, strategic buying trip turned into a voyage of discovery that would have a profound effect on Cartier's design ethos.

The great-granddaughter of Jacques Cartier, Francesca Cartier Brickell, spent more than a decade





researching her family history, resulting in a book, *The Cartiers*. Her starting point was correspondence among the brothers that she uncovered in her grandfather's cellar.

"The Cartier brothers and their teams were very inspired by Islamic art," said Cartier Brickell. "During his travels in the Middle East in search of pearls, Jacques documented his fascination with the culture and surroundings in his diaries and photo albums. He had a deep appreciation for the artistry and craftsmanship he encountered."

In an office down a long corridor at the Louvre Museum in Paris, Judith Henon-Raynaud, the head curator of the Islamic arts department, turns the pages of a book she co-edited, *Cartier and Islamic Art*.

An image of the "oriental bandeau" made by Cartier in 1911 is published alongside a 1904 photograph of the facade of the Mshatta Palace, an eighth-century Jordanian desert castle, now housed in the Pergamon Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin. The juxtaposition is striking and reveals the zigzag design that inspired this piece of jewelry.

"The Cartiers chose motifs which would translate into the language of jewelry," said Henon-Raynaud. "Simple, stripped-back, geometric shapes that could be reproduced in platinum and diamonds—minimal color so that the shape really stood out. The geometry they found in Islamic art felt very modern at the time, and I think it still does today."

With its abstract geometry and repeated interlocking shapes, Islamic art and architecture opened up new design possibilities. Triangles, rectangles, hexagons and octagons offered limitless combinations while stars, scrolls, arches and arabesques also found their way into Cartier's visual vocabulary.

OPPOSITE TOP Francesca Cartier Brickell looks through old family photos.
OPPOSITE BOTTOM Her great-grandfather Jacques Cartier meets with sheikhs in 1911 on a visit to the Arabian Gulf.
ABOVE Cartier Brickell has spent years researching her family history and wrote one of two recent books on their life and work.

"The Cartier brothers and their teams were very inspired by Islamic art."

—FRANCESCA CARTIER BRICKELL

A 1922 platinum bandeau, set with coral, onyx and tortoiseshell, recalls the horseshoe-shaped arches and colonnades of Islamic architecture, scaled down to a wearable size. The Cartier archives in Paris contain an illustration of strikingly similar arches at the Qalawun complex in Cairo, along with sketches based on this illustration by Charles Jacqueau, one of Cartier's most important designers.

"You have to be able to think in three dimensions to turn something two-dimensional, like a hard stone inlay in a wall, into something that wraps around your wrist or your neck," said Jennifer Tonkin, an expert in Cartier jewelry at Bonhams auction house in London.

"Geometric forms consist of distinctive shapes that can be repeated to form a pattern, and carved gemstones fit very neatly into these shapes. You can almost simulate what you are seeing in an Islamic building."

The spaces between the precious metal and stones are as important as the jewels themselves, creating shapes in much the same way that a *mashrabiya* on a balcony sculpts the light that passes through the carved wood.

The structural symmetry of Islamic buildings, like the Alhambra Palace in Andalusia, informed Cartier's use of clean lines. A new design lexicon was taking shape—Art Deco—which would dominate all forms of Western decorative art in the 1920s and '30s.

The art of ancient Egypt was also in vogue, following the excavation in 1922 of Tutankhamun's tomb. Motifs such as pyramids, sunbursts and papyrus flowers fed into the Art Deco movement. Cartier produced a number of ancient Egyptian-inspired objects, some of which involved mounting historical fragments, known as *apprêts*, into modern settings.

"Jacques Cartier was fascinated by ancient Egypt," said Cartier Brickell. "His extensive library has many well-thumbed, annotated books on the subject. Ancient Egyptian faïences, picked up in antique shops and on his travels in Egypt, became the centerpieces of one-of-a-kind brooches."

Not only did Cartier draw on the shapes of the Islamic world but also its color palette. Illustrations of tiled panels from mosques in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, with their vibrant blues, greens and turquoises, can be found in the Cartier archives in Paris. Echoes of these designs appear in a 1922 buckle brooch, set with an octagonal emerald surrounded by sapphires and diamonds, and a 1923 pendant, composed of two carved emeralds and a cabochon sapphire.

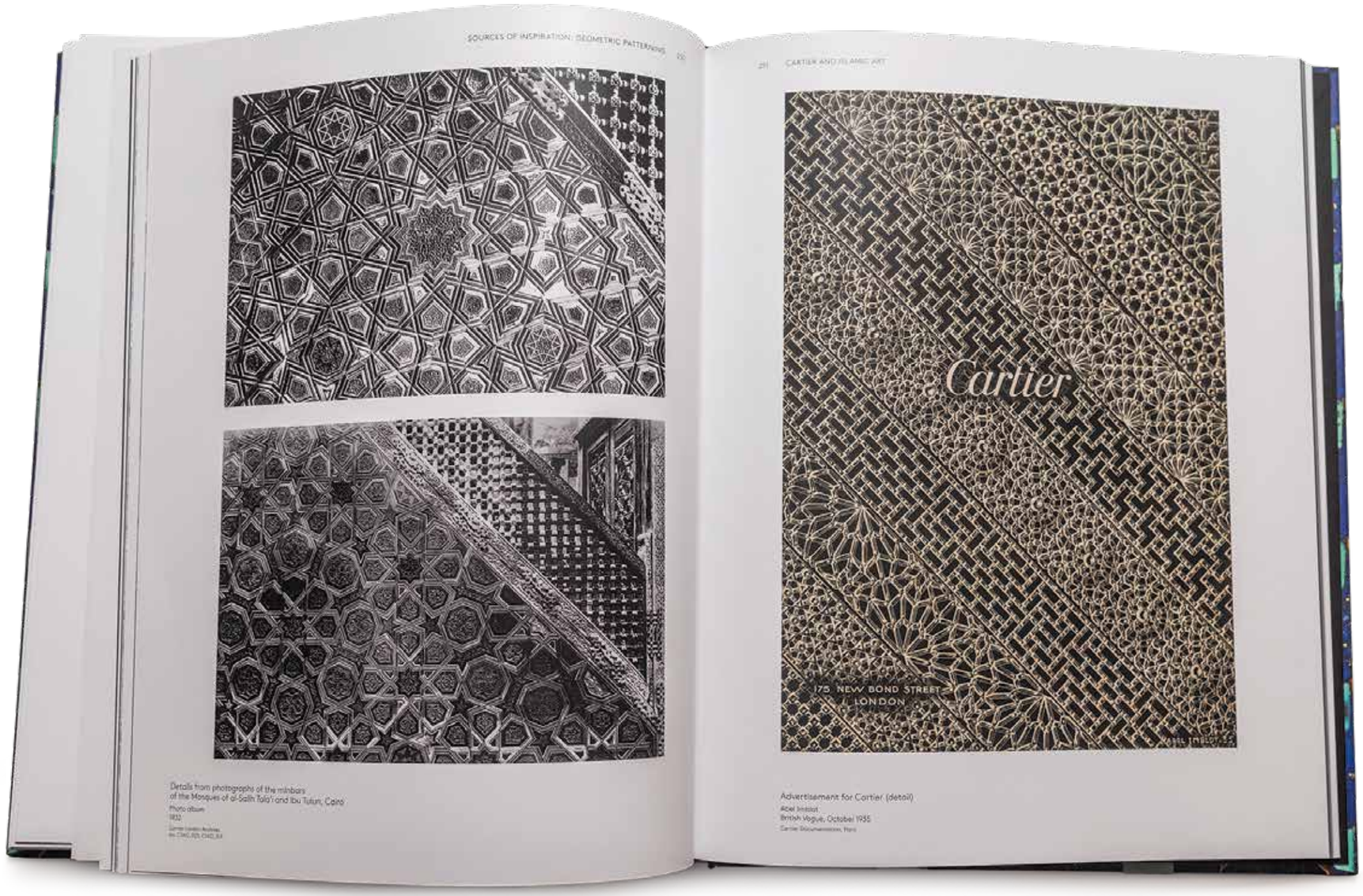
"The Cartiers juxtaposed turquoise with lapis lazuli and emeralds with sapphires," said Henon-Raynaud of the Louvre. "These were color combinations that you would not see in the West at that time. Indeed, wearing blue with green was considered the height of bad taste."

Jacques Cartier's travels in India inspired some of Cartier's most colorful and famous designs. The 1920s "Tutti Frutti" line, with its rubies, emeralds

RIGHT: VINCENT BAILLAIS; BELOW: WALEED DASHASH; OPPOSITE BOTTOM: CARTIER

"The Cartiers chose motifs which would translate into the language of jewelry. ... The geometry they found in Islamic art felt very modern at the time, and I think it still does today."

—JUDITH HENON-RAYNAUD



RIGHT *Cartier and Islamic Art: In Search of Modernity* compares details from 1932 photographs of minbars of the Mosques of al-Salih Tala'i and ibn Tulun in Cairo, left, with a company advertisement in British Vogue from 1935, right.
BELOW A scarab brooch, Cartier London, 1925, echoes the shapes and color palettes of the Islamic world.

“The Islamic-inspired objects ... set a benchmark for a level of reverence that needed to be given to everything [in the exhibition].”

—ASIF KHAN

and sapphires, mimics the floral extravagance of Mughal jewelry.

“Jacques was deeply struck by India,” said Cartier Brickell. “He wrote about being overwhelmed by the ‘blaze of color’ under the Indian sun. But the influence extended beyond color: Indian jewelry traditions inspired Cartier’s creativity in form and scale.”

Art Deco peaked in the 1930s before going into decline, but Islamic art has continued to inform Cartier’s creations to the present day. In 1947, Cartier designed a necklace called the “Arabic Sautoir” composed of gold beads accented with knot motifs. It continued to be produced until the 1970s as the “Muslim Prayer Bead” necklace.

CARTIER EXHIBITION AT VICTORIA AND ALBERT

The overall design of the Cartier exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum is the work of Asif Khan, a London-based architect and multidisciplinary artist. From conception to completion, he spent 18 months choreographing the show, which included creating soundscapes and making clouds from water vapor.

“In a jewelry exhibition, objects are behind glass, so it’s difficult to get a sense of the narrative unless you have a curator talking you through,” said Khan. “We also need to think about the relationship that jewelry has with the wearer. These objects are worn on the skin; they have a certain weight and texture. So in the absence of touch, I thought the exhibition needed to trigger our other senses to allow the objects to speak through the glass and almost breathe on us.”

Beyond the famous brand name, Khan knew little of the history of Cartier when he started work on the exhibition. As with all his projects, he looked for a personal connection that would give the work individual meaning to him.

“The Islamic-inspired objects were my way in,” said Khan. “I felt I had to communicate their importance to everyone who visited. I didn’t hold those objects above others, but they set a benchmark for a level of reverence that needed to be given to everything.”

In the final room of the exhibition, there is a dazzling display of tiaras, presented like a debutante’s ball and accompanied by Shostakovich’s Second Piano Concerto.

On display at the Victoria and Albert Museum are ceramic items from Iznik, Türkiye, dating to ca. 1580, a dish, **TOP**, with a blue leaf in the Saz style of that era of the Ottoman Empire, and a jug with a scale pattern, **MIDDLE**, that show a clear influence on a vanity case, **BOTTOM**, issued by Cartier Paris in 1927.

OPPOSITE TOP TO BOTTOM: DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND TOURISM—ABU DHABI/PHOTO: ISMAIL NOOR/SEEING THINGS; ABOVE: JONATHAN JAMES WILSON; RIGHT: CIAN OBA-SMITH

LEFT Cartier’s “Tutti Frutti” pieces were inspired by Jacques Cartier’s travels to India and pay tribute to Mughal extravagance. **BELOW** London-based architect and multidisciplinary artist Asif Khan designed 2025’s Cartier show at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

A 1914 platinum, diamond and pearl tiara has a central tree-of-life design made of black onyx. Alongside it sits a tiara created more than a century later. Composed of Cartier’s distinctive “Tutti Frutti” jewels, the design is once again based on the tree of life. “One of the brilliant things that Cartier has done is to constantly reinvent and come up withnew ideas,” said Molesworth, the curator. “But there is always a nod to heritage. This 2018 tiara has a Russian shape, Indian-type stones and an Egyptian-style tree of life. If that is not a brilliant reuse of contemporary design, I don’t know what else is.” AW

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.

SICILY

A Fertile Ground for Arab Culinary Innovation

Foods That Followed Centuries of Rule Are Still Celebrated Today

WRITTEN BY
JACK ZAHORA

PHOTOGRAPHED BY
TARA TODRAS-WHITEHILL

Salvo Nicolosi, former mayor of Ramacca and the owner of Le 5 Sorelle, an organization aimed at shaping and protecting Sicily's agrarian society, notes that artichokes were brought by Arabs and became so central to the island that Sicily now produces a third of Italy's crop.

ABOVE Oranges are harvested at the Calanni Srl farm. Arabs introduced irrigation methods that enabled the growth of orange groves in Sicily. **RIGHT** Marco Frasson owns Calanni Srl, which has used seeds from Syria and other Arab countries for grains and pastas.

Salvo Nicolosi points to the side of a dirt road that cuts through kilometers of orange groves and ancient fields of grain in Calanni Srl, a former aristocratic plantation in his hometown of Ramacca, Sicily, which is now one of the largest farms on the island.

Littering the soil are shards of red brick and painted ceramic that likely predate the ninth century CE, he says. Nicolosi, who was once mayor of Ramacca, travels with several paperback books, which he independently wrote about Sicilian history, in the trunk of his car. "This clay tells a story about how this area was once ruled by powerful empires and kingdoms," says Nicolosi, "that early on included the Romans, Vandals, Ostrogoths and Byzantines."

It's an exhilarating find for the uninitiated, who might see such artifacts only in a museum. However, one's gaze should focus on the oranges as well because, as some historians maintain, they recall the next chapter in the island's history that began in 827 CE.

At the time, the commander of Sicily's maritime fleet, Euphemius, was in revolt against the Byzantine Emperor Michael II, says Luca D'Anna, an associate professor of Arabic dialectology at the University of Naples. To aid in his rebellion, Euphemius called on armies in Ifriqiya, which were located across the Mediterranean Sea in present-day Tunisia. These forces eventually would defeat the Byzantines, and while doing so, sidelined Euphemius to become the

first of three Arab dynasties to rule over the island until 1091 CE.

What transpired over these two-and-a-half centuries would result in a complete transformation of the agricultural and culinary landscape. And while direct paths are sometimes difficult to pinpoint, it's clear that the cultivation techniques, crops and dishes that Arabs introduced in Sicily not only survive but thrive today through foods that are integral and widely celebrated.

ARAB INTRODUCTIONS TO AGRICULTURE

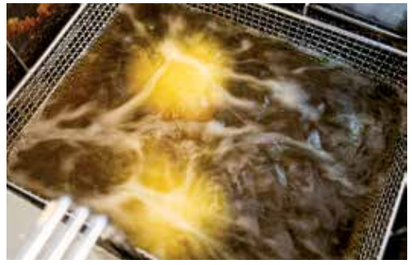
"The Romans and the Byzantines treated Sicily like a granary," says D'Anna, "because wheat does not require a lot of water in a climate that can become semiarid during the summer." He says Sicily's new rulers had a better understanding of how to overcome these challenges and introduced a network of underground waterways, communal fruit and vegetable gardens in relatively cooler valleys, housing that incorporated heat-resistant architecture and irrigation methods that redirected water through small channels—enabling the growth of orange groves similar to the ones Nicolosi would travel through nearly 1,200 years later.

While pontificating about an Arab prince who was responsible for adding peppercorns to Sicilian sheep's cheese, Nicolosi stops his car to show off a cardoon thistle. "The milk of this plant was used by the Arabs to make cheese," he says, "because pig's rennet, which is often used today to make some cheese, is not consumed by Muslims."

He then drives up to a nearby artichoke farm and greets a local farmer, Francesco Scuderi. Nicolosi picks up an artichoke and with a pocketknife peels back the fibrous outer layer of the thistle's stem to reveal a delicious inner core that's both sweet and tender. "We are in one of the most fertile regions of Italy," says Scuderi. "Since the old times, this place was focused on the production of artichokes."

In fact, ethnobiologists have been able to link the DNA from certain varieties of artichoke in Sicily to those grown in North Africa, and linguists note that the Sicilian word for the vegetable, cacocciuli, comes from the Arabic word kharshuf.

However, due to a lack of written records during the Arab conquest and the centuries thereafter, "attempting to trace the direct migratory patterns of these foods through a culinary family tree is nearly impossible," says Clifford Wright, a James Beard



ABOVE Alfio Di Stefano makes arancini at his restaurant in Ficarazzi, near Catania, Sicily. **LEFT** The rice balls are stuffed, coated with breadcrumbs and then deep fried. Arancini are said to have originated in 10th-century-CE Sicily, when the island was under Arab rule.

"The idea of frying is a specific cooking technique imported during the Arab conquest."

—GABRIELE PROGLIO

"Since the old times, this place was focused on the production of artichokes," farmer Francesco Scuderi says of the fertile area of Ramacca, Sicily.

Award-winning author of several books about Italian food history, who also wrote the culinary entries for Columbia University's Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East. He warns that in Sicily, asserting something is "Arab is enough to make it cucina arabo-sicula, or Arab Sicilian cuisine," explaining that Sicilians might understand a particular food is Arab through unverifiable folklore instead of peer-reviewed academic research. Wright also notes that Sicilians argue even today over the basic tenets of their cuisine.

IS THIS SICILIAN STREET FOOD ARAB?

Take one of Sicily's most famous street foods: arancini. No greater culinary rivalry may exist than between the cities of Catania and Palermo over whether a fried clump of rice and meat should be considered masculine or feminine.

"It's masculine, for sure," says Alfio Di Stefano, a 63-year-old master of this street food, who makes them daily in his restaurant Pizzeria Savanas in the small town of Ficarazzi, just outside Catania. For Di Stefano, the conical shape of what he calls arancino is reminiscent of un albero di arancio, or an orange tree. The "o" ending means it's taken on the masculine form. That's in stark contrast to Palermo, where instead of cones, the rice is balled up to resemble just the orange, or una arancia, a feminine word because it ends in "a".

Linguistic arguments aside, to prepare arancini

Linguists note that the Sicilian word for artichoke, *cacocciuli*, comes from the Arabic word *kharshuf*.

ABOVE Cheesemakers stir vats of fresh ricotta during the Festa dei Sapori e dei Saperi (Festival of Flavors and Knowledge) in Vizzini. **LEFT** A father and son split one of the cannoli on offer in Palermo. The traditional pastry is stuffed with ricotta, which has its origins in North Africa.

Di Stefano wakes up early in the morning to boil short- grain carnaroli rice. He then mixes in saffron, butter and shredded edam, a semihard cheese from the Netherlands. Shaping handfuls of the sticky concoction into cones, Di Stefano stuffs the rice with a ragù, or meat sauce. The ground beef has been stewed in a tomato-based sauce for a couple of hours with olive oil, carrots, celery and onions, along with some green peas for good measure. The naked arancini are then dipped in a batter of flour and water, rolled in breadcrumbs and deep-fried.

In a single weekend, Di Stefano will make up to 500 arancini for his restaurant's tavola caldo, or hot table, where diners feast on a selection of warm and cold appetizers. Every September up to 20,000 of these fried cones will be served over Ficarazzi's four-day Sagra di Arancini, a festival Di Stefano helped to start a quarter century ago.

"So what's the relationship to the Arabs here?" Wright rhetorically asks. "Well, there's two," he says. "One is the use of rice because it's thought that rice was brought to Sicily by the Arabs, and [the second] is in the 13th-century Arab cookbook that's known as the Kitab al-Tabikh, or Book of Dishes." Wright says the work by the Baghdadi writer Muhammad bin Hasan al-Baghdadi includes "a recipe called nāranjīya, and although it's not made with rice, it's a ball of meat fried to look like an orange, using saffron and eggs to affect the color." He notes that the word arancini is a derivation of the word narenj, which in Arabic means "bitter orange."

For Wright this does not guarantee that Sicily's Arab rulers invented the arancini served by Di Stefano, pointing out that the ragù in the dish is likely a cousin of the ragout made in France, a country that briefly ruled the island in the 13th century. But he says it does indicate that 264 years of Arab rule left an indelible mark on Sicilian cuisine.

PRESERVATION OF SICILIAN FOODS

And yet there is another clue pointing to the Arab influence on arancini. "The idea of frying is a specific cooking technique imported during the Arab conquest," says Gabriele Proglio, an associate professor of contemporary history at the University of Gastronomic Sciences of

The Festa dei Sapori e dei Saperi in Vizzini celebrates all things ricotta.

Pollenzo. Proglio's department includes a team of ethnobiologists, sociologists and anthropologists who study, in part, the migratory patterns of food. He says frying was a method employed by Arabs, in part, to preserve food, especially for an imperial power that needed to feed its soldiers over long distances.

Another of those preservation techniques, says Proglio, can be seen an hour's drive from Di Stefano's restaurant in the town of Vizzini, which around April celebrates the Festa dei Sapori e dei Saperi, or the Festival of Flavors and Knowledge.

Parades of accordion-playing folk musicians, riding in colorful horse-drawn carriages, pass by 59-year-old farmer Vito Barbuzza, who stirs a barrel of milk that sits atop a gas burner. "First, I'll add sheep rennet to the warm milk," says Barbuzza, "which after some time will split it into curds on the top and whey on the bottom."

He skims off the curd and strains it for a few hours, turning it into a soft cheese called tuma. During that time he reheats the whey, stiffening its remaining proteins, which creates ricotta (meaning recooked), an iconic ingredient that is exhibited in countless savory and sweet dishes at the festival, including cassata cake decorated with almonds and candied fruits, a variety of cannoli, and orange and lemon cassatelle—all of which boast influences in both recipe and technique from Sicily's Arab history.

Long lines of local residents eagerly wait to be served by Barbuzza, who makes hundreds of kilos of ricotta during the festival. Lucio Nasca greedily slurps down a bowl, letting it dribble down his chin and chest. "Vizzini has been making this ricotta for centuries," he says with a gregarious, ricotta-covered smile. "Ever since I was a little boy, I have to admit, I can't resist eating it in this way."

While ricotta is technically not a cheese, says Proglio, it's produced with a method of making acid-coagulated cheeses, which was popularized in Sicily by the Imazighen, or Berber, people of North Africa. He says it's akin to Jben, a soft cheese found in Morocco. However, Proglio notes that the "ricotta" made in ninth-century Ifriqiya would have tasted more acidic, explaining that as people migrate, the flavor profile of their food tends to mellow to better integrate with established communities, in the same way that Indian or Mexican cuisine tends to be less spicy in the United States.

Proglio also points out that migration is just as important as colonialization when measuring the influence Arabs have had on Sicilian cuisine. "We cannot limit the spread of Arab food to the conquest of Sicily between the ninth and eleventh centuries," says Proglio, adding, "there are records that show how couscous—a historical and modern staple of Sicilian cooking—appeared much earlier."

He says it showcases the long-lasting ties between Sicily and North Africa that fostered a relationship—one that survives in, among many other things, the oranges, artichokes, ricotta and rice that are fundamental in today's Sicilian kitchens. AW

OPPOSITE AND ABOVE
Cannoli are a popular pastry and widely sold in Palermo.

Jack Zahora is an award-winning journalist whose work has appeared on various major outlets including National Public Radio and Al Jazeera English. He's also the chief content officer and managing partner of TW Storytelling Agency, a media company based in Lisbon, Portugal. **Tara Todras-Whitehill** is an award-winning photojournalist and CEO of the TW Storytelling Agency, based in Lisbon, Portugal. Her passion is empowering NGOs, social impact teams and journalists with impactful storytelling.

Songs of the PEARL DIVERS *Drawn Back to the* SURFACE

Fusion Music Ensemble Honors Traditional Arabian Gulf Way of Life

WRITTEN BY BANNING EYRE

BELOW: MIKE KRUEGER; RIGHT: BANNING EYRE

Standing at the edge of a dhow, Ghazi Al-Mulaifi removed the cloth around his waist and placed his foot into a loop at the end of a rope with a rock tied to it, heavy enough to plunge him into the depths. Then he leapt into the Arabian Gulf waters off Kuwait to collect oysters in a basket, in hopes that some would contain pearls.

For Al-Mulaifi, a Kuwaiti guitarist and ethnomusicologist, the mission of diving was more than a search for the gems. He was trying to experience a life led by his grandfather, who was one of the last pearl-diving shipmasters, to piece together a family history he had never known about.

"My grandfather and I were close," he recalled. "He was an extremely gregarious and funny guy, so I asked him, 'Hey, tell me about life at sea.' He just said, 'All the men died at sea.'" Al-Mulaifi knew not to ask more. Still, the memory lingered. "That's where my curiosity about this whole lifeway was born."

Two decades later, Al-Mulaifi learned that music played a central role in the hunt for pearls. "It made pearl-diving life possible," he says. The music of pearl divers led him to create one of the most unusual musical ensembles in the Gulf region: Ghazi al-Mulaifi and Boom.Diwan with Arturo O'Farrill.

And now these musicians conjure a moody, at times joyous, swirl of traditional Gulf rhythms and deeply sonorous vocals, with inspired jazz improvisation on piano, saxophone and electric guitar.

PEARL-DIVING MUSIC

The connection between a profession that involves life-threatening dives into deep waters in search of the perfect pearl and trancelike, rhythmic music—played on clay pots and barrel drums and led by a powerful, high-pitched male voice singing over a deeply droning chorus—may not seem obvious.

"Among the highest-paid members of each [boat] for pearl-diving expeditions is a *naham*. A naham is a singer, and shipmasters

OPPOSITE Guitarist and ethnomusicologist Ghazi Al-Mulaifi re-creates the pearl-diving life of his grandfather in 2012 in Kuwait. **ABOVE** Al-Mulaifi performs in 2022 in New York with Arturo O'Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra.

The boatswain and crew of the Triumph of Righteousness sing and drum as they sail into Oman's Mutrah Harbour in 1939.

LEFT Prior to the discovery of oil in the 1930s, pearl diving was the backbone of the region's economy. **BELOW** Divers look through the prior day's catch before heading back into the water.

would fight over the good nahams," Al-Mulaifi explains, "because they would keep the spirits of the sailors up for the expedition."

The songs of the naham literally choreographed the complex activities of a pearl-diving expedition: when to trim the sails, when to drop anchor, when to send divers into the waters and, crucially, when to bring them back up safely.

Pearls were in high-fashion demand all around the world, and the banks off Bahrain and Kuwait provided the principal source. Prior to the discovery of oil in the 1930s, pearl diving was the backbone of the region's economy. One could argue the naham and his musicians were about as important to sustaining life in the Gulf as any musician could be.

Bahraini ethnomusicologist, musician and composer Hasan Hujairi also studies pearl-diving music from his base in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. Hujairi notes that these days the most authentic pearl-diving music is performed in private ceremonies, in long, narrow rooms that echo the feeling and social hierarchy of a pearling boat.

On the actual boats, the stakes were high, as divers routinely risked drowning and decompression sickness (the bends) if the naham's timing was off. Hujairi calls the songs "a matter of life and death," but he says that the culture of pearl diving had broader implications as well. "We talk a lot about the songs, but the pearl industry doesn't only affect music. It affects the language. It affects the food."

The sea didn't separate people, Hujairi says, but rather it connected them. "When people traveled across it, their languages and cultures came with them. Instruments and music styles originating in Persia, India, Kenya and Zanzibar found new homes on the Gulf coast."

Lisa Urkevich is a professor of musicology and ethnomusicology specializing in the heritage and music of the Arabian Peninsula. She says, "Pearl diving in the Gulf dates back to the Neolithic Period, maybe 7,000 years or so. … The origins of this music are impossible to pinpoint." That doesn't preclude origin stories.

Regardless of its exact origins, the cultural intricacies pearl-diving music have intrigued many, including Bill Bragin, program director for New York University's performance center in Abu Dhabi. In 2019 he conceived of a concert project called The Cuban-Khaleeji [Gulf music] Project. For that Bragin thought of Al-Mulaifi, an artist with an expansive sense of Gulf music's possibilities.

That idea underscores that this is global music, with cultural connections well beyond the Gulf.

BOOM.DIWAN PROJECT

Al-Mulaifi's ensemble began as a fusion of pearl-diving music and jazz. Bragin's idea was to invite composer and piano maestro Arturo O'Farrill, leader of New York's Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, to collaborate with Al-Mulaifi's pearl-diving musicians to see what would happen.

O'Farrill's interest was piqued when he read Ned Sublette's expansive book *Cuba and Its Music*, which begins with deep pre-history. He recalls his revelation. "I had never thought about the fact that Spain, Northern Africa and the Middle East were all part of this trade route—slavery and spices and all kinds of stuff. And so there's a lot of what [Sublette] calls Arabic and Spanish musical practice in northern and western Africa."

He knew he had to do something about it.

O'Farrill first encountered the pearl-diving musicians in Al-Mulaifi's living room where a righteous jam session ensued, with the players exchanging their own familiar rhythms. He recalls, "I'll be

Pearl Divers and Their Songs

***Fijeri* (sea music):** pearl-diving music genre dating to late 19th century

Sound: hypnotic call-and-response vocals by lead singer and chorus, often with rhythmic clapping, stomping and drums

Use: accompanied actions such as rowing, setting sails and pulling up the anchor

Themes: longing for loved ones, dangers of the sea, praise of God and hope for fortune

Sources: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, UNESCO

THIS SPREAD: COURTESY OF NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, GREENWICH, LONDON

Today authentic pearl-diving music is performed in private ceremonies, in long, narrow rooms that echo the feeling and social hierarchy of a pearling boat, says Bahraini ethnomusicologist, musician and composer Hasan Hujairi.

damned if these pearl-diving percussion masters did not remind me of *guaguanco* [a Cuban folkloric rhythm] and of all the beautiful, traditional call-and-response practices found throughout Africa and Latin America."

Al-Mulaifi was similarly amazed. "Arturo was saying, 'Oh, that's a *bomba*, or a *plena* [Puerto Rican rhythms],' and my guys were like, 'This is a *banati*.' And they're all playing the same thing. So there was this huge moment of recognition, with Africa in the center, connecting everything."

Just like that, a collaboration was born. The most important type of pearling dhow in Kuwait is called a boom, and the word *diwan* comes from the Turkish word for a salon. "So the boom is about going out, and the diwan is about welcoming people in," says Al-Mulaifi. "Arturo was like, 'Boom, boom. It sounds cool. That's it! That's the name of your band: Boom.Diwan!"

Al-Mulaifi's grandfather's reluctance to recall his pearl-diving life may have had to do with more than memories of friends lost at sea. Hujairi notes that during the off-season months, pearl-diving musicians performed a style of ritual music called *fijeri*. Freed of the constraints of a pearl-diving mission, fijeri musicians would stretch out in lengthy, sometimes all-night, ceremonies, still preserving the hierarchy that governed the boat, with the naham and elders at the top, but exploring a larger repertoire of rhythms and moods.

In colonial times, says Hujairi, "The British were afraid of the pearl divers. They saw these fijeri gatherings as potentially dangerous because you have men from a community gathering at night singing and talking, and this talking could mean they want to rebel or protest."

To avoid detection, fijeri musicians dug out the floors of their houses so that patrolling policemen would not see their heads through the windows. "This way," says Hujairi, "it remained a very secret activity for a number of decades in Bahrain."

In forming Boom.Diwan, Al-Mulaifi had to earn the trust of the pearl-diving musicians, especially percussionist Hamad ben Hussain, whose great-grandfather was responsible for introducing the Indian barrel drum to the tradition in the early 20th century. "Hamad took a while to play with us," recalls Al-Mulaifi, "because he wasn't sure what I was doing was respectful enough. All these guys are part of the traditional Kuwaiti music *diwaniya*s [salons for gatherings]." As it turned out, their devotion to tradition did not rule out cross-cultural collaboration.

For Al-Mulaifi, this project is personal. "This pearl-diving music is not being respectfully represented on the national stage," he says. "One of the main things we're trying to do is to put the music back in the kind of situation that occasioned it, not looking to represent any nation or state, because when this music was played, those realities didn't apply."

On stage the complete ensemble presents a spectacle, with the pearling musicians and their drums aligned on one side, O'Farrill and his piano on the other, and Al-Mulaifi with his guitar and the band's bassist and saxophonist at the center.

It's a fluid endeavor. Boom.Diwan has also recorded and performed with South African jazz maestro Nduduzo Makhathini. The project is part of a new wave of experimentation in Gulf music.

Urkevich says, "Music like that of Boom.Diwan plays a unique role: It offers a modern expression of regional identity, provides an accessible entry point through which both local and international audiences can be subtly introduced to Gulf sounds, rhythms and timbres."

Pearl diving may be consigned to the pages of history, but the music that provided its spirit and tempo live on, reinvented for our time. AW

Boom.Diwan with Arturo O'Farrill performs in 2022 at NYU Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

OPPOSITE TOP: COURTESY OF HASSAN HUJAIRI; OPPOSITE LOWER: COURTESY OF LISA URKEVICH; ABOVE: WALEED SHAH

Diving for Pearls

Boats: wooden, light and maneuverable

Equipment: basic gear (tortoiseshell nose clips, finger guards, tug ropes, weighted stones and baskets)

Crew: 10-30 men

Depths: 12-40 feet (3.6-12 meters) in typically calm Gulf waters

Dives: 50 per day, each lasting about 1 minute

Peak: 1912, the "Year of Superabundance," before rise of oil and cultured-pearl industries

Sources: Frontiers USA, Kuwait News Agency

Scan this code:

To hear the sounds of Boom.Diwan and the traditions of the pearl divers, visit AramcoWorld.com.

Banning Eyre is a senior producer for Public Radio International's Peabody Award-winning "Afropop Worldwide" (afropop.org) and author of a number of books on African music and history.

"Boom.Diwan ... provides an accessible entry point through which ... audiences can be subtly introduced to Gulf sounds, rhythms and timbres."

—LISA URKEVICH

Author's Corner

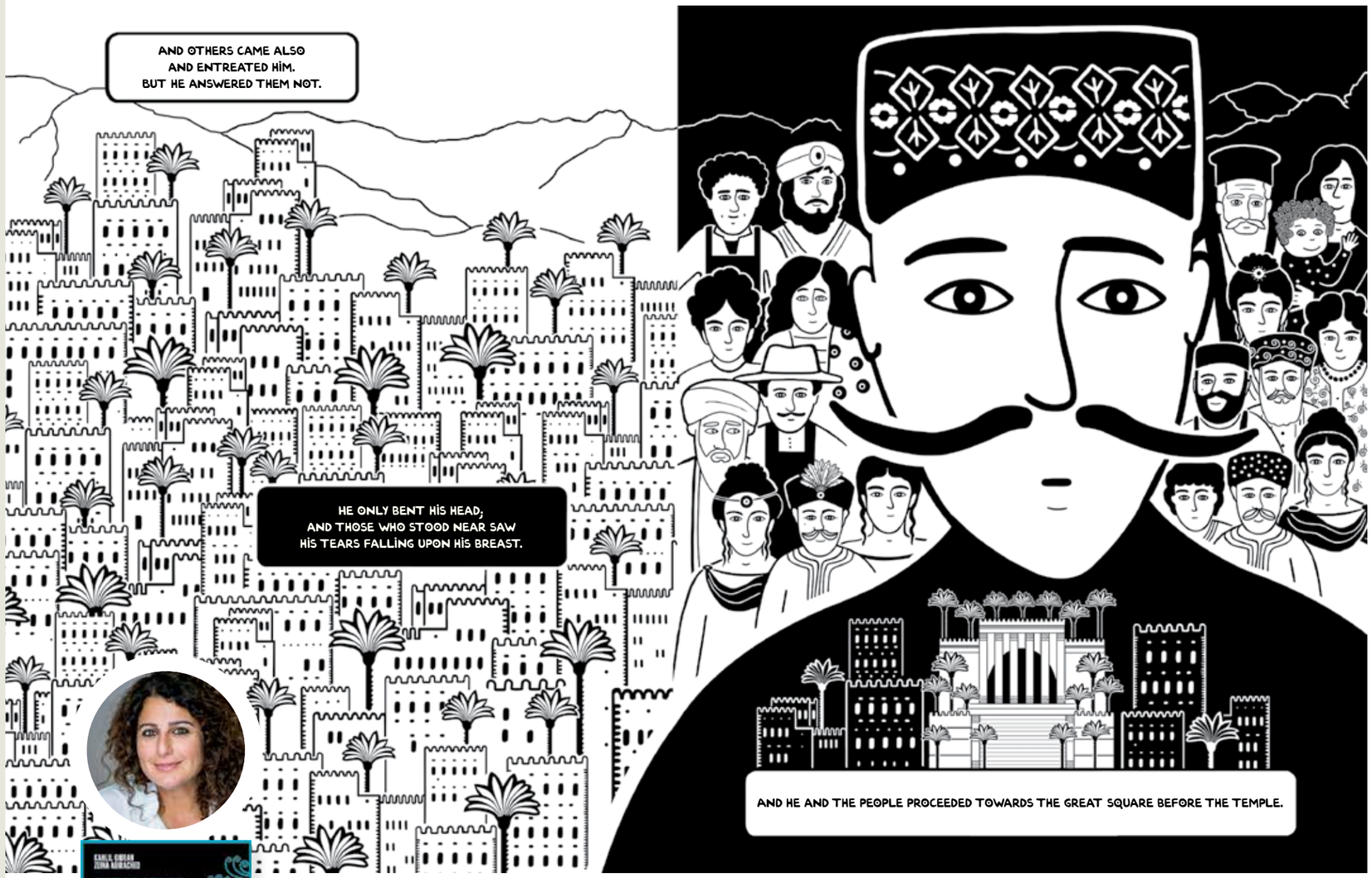
Drawing Out Gibran: A Conversation With Zeina Abirached

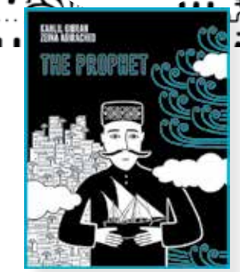
Written by ROZA MELKUMYAN

When Lebanese artist and illustrator Zeina Abirached received the invitation to adapt Khalil Gibran's 1923 classic, *The Prophet*, into a graphic novel, she hesitated. Gibran's text—26 poetic essays voiced by fictional sage Almustafa—holds a special place in Lebanese households. Recited at weddings, funerals and rites of passage, *The Prophet* doesn't just endure, it lives. Adapting it meant more than reinterpreting a classic—it meant entering into conversation with a beloved and deeply rooted text.

Abirached, who left war-scarred Beirut at 23 to forge a life in Paris, understood that weight. Yet something in the project called to her. Like Almustafa, who prepares to return home after years in a foreign land, she began her own journey—through memory, imagination and linework. As she traced his path, she also traced her own. What has emerged is a striking black-and-white reimagining that brings Gibran's meditations into fresh visual form.

In this interview, Abirached reflects on the act of illustrating *The Prophet*—how she grappled with its ambiguity, honored its spirit and discovered a new way of seeing the wisdom she thought she already knew.





The Prophet: A Graphic Novel

Khalil Gibran. Il. Zeina Abirached. Interlink Books, 2024.

What made you accept the challenge of adapting *The Prophet* into a graphic novel?
You meet Almustafa at the moment when he is preparing to leave, and the people of Orphalese ask him to stay a bit longer and share his wisdom. As I read the introduction, I suddenly realized that he's talking about exile. He's talking about so many populations of the Middle East but also of the entire world. He's talking as a Lebanese person, too, because we are always packing a suitcase and leaving and coming back and leaving again. It's the story of our lives, of the lives of our parents and grandparents, and it touched me really deeply. I had to draw him.

What was the drawing process like?
You know, there's a rhythm to the text; it's poetry. I would read it out loud to decide where to cut and to turn the page. I think that was the bigger part of the work because it establishes the way the reader is going to read and receive the text. With the drawing, I tried to keep my oriental way of drawing in black and white, a bit like calligraphy. When you work in black and white, there are so many emotions you can express. At the same time, I didn't want to be too specific about the place where the story takes place: Orphalese. So, it's a bit of architecture from a lot of inspirations. I tried to mix many influences and keep this universal spirit that Gibran had in his text, which itself is spiritual without being religious. The introduction was also very challenging because I had to represent the people. For example, is Almustafa old or young? Do the women cover themselves or not? Is it set in the 20th century or earlier? There are so many questions to answer in the drawings. Sometimes I felt as if I was a detective trying to find my way to graphically say what he says with his words, because some parts—like the part about freedom—are so abstract. I felt like I needed to crack the code. I smile when I talk about it because it was a super intense process. I went from not knowing anything from Gibran to knowing it by heart. It was a journey.

OPPOSITE: YURI ZAKOVITCH

You describe the process as a kind of code-breaking. What do you hope your illustrations unlock for readers?
I say this with humility, but hopefully in my version they will get the musicality of the text. And, probably, they will also get more time because the text is difficult and intense, and sometimes you don't understand. It's super short, so you could be tempted to turn the pages without taking the time to process what you are reading. In this version of the book, you can wander around in the images and your imagination can participate in the understanding of the text. Hopefully, it will create an atmosphere that helps the reader get closer to the text.

There are sentences in the original text that are real gems, and in my version, I also wanted them to take up all the space of a double page. For example, there is a line: "Work is love made visible." I still think about that sentence often because it's beautifully said, it's simple, and it's true.

Speaking of truths, what is one piece of wisdom from *The Prophet* that has stuck with you?
The line about work is probably my favorite, but there is also a chapter about marriage where he talks about the strings of the lute. He means that you have to find the right distance when you are in a relationship with someone to live in harmony; you cannot be glued to one another. This is a classic. I think that Gibran's prophet is still alive because wherever you are in your life, you can grab something and it can grow inside of you. I have goosebumps now.

How do you relate to Almustafa when it comes to leaving and coming home?
I'm Lebanese, but I write in French. I live in France, and I talk about Lebanon but in French. So there's this constant movement between Beirut and Paris that was my life before I ended up in Oman—we have only been here for three years. In a way this was a way to cut the distance between Paris and Beirut that I had for 20 years. Being in a third place, I can look at my hometown and Paris from a different perspective. I drew everything for the book here, and it was interesting to have all this wisdom and poetry at a time of my life when I was away from "homes." Of course, Beirut is my hometown; my parents are there. Paris is the home of the artist because I became an artist there, which was like a second birth. So, I cannot choose. I have to have both.

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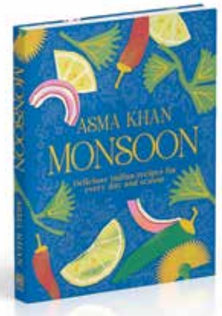
Reviews

From Wilderness to Paradise: A Sixth-Century Mosaic Pavement at Qasr el-Lebia in Cyrenaica, Libya
Jane Chick. Archaeopress Archaeology, 2024.

An enigmatic 6th-century CE Roman mosaic from a site known as Qasr el-Lebia in Cyrenaica, Libya, has baffled historians since its 1957 discovery. This 11-meter by 5.5-meter grid of 50 panels teems with a disjointed menagerie of sea monsters, satyrs, ostriches, bulls and leopards. Jane Chick, an expert on Roman mosaics, tackles this puzzle in her new book, arguing the artwork is not haphazard but reads as a deliberate spiritual allegory. She deciphers the panels as a narrative journey—beginning with a chaotic wilderness at the bottom and culminating in paradise at the top. Chick's vivid analogy of a Roman "graphic novel" invites readers to imagine sixth-century-CE viewers walking the mosaic as an act of devotion. Artisans who worked throughout the Roman province of Africa Proconsulari, including modern Tunisia, northeast Algeria and western Liby, crafted the imagery—Chic traces how pagan motifs were repurposed in ecclesiastical contexts in sixth century CE late antiquity. While admitting her reading remains conjectural, Chic bolsters her claim with archeological analysis and stylistic parallels, making a compelling case for the mosaic's intentional design. The book's accessible prose balances scholarly rigor with imaginative flair. Beyond solving a local mystery, Chick's work illuminates a pivotal era of cultural transition. Mosaic enthusiasts and Roman history buffs will enjoy Chick's sleuthing to untangle the colorful riddle of the Qasr el-Lebia mosaic.
—KYLE PAKKA

The Court of the Caliphate of al-Andalus: Four Years in Umayyad Córdoba
Eduardo Manzano Moreno. Tr. Jeremy Roe.
Edinburgh University Press, 2023.

The Court of the Caliphate of al-Andalus, by Spanish historian Eduardo Manzano Moreno, an expert on Islamic Spain, paints a vivid picture of the court of the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba. In the 10th century CE, Córdoba enjoyed its Golden Age under al-Hakam II, son of 'Abd al-Rahman III, the Umayyad emir who in 929 CE transformed al-Andalus into a caliphate for nearly 150 years, due to "the internal peace and widespread prosperity" found throughout. Córdoba, seat of the caliphate, reached its zenith under al-Hakam II, who reigned for 15 years, between 961 CE-976 CE. As impressive as al-Hakam II's résumé was—he expanded Córdoba's main mosque, the fortress-palace of Madinat al-Zahra and its caliphal library—few records beyond the court records of Umayyad court scribe 'Isa ibn Ahmad al-Razi exist, *Reports on the Kings of Spain*, the contemporaneous 130-folio chronicle written in Arabic on which this work relies. Moreno masterfully gives life to al-Razi's observations of Córdoba. He adroitly picks up on the nuances of al-Razi's anecdotal evidence that otherwise may escape a reader. Nearly lost for 900 years, till their discovery in the late 1800s, these annals reveal in detail the ruling Umayyad court in Córdoba from 971 CE–975 CE. Al-Razi's observations of al-Hakam II's reign, later reproduced in detail by 10th-century-CE al-Andalus historian Ibn Hayyan in his *Muqtabis*, a compilation of historical accounts, open a rare window into life of Islamic Spain under the Umayyads. —ROBERT W. LEBLING



Monsoon: Delicious Indian Recipes for Every Day and Season
Asma Khan. DK RED, 2025.

Known for her all-female kitchen at London's Darjeeling Express, Asma Khan transforms her new cookbook into a memoir, steeped in nostalgia and shaped by the rhythms of India's monsoon season. Khan, who is of Indian origin, long has championed marginalized voices. Like her earlier works, *Monsoon* draws from familial memory and cultural legacy—but it marks a more reflective turn, with seasonal structure and emotional depth guiding both recipes and storytelling. One recipe, Ammu's Yellow Curry, begins with the memory of a fierce matriarch. Aloo Dum and Lutchi recall Kolkata street vendors. These recipes transcend anecdote—curated with care and memory, they offer quiet blessings through each season. For beginners Khan strikes a liberating tone, urging readers to treat her recipes as starting points. She revives seasonal Ayurvedic flavors—sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, astringent—that nourish body and soul, unlike kitchens that favor shortcuts. Khan balances restraint with lyricism, especially in the essays preceding each recipe. The book's warm, elegant design illustrates how food evokes place, memory and feeling. With thoughtful menu suggestions and evocative visuals, *Monsoon* invites readers to cook not just with their hands but with memory. More than nostalgia—it's food as shelter, memory and renewal, a memoir guided by seasonal rains. —SUNNIYA AHMAD PIRZADA

"Bengali seasons ebb and flow poetically with nature, … and my childhood experience of seasonal cooking and eating is embedded in my foundations as a chef."

—Monsoon

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

JOSE LUCAS/ALAMY

Resurrecting an Egyptologist's Entombed Legacy

Written by KYLE PAKKA

When George Reisner died in 1942, he did so surrounded by ghosts—not just the pharaohs he'd unearthed but the stacks of unpublished notes that entombed his legacy. With this haunting image, Peter Der Manuelian begins his mission to resurrect the father of scientific archeology. *Walking Among Pharaohs* reveals how the son of a Midwestern shoe salesman revolutionized Egyptology, only to be forgotten by the field he helped create.

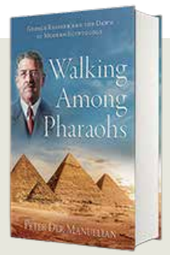
Manuelian, professor of Egyptology at Harvard University, transports us to the Giza Plateau at dawn, where Reisner's team—both Western and Egyptian—brushed dust from the 4,500-year-old face of King Menkaure. Discovered in fragments, the colossal head did more than just complete an alabaster statue. It became one of the most important finds from the Pyramid Age. Unlike treasure-hunting contemporaries, Reisner documented every detail: the statue's precise orientation, the quality of sunlight when discovered, even the sweat dripping on his field notes. It highlights archeology's rigor—layer-by-layer excavation, glass-plate photography and the work of Egyptian staff who helped Reisner.

The book shines brightest in its portrait of Harvard Camp, Reisner's mud-brick compound beneath the Pyramids of Giza. Manuelian makes us taste the gritty tea shared with foremen, hear the arguments over trench measurements and feel the weight of unpublished discoveries piling up as funding waxed and waned. Through unpublished letters, we meet Egyptian families who worked for Reisner for decades, yet whose contributions were erased from official histories.

Reisner's contradictions fascinate. He empowered Egyptian colleagues while dismissing Nubia's kingdoms as Egyptian imitations, produced 45,000 photographs but left manuscripts unfinished and built Harvard's Egyptology program only to see it languish. Manuelian frames these not as failures but as symptoms of archeology's growing pains—a field torn asunder by its colonial past and scientific future.

Some may wish for less detail about expedition logistics, but Manuelian's granular approach mirrors Reisner's own: Every invoice and diary entry matters. When World War II stranded the aging archeologist at the Harvard Camp, we witness his heartbreaking race against time—paralyzed by a stroke but still dictating notes even if with the most undecipherable of utterances, surrounded by the greatest unpublished record in Egyptology.

The final pages deliver a masterstroke: Reisner's methods became standard, yet credit went to others. His unpublished works, we realize, aren't just unfinished business, they are archeology's lost foundation. Manuelian doesn't merely chronicle a life; he exposes how knowledge gets buried, both in sand and in institutions, forcing us to ask who else might be missing from the record and why.



Walking Among Pharaohs: George Reisner and the Dawn of Modern Egyptology
Peter Der Manuelian, Oxford University Press, 2022.

"His [George Reisner] fluent Arabic and personal connection to the Egyptians with whom he worked still sets the archaeological bar high even today."

—Walking Among Pharaohs

Find more reviews like this online at AramcoWorld.com.

Solo Exhibition Highlights Artist's Explorer Spirit

Ömer Uluç: Beyond the Horizon presents more than 300 artworks from the 1960s to 2010 by the late contemporary Turkish artist, part of an influential group known as Tavanarası Ressamları (The Attic Painters), which explored the complex relationship between humanity and the universe. Reflecting the enriching experiences of his time living not only in Türkiye but also London, the United States, Mexico and Nigeria, this solo exhibition includes examples from various disciplines such as patterns and drawings on paper, acrylic on canvas, collage and sculpture, along with Uluç's works created with materials like rubber, felt, aluminum, acrylic sheet, PVC and polyester.

Istanbul Modern, through December 12.

RIGHT The show includes "Untitled 1989," an acrylic-on-canvas piece. Courtesy of Ömer Uluç.

Current / January

Bienal de São Paolo's 36th edition encourages reflection on humanity and nature under the theme "Not All Travellers Walk Roads—Of Humanity as Practice." Drawing from bird-migration routes and river flows, the contemporary art exhibition features 120 artists' works that highlight themes of displacement and memory for mankind and birds, as both species migrate and carry memories, experiences and languages across borders and bodies of water. Included in the exhibition are works by Saudi Arabia-born Hajra Waheed and the late Moroccan modern painter Mohamed Melehi and Algerian textile artist Hamid Zénati.

São Paolo, Brazil, September 6 through January 11, 2026.

ABOVE The invocation of the 36th São Paolo Biennial includes a lecture by French Moroccan literary critic Kenza Sefrioui, top.

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

Coming / November

The Ubud Writers and Readers Festival, Southeast Asia's largest literary event, gathers more than 170 writers and thinkers for discussions, workshops and performances to foster cross-cultural dialogue. This year sees the addition of an international lineup that features literary luminaries such as the winners of the 2025 International Booker Prize, Indian author Banu Mushtaq, whose collection *Heart Lamp* was recognized for its women-centered stories set in Muslim communities in southern India, and its translator, Deepa Bhasthi.

Bali, Indonesia, October 29 to November 2.

Bukhara Biennial is an evolving platform for contemporary art and culture launching in September in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, a UNESCO "Creative City of Craft & Folk Art." Developed by the Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation, the interdisciplinary event is set to feature homegrown participants and international artists such as Saudi multidisciplinary artist Ahmad Angawi and Egyptian culinary artist Laila Gohar. The biennial aims to demonstrate Bukhara's rich history as an important intellectual and economic center for production on the Silk Roads and as a hub for cultural exchange among Asia, Africa and Latin America in the 20th century with a focus on craft, visual and culinary arts, design and more.

Bukhara, Uzbekistan, September 5 to November 20.

Coming / January

LagosPhoto Festival, Nigeria's premier international photography event, fosters visual storytelling and counters African cultural stereotypes. Transitioning this year from an annual to biennial format, the event features exhibitions, artist talks, portfolio reviews and more to unite global perspectives through photography and mixed media. Artists including Amina Kadous of Egypt and M'Hammed Kilito of Morocco are among those whose works explore constraints of various types, following this edition's theme.

Lagos, Nigeria, October 27 to January 23, 2026.

RIGHT Amina Kadous's portrait of Warda, a cotton picker, in El Mehalla El Kobra, Egypt, 2020.

OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF BIENAL DE SÃO PAOLO; TOP RIGHT: COURTESY OF AMINA KADOUS

Pigments of Emotional and Optical Power

Uman: After all the things elicits the flamboyant fabrics worn by women in Somali bazaars, the slanted flourishes of Arabic calligraphy taught in the madrassas and the vast countryside of Kenya and upstate New York. This exhibition serves as the artist Uman's first institutional solo exhibition and includes compositions in oil, acrylic, spray paint, collages and sewing.

The Aldrich, **Ridgefield, US**, October 19 to May 10, 2026.

LEFT Uman's works, full of vivid colors, are on display in this solo exhibition. ©Uman. Courtesy of the artist, Nicola Vassell Gallery and Hauser and Wirth.

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

What's Online?

Kavala's Almost Inescapable Past

The Aegean Sea port town of Kavala boasts the Imaret, a shining example of Ottoman influence in Greece. Today local enthusiasts have succeeded in preserving that architectural heritage.

Meatballs With a Hidden Past

Behind every bite lies a story older than Spain, sweeter than pomegranate: Explore our narrative recipe about albóndigas.

Learning Center: Tips for Building Confidence in Math

Our For the Teacher's Desk section offers hands-on activities that encourage mathematical exploration, based on the article "Escher + Alhambra = Infinity."

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Quiz

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Photographer George Steinmetz is known for documenting what subject?

A

African safaris

B

Mountain ranges

C

Poetry readings

D

The global food chain

Answer: D. "From above, you can grasp the geography of land, and the enormous scale of feeding humanity," says the author of *Feed the Planet*. Read more from Steinmetz's Q&A on the world's food sources at AramcoWorld.com.

AramcoWorld

ABOVE Cartier's diamond-set 'Horus' Collar, circa 1990, reflects ancient Egyptian art and symbolism.

Read more on page **14**

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