Patterned in ochres and trimmed in white lace, old Sana’a, the 2000-year-old capital of Yemen, compromises some 6500 “tower houses” built of mud brick and elaborately decorated with gypsum plaster. Aerial photo by Yann Arthus-Bertrand / Altitude. (Detail of original.)

Little Syria, NY
Written by Louis Werner

From the 1870’s to the 1930’s, along a few blocks on the West Side of lower Manhattan, immigrant families, merchants, tradesmen, peddlers, laborers—and the first Arab–American novelist—built the neighborhood named after the immigrants’ land of origin. All that’s left today are three buildings and the memory of the first vibrant hub of Arab–American culture.

The Happy Ones?
Written by Matthew Teller
Photographs courtesy of the National Wildlife Research Center, Taif, Saudi Arabia

Along the mountainous spine of the western Arabian Peninsula, new conservation efforts are aimed at keeping Arabia’s only endemic primate wild—the hamadryas baboon.

Saudia Aramco, the oil company born as an international enterprise more than seventy-five years ago, distributes Saudia Aramco World to increase cross-cultural understanding. The magazine’s goal is to broaden knowledge of the cultures, history and geography of the Arab and Muslim worlds and their connections with the West. Saudia Aramco World is distributed without charge, upon request, to a limited number of interested readers.
2013 Calendar: Above
Introductions by Robert W. Lebling and Paul Lunde
From Morocco to Indonesia, from desert to sea, from the beauty of borderless landforms to kaleidoscopically intricate cities, viewing our Earth from above inspires stories, science and a shared sense of wonder.

Free Running Gaza
Written by Miriam Shahin
Photographed by George Azar
In a refugee camp where overcoming obstacles is almost a way of life, two former Al-Azhar University students in 2008 combined gymnastics with acrobatics to found a performance art team that reaches out to local youth and, this year, joined its first worldwide event, in Milan.

New Flavors for the Oldest Recipes
Written by Laura Kelley
The world’s oldest written recipes come down to us in cuneiform on clay tablets that are mostly from Mesopotamia. Listing only the names of their ingredients, some of which defy easy translation, they present a culinary challenge to chefs, who must interpret them, rather than follow them. Their results might inspire a touch of Nineveh, or perhaps Uruk, in your own kitchen.
LITTLE SYRIA, NY
WRITTEN BY LOUIS WERNER
ON NEW YORK’S MANHATTAN ISLAND—an American Indian name meaning “many hills”—on lower Washington Street—named for the first US president—once lived people with Arab names like Sakakini, Khoury and Hawawiny. The great majority of them were Christian immigrants from the lands known today as Lebanon and Syria. They began arriving in the 1870’s from what was then the Ottoman province of Syria, most leaving behind home villages set in mountains much higher than Manhattan’s not-so-hilly terrain.
The émigrés brought their foods, clothes and traditions—including street peddling—with them. Their neighborhood became known as Little Syria, and for some 75 years, until just after World War II, it was the point—within sight of the Statue of Liberty—where many Arab immigrants arrived in the United States.

Like America itself, Washington Street changed over time. In the late 1940s, the construction of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel tore through streets to the south, dispersing what was left of a dwindling Arab population and closing the neighborhood’s last two Arab restaurants, The Nile and The Sheikh. As Lower Manhattan became a place of elevator-equipped buildings with offices of high finance, so small shops and warehouses closed. Tenements were torn down. A parking garage—the most hurtful affront to a community that once made its living by ambulatory sales—was built. Then came the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, just a few blocks to the north.

Today there is a newfound awareness of the neighborhood’s role in Arab–American history. Descendants of the immigrants whose origin gave the area its name have raised the alarm about losing what is left of its original architecture. A conference on Little Syria at the Museum of the City of New York in 2002 resulted in publication of the book *A Community of Many Worlds: Arab Americans in New York City*. The Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, is planning its own Little Syria exhibition. And, as the most literal symbol...
of this historical rediscovery, the cornerstone of St. Joseph’s Maronite Church—which began serving the neighborhood in the 1890’s—was found in the rubble of the World Trade Center.

The initial impetus for the first wave of Arab immigration to New York was America’s 1876 Centennial Exposition, held in Philadelphia. It drew a number of Arab delegates, and they returned home extolling the new opportunities in the us. In 1890, the Bureau of Immigration hired one Najib Arbeely to help steer his Lebanese countrymen from the immigrant intake centers, New York’s Castle Garden and later Ellis Island. As Abraham Rihbany succinctly put it in *A Far Journey*, a memoir of his arrival in 1891, “We landed at Battery Place [Manhattan’s southernmost point], explored the dock for our trunks ... and proceeded to a lodging house on Washington Street.”

The area saw a dynamic coming and going during those years. From a place of both residence and business for immigrants of all social classes, it slowly sorted itself out as the locus of shops owned by those who sold peddling goods to their less-well-off itinerant compatriots; the latter rented rooms in its cramped tenements between long-distance trips that reached as far as the mining camps of the American West. As the eminent Lebanese–American historian Philip Hitti wrote in his first book, *The Syrians in America* (1924), “Trade takes a man far.”

With the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883 and the East River subway tunnel in 1910, the more salubrious outer boroughs became accessible, and those who were able moved their families away from Manhattan, leaving the peddlers...
behind. By 1935, Brooklyn’s Atlantic Avenue was described as “the new Washington Street.”

Accurate numbers of the Arabs living on Washington Street are not available, partly because they were registered as “Syrians” upon arrival but in later census counts were identified as “Turks.” One estimate was of 300 families in 1890. In 1904, a newspaper estimated a total of 1300 people. The total number of Arab immigrants admitted to the United States between 1899 and 1907 was 41,404, and 15,000 more arrived in the following three years. Few of those later arrivals, however, ended up in Little Syria.

One who did not was Salom Rizk. Arriving from the quiet Syrian village of Ain Arab in 1925, he took one look at the city and bought a ticket on the first train to Sioux City, Iowa. “New York was overwhelming,” he wrote, “an unbelievable jumble of swiftness and bigness—millions of people, millions of cars, buildings, windows, lights, noises—a great mass of vagueness swimming and spinning in my eyes.”

But those who stayed made Little Syria famous. A New York Times writer visited in 1899, marveling at the merchandise of the many peddling emporia, as well as Abraham Sahadi’s grocery, founded there in 1895. Invoking the metaphor of Aladdin’s cave, the reporter was awed by swords and lamps hanging from the ceiling, glass bracelets of many colors and narghiles with their “fixings,” yet disappointed to find “no languorous eyes nor red fezzes.”

Sahadi & Co. is going strong today on Brooklyn’s Atlantic Avenue after a nephew broke away and established a new store there 60 years ago, following his Arab customers.

Current owner Charlie Sahadi remembers his great-uncle Abraham’s original grocery, which remained on Washington Street until 1967. “The retail counter sold nuts and dried fruits to a very different clientele from its early days,” he says, “yet they still made their own halvah and sesame bars and apricot paste.”

Business became an extended-family affair. Charlie’s father, Wade, who arrived from Zahle, Lebanon in 1919, became Abraham’s traveling salesman, riding the train into the American Midwest to take wholesale orders. Uncles in Lebanon supplied them with the spices and grains unavailable elsewhere, as well as the brass trays, coffeepots and mortars and pestles that Arab cooks insist make all food taste better.

The Arbeely family founded New York’s first Arabic newspaper, Kawkab Amrika (Star of America), followed by another named Al-Hoda (Guidance), both printed on Washington Street. Marian Sahadi Ciaccia (no relation to the grocer family of the same name), whose father came from Jeita village and whose mother came from Lebanon via the West Indies, delivers Al-Hoda to subscribers as a teenager. “It kept me busy after school, and I made a nickel for each delivery,” she says. “I couldn’t read it but I did speak Arabic with my father. It was like our private language, because Mother didn’t speak it very well.”

Those who couldn’t read Arabic could keep up with local news in the English-language Syrian World. Its first issue, in 1926, included a work by the great Lebanese-born poet Kahlil Gibran exhorting cultural assimilation. However, Gibran’s invocation of such rarefied authors as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry James in his “Message to Young Americans of Syrian Origin” may have gone over the heads of his readers.

While Arab immigrants could get ahead in America, they faced cultural hurdles. Social reformer Jacob Riis fell into the trap of stereotyping the less favored in How the Other Half Lives, his 1890 book on New York tenement life. His chapter on homeless children carries the term “street arab” as its title, now regarded as an ethnic slur.

Syrian–American Alixa Naff, founder of an archive of...
Abdul-Rahim, who wrote about the advantages of a peddler job in his autobiographical novel, *The Book of Khalid*, noting, "We travel and earn money; our compatriots, the merchants, rust in their cellars and lose it."

Khalil Sakakini came to New York in 1908 and wrote in his memoir of having to move at top speed just to stay in place: "The American walks fast, talks fast, and eats fast.... A person might even leave the restaurant with a bite still in his mouth."

Yet the pace of life on Washington Street was not all at double time. The restaurant owned by a man named Arta—a non-English speaker described by the *Times* as "fezzed, but all his other garments quite American"—became a coffeehouse during evening hours, its air filled with the clack of dominos played hard on the table, wafts of pipe smoke and the scents of kibbe, *laban* and egg-plant dishes—"tasty and delicate, neither French nor Teutonic"—that sold for 10 cents each.

Such was the setting for "Anna Ascends," a 1919 Broadway play later made into a silent film by Victor Fleming, better known as the director of "Gone with the Wind" and "The Wizard of Oz." The plot revolves around Anna, a Syrian girl working in a coffeehouse that she doesn't know is the front for a gang of thieves. At the end, she finds an American husband and happily assimilates into American culture. Act i begins with Anna busy arranging garlic wreaths and cans of olive oil, unmistakable markers of a Middle Eastern immigrant.

Not far from where the fictional Anna might have served coffee stood St. Joseph's Maronite Church, established in 1891, the home parish of many of the neighborhood’s Syrian Christians. A marriage announcement in the *Times* from 1897 describes the wedding of Miriam Azar, from Jaffa, Palestine, to Touma Elia. Agog with Orientalist fascination, the article tells of the bride hidden by a "veil of curious lace," while a baby bawled in the church, "presumably in pure Arabic."

As Arabs left the neighborhood, St. Joseph’s emptied too; it was sold and demolished in 1984. Much of its masonry went as fill into new construction sites near the World Trade Center. Bishop Stephen Hector Doueihi remembers getting a call in October 2002 when he was presiding bishop at Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Cathedral in Brooklyn Heights. A broken cornerstone, with three words in its inscription indicating its Maronite origin, had been unearthed by a bulldozer clearing Ground Zero. Would the bishop’s cathedral care to have it to display?

"It was both a big surprise for us and a big honor," remembers the bishop. "We knew we had once had a humble church near the World Trade Center site, but it had long ago been torn down. And then suddenly we hear that its Latin cornerstone, which had already been moved several times as St. Joseph’s had relocated over the years, had been found.... Truly it was like the fathers of many of our own parishioners—on the move from place to place."

A happier outcome occurred not far from St. Joseph's last address at 137 Cedar Street. St. George's Syrian Catholic parish, established in 1889, built itself a neo-Gothic church at 103 Washington Street in 1925, enlarging a building that had been a boardinghouse, an Arab restaurant, a loan office for recent immigrants and the H&J Homay—a family name from Homs, Syria—garment factory. Beirut-educated architect Harvey Farris Cassab designed a new terra-cotta facade. After a six-year review, the New York Landmarks Commission granted the church building, now under different use, full protected status in 2009.

Carl Antoun is the 20-year-old descendant of Tanios Sadallah, who came to America from the village of Baskinta in 1891 and quickly returned to fetch his family, settling in Little Syria to open a silk-importing business. "I grew up in the borough of Queens and knew nothing of the Lebanese side of my family’s early days," Antoun says while leading a walking tour of Washington Street. "When I found the old business records, written in Arabic, at my grandmother’s house, I wanted to learn more, which led me here."

There is not much of Little Syria’s original architecture for Antoun to point out. A new hotel is going up on one side of St. George’s; a community house built by a benevolent society in 1925 and an older tenement building are in danger of being torn down on the other. Antoun’s organization, Save Washington Street, is lobbying to preserve the community house, which served as an

In the 1940’s, construction of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, top, tore through the lower part of Little Syria, further hastening migration to Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn, above, which remains a hub of New York’s Arab–American community to this day.

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Though the best-known Arab writer in America is Kahlil Gibran, whose 1923 book The Prophet has been translated into some 40 languages with an estimated 100 million copies in print, the author of the first Arab novel published in the US was his compatriot Ameen Rihani (1876–1940), whose The Book of Khalid celebrated its centennial in 2011.

And while the former is considered an “easy read,” a bit trite and romantic, Rihani’s work is altogether different—so difficult that the novel quickly went out of print and has only recently been republished. Its dense plot as a reverse Orientalist saga set partly in America and partly in the Middle East, its Victorian vocabulary, calling to mind Charles Doughty’s Travels in Arabia Deserta and William Kinglake’s Eothen, and its winking references to such picaresque models as Don Quixote and Voltaire’s Candide, all make The Book of Khalid a challenge for the modern reader. But it offers a rich reward—and only in part because it was illustrated by Rihani’s dear friend Gibran.

Poet and literary historian Gregory Orfalea calls the book “overblown, using ten cent words the way someone might who pulls carelessly from a thesaurus.” However, he is altogether admiring of its attempt to contain the world within its covers, much as Walt Whitman attempted in Leaves of Grass, and he praises “the satiric wisdom that both celebrates and rebukes the immigrant’s fanciful hope, to good effect.”

Rihani came to America as a child in 1888 and worked in his father’s peddling supply store on Washington Street for four years. Taken by the sights and sounds of New York, exposed to book-sellers and stage actors, and hungry for a formal education, he entered law school but soon fell sick and returned to Lebanon to recover. When he came back, he was ready to publish his articles and his translations of poems by the 10th-century philosopher Abu al-Ala al-Marri in the New York newspaper Al-Hoda, which introduced linotype printing to Arabic journalism worldwide.

During his second extended trip back to his ancestral mountain village of Freike, Rihani began to write The Book of Khalid, in English. It is based as much on his experience as an impressionable young man in New York as on the principles of self-reliance, rational thinking and superior achievement available to a man who acts alone. Indeed, that is an apt description of the adult Rihani, as his later career as a diplomat for the nascent country of Saudi Arabia, as a travel writer of books in English and Arabic and as a multicultural man of letters in Paris and New York all attest.

A scholar of Arab-American literature, the late Evelyn Shakir, has written that to be accepted in New York intellectual circles, Rihani and his compatriots first had to "dress carefully for their encounter with the American public, putting on the guise of prophet, preacher, or man of letters." The aim: to become "an Oriental spokesman," who could legitimately invoke the Orientalist clichés of Eastern mystic, exotic sage and desert denizen, as a character in The Book of Khalid says.

The book’s plot, a kind of “vision quest” conducted by Khalid as he grows to manhood, shifts from New York to Lebanon and from Damascus finally to the Egyptian desert, where Khalid mysteriously disappears from the face of the earth. The Book of Khalid is structured as a “found manuscript” much like Don Quixote, which Cervantes playfully claimed had been copied, translated and edited from a text by its original Arab author Cide Hamete Benengeli. Going one better, Rihani claimed two sources for his book—Khalid’s Arabic autobiography and a French biography written by Khalid’s sidekick Shakib.

Wa’il Hassan, professor of comparative literature at the University of Illinois, sees in The Book of Khalid a number of the same ambiguities and hidden messages that the late Edward Said teased out of many classic Orientalist texts—but this from the pen of an Arab. Hassan notes Rihani’s almost comic name-dropping of Arab literary forebears and his Arabic-to-English wordplay and use of untranslated Arabic vocabulary. He calls it more an “Arabized English novel!” than an Arab–American one.

As a soul-starved immigrant in New York, Khalid falls under the spell of a visionary used-book seller named Jerry, as in the Prophet Jeremiah, but also remembers he must fill his belly with mojadderah (a Lebanese dish of lentils and grains)—a word that comes from the same root as “smallpox.” Rihani plays the English meaning of “sham” off its homophone, the Arabic name for Syria. As Hassan notes, Rihani was writing for a reader who could swim equally well in both languages and cultures—in other words, someone like himself.

Todd Fine, executive director of Project Khalid, an international initiative to commemorate Rihani’s novel, has done the most to bring it back into the public eye. In honor of the centennial, he organized seminars at the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library and the Arab American National Museum. He has arranged for a new printing to be distributed by Random House and has helped two Arab-American congressmen to introduce a resolution honoring the author.

Fine recognizes the irony of his current passion if compared to his past. Though a former assistant to the late Samuel Huntington, author of The Clash of Civilizations and theorist of cultural determinism, he now espouses the importance of an Arab author who stands against all this. “To me, Rihani represents everything that can go right when cultures meet,” he says.

This East–West dialogue that Rihani carried out in fiction was nothing less than an attempt at the synthesis of civilizations. As the narrator of The Book of Khalid notes, “What the Arabs always said of Andalusia, Khalid and Shakib said once of America: a most beautiful country with one single voice—it makes foreigners forget their native land.”

Did Rihani succeed? One hundred years later, people are still asking that question.
adult-education school and clinic for new immigrants. Its exterior architecture, an amalgam of American styles called Colonial Revival, symbolized the cultural assimilation that was going on indoors in its English-language and citizenship classes.

Journalist Konrad Bercovici described life in Little Syria in the early 1920’s in his book *Around the World in New York*, a study of all the city’s immigrant communities. “A descent upon the Syrian quarter is like dream travel,” he wrote. Everything there seemed exotic to Bercovici, an immigrant from Romania himself—its coffeehouses, jewelry shops, rug merchants and even the dried roots and fruits on sale “of all kinds that grow one knows not where and are put to one knows not what use.”

Of the neighborhood’s cramped tenement buildings, he wrote that they had been the prosperous homes of “good Dutch burghers a hundred years ago.” For the Syrians, he suggested, they were but “a temporary tent.” As usual for outsiders looking in, he confounds their religion. Everything there reminded him of “Moslem fashion”—the floor seating, the dress codes, even the Christian prayer service at St. Joseph’s Maronite Church.

Lucius Hopkins Miller, a professor of religion at Princeton University who had taught in the Levant for three years, provided the only objective survey of Little Syria. Of its 454 families in 1904, he counted only one Muslim household, consisting of two individuals. He found that men and women engaged almost equally in peddling work, as in its factory jobs, while men outnumbered women working behind shop counters and women far outnumbered men in at-home sewing jobs.

Because of his fluency in Arabic and his familiarity with the home communities of the émigrés, Miller was able to get a unique insider’s view. While social-reformer Jacob Riis decried the state of their housing, Miller agreed with the municipal tenement inspector that the Arabs maintained higher standards of hygiene than other ethnic groups. But Miller, too, was not altogether free of bias. The peddler’s job, he said, “encouraged overreaching and deceit”; jobs in the neighborhood’s Turkish-cigarette factories were preferable, he felt, or in factories that made mirrors, suspenders or ladies’ housecoats.

Bercovici was perhaps overwriting when he described Little Syria’s “kavas [coffeehouses] and bazaars and belly dancing halls, zarafs [loan offices] and their own Arabic newspapers...” and labeled its residents as “a people of a different seed, of an older civilization that has ever been reluctant to the new, distilling a certain pigment into the dull greyness of our modern lives.”

Even today, in the shadow of the newly rising World Trade Center, the neighborhood still speaks clearly to those with the time to listen. Says Carl Antoun, the great-great-grandson of one of its earliest residents, “This place is like a history lesson for me. There is much still to learn here.”

Louis Werner (lwwernerworks@msn.com) is a writer and filmmaker in New York.

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Kahlil Gibran: M/A 83
Arab newspapers: J/F 67

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The editors thank Elizabeth Barrett-Sullivan, Todd Fine and Carl Antoun for their generous assistance.
"I was ten years old—I’ll never forget it." Ahmed Boug gazes across a hazy desert view from the highlands above Taif, in western Saudi Arabia. "We’d set off for a camping vacation in Abha, up in the mountains. This was before there was even an asphalt road there. It was wilderness, high above the town. At dawn my father woke us all in a panic. ‘Monkeys!’ he was shouting. ‘Quick, get everything!’ We grabbed what we could. There were about a hundred of them coming through. They stole fruit, food, anything. Later, we went down into the valley to retrieve our stuff—shoes and toys. It was all such a shock for me! That was what sparked my interest in these animals.” A child’s interest became a professional’s preoccupation.

“Baboons are neither beautiful to describe, nor good to eat. So the poets ignored them.” —Ahmed Boug
The rugged Sarawat Mountains offer ideal habitat to hamadryas baboons. Although some 65 percent remain wild, 35 percent live—and feed—near towns and cities, including roadsides such as those along Highway 15 west of Taif.

Today, as director of Saudi Arabia’s National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), Ahmed Boug is a world authority on the backcountry raiders who so shocked him as a boy—hamadryas baboons.

Unlike olive, yellow, chacma and Guinea baboons, all of which are found only in Africa, *Papio hamadryas* live on both shores of the Red Sea, ranging from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia across the water to the semi-arid mountains of Yemen and Saudi Arabia. *Homo sapiens* aside, they are the Arabian Peninsula’s only endemic primate.

Hamadryas need surface water for drinking and rocky slopes, even cliffs, for sleeping. In Saudi Arabia, where they number perhaps 350,000, these conditions prevail in the Sarawat Mountains, north from the border with Yemen for roughly 800 kilometers (500 mi), parallel to the Red Sea coast. It is a narrow corridor: In the deserts east of the Sarawat there are cliffs but no water, and on the coastal plain west of the Sarawat there is water but no cliffs.

Boug’s home city, Taif, perches at nearly 1900 meters’ altitude (6200’) in the Sarawat. It is so suitable for hamadryas that it has become famous for them. Especially around its western outskirts, they cavort by the hundreds across rocky slopes, loiter near parks and cajole leftovers from amused *Homo sapiens*.

Boug drove me out a few kilometers northwest to Al Hada, where Makkah-bound Highway 15 begins its descent off the escarpment in a series of precisely engineered hairpin turns. In a pullout before an epic desert vista, we watched as hamadryas males and females, adults and infants, all bounded over the rocks lining the shoulder and over the four-lane highway, at times appearing to literally dance in the road. Directly beneath a large sign reading *Mannooa rami al-akl lil-haywanat* (“Do not throw food to the animals”), drivers were nonetheless stopping to toss fruit, bread and leftovers out of car windows, drawing clusters of screeching, somersaulting baboons onto car hoods and roofs.

Hamadryas are not lithe, slender tree-dwellers: They are short, stocky and powerful. A full-grown male can weigh in at 30 kilograms (66 lb), and his long, squared-off muzzle opens to bare
five-centimeter (1½"") canines. With a silver mane that fluffs to form a broad cape across his cheeks, shoulders and upper body, and narrow eyes that dart intently beneath prominent brow-ridges, everything about his appearance signals size and strength.

Females are only about half as large, and their short, brown hair lacks the male’s impressive mantle. Socially, the males call the shots, corralling females around themselves in the polygynous building-block of baboon society, the “one-male unit” or OMU, as Boug explains. As we watched the fluster of baboons on the highway shoulder, Boug pointed out several OMUs: In each one, a male controlled two to eight females, plus their infants. There are larger divisions, too, he explained: Two or three OMUs live and feed together; gether as a clan; two or three clans maintain close contact as a band and several bands form a troop that may be composed of a hundred or more individuals who travel en masse from sleeping sites to feeding sites to resting sites and back each day.

Within each group, social order is a mixture of consent and coercion: It’s not uncommon to see a male attempt to prevent a female from straying by hauling her around by the tail. This behavior, Boug adds, is different from that of African male baboons, which fight each other for females. “It’s an adaptation to the more arid environment here. Herding your females takes less energy than fighting another male to win them back. Conservation of energy is a key priority.”

Despite his expertise, Boug has been working alone for much of the last three decades. Only a handful of scholarly papers have been published on the hamadryas populations in Arabia as compared with African species. It’s as if hamadryas baboons got left behind while human understanding of other parts of the natural world has grown over the last century. Swiss primatologist Hans Kummer has offered a hypothesis about this. A pioneer of hamadryas research, he first worked on Ethiopian hamadryas in the 1960’s. Whereas most mammals entice each other to mate using scents imperceptible to

Above: A family watches cavorting baboons along the roadside.
Right: Socially, hamadryas baboons organize into OMUs (“one-male units”) such as this male flanked by four females.
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humans, or sounds we do not perceive as sexual, he wrote, baboons are visual animals, and their physical displays and sexual exuberance are humans to such an extent. What’s worse, he added, is that they appear to be half-dressed: the male’s mantle covers his shoulders, but—like the female—he is naked from the waist down. Baboons, to some, are simply embarrassing.

In Arab culture, although baboons are mentioned in the hadith, or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, they are significantly absent from a rich poetic tradition that otherwise names every kind of wild animal, from oryx and gazelles to wolves and even the universally unpopular hyena. Ahmed Boug—himself a literary scholar and published poet—laughs as he delivers an explanation tantalizingly close to Kummer’s. “Baboons are neither beautiful to describe, nor good to eat,” he told me. “So the poets ignored them.”

That uneasy relationship persists. Only around 6.5 percent of Saudi Arabia’s baboon population is wild; the rest live in and around towns and cities, particularly Taif, which happens also to be the kingdom’s top leisure-tourism destination. These baboons are classified as commensal—meaning they “share our table”—which means that, to varying degrees, they rely on human food.

Boug took me to the south side of Taif, to Wadi Liya, where all the elements of a baboon habitat unite. The valley is steep-sided, with rocky cliffs, smaller wadis and springs nearby that channel water to where a dam has created a lake. As well as eating wild acacia fruit and the succulent roots of the prickly poppy (Argemone mexicana), the baboons make the short walk every morning to Ruddaf Park, a local picnic area, where they raid the dumpsters and trash bins for human leftovers, gathering as much as possible before the park rangers arrive for work and chase them off.

“Commensalism has been a problem here for a long time,” Boug tells me. “But it’s grown worse in the last 30 years, as rapid

How did African baboons end up in the Arabian Peninsula? Or was it the other way around? It’s a question that has taxed primatologists for decades. As Hans Kummer wrote in his 1995 landmark book In Quest of the Sacred Baboon, “It is a puzzling situation. The hamadryas must have originated on one side or the other [of the Red Sea]. As yet, we do not know which.”

Other mammals present on both shores of the Red Sea differ substantially from one another. Oryx and leopards, for instance, both show marked physiological and behavioral variation between African and Arabian populations. Papio hamadryas, though, is essentially the same. This implies a long period of isolation, in which the species evolved to its present form, followed by a relatively recent spread of population to fill the current range.

Kummer favored an African origin, putting forward the intriguing idea that the baboons were transported across the sea by the ancient Egyptians, who are known to have worshiped the animals. (Around 1500 BCE, Queen Hatshepsut is recorded as having sent out an expedition to the “Land of Punt,” presumably in the Horn of Africa, which brought back live hamadryas baboons.) Kummer suggested that at some point during the rise of maritime commerce on the Red Sea, baboons simply jumped ship and established pioneer colonies in the mountains above Arabian Red Sea ports.

If he is right, the African and Arabian populations of hamadryas would be genetically identical. But he was working from observation, before DNA testing was widely available.

CROSSING THE RED SEA

In the laboratories of the King Khalid Wildlife Research Center outside Riyadh, a team working under British geneticist Bruce Winney announced in 2004 that diversity in the mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) of Arabian baboons indicates that colonization of Arabia must have taken place earlier than 20,000 years ago—long before the emergence of human civilizations.

The baboons, therefore, made the journey themselves. But how? Did they migrate slowly northward from Ethiopia into Egypt, traversing the Sinai Desert to enter Arabia from the north? If so, populations at the northern edge of the hamadryas’ current range would be genetically closer to African populations than those to the south. But Winney’s analysis showed marked genetic diversity between samples taken in both Eritrea and Taif, at the northern limit of distribution on both shores.

So scientists looked south. The Bab Al-Mandab strait, which separates Djibouti from Yemen at the mouth of the Red Sea, is only 30 kilometers (18 mi) wide. During periods of glaciation, global sea levels were much lower, and the strait would have formed a land bridge at several times over the last half-million years, leading Winney and his team to conclude that baboons likely crossed from Africa to Arabia between 130,000 and 440,000 years ago.

Then primatologist Takayoshi Shotake of Kyoto University, working closely with Ahmed Boug in Taif, suggested that, at some point in the distant evolutionary past, an ancestor of the baboon crossed the Bab Al-Mandab strait into Arabia. The hamadryas then evolved its distinctive characteristics in Arabian isolation over hundreds of thousands of years, before crossing back into the East African mountains. A genetic difference between African and Arabian hamadryas detected in recent analysis appears to bear this idea out. Shotake’s research is still in preparation, and so his hypothesis remains untested, but it offers a tantalizing, intriguing possibility. Far from being a marooned African animal, hamadryas might be Arabian.

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development has overtaken environmental issues.” Four percent of the baboon population—that is, several thousand individuals—are now completely reliant on human food sources.

But, as the drivers at Al Hada demonstrate, it’s not just about raiding: The baboons are being fed. “Some people think monkeys and pigs are people punished by God for disobeying divine law,” Boug says. “They feed them to earn spiritual credit.”

He told me about a local character known for going around town filling sacks with leftovers from restaurants and bakeries and taking it all out to Al Hada for the baboons. I drove out to Al Shafa, a tourist area of amusement parks and picnic grounds in the hills south of Taif, where visitors were buying fruit from roadside stalls and tossing it directly to waiting baboons.

I asked three young men, visiting from the coastal city of Yanbu’, why they did it. “I don’t know,” said one. “I’ve never thought about it.”

“It’s a good thing to do, to get mercy from God,” said another.

At one of Al Shafa’s scenic overlooks, perched before a breathtaking panorama of forested crags and plunging ravines, Suleiman—who was weekending from the northern city of Hail with his friend Humaid—was setting up a barbecue.

“Feeding the baboons is part of praying and fasting,” he told me. “It’s a good thing to do. And they have nothing else to eat. If they had enough food, they wouldn’t come to us, would they?”

Such well-intentioned but biologically misguided interventions have dire consequences. In the wild, a troop of hamadryas might total 120 animals; however, commensal troops have been counted at more than 800. With less need to search for food, they roam smaller areas—seven or eight square kilometers (3 sq mi), compared with more than three times that in the wild.

This results in crowding, which causes social stress.
As males find themselves unable to keep order in their increasingly oversized omus, “floating females” drift away to mate with unattached males, who, in turn, club together to seize more females. The tail-grasping behavior in the commensal troop at Al Hada is stress-induced, Boug says: It doesn’t occur in the wild. Overfeeding is also shortening the interval between births, which compounds the overcrowding. And then there is junk food, which is high in salt, sugar and fat: Commensal hamadryas are showing health problems, including increased levels of intestinal parasites.

The problems spread to humans, too, who can be at increased risk of bilharzia and tuberculosis from nearby baboon populations. Baboons raid farms around Taif, stealing crops and damaging fences and other structures. One troop gained entry to an army base, where it ripped up seating in milking crops and damaging fences and other structures. One troop at Al Hada is stress-induced, Boug says: It doesn’t occur in the wild. Overfeeding is also shortening the interval between births, which compounds the overcrowding. And then there is junk food, which is high in salt, sugar and fat: Commensal hamadryas are showing health problems, including increased levels of intestinal parasites.

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DO BABOONS KEEP PETS?

In 2011, a video was posted on YouTube showing hamadryas baboons in Taif apparently kidnapping feral puppies to raise as pets. It has proved amazingly popular, garnering more than 600,000 views. The three-minute sequence was excerpted from “Animals Like Us,” a multi-award-winning TV series on animal behavior, produced by a French team in partnership with the National Geographic Channel. The YouTube clip shows a male baboon seizing a puppy by the tail, prodding it and dragging it along in the dust; the camera then switches to a scene of adult dogs and baboons apparently relaxing together as a narrator intones, “Kidnapped pups grow up with the baboon family, feeding with them and sleeping together.” Mellow scenes of mutual grooming fade as the feel-good music swells.

Kidnapping has long been understood as a normal aspect of baboon behavior: Males will attempt to seize infant baboons from nursing females as part of a strategy for improving their status within the troop. But why might a baboon kidnap another species? Overlooking its emotionally manipulative music and narration and carefully edited visuals, does this decontextualized video clip really show baboons seeking canine companions, and dogs responding to baboons as masters, or is that a case of humans projecting ourselves into the picture?

Symbiosis is familiar across the natural world. But pet-keeping—wherein one species adopts another for no obvious functional reason and takes responsibility for a lifetime of feeding and care—is virtually unknown: Outside captivity, only Homo sapiens is known to do it. Koko the gorilla famously kept a kitten, a Kenyan hippo befriended a giant tortoise, and there have been a handful of other cases, but they all occur in artificial environments. In the wild, chimpanzees in West Africa have been observed seizing hyraxes—small rodent-like mammals—for brief periods of play, but they invariably kill them shortly afterwards, in some cases for food.

For this reason, the YouTube clip drew the attention of Hal Herzog, a specialist on human-animal interaction at Western Carolina University. In columns for Psychology Today and The Huffington Post, he collated multiple viewpoints to explore the possibility that the Taif baboons might be keeping dogs as pets, remaining skeptical while raising questions glossed over in the video:

- How long do the dogs live with the baboons? Is it long-term or temporary?
- Do the baboons get anything from the dogs other than somebody to love and play with? How do the dogs benefit?
- Do the baboons ever kill or eat the puppies?

Answers, so far, remain elusive. John Wells, co-founder of the Saudi Arab American Baboon Research Association—a small volunteer organization based in Jiddah—reacts in similar fashion. “I’m also skeptical,” he told me. “I’d like to see the unedited footage.”

Nonetheless, Wells maintains that the video scenes are not unusual, explaining that he has observed baboons caring for cats. “In Al Shafa, I’ve watched as four female baboons came down a rocky slope to a mewing kitten. Straight away, the mewing stopped and the kitten rubbed up against them. It was playful behavior, bouncing around. Then we saw the males come down the slope and take the kitten with them to drink.”

In his book Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat, Herzog asserts that in order to have pet-keeping, there must be culture—that is, social imitation and peer approval. Is a stressful, overcrowded habitat and an overabundance of food prompting Taif’s commensal baboons to keep pets for comfort? Are these animals developing a culture of caring? For now, we can only guess.
significant success in a long-running program to control populations of macaques around Hong Kong through contraception and legislative intervention. Pending local government approval in Taif, Boug is ready to implement the same methods in Saudi Arabia. But it will be a long journey.

Back at Al Hada, vehicles are crowding the highway shoulder, seven or eight in a line, their occupants cooing as young baboons stuff their mouths under the gazes of the imperious, silver-caped males. A lone municipal worker in orange coveralls collects discarded plastic bottles and food wrappers.

None of this is particularly new. Merchants and travelers between Taif and Makkah have come through Al Hada since antiquity, and the old stone road over the escarpment still exists alongside the modern highway. Scholar Yaqut Al-Hamawi described Al Hada in 1228, in his Mu'jam Al Buldan (Dictionary of Countries), in which he drily noted the resident baboons. In much the same vein, an Internet search reveals plenty of exasperated comments attached to videos of the baboons’ antics. “I live in Taif,” writes Waleed Gilani. “Every time we go to Makkah or Jiddah these baboons give us a really tough time.... Sometimes we take a different road.”

In formal Arabic, baboons are called qurud. Connoting a miser or one who lives on the cheap, the term is derived from a word meaning “unlucky.” Yet in popular speech, most people know the hamadryas either as sa’dan, which translates as “the happy ones,” or rubah, “those who profit.” As we watch them filch from the well-meaning humans at Al Hada, with sweet-water springs close at hand and the safety of the rocky cliffs as a nighttime retreat, it seems the baboons are happily banking their miser’s profits against an uncertain future.

HEAVENLY APES?

Hamadryas baboons were revered in ancient Egypt. By the New Kingdom period (around 1500 BCE), baboons were being imported for ritual purposes from Nubia, in the area of modern Sudan, and Punt, assumed to be on the southern shores of the Red Sea. Their exact status in Egyptian religion is not clear, but it seems they were seen both as vessels for the gods to inhabit and as proxy humans: Painted scenes show baboons building boats and taking part in harvesting, and baboons may have been mumified as part of a process of royal reincarnation.

Hamadryas were most commonly associated with Thoth, the scribe of the gods, fount of knowledge and—in Thoth’s depiction as the ape named A’an—the god of equilibrium, the one who seeks balance by weighing the deceased’s heart against the motive force of the universe. Hamadryas abound in ancient Egyptian painting and sculpture, where they are often worshiping the sun in a pose that authors hypothesize derives from a distinctive position adopted by male baboons while being groomed: head back and arms upraised to the sky.

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roses in Taif: N/D 97
folk music in Taif: M/A 07
NWRC and oryx conservation: S/O 09

“Have we not made the Earth as a wide expanse and the mountains as pegs?”

—Qur’an 78:8-9 (English by Yusuf Ali)
From Above
Written by Robert W. Lebling

From earliest times, humans have lifted their gazes skyward, where the gazing of hawks and gulls made us first wonder what the world looks like to a bird. Today, though vistas from airliner windows rarely excite more than a glance, there are still views from above that can fascinate us by revealing the sensual beauty of landforms and the kaleidoscopic patterns of towns and cities, all shaped by nature, history and culture and rarely showing any traces of political borders.

One of the earliest written legends to describe the Earth from above comes from the tablets of ancient Mesopotamia. In it, an eagle carries Etana, King of Sumer, up to heaven:

When he bore him aloft one league,
The eagle said to him, to Etana:
“Look, my friend, how the land is now.
Examine the sea, look for its boundaries.
The land is hills,...
The sea has become a stream.”

In classical Greek stories, flight was a divine prerogative. Though Hermes, the wing-footed courier, was Olympus’s top-ranking aeronaut, and chariot-driving Apollo captained the daily sun shuttle, all of the Greek deities could take to the air when they wished.

Trespassing fateful on their prerogative was a legendary duo: the inventor Daedalus and his son Icarus. Their wings of feathers and beeswax were inspired by the eagles that pried the cliffs on the coast of Crete, where they lived in exile. The pair’s aerial escape became a fable about the value of moderation when impulsive Icarus ignored his father’s warning and flew too high, to where the sun melted the wax, and he perished in the sea below.

Legendary or not, Daedalus and Icarus were not the first in their attempt at flight. Around 850 BCE, according to the English tale, King Bladud of the Britons, father of King Leir (Shakespeare’s Lear), is said to have used feathered wings to try to fly over the temple of Apollo in London. He crashed, fatally, but as he was also founder of the spa city of Bath, he has been known ever since as “the flying king of Bath.”

In ninth-century Muslim Spain, another inventor, Abbas ibn Firnas, donned the feathered wings and beeswax-inspired wings to fly from the tower of Malmesbury Abbey in England. Aloft for 15 seconds—likely entirely descending ones—he landed too hard and broke both legs.

One of Malmesbury Abbey in England. Aloft for 15 seconds—likely entirely descending, Benedictine monk of the 11th century, also attempted winged flight from the tower of Malmesbury Abbey in England. Aloft for 15 seconds—likely entirely descending ones—he landed too hard and broke both legs.

Patterns of Moon, Patterns of Sun
Written by Paul Lunde

The Hijri calendar
In 638 CE, six years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Islam’s second caliph, ‘Umar, recognized the necessity of a calendar to govern the affairs of Muslims. This was first of all a practical matter. Correspondence with military and civilian officials in the newly conquered lands had to be dated. But Persia used a different calendar from Syria, where the caliphate was based; Egypt used yet another. Each of these calendars had a different starting point, or epoch. The Sasanids, the ruling dynasty of Persia, used June 16, 632 CE, the date of the accession of the last Sasanid monarch, Yazdagird III. Syria, which until the Muslim conquest was part of the Byzantine Empire, used a form of the Roman “Julian” calendar, with an epoch of October 1, 312 BCE. Egypt used the Coptic calendar, with an epoch of August 29, 284 CE. Although all were solar calendars, and hence geared to the seasons and containing 365 days, each also had a different system for periodically adding days to compensate for the fact that the true length of the solar year is not 365 but 365.2422 days.

In pre-Islamic Arabia, various other systems of measuring time had been used. In South Arabia, some calendars apparently were lunar, while others were lunisolar, using months based on the phases of the moon but intercalating days outside the lunar cycle to synchronize the calendar with the seasons. On the eve of Islam, the Himyarites appear to have used a calendar based on the Julian form, but with an epoch of 110 BCE. In central Arabia, the course of the year was charted by the position of the stars relative to the horizon at sunset or sunrise, dividing the ecliptic into 28 equal parts corresponding to the location of the moon on each successive night of the month. The names of the months in that calendar have continued in the Islamic calendar to this day and would seem to indicate that, before Islam, some sort of lunisolar calendar was in use, though it is not known to have had an epoch other than memorable local events.

There were two other reasons ‘Umar rejected existing solar calendars. The Qur’an, in Chapter 10, Verse 5, states that time should be reckoned by the moon. Not only that, calendars used by the Persians, Syrians and Egyptians were identified with other religions and cultures. He therefore decided to create a calendar specifically for the Muslim community. It would be lunar, and it would have 12 months, each with 29 or 30 days.

This gives the lunar year 354 days, 11 days fewer than the solar year. ‘Umar chose as the epoch for the new Muslim calendar the hijra, the emigration of the Prophet...
In Renaissance Italy, flight was only one of the many ideas that fascinated Leonardo da Vinci, who studied the anatomy of birds and bats and sketched flying machines that included a kite-like glider, a flapping-winged ornithopter and a proto-helicopter.

It was not until 1782 that the dream of seeing as birds do became possible, and it came over Paris, from the basket slung below the Montgolfier brothers’ hot-air balloon. During the French Revolution, balloons became useful for collecting intelligence and providing a broad view of battlefields. With the invention of photography in the early 19th century, another Frenchman, Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, in 1858 became the first to take a camera aloft. And in 1909, just six years after American bicycle-shop owners Orville and Wilbur Wright flew the first “heavier than air” craft—the airplane—Wilbur himself flew over Rome with an early movie camera mounted on his Wright Flyer Model A to produce the world’s first in-flight movie.

From World War I to the 1930’s, the conjunction of film and views from above gave rise to the industry of aerial mapping, which has proven essential to cartographers, governments, scientists and industries ever since. One eyes-in-the-sky pioneer was an American named Sherman Mills Fairchild, who both adapted aircraft for mapping and produced specialized cameras for the purpose. In 1934, it was one of his Fairchild 71 monoplanes and K-4 aerial cameras that geologists of the California Arabian Standard Oil Co. (CASOC)—forerunner of Aramco and Saudi Aramco—used to produce the first maps of the larger-than-Texas concession area in eastern Saudi Arabia. (See photograph for July/August.)

The next revolution in viewing Earth from above came in 1946, when an American-launched unmanned German V-2 rocket carried a camera up nearly into orbit. Twenty-two years later, astronaut William Anders made what is perhaps the ultimate view from above: As his Apollo 8 spacecraft slipped from behind the barren moon, it was greeted by a cloud-laced, deeply blue, rising planet Earth. It was a sight that defied imagination, and it has marked our thinking ever since.

It would be too easy to say that in the early 21st century our species has reached a kind of pinnacle in its ability to look down as the legendary King Etana and his eagle once did. Today’s artists in the sky, whose work fills this year’s calendar, remind us of the infinite terrestrial mosaics that are appreciated best when viewed from above.

Robert Lebling (lebling@yahoo.com) is a writer, editor and communications specialist. He is author of **Legends of the Fire Spirits: Jinn and Genies from Arabia to Zanzibar**.

On the cover: Sunrise sets aglow a rare fog near Shaybah, in Saudi Arabia’s Rub’ al-Khali, or Empty Quarter. Comprising an area slightly larger than France and smaller than Texas, it covers much of the south-central Arabian Peninsula.

Photo by George Steinmetz

The following equations convert roughly from Gregorian to hijri and vice versa. However, the results can be slightly misleading: They tell you only the year in which the other calendar’s year begins. For example, 2013 Gregorian begins in Safar, the second month, of Hijri 1434 and ends in Safar of Hijri 1435.

**Gregorian year**

\[
\text{Hijri year} = \left\lfloor \frac{\text{Gregorian year} - 622}{33} \right\rfloor + 622
\]

**Hijri year**

\[
\text{Gregorian year} = \left\lfloor \frac{\text{Hijri year} \times 33}{32} \right\rfloor + 622
\]


Paul Lunde (paul_lunde@hotmail.com) is currently a senior research associate with the Civilizations in Contact Project at Cambridge University.
Caravan trade routes once laced the vast sand and gravel wastes of the Sahara, which was seen then as joining, rather than separating, the inhabited lands on its “shores.” This small group amid dunes near Nouakchott, Mauritania, is likely a tourist expedition: Trade caravans, while now rare, usually comprise dozens if not hundreds of camels, and camel-mounted livestock herders travel with their stock.

“There is no road to be seen in the desert and no track, only sand blown about by the wind. You see mountains of sand in one place, then you see they have moved to another.”

Photo by George Steinmetz
### January

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### February

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<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India’s Mughal classical era begins 1556</td>
<td>New York Times’ Anthony Shadid dies in Syria 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Egypt’s singing legend Umm Kulthum dies 1975</td>
<td>Danny Thomas founds St. Jude’s for children 1962</td>
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<td>Spain declares Alhambra national monument 1578</td>
<td>Mongolia sack Baghdad 1258</td>
<td>President Roosevelt, King ‘Abd al-Aziz meet 1946</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>Mongol ruler Tamerlane dies 1405</td>
<td>Traveler Ibn Battuta born in Tangier, Morocco, 1304</td>
<td>Consumer advocate Ralph Nader born 1934</td>
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**Notes:**

1. The quotations from Arabic literature in this calendar were compiled by Tim Mackintosh-Smith.
2. The historic dates and anniversaries in this calendar were compiled by Robert W. Lebling.
Capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, Arbil (also Irbil and Erbil) is among the oldest continuously inhabited cities on Earth. Layered upon its own ruins, Arbil’s central citadel dates back to at least the fifth millennium BCE.

“…It is situated upon a great high mound of earth, broad on top. Within this citadel there are markets and the dwellings of the townspeople, and a congregational mosque for their prayers.”

—Yaqut al-Hamawi, Mu’jam al-Buldan (Dictionary of Countries), 1220
Notes:

First commercial flow of Saudi Arabian oil 1938
Optics pioneer Alhazen dies 1040
Leaves announces plans for museum in Abu Dhabi 2007

Facebook launches Arabic version 2009

Magellan becomes first European to sail east to Asia 1511
Explorer and translator Richard Burton born 1821
Novruz, traditional Persian New Year’s Day
Timurid ruler and astronomer Ulugh Beg born 1394

Philosopher Ibn Rushd born in Córdoba 1126
Famed Ottoman architect Sinan born 1489

Schliemann begins to dig for ancient Troy 1870
Egyptian actor Omar Sharif born 1932

René Caillié is first European in Timbuctu 1828

President Philip the Arab meets Anti-Och Christians 244

Scholar and interpreter Richard Burton born 1821

Poet, statesman Muhammad Iqbal dies 1938

Obama compliments “The 99” comic books 2010

Notes:

Easter
Laid out on dramatic display by a merchant in the old city of Marrakesh, Morocco, carpets woven throughout the High Atlas mountains and the surrounding area bear seemingly infinite varieties of colorful, intricate and often locally distinctive motifs. Marrakesh rose as a center of political power and trade in the 11th century, and its traditional craft industries endure today in an economy largely fueled by tourism and global trade.

“In a Garden on high • Where they shall hear no (word) of vanity • Therein will be a bubbling spring • Therein will be Thrones (of dignity) raised on high • Goblets placed (ready) • And cushions spread in rows • And rich carpets (all) spread out.”

—Qur’an 88:10-16 (English by Yusuf Ali)
### May

**16 May** - Pope John Paul II visits Damascus mosque 2001

**29 May** - Pope Sylvester II, friend of Arab science, dies 1003

**20 May** - Headless Pyramid rediscovered at Saqqara 2008

**19 May** - First Egyptian motion picture in Cairo 1907

**9 May** - Alexander the Great, age 32, dies 323 BCE

**1 May** - Assyrians record solar eclipse 763 BCE

**10 May** - Great Bombay Cyclone drowns 100,000 1882

**18 May** - Kahlil Gibran immigrates to America 1895

**27 May** - Volcano threatens Madinah 1256

### June

**6 June** - Ancient Egyptian moves solar transit of Venus 1032

**28 June** - Ataturk begins Turkish War of Independence 1919

**25 June** - Ottomans conquer Constantinople 1453

**30 June** - Architect Zaha Hadid wins Pritzker 2004

**19 June** - First Egyptian motion picture in Cairo 1907

**11 June** - Grameen Bank founder M.Yunus born 1940

**12 June** - Volcano threatens Madinah 1256

**28 June** - Kahlil Gibran immigrates to America 1895

**13 June** - Assyrians record solar eclipse 763 BCE
Viewed from an altitude of 3000 meters (10,000') in November 1934, the North Jafurah desert near Dammam, Saudi Arabia, took on a sculptural shape beneath the lens of CASOC’s survey team. The team produced the first aerial maps of the oil-exploration concession granted by King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Al Sa’ud.

“Though this part of our journey is so dangerous, and the goal remote, no roads are without endings. Do not grieve.”

—Muhammad Shams al-Din Hafiz, Diwan, trans. Robert Maxwell and Mariam Ma’afi, 14th century
### July

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- **1** July: Harun al-Rashid gives elephant to Charlemagne.
- **7** July: Abbasids defeat Tang China at Battle of Talas.
- **11** July: Queen Cleopatra dies by her own hand.
- **14** July: Muslims surrender Jerusalem to Crusaders.
- **21** July: Egypt’s Aswan High Dam is completed.
- **23** July: Swat absorbed into Pakistan.

### August

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- **1** August: Romans capture Alexandria.
- **5** August: T. E. Lawrence born.
- **18** August: Harun al-Rashid gives elephant to Charlemagne.
- **25** August: Abbasids defeat Tang China at Battle of Talas.
- **1** September: T.E. Lawrence (of Arabia) born.
- **15** September: Al-Andalus in Iberia.
- **22** September: Swat absorbed into Pakistan.
- **25** September: Physician Al-Razi (Rhazes) born.

### Notes

- **26** July: Queen Cleopatra dies by her own hand.
- **10** August: Arab-Berber army found Al-Andalus in Iberia.
- **18** August: Muslim calligraphy dies.
- **28** September: Anglo-Zanzibar War lasts 38 minutes.

### Additional Information

- **30** July: Muslims surrender Jerusalem to Crusaders.
- **17** August: Arab-Berber army found Al-Andalus in Iberia.
- **31** August: Physician Al-Razi (Rhazes) born.

### Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>June</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>September</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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</table>
Sunrise glistens off the cupola that tops the octagonal Dome of the Rock, set within al-haram al-sharif ("the noble sanctuary"), at the southeast corner of Old Jerusalem, its precincts holy to three faiths. To Muslims, it is from the rock above which this shrine was built that the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven during his miraculous Night Journey (‘isra).

“In one night you journeyed from sanctuary to sanctuary, Passing, like the full moon, through bleakest darkness on the way. Ascending all night till you came within Two Bow-lengths, A point never attained, nor aspired to before.”

—Al-Busiri, The Ode of the Mantle, trans. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, 13th century
### September—Dhu al-Qa’dah

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**Notes:**
- Persian poet Rumi born 1207
- Otomań pobrücke in Battle of Vienna 1683
- Grateful Dead play at Giza Pyramids 1978
- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is proclaimed 1932
- Orientalism author Edward Said dies 2003
- Champollion deciphers Rosetta Stone 1822
- President Nasser of Egypt dies 1970
- Apple founder Steve Jobs dies 2011
- Orhan Pamuk wins Nobel for Literature 2006

### October—Dhu al-Qa’dah—Dhu al-Hijjah

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**Notes:**
- Arabicity recaptures Jerusalem from Crusaders 1187
- Largest falcon hospital opens in Abu Dhabi 1999
- Egyptian opens New Library of Alexandria 2002
- Architect Hassan Fathy wins Aga Khan Award 1980
- Earthquake devastates Constantinople 740
- Astronomer and historian Al-Biruni born 973
- Saladin recaptures Jerusalem from Crusaders 1187
- President Nasser of Egypt dies 1970
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### August

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### November

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Low clouds and fog roll across the emirate of Dubai, blanketing all but the city’s skyscrapers, most of which hug the edges of Shaykh Zayed Road. Rising far above its neighbors, the 163-story Burj Khalifa tapers skyward to top out at 830 meters (2723’), making it the tallest man-made structure in the world.

“Though your head may scrape the stars, Don’t be deceived in pride. You remain the self-same handful of dust Swept upwards on the wind.”

—‘Abd al-Qadir Bidel, Diwan, trans. Robert Maxwell and Mariam Ma’afi, early 18th century
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Important Dates and Events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Arabic literati Ameen Rihani was born 1876</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japanese-American writer Estebanico was first Muslim to land in</td>
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<td>Texas in 1528</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jurist Ibn Hammad was born in Spain in 894</td>
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<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Arabic-American writer Ameen Rihani was born 1876</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jordan declared World Heritage Site 1985</td>
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<td>Novelist Naguib Mahfouz was born in Egypt in 1911</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Physician Maimonides died in Egypt in 1204</td>
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<td></td>
<td>US Army Camel Corps guide Hadji Ali dies 1902</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Arab-American writer Ameen Rihani was born 1876</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moroccan astronaut al-Sufi was born 903</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCTOBER</td>
<td>Suez Canal opened 1869</td>
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<td>Arab-American writer Ameen Rihani was born 1876</td>
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<td>Persan astronomer al-Sufi was born 903</td>
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<td>Petra declared World Heritage Site 1985</td>
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In November 1949, the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) published the first issue of an interoffice newsletter named Aramco World. Over the next two decades, as the number of Americans working with Saudi colleagues in Dhahran grew into the tens of thousands, Aramco World grew into a bimonthly educational magazine whose historical, geographical and cultural articles helped the American employees and their families appreciate an unfamiliar land.

The magazine is now published by Aramco Services Company in Houston, Texas, on behalf of Saudi Aramco, which succeeded Aramco in 1988 as the national oil company of Saudi Arabia. In 2000, Aramco World changed its name to Saudi Aramco World to reflect this relationship.

Today, Saudi Aramco World’s orientation is still toward education, the fostering of cooperation and the building of mutual appreciation between East and West, but for the last five decades the magazine has been aimed primarily at readers outside the company, worldwide, as well as at internal readers. Its articles have spanned the Arab and Muslim worlds, past and present, with special attention to their connections with the cultures of the West.

Subscriptions may be requested on the magazine’s website, by email to saworld@aramcoservices.com, or by fax to +1-713-432-5536. Multiple-copy print subscriptions for seminars or classrooms are also available.

The texts of all back issues of Aramco World and Saudi Aramco World are fully indexed, searchable and downloadable on our website, saudiaramcoworld.com. Articles from issues since 2003 include photographs. In addition, many photographs from past issues are available at photoarchive.saudiaramcoworld.com, and licensing for approved uses is royalty-free.
On the outskirts of the 14th-century merchant town of Khan Yunis, nestled into its 64-year-old refugee
or thousands of years, small cities like Khan Yunis were central to the trade routes that connected Egypt and Africa to Arabia. It was to Gaza City that the Makkkan merchant Hashim ibn ‘Abd Manaf, great-grandfather of the Prophet Muhammad, came to trade; he died there in 497 CE while heading a caravan. To Palestinians who relish their Islamic history, the capital of the Gaza Strip is still known as Ghazzat Hashim, “Hashim’s Gaza.”

To the young people who make up more than half of the Strip’s population of 1.7 million, Gaza’s historic role connecting cultures and continents makes up part of an identity intimately tied to the freedom of movement and travel enjoyed by most of the world’s population but routinely, almost universally, denied them today.

It is here in Khan Yunis, in Akkad, that in 2008 Mohammed Al-Jakhbeer and Abdullah Enshasi began practicing “free running.” Jumping from rooftop to windowsill to the ground, running along Akkad’s unpaved, sandy alleys, they found a way to both express themselves and reclaim a sense of freedom in movement.

At the time, Al-Jakhbeer was an avid basketball player studying film editing at Al-Azhar University in Gaza City.

“I was going home, and Abdullah, my best friend, told me he had just seen a video clip on-line about ‘free running,’ which is about overcoming obstacles. It just sounded like a sport that I would love to practice,” says Al-Jakhbeer, sitting in front of the booth-like shop where his father sells ice cream to the camp’s children.

“We started to practice every day, and our liking for this sport increased. We kept looking at video clips on-line, whenever the electricity worked. We toned our bodies and practiced jumps, rolls and runs daily,” he says.

Intermittent power—most Gazan homes receive electricity only 12 hours a day—is only one of the daily obstacles that Al-Jakhbeer, 24, and Enshasi, 23, face. In the spirit of free running, described by its French founder, Sébastien Foucan, as a self-development discipline that allows practitioners to “follow your own way,” the young men have indeed created their unique way.

“When I was young,” says Al-Jakhbeer, “I could not imagine that anything would dominate our consciousness more than our isolation or the occupation. All of Gaza was a series of obstacles—closures and checkpoints. Today, all and any obstacles are my point of departure. With free running, I overcome.”

He is one of seven children, and his family became impoverished after his father left Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, where he had worked as a plumber. For all the cheerful colors of the ice-cream cones he sells, there is little income, and the family lives mainly on United Nations rations.
Free running is a freestyle street sport that involves overcoming obstacles through agility, strength and flexibility, and getting from one place to another by combining jumping, running, flipping, tumbling and rolling. There are no standard “moves.”

“We approach each obstacle in a different way. We improvise as we move. We look at our object, figure out in our head how to overcome it and develop a strategy, then and there,” explains Al-Jakhbeer. “Momentum and focus are key.”

Unlike parkour, a similar sport that focuses more on speed and efficiency, free running is relaxed and esthetically oriented. Much of it uses body rolls to buffer the impact of jumps and falls on the legs, spine and back. The jumps, Al-Jakhbeer says, are often from challenging heights, which is a way to “free the mind” from mental and emotional barriers.

As the duo began practicing free running in the narrow lanes around their homes, they quickly became neighborhood stars. Young boys followed them in droves, trying to imitate their moves. “We never had any training of our own; we just learned from videos we saw on the net,” says Enshasi. Within a year they were shooting their own videos and training other kids. Like other free runners around the world, they adopted a name based on the older parlance of parkour, “PK Gaza.”

Using the soft sand dunes for their beginners, they taught groups of boys aged 8 to 16 how to tone their muscles and jump, climb and run.

“My main focus as I grow older is to make sure that PK Gaza continues as an art and sports form in Gaza. I do not want it to die with us. I want it to continue and grow. This is why now I feel our main focus should be on training the next generation,” says Enshasi. “They are young minds and bodies who want to be set free.”

Among their supporters is eminent Gazan psychologist Eyad Al Sarraj, MD. In the often oppressive atmosphere that prevails in the Gaza Strip, he explains, “sports and the arts are important ways for young people to express themselves and an outlet for their frustrations. Many young people in Gaza are angry because they have very few opportunities and are locked in. An art and sports form such as free running gives them an important method to express their desire for freedom and allows them to overcome the barriers that society and politics have imposed on them. It literally sets them free.”

To reach out to both other Gazans and the wider world, Enshasi and Al-Jakhbeer produced annual Gaza parkour and free-running videos, first on their inexpensive mobile-phone cameras, then later on borrowed video cameras. “We wanted the world to know we were here—we were free runners. It took a while, but eventually they reached out to us,” says Al-Jakhbeer.

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Al-Jakhbeer and Enshasi have filmed hundreds of hours of video footage of themselves and the youngsters they train. Many show the youngsters as well as their trainers suffering bruises, cuts and sprains. ¶ “We don’t have safety equipment like knee guards, helmets or gloves, because we cannot afford them. But we often wrap our ankles and wrists with cotton or elastic strips taken from sheets or other items to protect ourselves,” says Enshasi. ¶ “We have had some close calls,” says Al-Jakhbeer, who always wears elastic wristbands. “Focusing the mind and rolling the body are two important aspects of keeping safe while jumping. This is what we teach our students.”

They first came to international attention when they registered PK Gaza on the Web site of JUMP magazine. In June of last year, “Free Running Gaza,” the documentary film that photographer George Azar and I produced, aired globally, and Enshasi and Al-Jakhbeer began to get invitations to competitions around the world.

In February, with sponsorship from the Unione Italiana Sport Per Tutti (“Sport for All”), the two founders and fellow free runner Jihad Abu Sultan made their first crossing outside Gaza to the Italian Free Running and Parkour Federation’s annual event in Milan. From there, they performed also in Rome, Bologna and Palermo, and they met fellow free runners from around the globe, including performers from Egypt, Lebanon and Morocco.

“Those were the most memorable 17 days of our lives. I will never forget them. The other free runners were kind and helpful, and they wanted to hear what we had to say about Gaza. It was so beautiful,” says Al-Jakhbeer.

The most important lesson from the Italian competition, Al-Jakhbeer recalls, “was a piece of advice from the Italian trainer. He said, ‘Think of yourself as a large candle: If you keep a steady course and are in for the long run, the flame will stay alive. If you act erratically and make crazy moves and are in it for only the thrill, your flame will get extinguished fast.’”

I thought about it and decided, ‘I intend to keep my flame going.’”

One of PK Gaza’s favorite practice sites is the beach at Khan Yunis, where Al-Jakhbeer coaches Mohammed Amer, left, and Al-Jakhbeer and Jihad Abu Sultan practice jumps from pilings, below. Opposite: Rail jumping practice and, lower, a head-first flip that will end in a sandy landing.
Free running and parkour are related forms of performance art that involve the overcoming of physical and mental obstacles to get from point A to point B. Both were first practiced and later developed in urban environments in France beginning in the 1920’s, and some draw parallels to eastern martial arts disciplines. Today they are practiced among young people across the globe. Both include running, climbing, swinging, vaulting, leaping and rolling. Parkour—derived from parcours d’entraînement, “training circuit”—focuses on speed and efficiency, whereas free runners focus on the artistry and esthetics of their moves, performing a physical exercise of self-expression and creativity.

Take a journey back in time more than 2700 years to a royal banquet in the palace at Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire. As you arrive, the scent of lilies and roses fills the air. Musicians play harps and pipes, sing songs and recite poems. You snack on fresh pistachios and walnuts as you wait for the entrance of the king. The woman next to you stirs, and her red linen tunic crinkles slightly against her fine cotton shawl. Her gold earrings softly jingle as she moves. With her, you discuss your admiration for King Ashurbani-pal, a learned man and, as you see him, a benevolent ruler. He is a generous patron of artists, astronomers and mathematicians in his court. On military and diplomatic missions, he has directed that his envoys collect plants, seeds, animals or anything unusual from the foreign lands they pass through; when they return, their finds have been placed in palace gardens, zoos and rooms filled with curiosities.

New Flavors for the Oldest Recipes

Written by Laura Kelley
He has rebuilt and restored temples and buildings weakened by war or the simple ravages of time. But his greatest achievement by far is the systematic gathering and cataloging of knowledge. The library is a royal archive, but it also contains treatises on medicine, science and divination, collections of folktales—and even some favorite recipes.

Today, a few cuneiform tablets are the principal source of Mesopotamian recipes: the Yale Babylonian recipe tablets, which predate Ashurbanipal’s imaginary banquet by a little more than 1000 years. Tablet YBC 4644 has 25 recipes and two others, YBC 8958 and YBC 4648, contain 10 more. In addition to these sources, scholars generally acknowledge that there are two earlier recipes, one from Mari, Syria for a confection known as mersu, and the other probably from Uruk, also in Syria, for what has been interpreted as “court bouillon.”

These ancient recipes are a fascinating challenge for modern cooks—not only because they are a window into the food culture of ancient Mesopotamia, but also because they are actually little more than lists of ingredients, usually with scant information on the amounts of ingredients to use, their form, or even how to prepare the dishes. Although difficult for some to navigate, the recipes allow for a great deal of creativity in using what is on hand or in reinterpreting dishes with favorite local and personal flavors. (In medieval Europe, recipes were typically written like this, and outside the industrialized world they still are.)

The 25 recipes inscribed in cuneiform on both sides of the tablet known as YBC 4644, above, were already 1000 years old when this bas-relief, below, was carved to depict a banquet in the palace of Assyrian king Ashurbanipal. Opposite: Lamb and barley with mint.

The Yale recipes were first translated by French historian Jean Bottéro and published in 1995 in *Textes Culinaires Mésopotamiens*. (Another book by Bottéro, *The Oldest Cuisine in the World*, was published in French in 2002, in English in 2004 and as a paperback in 2011.) In Bottéro’s view, the dishes that can be discerned from the tablets are rich in meat and onions—particularly onions, which he calls the characteristic ingredient of the cuisine. He translated the recipes of YBC 4644 into 25 broths or porridges: 21 were meat- or fowl-based, and four were vegetable-based. All featured onions, garlic and leeks.

When I first read *Textes Culinaires Mésopotamiens*, I remember being disappointed that one of the greatest kingdoms on earth apparently had such dull food. Why, I wondered, when they had contact with civilizations all around western Asia, the Levant and North Africa, possibly even southern Asia, would they eat so many onions? Bottéro himself pronounced the food fit only for his worst enemies. My curiosity was piqued, and I started digging for answers.

Well-known sources, such as the Sumerian and Akkadian lexicon found on the Urra=Hubullu tablets, as well as Assyrian bas-relief wall panels, show a rich culinary culture. Fruits named or shown range from pomegranates and dates to apricots, apples and pears; vegetables include radishes, beets and lettuce. Sheep and goats were both milked and eaten for meat, while other meat came from cattle, bison and oxen as well as from wild game. Wild and domesticated fowl, fish and shellfish of many varieties were enjoyed, as were milk products ranging from butter and cheese to yogurt and sour cream. These sources depict bountiful harvests at home; vibrant foreign trade and the flow of people in and out of the empire brought additional ingredients and culinary knowledge.
My work on these recipes is ongoing. There are several requiring re-analysis, several still to be cooked (such as wild-fowl pies from tablet YBC 8958) and more to be discovered in offering texts. Here are two that worked well for me and that you may find easy to try.

Hen with Herbs *(Yale Babylonian Collection 8958, Recipe 2)*

Ingredients from the tablet: pigeon, salt, water, fat, vinegar, semolina, leek, garlic, shallots, tulip bulb, yogurt or sour cream, and “greens.” As with all Mesopotamian recipes, how these are put together, and in what quantities, is up to you. For this, I substitute Cornish game hen for pigeon.

Clean and dry fowl and salt liberally, inside and out. Set aside. Prepare water, stock and vinegar in a large stockpot or kettle large enough to hold the hens. Add butter, asafetida, mint and arugula, and heat over a high flame, stirring occasionally. When the water has come to a boil, add the hens and return to a boil. Reduce heat a bit and cook uncovered over medium heat for 5 minutes. Then reduce heat till liquid just bubbles. Cover and cook for 5 minutes.

In a food processor, pulse together the onion, leek, 6 to 7 cloves of garlic and lightly drained yogurt until it is a small dice or mince. Add it to the water and chickens, and continue to cook for another 5 to 10 minutes; do not overcook. Total cooking time for hens in the pot is 15 to 20 minutes. When done, remove birds from the pot and set aside until cool enough to handle.

Preheat broiler to high. While cooling the hens, take the stock you used to cook and set aside until cool enough to handle. Place hens rib side down on a lightly sprayed baking sheet. Cook under the preheated broiler flame 4 to 5 minutes per side. Watch constantly and be careful not to burn the hens.

Turn baking sheet as necessary to ensure even cooking. When done, remove from heat and let rest 5 to 10 minutes while finishing the sauce.

If desired, strain the sauce. (I did not, preferring a more rustic presentation.) I served the dish in a shallow bowl, adding a layer of roasted barley and herb pilaf and sauce beneath the hen and a bit of sauce on the fowl.

Roasted Barley and Herb Pilaf *(Yale Babylonian Collection 4644, Recipe 25)*

Ingredients from the tablet: water, fat, roasted barley, mix of chopped shallots, arugula, and coriander, semolina, blood, mashed leeks and garlic.

Preheat broiler to the highest setting. Spread the cleaned barley on a baking sheet to form a single layer of grain. Place barley under broiler flame and leave for a few minutes until it starts to smoke and color. Stir lightly and turn pan if necessary until most barley is tan in color. Be careful not to burn the grain. Properly roasted barley will taste nutty. When done, remove from flame and let cool.

Add water and prepared stock to a medium saucepan. You may season the stock any way you wish, or use the cooking stock from another recipe. (I used the stock from the hen recipe above.) Add butter, salt, asafetida and ground coriander, and continue to heat.

In a food processor, pulse shallots and arugula once or twice. Then add the semolina and blood, and pulse one or two more times. Add this mixture to the heating, water and stir. When just short of a boil, add the barley and stir well. Bring back to a boil. Then reduce heat, cover and cook over a medium-low flame until about three-quarters done—20 to 30 minutes.

As the barley is cooking, pulse leeks and garlic two to four times until minced but not mushy. Add this to the barley and stir once or twice—not too much or barley will be soggy. Partially re-cover saucepan and continue to cook, checking frequently. It should be done or nearly done within 10 minutes.
Although a pioneer in the interpretation of Mesopotamian cuisine, Bottéro did not claim certainty in many of his culinary translations, and some ingredients he left untranslated altogether. This makes reconstruction of actual recipes extraordinarily challenging.

For example, one of the untranslated ingredients used in almost every recipe is *samidu*. Bottéro assumed that it was in the allium family, which includes onions, garlic, chives and leeks. Looking to modern languages, however, I found that in Hebrew and Syrian, *semida* means “fine meal” and, in Greek, *semidalis* is used to denote “the finest flour.” According to the University of Chicago’s Assyrian Dictionary, *semidu* is also defined as semolina. One ingredient identified; many more to go.

Similarly, several of the recipes feature an ingredient called *kasû*, which was interpreted as dodder, a parasitic weed of the genus *Cuscuta*. Puzzled by the use of a bitter weed in these dishes, I found an alternate meaning in a paper by Near Eastern scholar Piotr Steinkeller, who argued that *kasû* was probably wild licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), and that it was used by the Mesopotamians both in cooking and in making beer.

Also, *mersu* was interpreted as a cake because of the similarity between that word and *marâsu*, which means “to mix,” and because *mersu* was described as comprised of nuts and dates. Yet there is nothing to imply that *mersu* was a cake, let alone any instructions on how to make it.

Above: YBC 4644, Recipe 20, can be successfully interpreted as a stew made with lamb, licorice, vegetables and juniper. Right: This bas-relief of a harvest scene hints at the energy and deliberate care associated with food harvesting.

TOP: MILES COLLINS; LOWER: DE AGOSTINI PICTURE LIBRARY / G. DAGLI ORTI / BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY (DETAIL); OPPOSITE: LAURA KELLEY
The writers of the Mesopotamian recipes omitted quantities from their lists of ingredients, assuming sufficient skill on the part of the cooks.

Could mersu be something else? A look at modern western Asian and Levantine cuisines hints that mersu could easily have been a date-nut roll, or a beautiful date “candy,” as well. Both sweets are based on pounded dates and chopped nuts or other fruit or nut toppings.

Or, adding only some type of flour, mersu could resemble the modern Iranian dessert ranginak, which consists of dates stuffed with pistachios enclosed in a thin crust of dough. Or it could be like the modern Lebanese ma‘moul, which has a pounded-date center covered in a layer of semolina that is then covered in a layer of chopped pistachios. Looking to non-European cuisines shows us the many possible, culturally plausible variations for mersu other than “cake.”

My current research, and kitchen experimentation by myself and others, is providing some revised interpretations of the Yale tablet recipes. In fact, I don’t think that any of the recipes on YBC 4644 represent either broths or porridges; rather, they are general guidelines for the flavors of dishes that range from stew-like koreshes, curries and soups to braised meats and dry pilafs. It all depends on the relative proportions of liquid and solid ingredients. As noted earlier, amounts of ingredients are almost always absent from these recipes, so the exact dish prepared is left up to the cook—who is assumed to have sufficient training to understand and use the recipes in this form.

For example, Recipe 19 on YBC 4644 is for halazzu, which is untranslated. I believe it to be a recipe for lamb or beef with carob: Halazzu was proposed as carob by several previous Assyriologists, and substituting “carob” for it in the recipe makes for a delicious stew or sauce. Recipe 20, called “salted broth,” I interpret as mutton with wild licorice and juniper; Recipe 23, for kanasu—another term left untranslated—I think is lamb with grain and mint. Lastly, I have found a delicious grain and herb pilaf in Recipe 25 by using the alternative definition of laptu, which Bottéro translated as “turnip” without mentioning that “barley” is an equally accepted translation among scholars.

In addition to new interpretations for recipes, I also found a rich source for other recipes in translations of texts about foods prepared as offerings for gods. According to Vanderbilt University scholar Jack M. Sasson, the intimate connection between the Mesopotamians and their deities makes it reasonable to assume a connection between foods offered to the gods and those enjoyed on home tables—or at least those served to the elite, for the elite also ate from the divine table, thus providing an added incentive to delight the palate. For instance, Marcel Sigrist’s translations of offerings at the Mesopotamian city of Nippur give several more ingredients for mersu, such as figs, raisins, minced apples, minced garlic, oil or butter, soft or hard cheese, and wine must or syrup. This widens the field of variation for the dish and allows cooks to mix and match combinations of ingredients. Also from the same paper is a recipe for a bread called ninda-gal that lists sumac,

Left: Meat with licorice and citron is a recipe from Uruk, Syria, that dates to 400 BCE. Top: Lamb with carob is Recipe 19 on the YBC 4644 tablet.
saffron and onion seeds as ingredients. In addition to being new sources for recipes, these offerings may also provide insight into some of the foods eaten by Mesopotamian people.

Assisted by a small group of chefs and cooks from three continents, I recently explored these and other Mesopotamian recipes. I cooked a lamb and carob stew, lamb chops with carob sauce, hen with herbs (from YBC 8958), barley and herb pilaf and several mersu variations. Others cooked lamb with grain and mint (substituting barley for couscous or wheatsberries, the most likely forms of emmer grain used in the recipe), several variations of lamb with licorice and juniper, and pork tenderloin with licorice and citron.

So how did these reinterpreted dishes taste? In a word—delicious. The flavors are unusual and complex, but enjoyable, tasting as if they could have been created by a skilled modern chef. Far from being suited to an enemy, these dishes are best shared with a dear friend.

In addition to experiencing new flavors in these Mesopotamian dishes, cooking some of the oldest recipes in the world transports you far, far back in time and opens a window on a wider world. From it, you might glimpse Babylon, Nippur or the palace banquet at Nineveh.

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

Mesopotamian food: M/A 88


Above: A flute player from a stone bas-relief at the palace in Nineveh. Lower: Mersu, first interpreted as “cake,” seems more likely to have been a type of date-and-nut ball.
CLASS ACTIVITIES

Usually in the Classroom Guide, we identify themes that draw the articles together. This time is different. Three articles in this issue lend themselves to different kinds of opportunities, and together they offer three case studies.

“Little Syria, NY”: Case Study 1 — Immigration

If you’ve studied even a little history, you probably already know that waves of immigrants arrived throughout North and South America over several centuries. And if you follow the news these days, you know that millions of people all over the world continue to immigrate—to move from one country to another, to build new lives somewhere else. When you study immigration, there are some questions that you’ll see over and over again. “Little Syria, NY” gives you a chance to address them.

Why do people immigrate?
The first big question to ask when you think about immigration is: Why? Why do people decide to uproot themselves, leave everything and everyone they know, and move to another country? Working in small groups (to make it easier to have a conversation), discuss the question. If you’re an immigrant yourself, or your parents are, share with your group why you moved. If an earlier generation of your family immigrated, talk about why they moved or share what questions you might have about why they did. Draw on your knowledge of current and past immigration, and include “Little Syria, NY” in your discussion. Why did the more than 40,000 people the article describes decide to leave their homelands and come to the United States?

As you talk, write down the reasons you’re hearing why people immigrate. Which of the reasons led people leaving a place because living there was such a negative experience, such as fleeing religious persecution? Which of the reasons have more to do with the promise of what might await them in a new country, from practicalities such as jobs to such wishful thinking as finding streets paved with gold? People who study immigration call these reasons for moving “push factors” and “pull factors.” Negative conditions in the land of origin push people to leave, while hopes of a better life pull people to the new country. Sort your group’s list into push factors and pull factors. Where do most of the immigrants discussed in “Little Syria” belong? Do some people experience both?

What do immigrants find when they arrive?
Another question that inevitably comes up when thinking about immigration is what it was like in the new country. As you might imagine, many immigrants find both positive and negative aspects to their new lives. Make a T chart with “Positives” heading one column and “Negatives” heading the other. Read through “Little Syria, NY” and find examples of the immigrants’ experiences that belong in each column. Look at the finished T chart and imagine that you were one of the people who had immigrated to Little Syria. Think about what your experience might have been like. Make a few notes if you want; you’ll have a chance to write about it shortly.

How much do immigrants maintain their home cultures and how much do they assimilate to new ones?

A third question in exploring immigration is the question of adapting to the new country. Do immigrants continue to speak their home language, learn the language of their new homeland or a combination of both? Do they dress like they did at home or like their new neighbors? Do they change a name that their new neighbors find difficult to pronounce or do they help their neighbors learn to pronounce it? Every immigrant has faced these questions, as have their children. In “Little Syria, NY,” what evidence do you see that people maintained elements of their original cultures? What evidence do you see of their assimilating into American cultures?

Now put it all together. Imagine that you immigrated to New York’s Little Syria in the late 19th century. Write a letter to a friend who is still (“back home”) in Syria or Lebanon, explaining why you think your decision to come to New York was or was not a good one. Include in your letter all the elements you have discussed here: reasons for moving, experiences upon arriving, and questions of assimilating.

“The Happy Ones?”: Case Study 2 — Unintended Consequences

“The Happy Ones?” is about hamadryas baboons that live in Saudi Arabia. In particular, the article discusses how human beings—just by going about their business—have inadvertently changed nearly every aspect of the baboons’ lives, from their social organization down to their very biology. That makes this article about hamadryas baboons a great example of unintended consequences.

What does the phrase “unintended consequences” mean?
Before you can begin to think about the unintended consequences of human behaviors on baboons, you need to be clear about what exactly the phrase unintended consequences means. Write a definition of consequences.
Now that you've read about how humans have affected the hamadryas baboons, what would you do? Would you intervene again or not? How? Working with your group, make lists of the benefits and drawbacks of taking action and of not taking action. When you step back and look at your lists, what decision do you come to? Have each group share its analysis of the situation.

Now turn your attention again to the article, which reports that the Saudi Arabian National Wildlife Research Center has already made one decision. It believes people must stop feeding the baboons and that the way to get them to stop is through “public awareness campaigns.” What might such a campaign look like? Working on your own or with your group, create a piece to contribute to such a campaign. Your piece can take whatever form you think will be effective. Here are a few ideas: an audio or video public service announcement; a Web site that informs people about the ill effects of feeding baboons and persuades them to stop; a lesson for students in a classroom (you can use the Classroom Guide as your model); a newspaper ad; a legislative proposal. These are just a few ideas to get you started. Share your final product with the class.

**“Free Running Gaza”: Case Study 3 — Dignity in Confinement**

If you have ever studied slavery, you probably know that, amid the terrible conditions in which enslaved people were forced to live, they sometimes found ways to maintain their families and retain cultural traditions. In other words, they found ways to hang onto their humanity and dignity in oppressive situations.

The third article, “Free Running Gaza,” provides a case study in how people live in confining circumstances. The article describes a place where 1.7 million people live in a tiny area with very limited access to the world beyond its borders. Yet, as you will see, the people profiled in the article have found ways to live with dignity.

Start with the idea of “obstacles.” Read the article, and make a list of all the obstacles it identifies. Then think about what it must be like to live in the Gaza Strip. What would you do if you faced such obstacles every day? Either write your answer or discuss the question with a partner. Then go through the article and circle the parts that describe free running and what Mohammed Al-Jakhbeer and Abdullah Enshasi say that it means to them. How does free running relate to the obstacles they face? Does their way of making sense of their situation make sense to you? Write your thoughts about it in a journal entry as a way to help you think. Don’t worry about turning it in or getting a grade. Here are a few thoughts to prompt you.

The obstacles that Al-Jakhbeer and Enshasi face are literal, physical obstacles. How does free running relate to those physical obstacles? How does it help overcome them? Although free running might not literally free them from obstacles, how does it free them? What kind of obstacles does free running dismantle? What value do you see in dismantling such obstacles?

Think about an obstacle that you have faced. It can be simple, such as taking a class in a subject you don’t like and find difficult. How have you dealt with it? Consider what Al-Jakhbeer says about facing obstacles as a free runner: “We approach each obstacle in a different way. We improvise as we move. We look at our object, figure out ... how to overcome it and develop a strategy, then and there.” He emphasizes the need for “agility, strength and flexibility.” Try applying this approach to your own obstacle. What would that look like? How might it help?

### ANALYZING VISUAL IMAGES

Now that you’ve had a chance to work with three case studies, think about how to illustrate them. Start by looking closely at the images that accompany the articles. Then choose one from each article that best exemplifies your case study. Don’t read the captions in the magazine. Instead, write your own. In each caption, describe how the image represents the theme you have studied: immigration, unintended consequences or dignity in confinement. Your captions can be up to a paragraph long, so don’t be shy about what you include in yours.
City of Gold: Tomb and Temple in Ancient Cyprus explores the history and archeology of Polis Chrysochous, a town in the Republic of Cyprus that is the site of the ancient city of Marion and its successor city, Arsinôe. The exhibition features 110 objects lent by the Cypriot Department of Antiquities, the British Museum and the Musée du Louvre, including splendid gold jewelry and a rare marble kourous; it marks the conclusion of more than two decades of excavations at Polis by the Princeton Department of Art and Archaeology. Note the related exhibition, Cyprus Between Byzantium and the West, below. Princeton [New Jersey] University Art Museum, through January 20.

A faint smile remains on this fragmentary head from a colossal male statue dating from the late sixth century BCE and now in the Museum of Marion–Arsinôe, near Paphos, Cyprus.

Current: November
The Book of Kings: Shirin Neshat presents a new video entitled "Overruled" and the photographic series "The Book of Kings." "Overruled" depicts the trial of a poet accused of blasphemy by a judge and jury of patriots, similar to the 10th-century trial of Mansur Al-Hallaj. "The Book of Kings" features black-and-white portraits covered with calligraphic texts and drawings, divided into three groups representing the Masses, the Patriots and the Villains. Galerie Jérôme de Noirmont, Paris, through November 17.

Liverpool Biennial: The Unexpected Guest features works by more than 60 artists displayed throughout the city in Britain's largest contemporary art festival. Participating Middle Eastern artists include Mona Hatoum, Nadia Kaabi-Linke, Akram Zaatari and Ahmet Öğüt; tours, talks, workshops and films are scheduled. Cunard Building, Liverpool, UK, through November 25.

Shadow of the Sphinx: Ancient Egypt and Its Influence explores the unparalleled impact on the modern western imagination of ancient Egyptian culture: its writing, its art, its religion and its funeral practices. The exhibition presents Egyptian artifacts—jewelry, coffins, portrait masks—together with such European and American objects as paintings, movie posters, porcelain, jewelry and furnishings, all inspired by real or imagined aspects of ancient Egypt. Munson Williams Proctor Arts Institute, Utica, New York, through November 25.

Faces of the Middle East is a collection of photos by Herminie Macura that documents people from across the Middle East and examines the region's common thread of humanity. The photos demonstrate the rich variety of cultures, ethnicities, religions and social groups that compose the Middle East and prove that the region is not in fact a monolithic culture. Macura strives for improved awareness and understanding of the Middle East, and for increased dialogue and appreciation among peoples. Busboys and Poets, Washington, D.C., through November 27.


Lasting Impressions: Abdalgader Al-Rais includes both early works by the pioneering Emirati artist as well as his most recent production, which is multi-layered and complex, often drawing on the region's landscape, heritage and architecture for inspiration. Sharjah [UAE] Art Museum, through November 30.

Current: December
Rostam 2: Return is a series by Iranian-born artist Siamak Filiżadeh, acquired by the museum in 2011, that relies on playful consumer and pop-culture iconography. Filizadeh uses images derived from the Shahnama (Book of Kings), a 50,000-couplet poem pivotal to Persian culture and dating back to the first century CE. In his retelling of the classic tale, Filizadeh bypasses its universality in favor of more specific commentary. Through his skillful blending of anachronistic and contemporary details, he effectively transports the viewer from the mythical realm of Iran's greatest champion, Rostam, to his own take on the kitsch consumerism and popular culture of present-day Tehran. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, through December 2.

Games of Desire is a photo-and-video installation that shows the life of aged Laoian women, living in a world hestitating between tradition and globalization, as they sing, court and fidget at weddings, ceremonies and other celebrations. Iranian artist Shirin Neshat explores the agency of women within and beyond society's prescribed roles. Art Plural Gallery, Singapore, through December 15.

Britain in Palestine tells the story of what happened to Palestine and its people under the British Mandate, showing how and why Britain got involved there and the impact of British rule upon the country. The exhibition illustrates the experiences of Britons who lived in Palestine as colonial servants, Palestine Police and military servicemen. The reminiscences of these people and their families testify to the profound impression Palestine made on their lives, and to the dilemmas of ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances, displaying photographs, personal testimonies, original documents and poignant personal belongings that have survived from the time. Britain's authority to rule was derived from a League of Nations mandate, written by the British, which included the controversial Balfour Declaration of 1917 pronouncing British support for a "Jewish National Home" in Palestine. The ambiguities and contradictions of the mandate fostered antagonism and resentment between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, which finally erupted into a full blown conflict when the British left in May 1948. The results of this conflict are still with us today. Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London, through December 15.

Patriots & Peacemakers: Arab Americans in Service to Our Country tells true stories of heroism and self-sacrifice that affirm the important role Arab-Americans have played in the United States throughout its history, contributing greatly to society and fighting and dying in every US war since the Revolution. The exhibition highlights service in the armed forces, the diplomatic service and the Peace Corps. Personal narratives tell of Arab-American men and women of different national and religious backgrounds. Jacksonville, Florida Public Library, through December 15.

Zarina: Paper Like Skin, the first retrospective of the Indian-born American artist Zarina (Zarina Hashmi), features some 60 works dating from 1961 to the present. Paper is central to Zarina's practice, both as a surface to print on and as a material with its own properties and history. Works in the exhibition include woodcuts as well as three-dimensional casts in paper pulp. Zarina's vocabulary is minimal yet rich in associations with her life and the themes of displacement and exile. The concept of home—whether personal, geographic, national, spiritual or familial—resonates throughout. Hammer Gallery, UCLA, Los Angeles, through December 20.

Mediterranean Dramaturgies includes four of Turkish artist Kutlu Ataman's latest video installations, which revisit the recent history of Mesopotamia. His interest in representation of the individual and the group widens to examine the way a nation forms and stages its own narrative. Sperone Westwater, New York, through December 22.

Khall Saleby 1870–1928: A Founder of Modern Art in Lebanon is the first public exhibition of work by the renowned Lebanese artist, drawn from an important private collection of more than 60 paintings by Lebanese modernists that was donated to AUB earlier this year. Saleby is considered to
be a pioneer in Lebanese impressionist- and modernist painting. He trained in Europe under John Singer Sargent before returning to Lebanon to teach; many of his students included the Ceramicists Osmi and Saliba Dovai, became renowned names in Arab modernist painting. American University of Beirut Art Gallery, through December 31.

Current January

Hassan Khan features a comprehen- sive display of videos, photographs, and artists’ works created since 1990, including early vid- eos and installations. The exhibition of video. In addition to Osmi and Saliba Dovai, also includes more than 100 artworks, most of which have never been shown in the United States before this tour. These spec- tacular treasures—more than half of which come from the tomb of King Tut- ankhun contains the mummy; relics found on the boy king’s mummy; a gold coffinette that held his stomach; golden statues of the gods; and King Tut’s rings, ear ornaments and gold col- lar. Khan showcased are objects associ- ated with the most important rulers of the 30 dynasties that reigned in Egypt over a 2000-year span. The exhibit- es the splendor of the pha- raohs, their function in both the earthly and divine worlds, and what “kingship” meant to the Egyptian people. Pacific Science Center, Seattle, through January 6.

Adel Abdessemed: I Am Innocent


Tutankhamun: The Golden King and the Great Pharaohs

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Arab Seasons by Bokja puts on display furniture and textiles by the Leban- nese designers Hoda Baroudi and Maria Hibi, co-founders of the firm Bokja—a Turkic word for the exquisitely worked fabric that a bride’s dowry is wrapped in. The firm’s reputation rests on their attention to detail and history, their new and vintage shapes and their beautiful textiles. Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, through January 7.

Beauty and Belief: Crossing Bridges

With the Arts of Islamic Culture aims to bridge differences and inspire inspi- ration with the cottons, fabrics, and other materials, among them the question, “What makes Islamic art is- lamic?” Tunisian-born project direc- tor Sabha Al Khemir has assembled 260 works by artists from the US and nine countries in Europe and the Middle East, including unique manuscripts from the Royal Library in Morocco. The exhibition repre- sents a journey through Islamic cul- ture from the seventh century onward, combining historical and geographic background with successive sections of calligraphy, figural imagery and pattern, but it makes a point of touch- ing on the present day, also including works by contemporary artists from Johns- onal (Indiana) Museum of Art, through January 13. Newark (New Jer- sey) Museum, February 13 through May 19, 2013. Portland (Oregon) Art Museum, June 15 through September 8, 2013.

Gaze: The Changing Face of Portrait Photography

sheds light on the 160 years of portrait photography through the works of 54 photographers, trac- ing the visual and artistic trans- formation that has taken place from the emergence of photography to the present. The gaze of the portrait’s subject reaches not only the lens of the camera but the future viewer as well. The sitter poses consciously to leave a message to the future from his/her own time. Boundless possibilities for communica- tion and self-expression from the lens network established between different times and spaces; each gaze opens the door for another existence. Istanbul Modern, through January 20.

Diadem and Daggar: Jewish Silver

smiths of Yemen celebrate Yemeni Jewish silverwork dating from the 18th and 19th centuries, highlighting the ways Jews both shared and contrib- uted to Islamic art and culture while maintaining their Jewish identity. From the revelation of Islamic art in the seventh century, Jewish and Muslim communi- ties coexisted in Yemen, although few Jews live there today. Yemeni Jewish craftsmanship is characterized by elaborate granulation and filigree for Muslim and Jewish cli- ents: headpieces, bracelets, necklaces and belt buckles as well as daggers (daggers) for the Muslim elite. Many of the 25 objects on display are dated and bear the name of both the Jewish sil- versmith and the Muslim ruler of the time. Jewish Museum, Baltimore, through January 21.

Fair Play: Heroes, Athletes and Princes in Islamic Art highlights sport in paint- ings and objects from the Islamic world, from the 13th to the 21st centu- ry. Football is today the most pop- ular sport in Islamic countries. In the medieval period, however, prominent sporting activities at Islamic courts from Spain to the Indian subcontinent included polo, horse racing, hunting and archery. The gallery is replete with turcos. The name comes from the question, “What makes Islamic art is- lamic?” Tunisian-born project direc- tor Sabha Al Khemir has assembled 260 works by artists from the US and nine countries in Europe and the Middle East, including unique manuscripts from the Royal Library in Morocco. The exhibition repre- sents a journey through Islamic cul- ture from the seventh century onward, combining historical and geographic background with successive sections of calligraphy, figural imagery and pattern, but it makes a point of touch- ing on the present day, also including works by contemporary artists from Johns- onal (Indiana) Museum of Art, through January 13. Newark (New Jer- sey) Museum, February 13 through May 19, 2013. Portland (Oregon) Art Museum, June 15 through September 8, 2013.

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Roads of Arabia: Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. An eye-opening look at the largely unknown ancient past of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, this exhibition draws on recently discovered archeological material never before seen in the United States. Roads of Arabia features objects excavated from several sites throughout the Arabian Peninsula, tracing the impact of ancient trade routes and pilgrimage roads stretching from Yemen in the south to Iraq, Syria and Mediterranean cultures in the north. Elegant alabaster bowls and fragile glassware, heavy gold earrings and Hellenistic bronze statues testify to a lively mercantile and cultural interchange among distant civilizations. The study of archeological remains only really began in Saudi Arabia in the 1970’s, yet brought—and is still bringing—a wealth of unsuspected treasures to light: temples, palaces adorned with frescoes, monumental sculpture, silver dishes and precious jewelry left in tombs. The exhibition, organized as a series of points along trade and pilgrimage routes, focuses on the region’s rich history as a major center of commercial and cultural exchange, provides both chronological and geographical information about the discoveries made during recent excavations, and emphasizes the important role played by this region as a trading center during the past 6000 years. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C., November 17 through February 24.

This above-life-size red sandstone statue of a man, dating from the fourth to third century BCE, was found at Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia. Now in the Department of Archaeology Museum at the University of Riyadh, it is thought to represent a king of Liyvan. Traces of paint remain on the statue, which shows signs of Egyptian stylistic influence.

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Amarna 2012: 100 Years of Nefertiti, an extensive special exhibition on the Amarna period, allows Nefertiti’s time to be understood within its cultural-historical context. All aspects of this fascinating period are illuminated and explained—not only the period’s theology and art, but also everyday life in the city, ancient Akhetaton. Founded by the monarchs Pharaoh Akhenaton (Amenhotep IV) to establish a new capital with places of worship for his own “religion of light,” the city was built within three years and populated in the year 1343 BCE. At the beginning of the 20th century, extremely successful excavations took place there under the direction of Ludwig Borchardt, and the finds were shared between Cairo and Berlin. The exhibition illuminates the context of the discovery of the bust of Nefertiti in the workshop of the Egyptian sculptor Thutmose, along with numerous related objects, including even the pigment and tools used by the sculptors. Along with the exhibition’s main focus on archeology, it also critically examines the history of the depiction of the bust of Nefertiti both as an archeological object and as a widely marketed ideal of beauty. Visitors can experience the Amarna period as a social, cultural-historical and religious phenomenon. Neues Museum, Berlin, December 7 through April 13.

Orientalist Paintings will be auctioned by Artcurial, Paris, December 11.
Coming

January
Disappearing Heritage of Sudan, 1820–1956: Photographic and Filmic Exploration in Sudan documents the remnants of the colonial experience in Sudan from the Ottoman, Egyptian and British periods. This photographic and video project by Frederique Cifuentes explores the mechanics of empire, highlighting colonial architecture, design and construction—official buildings, private residences, cinema houses, railways, irrigation canals and bridges—and the impact they had on Sudanese society before and after independence in 1956. It also helps us understand the ways in which people appropriated and used the buildings after the end of the colonial period. Oriental Museum, Durham [UK] University, January 17 through April 30; University of Khartoum, Sudan, June through December 2013.

February

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

March

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

Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum. The two cities on the Bay of Naples, in southern Italy, were buried in just 24 hours by a catastrophic volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. This event destroyed the life of the cities but also preserved them until their rediscovery by archeologists nearly 1700 years later. Herculaneum was a small seaside town, Pompeii the industrial hub of the region. Work continues at both sites, and recently uncovered artifacts include such treasures as finely sculpted marble reliefs and intricately carved ivory panels. The exhibition gives visitors a taste of the cities’ daily life, from the commerce of the bustling street to the domesticity of the family home, and explores the lives of individuals in Roman society—businessmen, powerful women, freed slaves and children. Thus a beautiful wall painting from Pompeii shows the banker Terentius Neo and his wife holding writing materials to show they are literate and cultured and posed to suggest they are equal partners. Other evocative items include six pieces of carbonized wooden furniture, among them a linen chest and a baby’s crib that still rocks on its curved runners. British Museum, London, March 28 through September 29.

Coming April

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

PERMANENT / INDEFINITE


Feast Your Eyes: A Taste for Luxury in Ancient Iran displays luxury metalwork dating from the first millennium BCE, beginning with the rule of the Achaemenid kings (550–330 BCE), to the early Islamic period, exploring the meaning behind these objects’ overarching artistic and technical characteristics. Highly sophisticated Iranian metalwork, especially in gold and silver, was created in an area extending from the Mediterranean to present-day Afghanistan. Favored with an abundance of natural resources, the region became known for works ranging in shape from deep bowls and footed plates to elaborate drinking vessels ending in animal forms, largely associated with court ceremonies and rituals. Others objects, decorated with such royal imagery as hunting or enthronement scenes, were probably intended as gifts to foreign and local dignitaries. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C.

The New Islamic Art Galleries of the Louvre provide a permanent home for the museum’s renowned collection of Islamic art, considered the greatest outside the Islamic world. Over 2500 objects, many never on public display before, are shown in rooms totaling 3000 square meters (92,000 sq ft). The galleries present the entire cultural breadth of the Islamic world, from Spain to India, spanning the seventh to the 19th centuries; their $127-million renovation was financed by the French state, supplemented by donations from a Saudi prince, the King of Morocco, the Emir of Kuwait and the Sultan of Oman. Musée du Louvre, Paris, from September 22.

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