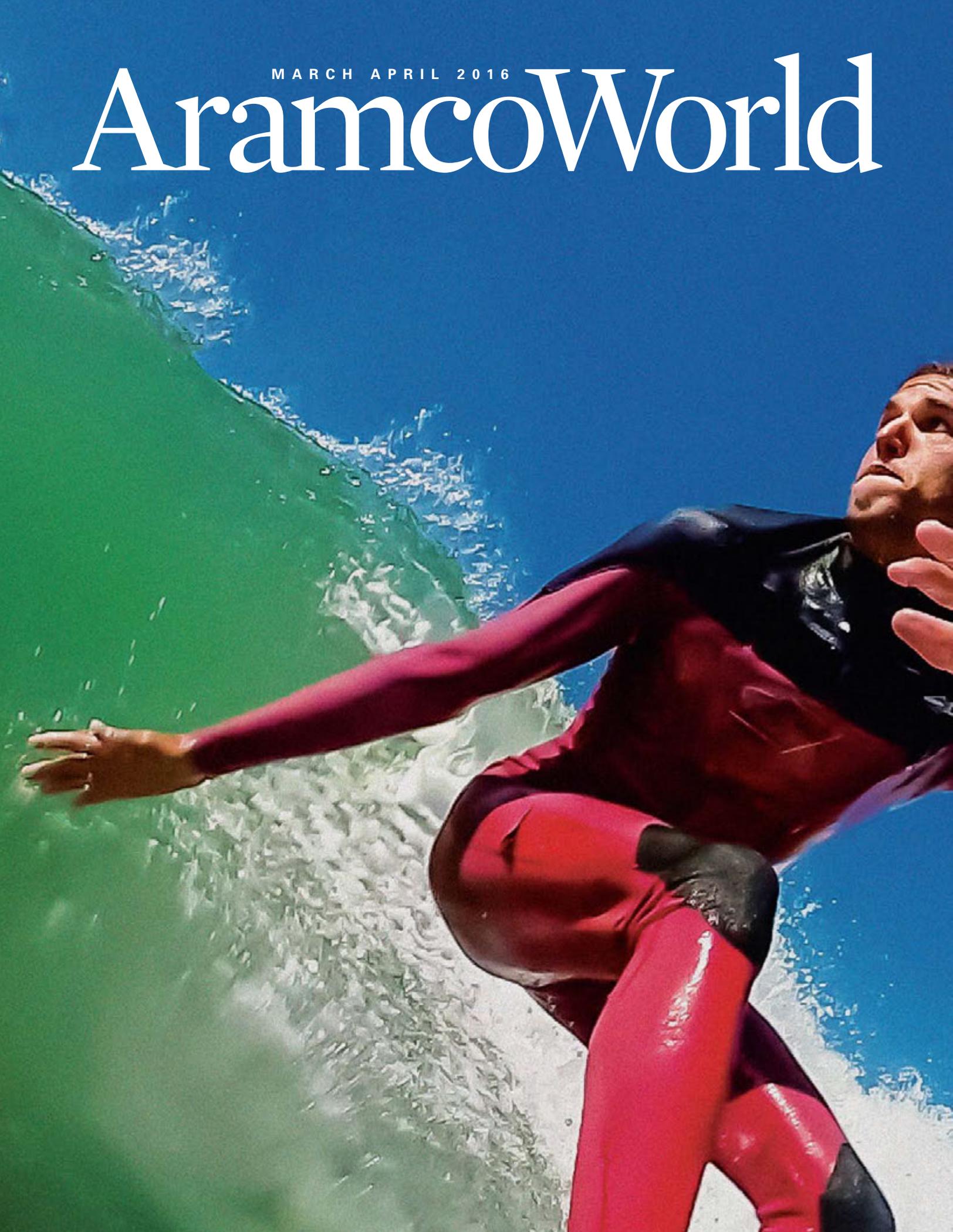


MARCH APRIL 2016

# AramcoWorld





## 4 A Is for Arab

Written by Jonathan Curriel  
Photos and video by David H. Wells

Media scholar Jack Shaheen spent more than 50 years not only studying the US entertainment industry's depictions of Arabs and Muslims but also collecting them. Now archived at New York University, the Jack G. Shaheen Collection shows graphically why stories, words and pictures matter.

## 12 Morocco's New Wave

Written by Brian E. Clark  
Photos and video by Toni Öyry

"Big, small, technical and dangerous waves ... no limit" is how one globe-surfing pro describes more than 3,000 kilometers of his native Morocco's Atlantic coast. Surfing indeed may be the country's fastest-growing sport: Officials estimate that as many as a million surf-seekers from Morocco and abroad now hit the waves each year, and from among them, a few young champions are starting to ride high.

 [Online CLASSROOM GUIDE](#)

 [2 FIRSTLOOK](#) Photo by Luke Powell

# AramcoWorld

[aramcoworld.com](http://aramcoworld.com)

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We distribute *AramcoWorld* to increase cross-cultural understanding by broadening knowledge of the histories, cultures and geography of the Arab and Muslim worlds and their global connections. In print, *AramcoWorld* is distributed six times a year, without charge, to a limited number of interested readers. Online, it is archived from 1960 on. A free tablet/mobile app is now available.

**Front Cover:** Riding near Taghazout, one of Morocco's top surfing regions along its southern coast, 25-year-old Mohammed Lemkadem practices rigorously, aspiring to earn a pro sponsorship that would allow him to enter international contests. See his video story at [aramcoworld.com](http://aramcoworld.com).

**Back Cover:** Hand-embroidered on a woman's *thobe* or on a dress, motifs such as this one are part of the rich heritage of both traditional and modern, neotraditional women's garments from Iraq south to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and parts of Oman.



## 22 The Gown That Steals Your Heart

Written by Kay Hardy Campbell  
Art by Leela Corman

Elegantly designed in almost as many patterns as there are regions of the Arabian Peninsula, the amply cut, flowing, colorful and often elaborate women's *thobe*—a word that means “garment” in Arabic—is enjoying a fashion revival.

## 34 Tasting Trinidad

Written by Ramin Ganeshram  
Photos by Jean Paul Vellotti

Start with one verdant Caribbean island; add the foodways of three colonial powers to those of slaves and workers from three continents; mix for five centuries; spice periodically with new arrivals, many from the Middle East.

## 42 Returning Treasures to the Kingdom

Written by Arthur P. Clark

Time was that a picnic in any of Saudi Arabia's deserts might turn up an ancient pot or other artifact. Since 2012 more than 100 people have given back thousands of informally gathered artifacts in a uniquely successful, goodwill-based antiquities preservation campaign.

 46 SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

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# FIRSTLOOK

## Lavender Flowers Near Maimana

*Photo by Luke Powell*

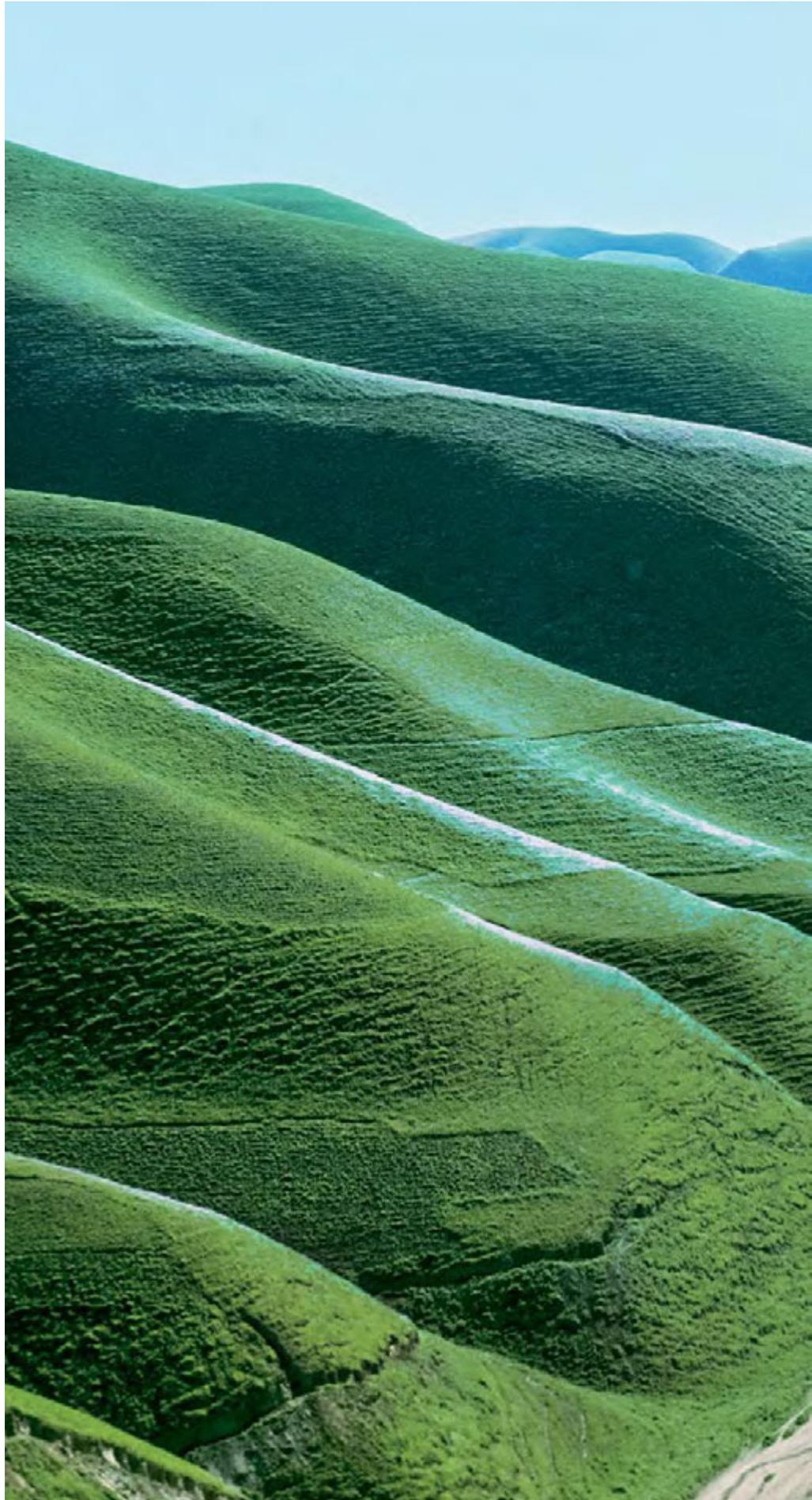
This photograph was made in the spring of 1978 on my 10th visit to Afghanistan. I was 31, and I had two degrees in religious studies. In Afghanistan there was a word for a traveling religious scholar. Christians and Jews had been among these travelers for centuries; I was welcomed almost everywhere.

I chose to work not as a scholar or a journalist but as an artist. I went out each morning open to what Afghanistan could show me, instead of trying to illustrate ideas that I already had in mind. When I took this image, two weeks before the Communists came to power, we were two days' ride from the nearest paved road.

Between 1989 and 2000 this was one of the 32 images in the exhibition "The Afghan Folio" that was shown in more than 120 museums and galleries in the us and Canada. When it showed at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., Soviet Chairman Mikhail Gorbachev saw it and had it exhibited in Moscow. More than a million visitors saw it in 1989 alone. After 2001 bookings ceased, and it has not been shown since 2008.

—Luke Powell

**Afghan Gold.** Luke Powell.  
2013, Steidl Books, 978-3-86930-648-3, €98, hb.







Written by **JONATHAN CURIEL** | Photos and video by **DAVID H. WELLS**

**“To paraphrase Plato, those who  
tell the stories rule society.”**

**— JACK SHAHEEN**

In the summer of 1974, Jack and Bernice Shaheen granted their kids a few hours on Saturday mornings for what was then an American children’s ritual: watching television cartoons, like *Popeye the Sailor* and *Bugs Bunny*, and staged, cartoonish battles among the characters of professional wrestling. It was all, they thought, innocent entertainment.

Jack Shaheen was then a professor of mass communications at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, a town of 20,000. As an academic, he analyzed society and culture in media, but he wasn’t prepared for one July morning when six-year-old Michael and five-year-old Michele “came running up the steps saying, ‘Daddy, Daddy, they’ve got bad Arabs on,’” he remembers. He went back with them to the TV, where wrestlers called “Akbar” and “Abdullah the Butcher” were on the bill, and an announcer played up their menace. “Akbar likes to hear

the cracking of bones,” the announcer said, “and when he makes those faces, he is ugly, ugly!”

Shaheen’s response was to give Michael and Michele an assignment as “monitors” of Saturday morning cartoons “looking for bad, evil Arabs.” They soon pointed out plenty: shows starring Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig and a cascade of other cartoon characters all featured occasional Arabs—nearly

**What this collection does is to redefine for us what is an archive. We are looking at celluloid images, music, posters, [and] print matters that are popular culture rather than scholarly work.**

**— ELLA SHOHAAT, PROFESSOR OF  
MIDDLE EASTERN AND ISLAMIC STUDIES**

One of the challenges of finding the films, especially the earlier ones, was that before the Internet, we would go to the libraries and take out *The New York Times* film review books from the early 1900s and actually go down every column and look for Arab names, Arab countries, anything that sounded like it might have an Arab person or town in it.

—BERNICE SHAHEEN

always as villains of one ilk or another.

Shaheen realized his children and other Arab-Americans “were growing up without ever having seen a humane Arab in a children’s cartoon.” From their viewing, he says, “came the idea to write an article about this.”

That day, it turned out, changed Shaheen’s life. Over the next eight years, the project grew and grew. Bernice joined him, and the two Shaheens took notes on hundreds of cartoons, sitcoms, dramas and documentaries, all having something to do with Arabs. From dramatic

characters to news subjects to the butt of comedy laugh lines, the images were overwhelmingly negative and stereotyped.

Along the way, Shaheen also began collecting books, comics, toys, games and even “shaykh” Halloween masks and bumper stickers—anything he could find that mirrored popular culture’s images of Arab people.

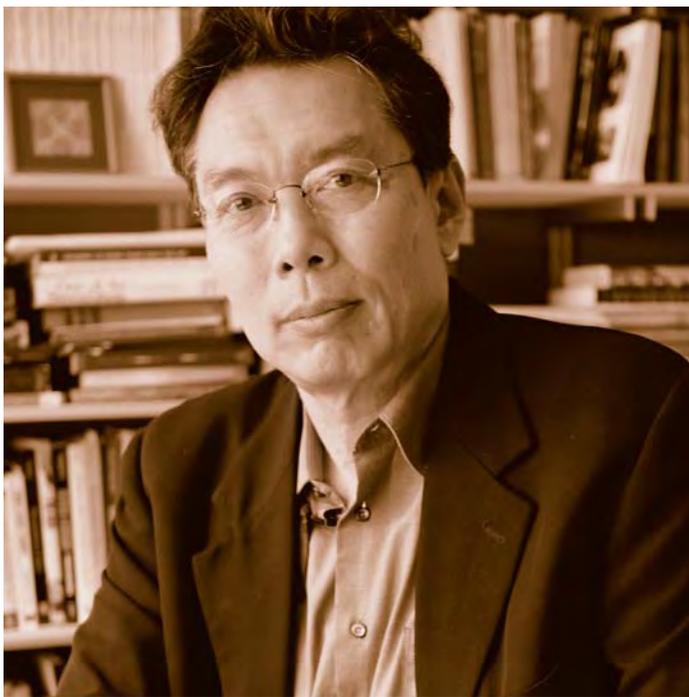
This led not only to his 1984 book *The TV Arab*, one of the first published studies of Arab images in American media, but also



to a one-of-a-kind collection, an archive that grew to include more than 3,000 television and film titles, what Shaheen calls the “hard evidence” of pop culture’s stereotyping of Arabs and—especially after 9/11—Muslims. For nearly 40 years, Shaheen kept his collection at home—in bookcases, on shelves, piled on the floor and even stashed behind furniture—“anywhere I could find a spot,” he jokes.

**You learn how easy it is to vilify a people, and how difficult it is to unlearn one’s prejudices, regardless of your race, your color, your creed. That’s the value of this collection. It’s not only about Arabs and Muslims. It’s about people.**

—JACK SHAHEEN



## The Film Buff

The roots of Shaheen's media activism reach back to his childhood in the steel-manufacturing town of Clairton, Pennsylvania. The son of Lebanese immigrants, Shaheen found magic at the movies. "I've always had a love affair with cinema," he says. "When I was a kid growing up outside of Pittsburgh, I fibbed about my age, and I was a movie usher at age 12. I stayed an usher for several years, and I worked the concession stand popping popcorn, making sno-cones. My mother, God rest her soul, was a cashier in the movie theater. I used to go to Saturday matinees, when I was four or five, with my grandmother. It cost a quarter to see a movie double feature with a cartoon. So I've always loved film. The vilification of a people that comes out of all this saddens me because, in the end, who benefits? We lose. Innocent people get hurt. We lose part of ourselves, because there is anger and hatred. So my work, in a way, is designed to take that away."

**Representations of Orientals and exotic others have always included Arabs, Muslims, the Near East, the Middle East, but also Central Asia and the Far East and South Asia.... To understand that process, you need the primary materials to access.**

— JACK TCHEN, FOUNDING DIRECTOR,  
ASIAN/PACIFIC/AMERICAN INSTITUTE

**B**ut in 2011, what is now the Jack G. Shaheen Archive became a public resource, housed at the Tamiment Library's Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, at New York University (NYU), where Shaheen himself is now a distinguished visiting scholar, and professors and young scholars are using his collection for new research.

In 2012, NYU organized examples from the archive on a series of two-meter-tall panels to produce the first public exhibit to draw on the collection. "A Is for Arab" has been shown at more than a dozen universities, high schools and other venues around the US, among them the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. It took its title from *The Book of Sounds ABC*, a children's reader Shaheen found at a garage sale in the 1970s. On the first page explaining the letter "A," the book illustrates a cartoon scene full of people and objects. At the center is a plump, garrulous, mustachioed Arab man on a mule with an axe hanging on his belt. "The mule is eating an apple," the book explains. "It makes the Arab very angry.... How many words start with a?"

From such trivia, the full exhibit traces the both troubling as well as newly hopeful arc of America's imagining of Arab people: from Arab men as not only angry but also backward, conniving and degenerate (especially as sultans) and Arab women as submissive temptresses relegate-





I call Professor Shaheen a “philosopher-journalist” because he is a scholar, a philosopher, a thinker who also cares about the everyday life of people.... He is the teacher of the scholars.

—ALI MIRSEPASSI, PROFESSOR OF MIDDLE EASTERN AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

through toys and TV shows or news items,” says Helga Tawil-Souri, director of the Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies and associate professor of media, culture and communications. “We come to be trained to think of Arabs and Muslims as ‘X, Y and Z.’ And those X’s, Y’s and Z’s are precisely what Shaheen tries to show.”

ed to harems, up to the more recent, stereotype-breaking scripts and characters by young filmmakers, producers, graphic novelists and others whose creativity portends positive change.

“Historically, there has been no documentation of these stereotypes, and when you talk about stereotypical images of Arabs, you have to have the evidence,” says Shaheen, sitting in the living room of his home in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, where he has lived since 1995. “The beauty and strength of the collection is that it’s in all areas of popular culture—everything from TV wrestling to comic books to toys and games.” The stereotyping, he says, “is everywhere, like a virus.”

The evidence in the archive, Shaheen and NYU scholars say, can now become a centerpiece for public and scholarly discussions about how Arabs and Muslims are portrayed not just in the US but also around the world. Both the negative and the positive images are important, Shaheen and other scholars say, because it’s through the repetition of images that pop culture produces widespread assumptions about all groups of people. For non-Arabs and non-Muslims, they say, the repetition of images from an early age becomes a proxy for people they may never meet personally.

“For most of us, that is the way we interact with that world, not by going [to Arab- and Muslim-majority countries] but by consuming it in different ways, whether

**What we, at NYU, hope people will get out of the collection and take away from it is the realization how prevalent the negative stereotypes are of Muslims and Arabs in the media.**

—LAUREN CHEN-SCHULTZ, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, ASIAN/PACIFIC/AMERICAN INSTITUTE

**T**he archive, which in 1984 began with some 200 TV and movie titles, now has approximately 3,200 video titles, along with about 20 16-millimeter films, 35 audio cassettes, 50 movie posters and stills, 400 editorial cartoons, 200 hardcover and paperback books, 150 comic books, 24 children’s books, 36 toys and games, 50 print ads from magazines and newspapers,

12 pulp magazine photos and an assortment of miscellany; other scholars have recently added collections of novels and nonfiction. There are silent films from the late 1800s, and there is what was for a time the only surviving copy of British filmmaker Malcolm Clarke’s *Terror in the Promised Land*, a documentary that aired on ABC in 1978 that Shaheen says was one of the first to put a human face on Palestinian history.

“After the film was shown,” Shaheen says now, “all copies were destroyed. I had the only copy. A couple of years ago, Malcolm came to NYU, because his son was taking a class. And when his son found out that *Terror in the Promised Land* was in the archive, he told his father, and his father came. We screened it at the Middle East Studies Association, and he spoke about the film—how he had to have bodyguards, and how his life was threatened. That’s the value of the archive.”

After publication of *The TV Arab*, Shaheen continued, specializing in how filmmakers, TV executives, screenwriters and producers viewed Arabs and Muslims. In 2001 he published *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a*





I spent two years going through all of the boxes, all of the notes, all of the VHS tapes, all of the children’s toys and books, to kind of get a sense of the contents, and I’m really amazed at the breadth of the collecting Jack Shaheen did. I’m really excited to see what else is there because I think no one else has seen all the footage on those tapes besides him and his wife, Bernice.

—AMITA MANGHNANI, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS & COMMUNICATIONS, ASIAN/PACIFIC/AMERICAN INSTITUTE

One of the reasons why we, at NYU, were so interested and compelled to bring the Shaheen archive here is because we are one of the media and journalism capitals of the world.... We believe it can influence future journalists.

—GRETA NICOLE SCHARNWEBER, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, HAGOP KEVORKIAN CENTER FOR NEAR EASTERN STUDIES



*People*, and in 2008, *Guilty: Hollywood’s Verdict on Arabs after 9/11*.

Both books, and now the archive, help connect Hollywood’s early stereotyping to Europe’s 19th-century colonial characterizations. NYU scholars say this helps situate Arab and Muslim experiences amid the experiences of other groups, especially Asians, Jews and African Americans. Arabs and Muslims aren’t unique in being subject to grotesque caricatures, says Shaheen. “How many people accepted stereotypical images of Jews and blacks because that’s all they knew?” he asks. “It’s difficult to unlearn.”

But change is coming, Shaheen believes.

“I prefer to be part of the solution,” says Shaheen, sitting next to Bernice, who organized the archive’s catalog from the beginning.

If there has been any shift in the way Arabs and Muslims are portrayed over Shaheen’s 80 years, Shaheen himself deserves at least part of the credit. *The TV Arab* dovetailed with other groundbreaking books by Arab-American scholars, notably Edmund Ghareeb’s 1977 *Split Vision: Arab Portrayal in the American Media* and Edward Said’s 1981 *Covering Islam*. Together, they influenced a generation of scholars at a time when Shaheen’s own research in Hollywood led him to conclude, “Television executives permit the stereotype because they do not know much about Arabs or their nations. Nor have they taken the time to find out.”

A hint of change came in 1999, when Shaheen was first enlisted to consult on a major Hollywood film, *Three Kings*, starring George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg and Ice Cube as US soldiers in the 1991 Gulf War who abandon their plan to steal gold and instead rescue Iraqi civilians. Then in 2005, Clooney personally called on Shaheen to advise on *Syriana*, which Clooney produced and starred in as a CIA operative with an unwelcome assassination mission. In both films, Shaheen helped make Arab characters more humane: In *Syriana*, for example, Shaheen asked screenwriter/director Stephen Gaghan to make sure the Arab financier who is the assassination target had a family as part of his backstory—a seemingly simple change, but one that added moral complexity to a character who, decades earlier, would likely have been a flatly one-dimensional villain.

## Shaheen Scholars

Through the Center for Arab American Philanthropy in Dearborn, Michigan, since 1997 the Shaheens have funded the Jack G. & Bernice M. Shaheen Endowed Media Scholarship Fund for college students of Arab-American heritage in mass communications, journalism and film. To date they have helped 63 recipients. Notable among them is NPR Middle East correspondent Leila Fadel, a 2004 graduate of Northeastern University in Boston. “Getting that scholarship—it was a small amount—felt really supportive,” she says by phone from London. “Over the years, ever since I won that scholarship, he’s checked on me throughout my career. He’s almost a father figure in the industry. He’s always sent me emails, checking in, expressing pride,” she adds.

**It’s a bit of a misnomer to think about the collection as simply American. Yes, it’s American because the products have been produced in America; they’ve been made in America. We’re talking about Hollywood films. We’re talking about us news media and so on. But the imagined geography, if I can call it that, of what is being represented and produced and talked about is global, if not at least transnational.**

—HELGA TAWIL-SOURI, DIRECTOR,  
HAGOP KEVORKIAN CENTER FOR  
NEAR EASTERN STUDIES AND  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

In addition, Shaheen’s documentary version of *Reel Bad Arabs* has screened at film festivals and aired on television in the Middle East and other regions outside the US. Shaheen is currently consulting on an animated children’s TV series called *Shimmer and Shine* about a girl with two comically fallible genies.

To Ella Shohat, a professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies at NYU, the archive is a cultural mirror. “The archive is crucial because it’s not just about the collection,” Shohat says. “The archive ultimately is about those who generated it. With every type of reflection or image that imagines another region, it’s about those who imagined and less about those who are being imagined.”

Jack Tchen, founding director of NYU’s Asian/Pacific/American Studies Program and Institute, helped steer the archive to the university. As author of *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* and co-author of *Yellow Peril! An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear*, Tchen met Shaheen through a mutual friend and later visited Shaheen’s house in Hilton Head with a team of NYU colleagues. Tchen immediately saw the value of Shaheen’s collection in relation to another NYU archive: The Yoshio Kishi and Irene Yah Ling Sun Collection, which has more than 10,000 books, magazines, prints, posters, newspapers, advertisements, postcards, films, videos, audio recordings, comics and toys that document the stereotyped images of Asian Americans from the 1800s to the present.

“As a historian, I’ve looked at patterns as they’ve shifted over time, and of course with each generation, we hope [negative portrayals] go away, but it’s not been happen-



ing,” says Tchen, sitting in his NYU office a few minutes’ walk from Shaheen’s archive. “If anything, some of these older images of the evil Oriental—whether it’s Fu Manchu or the kind of dagger-wielding shaykh—are constantly coming back in new forms or in slightly updated old forms,” he says. “We can certainly say that there’s been progress in



**I don't know of any parallel to [the Shaheen Collection]. There are all sorts of shared questions with African and Asian stereotypes.... It's the comparative element that's important.**

—MICHAEL GILSENAN, PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND MIDDLE EASTERN AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

Muslim filmmakers—and filmgoers—will, Shaheen says, change the world.

This does not mean, Shaheen says, that every image of Arabs and Muslims should be or will be positive, but that Arabs and Muslims can be shown “in all their complexity, no better and no worse than they portray others.” The ways people consume media may have changed drastically since that Saturday when Shaheen’s kids called out to him, but the standards by which one can judge fairness, he says, are the same: Is the work substantive and insightful? Are there moments that humanize an Arab or Muslim character? Are there scenes that explore complexity in Arab and Muslim culture and society? And does the storyline avoid caricatures, stereotypes and easy answers?

Standing in his office, Shaheen points to still more welcome additions, now in his collection at home: *Taxi for Tobruk*, a 1961 French film about soldiering in the North African desert during World War II, now out on DVD, and *I'm Not a Terrorist, But I've Played One on TV*, the 2015 memoir by Persian-American comedian Maz Jobrani. He also compliments the TV series *Quantico*, which includes two Arab sisters. “None of the characters are one-dimensional,” says Shaheen.



terms of how African Americans are represented in various media forms, but those stereotypes aren't gone—they're still deeply entrenched in the American imagination. These things aren't quick to go away.”

Tchen says that the history of enmity in the US against what scholars call “the other”—anyone different, whether Arab, Muslim, Japanese, Chinese or from another “outsider” group—is often “tied to trade and foreign policy, and a feeling that this country is getting a raw deal.” Cultural portrayals of these groups in movies and on TV can be “an extension of the cowboy westerns, but instead of Indians, you have the Arab or ‘the Chinaman.’ The commercial culture’s relationship to the political culture is deeply intertwined.”

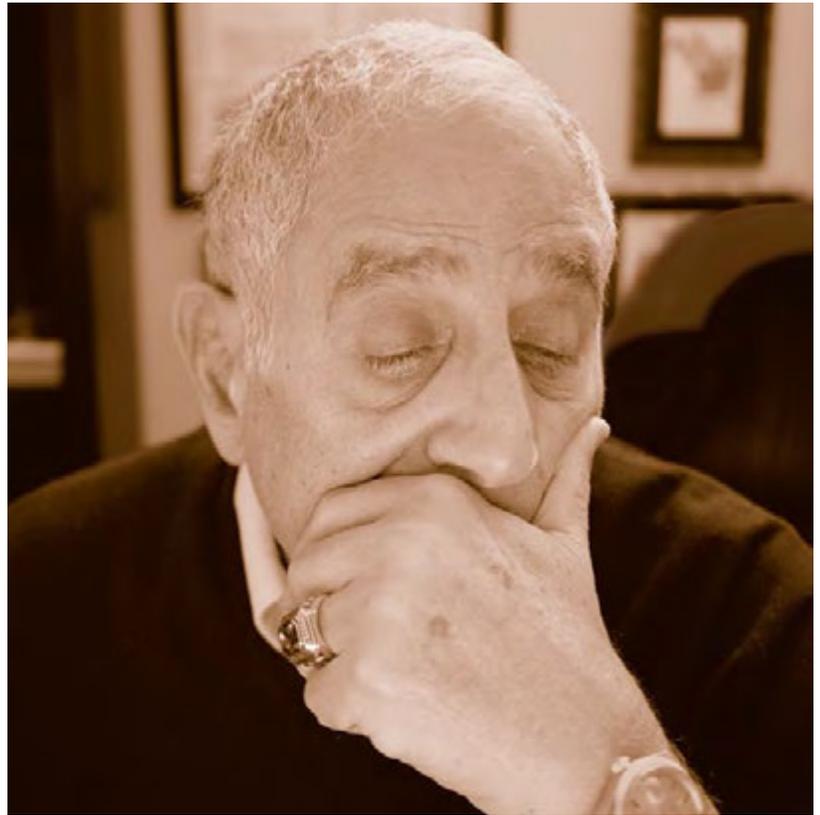
Shaheen argues that no matter how deeply entrenched the images may be, change in Hollywood is “inevitable”—even as movies continue in 2016 to traffic all too often in gross stereotypes and to push Arabs into villain roles. He points to a new generation of independent Arab filmmakers: Sam Esmail (*Mr. Robot*); Rolla Selbak (*Three Veils*); Annemarie Jacir (*Salt of This Sea*); Cherien Dabis (*Amreeka*) and more, all of them pushing in exactly the other direction, just as movies with African American characters and images pushed back over the past 30 years. Arab and

**The archive ultimately is about those whogenerated it. With every type of reflection or image that imagines another region, it's more about those who imagined and less about those who are being imagined.**

—ELLA SHOCHAT, PROFESSOR OF MIDDLE EASTERN AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

When I first began doing research on this topic, I felt like the Lone Ranger without Tonto. I was all alone. Not anymore. The goal of any scholar is to plant seeds, hoping that young people will pick up and move forward with even more creative, fresh ideas. This is what's happening now.

—JACK SHAHEEN



Shaheen says he will be happy—well, sort of happy—to stop collecting. “People write, ‘Have you seen this?’ And then I’m watching a movie on TV.” “He’s *still* collecting,” Bernice intervenes, laughing a bit. “I can’t stop,” says Shaheen. “To be honest with you, if I lived in New York, I’d be with the collection every day. There’s so much there. I’d find something that

It’s really important to note that Bernice has been behind the scenes serving as the first archivist of this collection. The coherence of the collection comes together as their joint project.

—GRETA NICOLE SCHARNWEBER



happened in the past and link it to what’s happening in the present.”

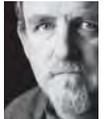
That job, now, is for others. By donating the archive, Shaheen ensured it will have impacts for generations.

“I’m still an optimist despite everything,” Shaheen says. “That blockbuster film or TV show, that one with positive, memorable, complex Arab characters, it’s coming. Believe me, it’s coming. There’s more awareness now. When I first started this, I was all alone. That’s not true anymore. There are students writing dissertations. Courses are being taught on the image of Arabs. It was always my dream that there’d be young people picking up the torch and moving forward. And so like Hollywood always says, it’s coming soon to a theater near you.” 🌐



**Jonathan Curiel** (jonathancuriel@hotmail.com) is a San Francisco journalist who has written widely about the Middle East, and he is the author of *AI’ America: Travels Through America’s Arab and Islamic Roots* (New Press, 2008).

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**Video: “The Legacy of Jack Shaheen”**





MOROCCO'S  
—  
NEW  
WAVE  
—

Written by  
BRIAN E. CLARK

Photos and video by  
TONI ÖYRY

**MERYEM EL GARDOUM NEVER DREAMED SHE'D  
BECOME THE MOROCCAN WOMEN'S NATIONAL  
SURFING CHAMPION WHEN SHE WAS A  
LITTLE GIRL ACCOMPANYING HER MOTHER TO  
GATHER OYSTERS.**

off points like Devil's Rock, as well as good "beach breaks" and some "left-handers." At some places such as Anchor Point north of Tamraght, waves break for so long surfers

can ride for nearly half a kilometer.

In the past 20 years or so, surfing has caught on also with Moroccan youth, and this has produced some top professional riders, including Jérôme Sahyoun, a 35-year-old native of Casablanca who regularly rides

**B**ut when I saw people surfing and my brothers took it up, I knew I had to try it," says the 18-year-old, who grew up in the town of Tamraght on Morocco's Atlantic coast and has claimed the women's surfing title three years in a row. "I like challenges and experimenting with different surfing techniques. Fortunately, I've had the support of my

family. That's been a really big help.

"I feel so happy when I am out there on the waves," she adds. "It just makes me forget anything that might be bothering me."

Ocean swells have been rolling in off the Atlantic to break on Morocco's 3,450-kilometer coast for eons. Fishermen have caught sardines, mackerel, anchovies, octopus and squid for centuries, usually from small, colorful wooden boats. Their offspring have been going to sea with their elders for countless generations, playing in the ocean when they had the chance. But it was only in the last 50 years that surfers discovered that the waves breaking along Morocco's reefs, rocks and beaches were ideal for their own modern mix of work and play.

At first, locals say, it was mostly Europeans and Australians, along with the odd American or two, who discovered that from October into March, the Moroccan coast became a paradise of "big rollers" that produced excellent "right-handers," or waves that break

*Previous spread: A few minutes' drive north of Taghazout, surfers find Killer Point, or just "Killers," a classic point break where waves form off rocks jutting into the sea. At low tide, surfers can hike down to it; at other times they paddle for 30 to 45 minutes from a nearby beach.*



"I knew I had to try it," says three-time national champion Meryem El Gardoum. Lower: A local surfer prepares to make the 20-minute walk from Taghazout south to Devil's Rock, where the point break makes it an inviting location for those learning the sport.





Riding the beach break at “K17,” which locals call the surf location 17 kilometers north of Agadir, El Gardoum films herself with a GoPro camera. El Gardoum wanted to learn to surf as a young girl and today she is one of the many young Moroccans putting North African surfing on the map.

20-meter waves on the world circuit, and Ramzi Boukhiam, a 25-year-old from Agadir who won the 2012 European Surfing Championship. Along with them, thousands of others have embraced the sport and the surf culture that often goes with it, dreadlocks and all.

“Morocco is definitely on the rise in the international scene,” says Dave Prodan, a World Surf League (WSL) spokesman. “And the country is producing some pretty good surfers, too.”

Last September, the Royal Moroccan Surfing Federation, in conjunction with the WSL, hosted the country’s first major competition—the Quicksilver Pro Casablanca.

Mohammed Kadmiri is president of the Royal Moroccan Surfing Federation. He describes a sport that has grown “exponentially,” especially over the past decade. He says the country now has more than 245 surf instructors—all Moroccan—and 45 competition judges certified by the Federation. Numerous contests are held annually, and some attract top surfers from around the globe, he notes.

Historically a fishing village and a producer of argan oil, Taghazout has added surfing and tourism to its economy over the past 50 years. Here, at the Taghazout beach, the daily catch is sold as waves await the day’s riders.



TOP: RACHID AMGHAR; OPPOSITE, TOP: BRIAN CLARK



The long and often rugged coast, he adds, makes it a “natural paradise, a quintessential destination for surfing.” Add to that warm winter temperatures, large waves and a generous geography with at least 95 named “breaks,” it attracts hundreds of thousands of domestic and international surfers.

Kadmiri says he believes the first surfers on this coast were Americans stationed at what was then a US military base at Kenitra in northern Morocco in the early

Ambassador of Moroccan surf and big wave rider Jérôme Sahyoun, 36, has surfed some of the largest swells around the world. *Lower:* He rides near one of his secret locations between Agadir and Dakhla. “I love Morocco from north to south,” says Sahyoun. “I don’t have a preferred area. That’s why I travel all winter, driving kilometers and kilometers. The coastline offers an incredible diversity of waves ... big, small, technical and dangerous,” he says.



1960s. They rode waves at nearby Mehdia beach, and from there, word of Morocco's breaks began to spread around the globe.

Kadmiri himself learned to surf in 1984 at Oued Echarat north of Casablanca, and since then he has ridden waves around the world. In recent years, he says, the government of King Mohammed VI—whom he describes as an avid jet skier—has promoted surfing as recreation for young Moroccans and helped establish clubs along the coast. The government has also backed surf-related tourism, he explains, especially along the southern coast.

According to the World Tourism Organization, Morocco attracts 10 million tourists annually, the greatest number for any African country, and Kadmiri estimates that about 10 percent—nearly 1 million of those visitors—surf. GrindTV, an online adventure sports video channel, ranks Morocco among the top three places in the world for riding waves and learning the sport.

Kadmiri says the country now has at least 53 surfing schools run by Moroccans and another 50 surf camps headed by foreigners—mostly Europeans—who often use local instructors. He called surfing “a key indicator for tourism.”

El Gardoum, who started



surfing at age 11, is among the handful of young Moroccan women who have also taken boards to the waves. She is already passing on her skills to the next generation, as she teaches youngsters like five-year-old Chamae El Bassiti how to ride—as well as offering tutoring with schoolwork.

Brahim LeFrere, 28, of Moroccan Surf Adventures in Tamraght, has surfed these waves since he was 14, and *below*, he shares his knowledge during a surf lesson. The Royal Moroccan Surfing Federation says the country now has more than 245 surf instructors and 53 surfing schools run by Moroccans.



LOWER: BRIAN CLARK; OPPOSITE: BASTIEN BONNARME (2)



*Opposite:* Aspiring pro surfer Mohammed Lemkadem sizes up a wave at La Source, a surf location north of Taghazout known for its A-frame peaks with rights and lefts.

“I like surfing with Meryem,” says Chamae, smiling up at her mentor as they sit on a stone wall. “She’s teaching me a lot and she’s fun to be around. I can stand on my board and I am starting to be able to turn. She’s also helping me learn how to read, too.”

Chamae’s mother, Zahira, runs a small tea shop on the beach, and she says she appreciates El Gardoum working with her daughter.

“I hope Chamae will be as good as Meryem when she grows up,” she admits with a smile. “Maybe she’ll even become a top pro surfer and can support me in my old age.”

El Gardoum has worked as an instructor for several of the surfing schools that focus on the surf at Devil’s Rock (called *imourane* in Berber) and Camel Beach (called *jamal sha’ati* in Arabic, because of its shape), and offer guide services to veteran surfers seeking out famed—and tricky—breaks called Boilers, Killers, Dracula’s and the famous Anchor Point.

On a misty October morning, small one-meter waves break onto Devil’s Rock beach near Tamraght. One class of kids in wetsuits and another still in street clothes warm up with jumping jacks and other calisthenics. Brightly painted blue fishing boats—some with cats lounging on their seats—are scattered on the beach, and a row of what could only be called surf shacks lines a ridge above. Behind them, rolling foothills of the nearby arid countryside touch sky. Tamraght, with the towers of two mosques, lies about a kilometer inland.

Out in the water, surfers have already begun to take advantage of waves that are pushed into the bay by the rocky point. Safir Lasim, who has surfed the region for more than two decades, steps out of his hut where he rents surfboards, stretches and wipes the sleep from his eyes. Nearby, another class, this one from Moroccan Surf Adventures, one of the oldest surfing schools in the region, is unloading surfboards from a van.

“Just another day on



*Above:* In the inaugural Quiksilver Pro Casablanca, Portuguese surfer Pedro Henrique holds the trophy after winning the competition in the first World Surf League event this past September in Morocco. *Left:* An event poster promoting the European Surfing Federation’s 2015 European Surfing Nations Championship held in Ain Diab, Casablanca, Morocco, the first Eurosurf event to take place in the country. Defending champion France won the event with seven medals, while Morocco placed third with four.

Taghazout Bay,” says Nigel Cross, Moroccan Surf Adventures co-owner. His father started a surfboard company in Britain and first surfed here in the 1970s together with Nigel’s mother, a swimsuit designer. Nigel was three years old.

“They were chasing the sun,” says Cross, who is now 42. “Places like Taghazout and Tamraght were just tiny fishing villages back then.”

Brahim LeFrere, one of Cross’s instructors, has been surfing for nearly half his 28 years and teaching since 2008. The son of a fisherman, he became good enough to compete in regional contests.

“In the beginning, it was too expensive for me to get a surfboard or a wetsuit,” he says. “So I’d wait until friends were done and I’d borrow their gear. After a year, I’d saved up enough money and bought a used board and wetsuit.”

A natural athlete, he also coached volleyball. “I like all kinds of sports that we can do

**“I RECENTLY FOUND A PLACE ON AN OUTER REEF WITH A GIANT WAVE, PROBABLY ONE OF THE BIGGEST IN THE WORLD.”**  
—JÉRÔME SAHYOUN

on the beach—and in the water,” he says. “We have lots of space at low tide to play football, Frisbee and other things. Most of the people in my village were fishermen, and we all grew up on the sea, so playing in and on the waves just came naturally.”

Karim Rhouli, a 30-year-old who grew up in Marrakesh and now owns Marrakesh Surf and Snow Tours, says his parents often brought him to Taghazout Bay for holidays, where they would rent a house near Anchor Point.

“First I got into body boarding, but by the time I was 17, I really knew I wanted to surf,” explains Rhouli. As he improved his surfing, he began to teach. He also developed skills as a skateboarder and snowboarder, all of which led to the creation of his guide service.

“Surfing is a great sport because you feel like you are riding a force of nature when you are on a wave,” says Rhouli, who has surfed in Bali and Australia and taught snowboarding in Dubai. “That first rush of standing on a board and being carried in is incredible. It’s called ‘the stoke,’ and it grabs you and makes you want to do it more and more.”

Lasim Safir, who sports gold-tipped dreadlocks, rents surfboards and gives lessons from a small wooden building that also serves as his home above Devil’s Rock beach. He helped mentor El Gardoum, who stores her short board in his shack.

“There’s nothing I’d rather do than surf and help people learn,” says Safir, who is in his mid-30s and started surfing 15

years ago. “When I was a kid, there weren’t that many people who came to this beach. Now, sometimes, the waves can almost be crowded. But that’s good for business.”

Later that afternoon, El Gardoum drops by Safir’s shack to grab her short board, slip on her wetsuit and head for the surf. Soon she is catching long rides and snapping sharp turns—maneuvers a short board makes possible. Upon finishing, she spots her favorite five-year-old surfing prodigy, Chamae, on the sidewalk—riding her skateboard. El Gardoum greets her with a big hug.



*Above:* Surfer Lasim Safir, who lives and works above Devil’s Rock beach renting surfboards and giving lessons, mentored three-time national champion, Meryem El Gardoum, who stores her surfboard there. *Lower:* Surf shops abound in and around Taghazout where locals and tourists can rent surfboards, find out the regional surf reports and get lessons from local pros.



Above: The next generation of Moroccan surfers takes time out from the waves to play on the beach near Devil's Rock. Left: Five-year-old surf prodigy Chamae El Bassiti is mentored by El Gardoum.



"She could be really good," she says of Chamae.

"I didn't begin until I was 11, so she has

a big start on me," she says with a laugh. "Like most kids, I began with swimming, and the next step was body boarding. Then I got on my cousin's board, and he pushed me into the surf. I stood up and fell off, of course. But I knew right away that I'd like it."

Now, she says Anchor Point is her favorite break because it produces consistent tubes and long rides.

With the backing of her parents, she says, she was soon competing and winning contests. With that came fame and sponsorships from companies interested in reaching the growing Moroccan market. When she's not in school or playing other sports, she's lifting weights that she says help make herself stronger for the constant paddling surfing requires.

"It's just so much fun being out there, so it's really not work. I like winning, but I know I can be a lot better. At the European championships in Casablanca [last fall], I surfed against French and Spanish girls and got an eighth-place finish because the competition is tough. Still, I also know I can surf better than a lot of guys."

El Gardoum says she plans to go to university in Morocco or France to study science if she doesn't pursue pro surfing. And in her free time, she plans to continue helping girls like Chamae.

"She already has her mother's backing," she says. "I would tell her and other girls to be strong, and don't listen to people who want to hold you back. If surfing becomes their passion, like it has for me, they should go for it." 🌐



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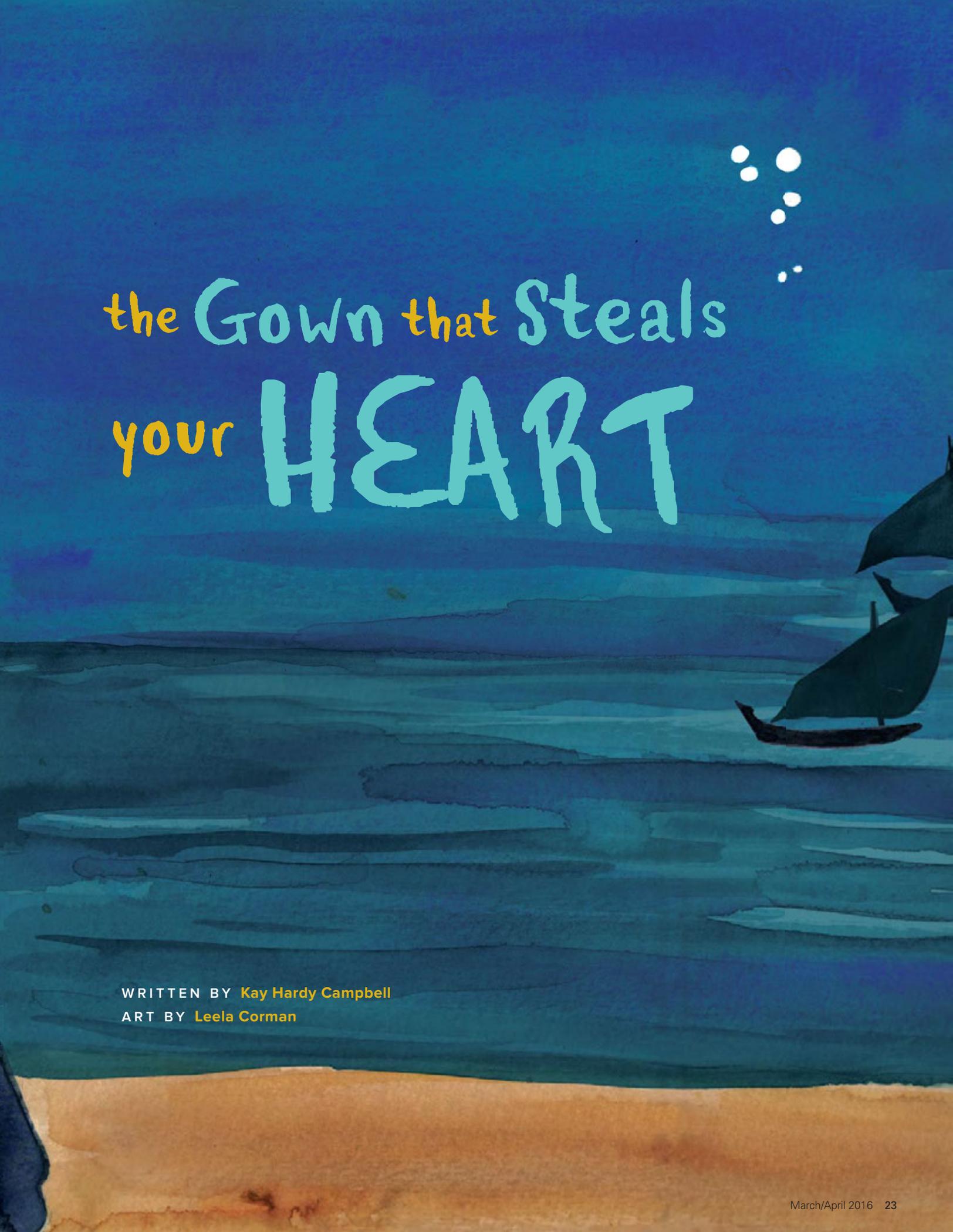
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Arab-American Roots of Surf Music: M/A 98



**Video:**  
"Morocco's New Wave."







the Gown that Steals  
your HEART

WRITTEN BY Kay Hardy Campbell

ART BY Leela Corman



When the head of the house, or a son, returns from a long journey or the pearl-banks, the woman of the house hangs up on a pole ... one of her best and most brilliantly coloured thaubes. Among townswomen, this is hung up on the roof.

—H.R.P. DICKSON, *THE ARAB OF THE DESERT*, 1949

**T**his custom, known as *al-raayah* (“the banner”), centered on a woman’s holiday gowns: colorful, often ceremonial garments at the top end of her ensemble. Similarly to the coastal and townfolk Dickson described, Bedouin women, too, would place a brightly colored *thobe* on a pole in front of the tent to welcome home a traveler or “when an important shaikh or personage is expected to arrive at or pass a camp,” wrote Dickson, one of the foremost Western experts on Bedouin life of the early 20th century.

In English, the Arabic word *thobe* translates simply as “garment.” Today, although it most often refers to the floor-length shirts, often of plain white, worn by men throughout the Arabian Peninsula, it is used also for what is nearly that shirt’s opposite: amply cut, colorful, often highly decorated robes worn by women inside the home or at parties of family or friends. Once commonly worn in almost as many styles as there are regions of the Peninsula, the women’s thobe is enjoying a fashion revival from Iraq and Kuwait down into eastern and central Saudi Arabia, as well as the coastal



During the holy month of Ramadan, thobes can be popular at nighttime gatherings. Thobe styles old and new appear here, *left to right*: Kuwaiti-style thobe with V-neck opening; modernized and belted version of a thobe based on a Faisal Alrayes design; young woman checking her smartphone in a striped *mufahhah* thobe; pink *thobe al-nashal* with its signature full floor-length front panel of embroidery; thobe with crescent moon and stars, also based on a Faisal Alrayes design; *sambusak*-style thobe covered with gold triangles, based on a design by Mohamed Saleh; and a vintage Iraqi thobe known as a *hashmi*. *Previous spread*: Wives, sisters and female relatives of pearl-divers greeted the return of ships at the end of the pearling season wearing their best thobes. The exceptionally majestic *thuraya* thobe, center, is named for its large triangular embroidery motif that signifies the Pleiades constellation that would appear in the September sky and signal the end of the pearling season. It is said that only a pearling boat captain's wife would wear the *thuraya* thobe.

on the season, a woman's social position, her lifestyle, and the fashion of the time and place.

It was on top of this that a woman pulled on the loose-fitting thobe. In some places, thobes did double duty both as holiday gowns and as more daily cover-ups.

states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and parts of Oman.

All women's thobes share a few basic characteristics: cuts that are large and square, or nearly square; side panels that open to form billowing sleeves (some with beautifully decorative gussets); and, in many varieties, length in back enough to trail on the floor.

Women wear such thobes over other layers, light or heavy depending on the season. (Wearing layers is a hallmark of Arabian women's traditional dress.) For example, in the Najd region of central Saudi Arabia, as well as east to the Gulf coast, a woman would traditionally put on long pantaloons, gathered at the waist, called *sirwal*. On top of that, she wore a long gown with fitted sleeves but generally not "waist-ed" (tighter at the waist). These garments, too, have many regionally distinctive names: *dishdasha*, *dira'a*, *miqta'* and *kandurah*; those with more defined waists were *nafnuf* or just *gawan*—after the English "gown." This layer could be of sturdy cotton, lightweight wool, satin, polyester or silk, depending

Designed for versatility, a thobe allows a woman to lift its neck opening to cover her head; alternatively, she can drape one or both sleeves over her head.

Like a living thing, fashion ebbs, flows and at times folds back on itself. The origins of the women's thobe are unknown. Some look to its ancestry in the voluminous ceremonial over-garments worn in the courts of the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, and others look back even farther, to Byzantine times.

Women wore thobes in so many places in the Arabian Peninsula that, over time, several styles developed. Among the Bedouin of central Saudi Arabia's Najd region, thobes were made of dark cotton, sometimes decorated with colorful embroidery and strips of colored fabric sewn in, including natural silks in cerise, turquoise and gold. In the Najd's towns and cities, as well those east in Kuwait and southern Iraq, women wore thobes of finer fabrics, such as black or red silk, tulle and touches of lace, with lavish gold and silver embroidery and sequins at the neckline, sleeves and hem.



In the past, local tailors and women at home sewed and embroidered most thobes, while the more elaborate ones came from tailors in India. These days, most thobes for sale in the Gulf are imports from India or made locally by Indian tailors.

**T**oday in the Gulf region, if you stroll through malls, streets and markets where women's attire is sold, you may catch a glimpse of an exceptionally brilliant-hued, heavily embroidered thobe. Whether it is a royal purple, a bright red or a rich lapis blue, it will be decorated in front from neckline to floor with a panel of intricate gold or silver embroidery:

This is the elegant *thobe al-nashal* (or just *thobe nashal*), the signature women's thobe style all the way from Kuwait into eastern Saudi Arabia, over to Bahrain and down to Qatar.

"The thobe nashal is the queen of thobes, in terms of its splendor and the density of its embroidery," explains Mohamed Saleh, head of the Bahrain-based thobe manufacturer Saleh for Zari, in a Ministry of Culture video.

His company is one of a handful that not only designs and sews high-quality thobes, but also has imported and manufactured women's thobes since 1950. It has several workshops, all in Bahrain. Prices start around \$500, and the most customized thobe might cost up to \$10,000.

One spring day last year, the firm's showroom in downtown Manama's Yateem Center mall was bustling with customers ordering thobes for Ramadan nights that would be full of visits among friends and families. In addition, it was wedding season, and Saleh was arranging deliveries to brides and their families for events like the traditional henna night, when the bride's hands and feet are decorated, and for the wedding-night party itself. Typically, the bride and female wedding guests don different ensembles each night; the bride usually wears a white gown on her wedding night.

Switching amid Arabic, English and Hindi, Saleh carries on multiple conversations with his customers and staff. When there is a rare lull, he expounds on the history and styles of thobes in the region.

The simplest, he explains, is called a *korar*, which is worn every day at home by Bahraini and other Gulf women. It is made from cotton and polyester fabric in all kinds of patterns with chain-stitch embroidery at the neck opening and sleeves. Older women wear korars for formal occasions, and younger ones use them more informally.

No one, he says, not even historians, knows the true origin of the term "thobe al-nashal." One meaning of *nashal*, he notes, is "pickpocket," and thus he says he likes to think that it's the thobe "so beautiful it steals your heart."

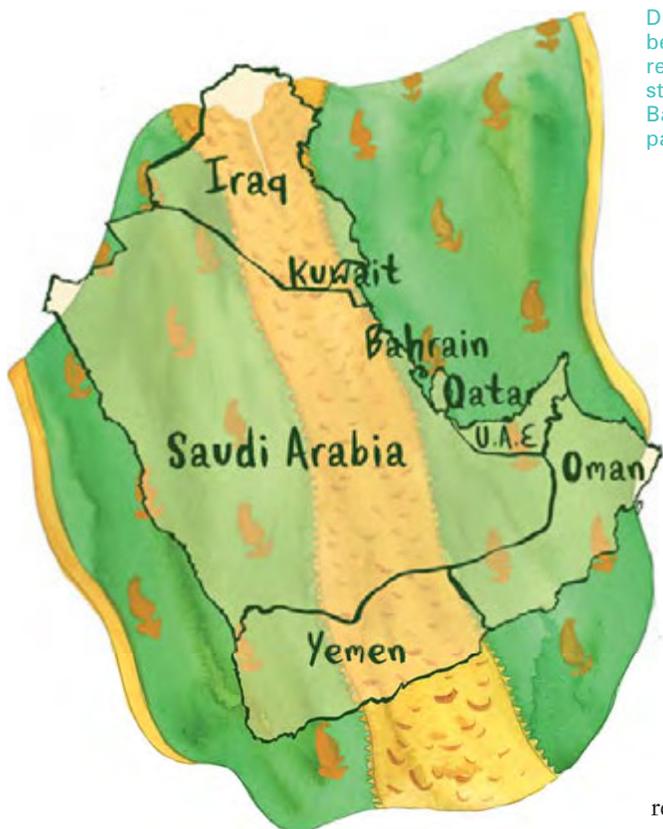
And a "pure" thobe al-nashal just might do that, with its brilliant color and its front panel of dense gold and silver embroidery that reaches to the floor. But the name, he cautions,



*Top: Bahrain's female athletes wore thobes for the parade that opened the 2012 Olympics in London. Above: Egyptian singing legend Um Kulthum visited Kuwait in the 1960s and donned a Kuwaiti-style thobe at a social occasion. Left: Mary Eddy, whose husband, William Eddy, translated at the historic meeting in 1945 between Saudi King 'Abd al-'Aziz Al-Sa'ud and us President Franklin D. Roosevelt, wore a thobe ensemble gifted to her by the King. It is now part of the collection at the Mansoojat Foundation in London.*



Dressed to greet important visitors, a Bedouin woman would often don her best thobe and bring a bowl of camel milk. The Bedouin thobe of the Najd region in central Saudi Arabia features the same inset stripes as the *mutaffat* style of the Najdi towns and echoes the *al-mufahhah* style thobe well-known in Bahrain. *Left*: Thobe al-nashal and her many cousins are worn from Iraq to parts of Oman.



is tricky: There are endless variations. For example, in Najd, it might be called *thobe mukhattam*, a name that refers to its vertical bands of embroidery, but the cut is wider and the sleeves are longer, the easier to fold them back to show off the sleeve embroidery.

In Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar, the *manthur* (“scattered”) style of embroidery is more common. Less ornate at the neckline, it drops down the front a meter or less. Since it uses less thread (which on the very best thobes is made of gold), and consequently less labor in ornamentation, it’s more affordable. The name actually refers to small embroidery motifs that are sewn all over the rest of the dress: paisleys, flowers, fanciful medallions, small circles or whatever a designer or customer fancies.

Bahrain is also famous for a striped thobe called *mufahhah*, named for the multicolored strips of fabric (*fahhah*) sewn together and embellished with embroidery and sequins. This echoes the style that townswomen and Bedouin in Najd sewed out of colorful remnants—only in the towns, they call it *mutaffat*, literally “taffeta’d,” or “the dress with taffeta.”

In Iraq, the thobe also goes by the name *hashmi*, which is possibly a reference to the country’s early 20th-century Hashemite rulers. In Kuwait,



Just before her wedding, a bride wearing an Emirati-style thobe is being decorated with henna. The henna artist and her companions wear the *korar*, a less extravagant style usually made of cotton or polyester, often from printed fabric. Although the *korar* has been traditionally favored by older women, younger women are adopting it today as an informal cover-up.

the traditional style was to make the garment from more sheer netted fabrics like tulle, and to sew a smaller embroidered panel in front. The neck opening also tended to be more open, rounded or with an elongated V-shape.

In the Emirates, women's thobes are often made from patterned fabric, and there is little embroidery on the thobe itself. Instead, there is fancy embroidery on the tight sleeves of the dress underneath, the *kandorah*; another distinction is that the neck embroidery panel of Emirati thobes is often square.

**O**n all types of thobes, the embroidery designs change much with the times. Decades ago, it was all about floral patterns and ornate medallions, as well as the crescent moon and star (*bilal wa najmah*). Today peacocks and butterflies appear on thobes. In the 1990s Saleh introduced

fanciful curlicues called *darb al-hayyah*, or “snake trail.” These days, some customers even like to have a family name worked into the embroidery.

Paging through his photo album of custom orders, Saleh stops to point out one black thobe completely covered with small embroidered gold triangles. He calls this sumptuous (and very expensive, he adds) style *sambusak*, since the embroidery triangles are shaped like the savory pastries from which the name is taken.

Then he turns to a photograph of a rare gem: a thobe with a large triangle of gold embroidery at the base of the front. This, he says, is a *thuraya* (“Pleiades”) thobe. It is so named, he says, because the appearance of the star cluster in the sky in September marked both the end of summer and, more importantly for the woman wearing the thobe, the end of the pearl-diving season.

## THOBE CARE

Traditionally, thobes and other special garments were air-dried and sometimes infused with expensive Aloeswood incense.

Costume expert Reem El-Mutwalli relates how in the Gulf, a pyramid-shaped frame of wood or bamboo would be set over a small incense burner, and the garments would be laid on the frame to fumigate for a few hours. Then the thobes would be stored in a dark place, such as a *sunduq*, or teak chest.

Don't hang them, says El-Mutwalli: The weight of the embroidery can stretch the fabric unevenly. Of course, modern thobes can also be dry-cleaned if the cleaners take care not to harm the embroidery.

A century ago in Bahrain and Kuwait, diving for natural pearls took men to sea for several months each summer. When the pearling ships returned, the crews' families greeted them on shore, the women and girls wearing their best thobes. According to Saleh, only the wives of the ship's captains would wear a thuraya style, which was expensive; some even had gold coins sewn onto them.

In recent years, women's thobes of various kinds have been turning up in modern places. At the 2012 Olympics in London, the female athletes from Bahrain wore three types in the opening parade: a nationally colored red manthur and two versions of the striped mufahhah. The 2009 short feature film *The Good Omen* by Bahrain director Mohammed Rashed Bu Ali took its title from a variation on the al-raayah or "banner" tradition of hoisting a woman's thobe on a pole above a house to celebrate the return of a family member: In this case, a despondent widower's spirits are lifted when his wife's ghost visits and he raises her thobe over his house. He calls it *thobe al-bisharah*, the "thobe of the good omen."

Fine thobes are also beginning to appear in museum collections. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has at least two, and the British Museum is home to the thobes of Dame Violet Dickson, wife of H.R.P. Dickson. In London, the nonprofit Mansoojat collection of Arabian women's dress features several striking examples, including one given by the founder of Saudi Arabia, King 'Abd al-'Aziz Al-Sa'ud, to Mary Eddy, wife of us Colonel William Eddy, who served as Minister Plenipotentiary to Saudi Arabia and translated between the King and President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the historic meeting of the two on the *USS Quincy* in the Suez Canal in 1945. Another fine, red thobe



The sleeves of thobes are extra-wide, in part so they can be draped over one's head for a quick cover, but also to show off embroidery at the sleeves. This *mufahhah*, or striped thobe, is famous in Bahrain.



Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. In recognition of her gift, the museum's Textile Society invited Arabian dress specialist Aisa Martinez to speak at the museum. Martinez is also a curator for the Zayed National Museum Project in Abu Dhabi.

Garments, she said, "are active participants in creating and fostering a sense of cultural identity ... [and] a form of non-verbal communication," one that "defines our roles in society" through "a language of personal adornment." They show which group you belong to or which tribe you're from, your wealth, status and social position.

Thobe customs are always changing, and popularity waxes and wanes. While weddings were once the principal occasion for a thobe, women today follow international fashion trends,

or wear traditionally inspired gowns that mix and match old and new, Morocco with Pakistan and Paris. While in the past women often danced in their thobes at weddings, these days women and girls might don a thobe when performing folk dances at festivities such as national day celebrations.

Women in one Iraqi family recall how the custom of wearing thobes changed over four generations. Nawal Barbuti grew up in Iraq in the 1950s and '60s, and she recalls that her grandmother's generation wore the hashmi and the sayah dress under plain black *abayas* when they went out. In her mother's generation, women favored Western dress styles,

nashal in that collection was originally a gift to an American friend from Saudi Arabia's Queen Effat, wife of King Faisal.

In Boston, the Museum of Fine Arts received several thobes from Dawn Nordblom, an American who lived in



Flanked by mannequins displaying the *manthur* style, Mohamed Saleh runs Saleh for Zari in Bahrain. Manthur is popular all over the region, and it is distinguished by a smaller embroidery panel in front and embroidery motifs scattered throughout the garment. *Opposite:* In addition to visiting shops, women now often buy thobes like any other clothing—online, often interacting with designers who post on Instagram and their own websites.

and the only time they wore a hashmi was to put on a black one for a funeral. In the late 1970s, there was hashmi revival, led by the government-run Iraqi Fashion House. Barbuti's daughter Sara remembers wearing a red hashmi made by a family friend when she attended henna parties as a child in the 1980s.

One of the most active thobe-revival markets today, according to Saleh, is in Qatar. He flies the 280-kilometer roundtrip between Manama and Doha at least once a week. But now, instead of a suitcase full of samples, he packs maybe just one or two thobes, a pair of mobile phones and a laptop. More and more sales, he says, are coming through his posts on Instagram, and he takes orders over WhatsApp.

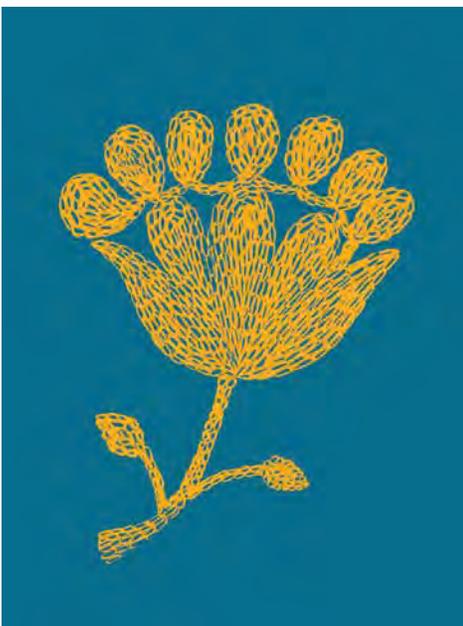
One of his Qatari customers, he says, recently ordered several dozen manthur-style thobes of tulle in a bouquet of

colors for the guests at her daughter's wedding, and she of course encouraged them to wear the thobes at the party.

Artist Hend al-Mansour recalls how growing up in al-Hasa Oasis in Saudi Arabia, she would watch her aunt make and embroider thobes on her sewing machine. Now an artist living in the US, al-Mansour maintains her family ties and says young women in al-Hasa have returned green and red thobes, after years of fashion neglect, to the henna-party tradition. Al-Mansour says she herself wore a green one at her own wedding in 2002.

It's a key part of her identity, says al-Mansour, who says she always keeps at least one in her closet. She recalls that while studying at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design she once made a full-size self-portrait—dressed in her thobe.

Laila al-Bassam teaches a course in traditional Saudi women's dress at Riyadh's Princess Noura University in



Five details of the many hand-embroidered motifs used on the garments often worn with the thobe, *sirwal* (gathered pantaloons) and *dira'ah* (long-sleeved gowns), drawn from displays in the Bahrain National Museum.

which her students cut and sew five traditional garments. A long-time collector of these garments and a fashion designer herself, al-Bassam wrote a book whose Arabic title translates to *Traditional Inheritance of Women's Clothing in Najd*, about the women's dress of her hometown of 'Unayzah.

"People wear these gowns in Ramadan now. It is very important to attend evenings in Ramadan in this kind of dress—but new ones, not exactly the old ones," she says. "People here are really interested in this kind of fashion. It looks nice and it gives the effect of the old gowns, with the cut lines and embroidery.

"For myself, sometimes I copy the old, but I use new colors since the traditional style was usually black. So I make a mutaffat [striped]-style thobe, but in all colors—red, fuchsia, green—any colors I can find."

Writing about late 20th-century traditions in the UAE, Reem El-Mutwalli authored a beautifully illustrated, bilingual book, *Sultani: Traditions Renewed*.

For her own part, she says that although she follows fashion in the UAE, where she has lived for

## POP THOBE

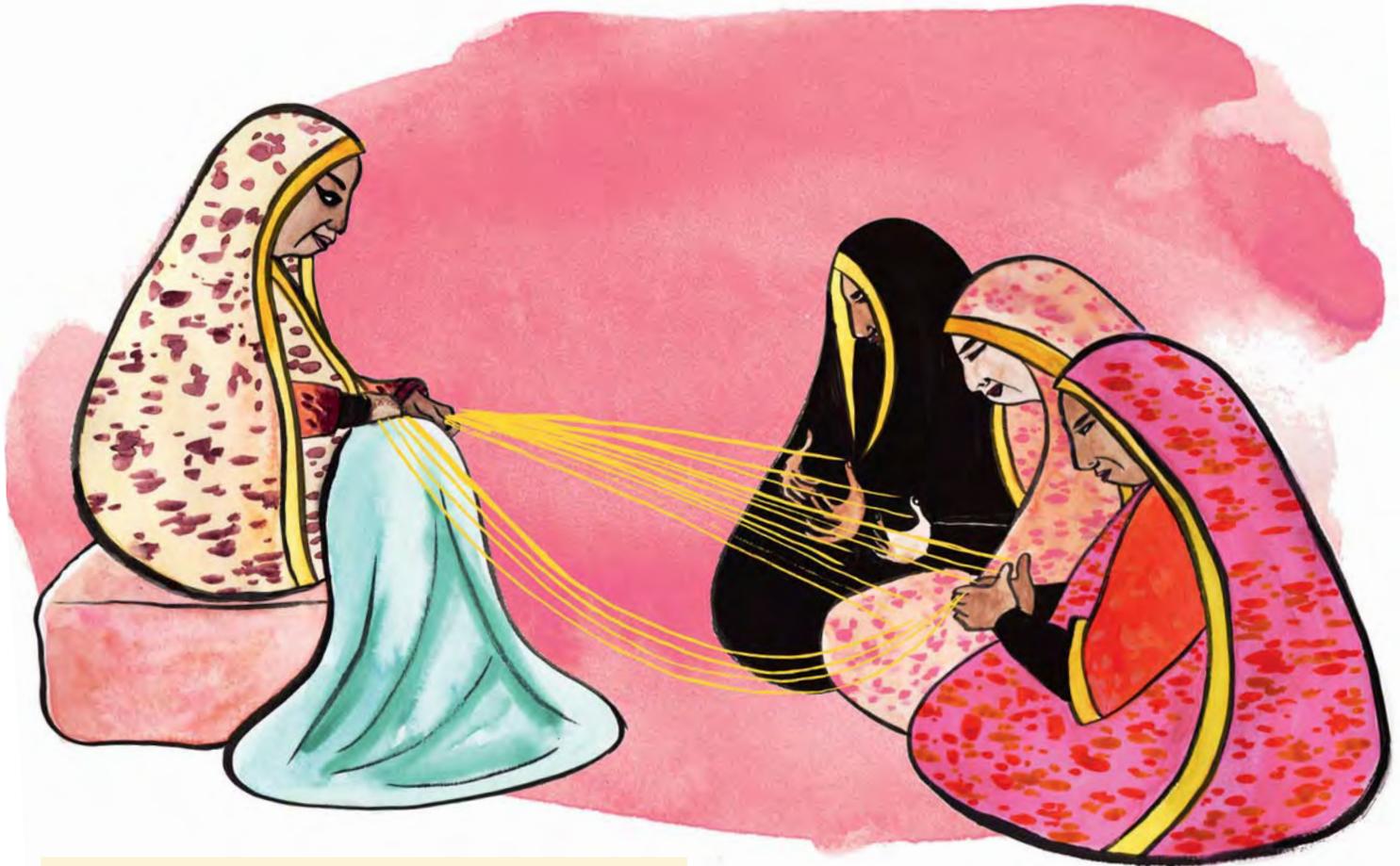
In the 1970s, Kuwaiti singer Abbas al-Badri's hit "Khalijiyah" ("Gulf Girl") mentioned the thobe.

The lyrics are translated here into English:

*The embroidered thobe, it sparkles when you walk by.*

*The embroidered thobe, it's a candle on a night of longing.*

*The embroidery is scattered on your thobe, O beauty...*



## KORAR COOPERATIVE

In Bahrain, women used to create wide bindings on the sleeves of the korar-style thobe in gold thread using a cooperative weaving technique that was also called korar.

After weighing enough gold thread for the dress, a group of women would sit in a semicircle—with gold threads looped around all their fingers.

Across from them sat the *mukarrirah*, who would gather up all their threads and sew them by hand onto the binding. In the process, the women would move their hands in unison to weave the thread strands together to form a thicker thread. Later, to make the threads shine, the women would gently pound the binding with a wooden mallet. The Ministry of Culture in Bahrain has established the House of Korar to preserve this cooperative art.

many years, she cherishes the thobes she inherited from her grandmother in Iraq, where she herself was born. Accordingly, she calls her own thobes hashmis, and she wears them for special occasions.

In the Emirates, she says, women still wear the thobe at festivities, religious holidays and wedding celebrations, and that “nowadays we have a tradition during Ramadan of people dressing up in Arab Islamic style ... so they look for the thobe al-nashal and the new contemporary versions [from] new designers,” she notes.

“They interchange between the traditional, the new versions and the metamorphosed versions of those. It runs in circles. Every few years you start having a return to that style, then going away from it and then coming back.” 🌐



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# Tasting TRINIDAD

Written by **Ramin Ganeshram** Photos by **Jean Paul Vellotti**



Mathematics may have been her *profession*, but now *maleeda* is one of Nazira Ali's *passions*.

**R**olling dough and baking, she makes the traditional sweet to share on Muslim holidays and also to send with pilgrims leaving her native Trinidad for the hajj in Makkah—with the provision they deliver some to her son, who lives there.

Maleeda is a sweetened dough ball made from a soft Indian griddle bread called *paratha roti* that first came to this Caribbean island in the late 19th century with Afghans, many of whom arrived as indentured servants, as well as with Muslims from India. Ever since then, Trinidadian maleeda has been adapted, like so many of its foods, to

Coming to the Caribbean island in the late 19th century with Afghan workers, balls of *maleeda* are made with shredded *paratha roti* (bread), and Trinidadians have adopted it into national fare with variations that include spices and a topping of ground coconut.

Zalayhar Hassanali served as the island nation's first lady from 1987 to 1997. She is widely credited with the betterment of social relations among Muslims and non-Muslims—an accomplishment in which food and cooking played a part. "When I became First Lady, I served East Indian, Chinese, Creole and Syrian foods at state dinners to demonstrate our nation's diversity," she says.



Today eastern Trinidad remains a largely Muslim and mixed-race enclave, bolstered in the mid-19th century by indentured servants hailing from what is now Pakistan and northern India. As with all of the faiths, ethnicities and cultures that make up Trinidad today, it is food that most often provides opportunities for fellowship and understanding.

"Growing up, I remember that it was always the men who would make the paratha

local tastes and ingredients such as coconut, cinnamon and clove, which are ubiquitous in Caribbean sweets—the latter two originally hailing from Southeast Asia. Although maleeda is to Muslims a special dessert for Muslims during Ramadan, the month of sunrise-to-sunset fasting, non-Muslim Trinidadians welcome it, too.

"It's a usual thing for neighbors to share sweets and foods with each other," says

Ali, now retired and living near Point Lisas, an oil-industry town in the central part of the island. She is part of Trinidad's Muslim community, which comprises mostly people of African, East Indian, Afghan and Syrian roots. "People will ask for and look forward to sweets like maleeda or *sawine*—the vermicelli pudding—that we normally make to bring to the mosque."

The two-island country of Trinidad and Tobago, the southernmost islands in the Caribbean chain, is a nation of many cultures. Just 13 kilometers off the coast of Venezuela, Trinidad was among the few places Christopher Columbus actually dropped anchor, and it quickly became a prize in the colonial battles for the New World. Initially colonized by Spain, it was taken by France and, for its longest period, England.

The colonial powers brought enslaved Africans here and, later, indentured Chinese and Indians of Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim faiths, all to work on the sugar and cocoa plantations that built Trinidad's first fortunes. (Today nearly half the island's economy relies on oil and gas.) Cocoa laborers were recruited also from Venezuela, and, later, refugees from Syria and Lebanon found their way to these shores in an ongoing immigration that began in the late 19th century and continues today.

Second to Christianity, Islam is the longest-practiced religion in Trinidad. The first known and, later, most prominent Muslim was Yunas Mohammed Bath, an enslaved West African from the area between the Senegal and Gambia rivers. Literate in Arabic, he arrived in Trinidad around 1805, and he quickly became a leader among fellow enslaved Mandingo (Muslim) Africans.

A decade later Africans who were originally enslaved in Georgia and the Chesapeake region of the US arrived in Trinidad, where they were granted their liberty and some land along the eastern shore as payment for military service to Britain during the War of 1812.

roti for big Islamic functions—weddings or holy days. They were the experts, so when anyone had a function—even if they were Hindu or Christian—the Muslim men were called upon as the best paratha roti-makers," says Ali's daughter Safiya, an attorney with Caricom, the Caribbean Community Secretariat, which promotes policy and development among

15 Caribbean nations. Safiya blogs about Trinidadian food on "Life-span of A Chennette," and her mother tests recipes after reducing them from the large volumes used to prepare food for crowds at the mosque.

In the same vein, notes Safiya, whenever there was a large function in the village that required



Middle Eastern fast food is the latest culinary arrival to Trinidad, where it has become a new favorite with the late-night crowd. Vendor Zuher Dukhen says that "mostly we serve chicken because that is okay for most everybody—Hindu or Muslim."



Spread below mountainous northern Trinidad lies the Caroni plain, and beyond its towns and cities stretch the once-vast plantations of sugar and cocoa that made Trinidad a contested prize among rival Spanish, French and British colonial powers. Each brought enslaved and indentured peoples variously from Africa, Asia and South America, leading to today's shared palate of tastes that is as varied as the island's history.

the help of women—perhaps for the ceremony beginning a Hindu wedding, or the celebration of Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights—all the ladies in town were called upon, and her mother, Nazira, especially was asked to join in making sweets.

“We didn’t participate in the fetes or dancing, but when there was a village ceremony, we participated in the cooking because we were part of the community,” says Safiya. She adds that she, her mother and sisters could help all the more easily at Hindu functions because they were vegetarian affairs, thus mooting any question about Islamic *halal* dietary codes concerning meat.

Many point to the presidency from 1987 to 1997 of Noor Hassanali, the country’s first Indian president and the first Muslim head of state in the Americas, as a watershed in the history of social relations among Muslims and non-Muslims in Trinidad. It was the efforts of his wife, First Lady Zalayhar Hassanali, often made through food, that perhaps provided the most tangible opportunities for cultural and culinary cross-pollination.

“When I became First Lady, I served East Indian, Chinese, Creole and Syrian foods at state dinners to demonstrate our nation’s diversity,” she says. “But one thing we never served was liquor or pork because we are Muslims.”

While there was at first some concern about how dignitaries both at home and from abroad would accept this, Hassanali says people respected the couple’s decision—including Great Britain’s Princess Anne, whom Hassanali recalls enjoying the First Lady’s freshly pressed juices from fruits grown on the presidential estate.

“Even though it was shocking to many for a head of state to create a restriction about things that are so integral to Western diplomatic etiquette and there were those who frowned on it, in the end people respected the Hassanalis’ decision,” says hotelier Gerard Ramsawak, who is also a founding member of a multicultural outreach association the works with the office of the president of Trinidad and Tobago.

As manager of Pax Hotel, a historic building on the grounds of Mt. St. Benedict, one of the island’s oldest monasteries, Ramsawak regularly attended state dinners that included diplomats, artists and business people

throughout President and First Lady Hassanali’s tenure.

“Mrs. Hassanali’s secret was that she embraced the larger culture of Trinidad and Tobago—a culture that is a melting pot where we’ve learned to appreciate each other’s differences,” he says.

Today food continues to represent mutually influential exchanges among Muslim and non-Muslim Trinidadians. While in the past most non-Muslim Trinidadians enjoyed Muslim foods, largely thanks to the generosity of Muslim neighbors and friends, some foods have become such a common part of daily life they are readily available to all.



# Spicy Buljol Bagel

## WITH LABNEH AND SCOTCH BONNET PEPPER

(Courtesy Adam's Bagels)

¾ lb salted cod fish	1 t freshly ground black pepper
1 small onion, minced	4 bagels, any style
1 clove garlic, minced	1 c labneh
1 pimento pepper (aji dulce) stemmed, seeded and minced	1 small scotch bonnet pepper, stemmed, seeded and sliced very thinly
1 medium tomato, diced	
1-2 T cilantro, minced	

1. In a large pot, cover fish with cold water and bring to boil. Simmer 20 minutes. Drain and repeat two more times to soften the fish and remove most salt. Put the drained fish in a large bowl and shred it with a fork.
2. Mix in onion, garlic, pimento and tomato. Add cilantro and ground pepper. Mix and refrigerate about 1 hour.
3. Slice the bagels and smear with labneh. Top with 2 to 3 tablespoons of buljol; top off with slices of scotch bonnet pepper.



The sawine that is a must-have for Muslims at 'Id al-Fitr has become so popular that major Trinidadian food manufacturing brands such as Chief and Sheik Lisha sell packaged, toasted vermicelli with premeasured spices so that anyone can make the dessert at home.

“Sawine is something we all like even though it’s an Islamic food,” says Ramsawak. “Chinese, Hindu, Christian—we all make it at home.”

The presence of halal meat shops and restaurants throughout the country, frequented by people of all faiths and ethnicities, are another example.

Sarina Nicole

Bland is part of the island’s extremely small Jewish community. She, too, blogs about the diversity of the cuisine in her homeland. She says she appreciates the ubiquity of halal restaurants, ranging from Chinese to burgers, Indian, barbecue, Arab and more.

“I keep kosher, and the laws of halal are extremely similar,” says Bland. “It makes things a lot easier for me.” Among her favorite Muslim Trinidadian

foods is “fat kurma,” another sweet dish that is often brought to mosques for Friday prayers. It is one of the many dishes that demonstrate the subtle difference between foods that are considered Muslim versus Hindu or simply Trinidadian. A crispy fried treat that is coated in sugar, the Muslim version of kurma is more like a tiny doughnut with a crisp crust.

“I’m not sure how or why the two versions came about, or why one became associated with Muslims or the other Hindu,” says Safiya. “But that could be said about a lot of our foods.”

Nazira says that paratha roti, which is the forebear

to the overwhelmingly popular “buss up shut”—in which the paratha is torn or shredded and has become the default standard to eat with curries—was considered Muslim while *dalpuri*—in which the paratha is stuffed with ground lentils—was largely thought to be Hindu, and was once only made for special occasions. “Now both are eaten by everyone interchangeably,” she says.

Also widely popular is *pelau*, the Trinidadian version of biryani, a Persian rice dish brought to India by the Mughal emperors. It is an excellent example of the influence, adaptation and evolution of Muslim dishes within Trinidadian cuisine. The layered rice dish is made with meat that is “browned” in caramel syrup in the African style and seasoned with “green seasoning,” a local mixed herb paste, hot pepper and coconut milk.

## Food continues to represent mutually influential exchanges among Muslim and non-Muslim Trinidadians.

Adam Abboud’s family-owned pastry shop in Port of Spain attracts a loyal clientele that comes for herbs and spices imported from Syria and Lebanon as well as uniquely local family recipes like Adam’s pepper sauce, which he tuned to Trinidadian tastes.





An informal café sells three serving sizes of pelau, the Trinidadian favorite that plays off Indian biryani but is browned in syrup in an African style and seasoned with Trinidadian “green seasoning,” hot pepper and coconut milk.

of the Sacrifice), in which cows, sheep and sometimes goats are sacrificed and the meat cooked immediately, while fresh. At the same time, pelau made from chicken or beef is a pan-Trinidadian dish often made for large gatherings and, especially, Sunday lunch with the family.

Even as the cuisine of Muslim Trinidadians has crossed over into larger culture and also been influenced by the culture around

Like the biryanis that are often served in mosques in India, Trinidadian pelau is an incredibly popular one-pot dish that is also often made in mosque kitchens, particularly after 'Id al-Adha (Feast

it, culinary evolution continues. A new wave of “Muslim food” is, again, changing the way Trinidadians eat—mostly in the form of the shawarma stands, locally called gyro (jie-roh), that now line major boulevards in towns, from the capital of Port of Spain in the north all the way down to San Fernando, the large oil-and-gas city in the south and, seemingly, everywhere in between.

Almost exclusively the bailiwick of the newest Syrian refugee immigrants, these stands range from independent operators, like Hassan’s, Yousef’s and Original’s, all the way to franchises like Pita Pit and even Lawrence of Arabia. Gyros are rapidly overtaking “traditional”

## Republic of Trinidad AND Tobago



Attorney and local food blogger at [www.chennette.net](http://www.chennette.net), Safiya Ali has seen through the experiences of her mother, Nazira Ali, and her grandparents how food bonds Trinidad’s multi-ethnic society.

fast-foods like *doubles*, a curried chickpea sandwich and oyster shooters from mangrove oysters, as the go-to after-party food for the clubbing crowd.

“The people line up for gyros every night,” says Zuher Dukhen who with his brothers arrived in Trinidad within the last few years.

At their takeout stand, named Sami’s Arabian, they make their meat daily, hand-forming it using traditional methods. “Mostly we serve chicken because that is okay for most everybody—Hindu or Muslim.”

While for now the fare of this new food community remains fairly true to its ethnic origins, if the history of this island is any indication of the future, then it will not be long until it, too, is adapted, assimilated and in turn influenced.

“It wasn’t easy to make pure Arabic foods when our grandfathers first came,” says Adam Abboud, a Syrian-Lebanese Trinidadian whose Christian ancestors arrived more than a century ago. “They made do using things like the local *shado beni* for cilantro and *pachoi* for spinach. We made *shankleesh* cheese using cow’s milk instead of sheep’s milk. Now, it’s our own Trinidadian thing, and it’s what we prefer.”

Shankleesh is a homemade cheese made from aging strained yogurt (*labneh*) that is then rolled in spices and herbs, most often the Lebanese thyme called *za’atar*. Abboud is the proprietor of Adam’s Bagels, an eatery that bakes Arab breads onsite and serves olives, olive oil, herbs and spices imported from Syria and Lebanon, as well as locally made shankleesh.

Safiya Ali agrees. “My mother’s father was a Syrian Muslim who came here in the 1940s, and my mom made plenty of *kibbeh* and *falafel* when I was growing up, but I remember having to travel to Port of Spain to get the ingredients she needed. They weren’t so common as they are now,” she says.

For Trinidadians, these cultural nuances are just part of what it means to be Trinidadian.

Nazira Ali recalls attending mosque school every evening as well as the village Sunday school while she was growing up—with children of all faiths.

“We still all identified with our own religion,” she says. “Whenever the lesson was about biblical stories—like Ibrahim or the story of Christmas—we’d share our version of what Islam says about it,” she explains. “It was just learning. We grew up together and respected each other, in practicing our faith and in sharing our food.” ☪



## Beef Pelau SERVES 6

Pelau really exemplifies Trinidadian cuisine’s fusions. A variation of East Indian *pilau*, which originated in Persia, it is very similar to the *biryani* of the court of the Mughal emperors in India. (Its name likely came from *birinj*, the Persian word for rice.) The process of browning the meat in sugar is an African tradition, and although ketchup is a New World addition, it may have its basis in tomato chutneys brought to Trinidad by the English.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 c dry or 1 (12-oz.) can pigeon peas, pinto beans or black-eyed peas | 2 t “green seasoning” (see recipe below)                              |
| 2 c long-grain rice   | ½ c chopped parsley   |
| 3 T canola oil  | 1 sprig thyme   |
| ¾ c sugar (white or brown)  | 2 carrots, peeled and chopped   |
| 3 lb stewing beef, cut into chunks                                    | 5 scallions, ends trimmed and minced ( <i>white and green parts</i> ) |
| 1 small onion, chopped  | 2 c cubed fresh calabaza or butternut squash                          |
| 1 clove garlic, minced  | 1 small whole scotch bonnet pepper                                    |
| 1 c canned coconut milk   | ½ c ketchup   |
| 1 bay leaf  | 1 T butter  |

1. If using dried peas, soak them overnight in 3 cups of water. Drain. Bring 3 fresh cups of water to a boil in a saucepan and add the peas. Simmer for 15 minutes, or until cooked almost completely through. Drain and set aside. If using canned beans, drain, rinse with cold water, drain again, and set aside.
2. Wash the rice by placing it in a colander or fine-mesh sieve and running cold water over it until the water runs clear. (About 1 minute.) Drain well and set aside.
3. Heat the oil over medium heat in a Dutch oven or other heavy, deep pot. Add the sugar and swirl in the pot, stirring constantly. Allow it to caramelize to a dark brown color. Add the beef pieces and stir well to coat. Add the onion and garlic and cook for 1 to 2 minutes, stirring constantly.
4. Stir in 1 cup of water, the coconut milk, bay leaf, green seasoning, parsley, thyme, carrots and scallions. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer for 10 minutes.
5. Stir the rice, squash, peas, hot pepper, ketchup and butter into the beef. Cover and cook for 20 minutes, or until the peas and vegetables are tender. Remove lid and fluff the rice. The rice should be moist but not sticky.

## Green Seasoning for Pelau MAKES 1 CUP

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| ¼ c vinegar                                | 1 bunch fresh thyme, leaves removed |
| ¼ c water or as needed                     | ½ c fresh oregano leaves            |
| 1 bunch fresh chives, end trimmed, chopped | ½ bunch fresh, flat parsley leaves  |
| ½ c cilantro leaves                        | 4 cloves garlic                     |

1. Place all ingredients in a food processor and process into a smooth paste. Add more water as necessary to achieve this consistency.
2. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to one week.

## Sawine SERVES 8

Probably named from *saviyan*, the Urdu word for vermicelli noodles, sawine is the Trinidadian version of *vermicelli kbeer*, the popular noodle pudding that is served during 'Id al-Fitr. The Trinidadian version features evaporated milk, which is more common on the island than fresh milk, which was, historically, less available. Cinnamon, candied cherries and “mixed essence”—a popular flavoring for Caribbean sweets—are also featured in this version.

1 8-oz package vermicelli noodles (available in Middle Eastern and Indian grocers)  
 ½ t ground cinnamon  
 ½ t cloves  
 1 pinch of salt  
 4 c evaporated milk  
 ¼ c sugar  
 ½ t mixed essence (available in Caribbean grocery stores or substitute ¼ t vanilla extract and ¼ t almond extract)  
 ½ c blanched slivered almonds  
 ½ c golden raisins  
 ½ c candied maraschino cherries, minced

1. Break the vermicelli into 5-cm pieces and place them in a dry skillet over medium-low heat. Toast until golden brown and remove from the pan, about 3 to 4 minutes.
2. Bring 2 cups of water, the cinnamon, cloves and salt to a boil in a large saucepan, and add the vermicelli. Cook over low heat until most of the water is evaporated and the vermicelli is soft, about 10 to 12 minutes.
3. Stir in the evaporated milk, sugar and mixed essence (or substitute). Bring to a simmer, stirring often, until the sugar is dissolved, about 5 to 6 minutes.
4. Pour into a deep bowl and allow to cool. Stir in the almonds, raisins and candied cherries and serve.



## Fat Kurma MAKES ABOUT 50 KURMA

(Courtesy Safiyah Ali)

Kurma is an incredibly popular Indo-Trinidadian sweet snack that is sold in roadside stands. However, the version that is publicly sold is a hard crunchy version that is widely different from the Muslim version that is more like a tiny donut with a crusty outside and soft center.

- 5 c flour  
 ½ t cinnamon  
 ¼ t cardamom  
 ½ t clove  
 1 T finely grated ginger (or as desired)  
 3 oz evaporated milk  
 3 oz water  
 1 stick butter (4 oz.)  
 3 oz. condensed milk  
 4 c oil for frying  
 1½ c granulated sugar
1. In a large bowl, whisk the flour, cinnamon, cardamom, clove and half of the ginger together. Add the butter and, using a pastry cutter or a fork, cut the butter into the flour until it looks like fine breadcrumbs.
  2. Mix the evaporated milk and water together and set aside. Add half of the condensed milk to the flour mixture and half of the evaporated milk mixture to the flour mixture and knead the dough until it is smooth, about 5 minutes.
  4. Separate the dough into 4 balls and knead again for 2 to three minutes and set aside to rest.
  5. Heat the oil in a heavy bottomed pot over medium heat for 4 to 5 minutes. Test the oil by dropping a pinch of flour into the oil. If it sizzles immediately the oil is ready.
  6. Roll out one of the dough balls into a rope about 1 cm thick and about 30-40 cm long. Cut the dough on a diagonal into pieces about 4 cm.
  7. Fry the pieces in batches until golden brown. Remove and place on a wire rack or paper-towel lined tray. Repeat for each ball.
  8. Make the *paag* (sugar syrup): Put sugar and ½ cup of water to boil in a large pot with the remaining ginger until the sugar mixture spins a thread when dropping from a spoon.
  9. Add the remaining condensed milk and boil again until the mixture spins a thread.
  10. Place this mixture in a large wide bowl and add the kurma. Stir continuously until each kurma is coated.
  11. Transfer to another bowl or tray to spread out a bit so that the kurma doesn't clump together as it dries.

# Maleeda

MAKES ABOUT 50 MALEEDA

(Courtesy Safiyah Ali)

Historically, maleeda was made by Afghan women who said prayers while breaking up the griddle bread in their hands so it will become a *nazr* (“wish made to God”). In Trinidad, as in its regions of origin, maleeda is used for births, weddings, engagements and other special occasions including ‘Id al-Fitr. On the Caribbean island, coconut, black pepper and maraschino cherries add a twist to the original.

4 (hot) paratha roti (see recipe right)	½ t ground cinnamon
1 c flaked, desiccated, unsweetened coconut	½ t ground cardamom
¾ c brown sugar	¼ t ground cloves
8 oz butter or ghee, melted	1 pinch black pepper
½ t vanilla extract	¼ cup each of raisins and candied maraschino cherries (chopped)
	⅔ c evaporated milk

1. Chop the parathas into fine pieces, about the size of rice grains, using a food processor or by hand.
2. Add shredded parathas to mixing bowl with all ingredients except the milk.
3. Mix well, adding milk slowly until the maleeda comes together to be able to form firm balls.
4. Form into balls about the size of golf balls and serve at room temperature. Cover unused maleedas and store in the refrigerator for up to three days.



FOR MALEEDA

# Paratha Roti

MAKES 4 ROTI

Paratha roti is the soft griddle bread that is served with curries throughout Trinidad. *Paratha* is a combination of the Indian words *parat* (“layers”) and *atta*, which refers to the base flour; *roti* is an all-purpose Sanskrit word that means “bread.” The method of making paratha roti is to create *loyas*, or layered cones of dough, brushed with butter paste. These help to make the fluffy layers in the finished roti.



2 c flour
2 T baking powder
1 pinch of salt
warm water as needed
3 T canola oil
2 T butter
1 T vegetable shortening
flour as needed

1. Combine the flour, baking powder and salt together in a large bowl. Gradually add water as needed to bring the flour together into a very soft dough. Do not over-knead. Gently knead in 1 tablespoon of the oil, and set it aside to rest for 15 minutes.
2. Divide the dough balls into four equal pieces. Set aside to rest again for 15 minutes. While the dough is resting, mix the butter, shortening and remainder of the oil into a thick paste and set aside.
3. Flour a work surface. Roll out a ball of dough into a thin circle less than ½ cm thick. Brush with the paste and sprinkle liberally and evenly with additional flour. Slice the circle from the outer edge toward the center, and stop slicing at the center. Starting on either side of the cut, roll the dough away from you into a cone shape.
4. Roll the cone into a ball by pinching the edges of the wider end of the ball closed, then pushing the narrow end of the cone toward the wider end and pinching the edges closed. Repeat with the remaining pieces of dough. Let the balls rest for 15 to 20 minutes on a floured surface.
5. Heat a tawa or cast iron griddle over medium heat for 1 to 2 minutes. Test the griddle by dropping a drop of cold water on it. If it sizzles immediately it is ready.
6. Flour a clean work surface generously and roll the rested dough into thin circles about ½ cm thick or a bit less, and place on a tawa or cast iron griddle. Brush with oil and turn over immediately and brush with oil again.
7. Cook the paratha until the surface is bubbled and puffy and then turn over and cook the other side for 1 minute more.
8. Remove from the pan and repeat with all the dough.
9. If making maleeda, shred; if not, serve warm and whole.



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# RETURNING TREASURES

TO  
THE  
—

# KINGDOM

WRITTEN BY

ARTHUR P. CLARK

**WHEN BOB ACKERMAN SET OUT** with his family on a desert picnic one day in 1972 to Jubail near Saudi Arabia's east coast, the farthest thing from his mind was archeology. A refinery engineer for the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco), Ackerman simply enjoyed the outdoors.

“**F**or some reason I don't understand and never will, some impulse caused me to bend over and scratch the sandy surface of this windblown area with my finger,” he says. He struck something hard. When he brushed away the sand, he found nine intact ceramic pots, each about a handspan wide at its mouth. He took three of them back to his home. After some research, he estimated they could be as much as 4,000 years old. When he returned to the us a few years later, he took the pots with him.

That was before Saudi Arabia had well-established museums and antiquities-preservation institutions, before regulations controlled the export of antiquities. For Ackerman and many others, including many Saudi citizens, such pots were just souvenirs of a not-too-extraordinary day's outing.

Others, however, took their amateur collecting more seriously. This led to the popularity of the term “pot-picking” that, beginning in the 1950s, described a largely recreational activity that lasted through the late '70s, when Saudi Arabia

began its concerted effort to preserve its national archeological heritage at home.

Beverly Swartz recalled this informal archeology as “an unequaled, heart-thumping thrill, no matter how many times we experienced it.” She and her husband, Carter, moved with their three children in 1958 to Dhahran, Aramco's headquarters, where Carter helped guide management-training programs. On weekends and holidays, the family would join others to travel, explore, camp—and collect antiquities.

Swartz said that often their campsites were “littered with arrowheads and other Stone Age tools.” With her avid interest in archeology, she knew the significance of her family's finds: The only problem was that there was no place to put them except in boxes and on shelves at home, organized by type and location.

Today, that's no longer the case. Shortly after Saudi Arabia opened its National Museum in 2001 in Riyadh, it began formally to welcome antiquities home. In 2003 the country made preservation a goal of what is now the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTNH), headed by



“Not gems or gold,” says Bob Ackerman of clay pots he found on a picnic in 1972, “but they have a value.” Rachel Dewan, executive director of Saving Antiquities for Everyone, observes that “context is really key. The added meaning and significance of an object in its place of origin is powerful. Fortunately, many people around the world recognize this.”

Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, the first international legal framework for controlling traffic in cultural property. In the four decades since, repatriation of antiquities has become a global effort. Such repatriations “strengthen national sentiment [and] increase social cohesion,” says UNESCO spokesman Edouard Planche. “[They] also allow experts and tourists to study and to visit antiquities on the sites of origin,” while contributing to economic development through the tourism industry.

For example, the J. Paul Getty Museum in California has returned treasures to the Italian Ministry of Culture, while an exhibition in January at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo showed off about 200 antiquities from among some 500 that had been repatriated from the US, UK, Germany, Belgium and Australia.

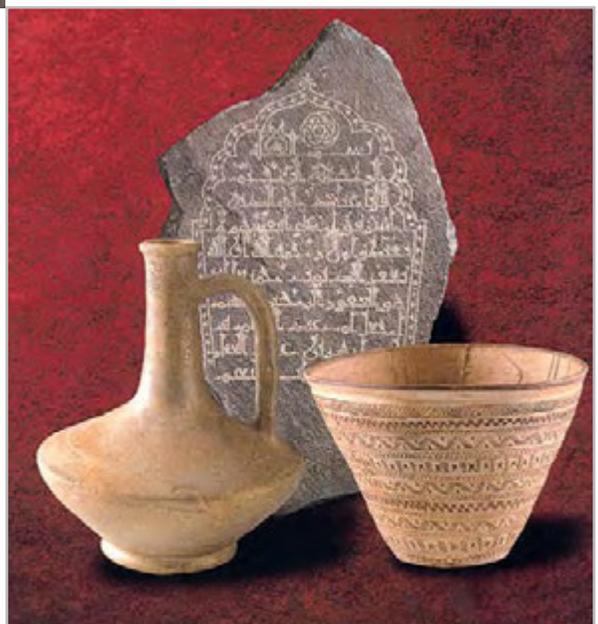
“While the past belongs to all of us collectively, context is really key,” says Rachel Dewan, executive director of Saving Antiquities for All, a US-based nonprofit organization dedicated to thwarting smuggling and supporting antiquities repatriations. “The added meaning and significance of an object

Prince Sultan ibn Salman ibn Abdulaziz. Since then, the SCTNH has focused much on the return of archeological artifacts from the private collections of Saudis and former expatriates to make them available for study and museum display.

It is an effort that relies almost entirely on goodwill. Ali I. Al-Ghabban, vice president of the SCTNH, points out that almost every one of what now totals more than 46,000 objects—some 16,000 from Saudis and 30,000 from expatriates—has been handed over voluntarily. For Swartz and others, the process was satisfying. “When we started our desert excursions and artifact collecting, the kingdom was not yet focused on discovering and preserving archeological sites,” she said in an interview before her death in 2013. “We not only enjoyed our finds, but felt we were saving them for eventual recognition and identification. Their rightful home is back in Saudi Arabia.”

In 1976 Saudi Arabia became signatory to the 1970 UNESCO

To date, some 46,000 items have been donated by more than 100 people. The artifacts will be housed at the National Museum in Riyadh as well as regional museums.



**Saudi Arabian Antiquities  
Recovered from Within the  
Kingdom and Abroad**



Left to right: This camel petroglyph was found in the 1970s on a rubble pile under a cliff in Wadi al-Faw that donor Pat Oertley describes as “mostly animals and stick figures.” Varieties of worked stone found over the course of several decades of off-road family camping trips, donated by Beverly Swartz. Glass bracelet fragments, some likely dating to Roman times, donated by Virginia Onnen.

in its place of origin is powerful. Fortunately, many people around the world recognize this importance.”

One of them was Elinor Nichols of Bailey’s Island, Massachusetts. Indeed, her wish to repatriate what she lightly calls “a rather heavy shipment of rocks”—140 kilograms in all, it turned out—helped set in motion the ongoing artifact-repatriation campaign aimed at former expatriates. Prominent in her collection were limestone and basalt grinding stones and a meter-long stone block inscribed with Taymanitic script dating to the sixth century BCE. By 2012 what became the Antiquities Homecoming Project had harvested some 14,000 items from 14 US donors, and more came from an additional 25 donors later. The objects range from arrowheads to stone

blades and axe-heads, and from glass bracelet pieces to petroglyphs, coins, clay pots, shards and figurines.

In response to Nichols’s donation, Prince Sultan wrote to her personally. “As you know, preserving and exhibiting ancient treasures of the kingdom has become a major cultural effort” with several goals, he explained. “First, to increase tourism to these unique sightseeing attractions, and second, to enhance the education of Saudi Arabians

**“MANY OF THE RECOVERED OBJECTS WERE ACQUIRED BY PEOPLE WHO APPRECIATED, VALUED AND PRESERVED THEM. RETURNING THEM NOW SHOWS A GREAT APPRECIATION FOR THE HISTORY OF OUR NATION.”**

—PRINCESS ADELA BINT ABDULLAH

about their heritage and history. Our efforts to discover and preserve the treasures of our history has hit a responsive note among Saudis, who are eager to learn more of their past.”

A personal album photo shows the Swartz and Hills families, camped in the available shade near Jabal Berri (“Mt. Berri”) in the Jubail region in the northeast of Saudi Arabia. “When we started our desert excursions and artifact collecting, the kingdom was not yet focused on discovering and preserving archeological sites,” said Swartz. “We felt we were saving them for eventual recognition.”



**FROM THE 1950S TO '70S**, some amateur archeology in the kingdom approached near-professional level. Marny Golding and elementary school teacher Grace Burkholder, both “weekend archeologists” from Dhahran, in 1970 won applause at the Third International Conference on Asian Archeology in Bahrain for their discovery in Saudi Arabia of pottery from the Iraq-based ‘Ubaid culture that dated as far back as 5000 BCE. The women donated their ‘Ubaid-ware finds and other artifacts to the Ministry of Education. In the 1980s, Golding also played a role in the establishment of archeological exhibits at the ministry’s first museum in Dammam, capital of the Eastern Province. Burkholder wrote a book in 1984, *An Arabian Collection: Artifacts from the Eastern Province*, about her finds in the region. This year, some of the ‘Ubaid ware she found is planned for display among the inaugural exhibitions of the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran.

Indeed, Saudis have responded positively. In 2012, Al-Ghabban accepted return of a heritage piece dating to the early period of Islam from Daifallah Al-Ghofaili, a private museum owner from al-Rass, northwest of the kingdom’s capital. “I was prompted to hand over the antique in recognition of the top priority and concern given by [SCTNH] authorities to preserve these treasures,” Al-Ghofaili told the newspaper *Al-Eqtisadiyah*. “This move would contribute substantially to highlighting the kingdom’s heritage and its sublime position in the human civilization,” he added.

Similarly, the newspaper reported that Abdul Aziz bin Khaled Al-Sudairy donated 15 artifacts, including an inscribed marble-and-bronze piece from al-Ukhud in the kingdom’s southwest that dates from between 600 and 300 BCE. “No

one except me, my children and those visiting us ever saw them,” he said, adding that he hoped his donation would enable more people to view them in museums.

Among Elinor Nichols’s donations was this pair of limestone grinding stones. The indentation near her finger held a wooden handle used to turn the top stone against the lower one. “We enjoyed looking at them around our home,” says Nichols. “As time passed, I realized they should all be returned.”



Found in 1969 by Roger and Elinor Nichols near Tayma, a caravan oasis town in northwest Saudi Arabia, this stone with a Taymanitic inscription was likely carved around the sixth century BCE.

In February 2012 Prince Sultan invited expatriate donors—many in their 70s and 80s, and most with Aramco connections—together with family members to join 80 Saudi donors in a ceremony of recognition held at the National Museum.

Addressing the expatriate donors, Prince Sultan said, “I’m very happy to see people and their children bringing back important treasures. We are experiencing the golden age of antiquities and heritage in Saudi Arabia.” The country is, he added, undertaking a national project to establish new, regionally focused museums. “You are not just giving back artifacts,” he said. “You are being part of a major heritage initiative.”

Princess Adela bint Abdullah, a daughter of late King Abdullah ibn Abdulaziz and head of the National Museum’s consultation committee, met with the expatriate women and complimented them. Many of the returned objects “were acquired by people who appreciated, valued and preserved them,” she said. Voluntarily repatriating precious artifacts “shows a great appreciation for the history of our nation. I believe the gesture was a great one as after keeping them for a long time some would feel that those pieces were part of their lives.”

This struck a chord with donor Pat Oertley, who had donated a camel petroglyph that she had found on a pile of rubble under a cliff that was inscribed with “mostly animals and a few stick figures” at Wadi al-Faw in southwestern Saudi Arabia. “I’m very pleased to return the camel, but I will miss him,” she said.

Of the three pots Ackerman found while picnicking, he said simply, “They belong in Saudi Arabia. I’m pleased to have the opportunity to return them.” ☺



**Arthur P. Clark** (arthur.clark@aramcoservices.com) is an assistant editor of *AramcoWorld*, editor of *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah*, the magazine for Aramco retirees, and coordinator of the Antiquities Homecoming Project for Aramco Services Company.

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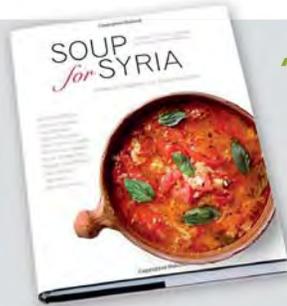




# SUGGESTED READING

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### Soup for Syria: Recipes to Celebrate Our Shared Humanity

Barbara Abdeni Massaad. 2015, Interlink, 978-1-56656-089-4, \$30 hb. Good food and good photography are natural companions, and here they come together for a good cause. Cookbook author Barbara Abdeni Massaad has made a career photographing Lebanon’s back roads in search of its culinary heritage. Recently, that has also meant meeting some of the country’s thousands of Syrian refugees. Her intimate portraits of these displaced men, women and children are paired with unique soup recipes from a very different set of friends—celebrity cookbook authors and chefs. Contributors include Alice Waters, Claudia Roden, Paula Wolfert and Greg Malouf. Levantine cooks also provide local flavors, such as Aziz Hallaj’s Aleppo Red Lentil with Verjuice and Paola Skaff’s Pumpkin Soup with Cardamom. Proceeds from the book will go toward humanitarian care for the refugees residing in a country heavily burdened by the scars of its wars. —ALIA YUNIS



### An Alexandria Anthology: Travel Writing through the Centuries

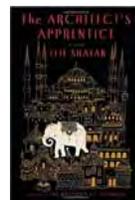
Michael Haag, ed. 2014, Auc Press, 978-9-77416-672-3, \$18.95 hb.

This collection of short writings by travelers from Plutarch to Naguib Mahfouz depicts Alexandria from its founding on Egypt’s coast by Alexander the Great, to its Hellenistic golden age, to Roman rule, to the Arab conquest, Alexandria’s rebirth under the pasha Muhammad Ali, its move toward modernity amid the world wars and into today’s era. Some of the works are impressionistic, some starkly realistic, others humorous, melancholy, informative or poetic. Ibn Battuta writes of his 1326 visit, when he viewed the remnants of

“I am a food writer and photographer. How can I use my trade to help the unfortunate and send a message of peace through the two great passions of my life: food and photography?”

the legendary Pharos lighthouse. Florence Nightingale (1849) surprises the reader with adventure, as she luxuriates in Pompeian baths, wages war against mosquitos and describes riding one of Alexandria’s sturdy little donkeys, which “runs like a velocipede.” Rich portraits of early 20th-century Alexandria are furnished by E.M. Forster, Constantine Cavafy and Lawrence Durrell. Durrell’s friend Gwyn Williams describes a chilling descent into the little-known catacombs at Kom el-Shogafa. Amid all this, we are constantly reminded of Durrell’s reference to Alexandria as a “dream city,” where the glorious past hovers over the reality of a sometimes drab but ever genteel (and essentially Levantine) seaside metropolis.

—ROBERT W. LEBLING



### The Architect’s Apprentice: A Novel

Elif Shafak. 2015, Viking, 978-0-52542-797-1, \$27.95 hb.

This is the semi-historical story of the Ottoman architect Sinan (d. 1588) and his hundreds of mosques and other works in Istanbul and beyond, seen through the eyes of Jahan, a mahout caring for an elephant intended as a war machine but used instead at busy construction sites in the imperial city. Jahan has a lifelong crush on Suleiman the Magnificent’s beloved daughter, Princess Mihrimah, while he works as Sinan’s most trusted assistant. Without meaning to, the naive Jahan upsets the order of the entire court, bumping into everyone from the grand vizier and chief eunuch to the royal menagerie’s bear and lion tamers. The author ably imbues her work with flavors reminiscent of those in her compatriot Orhan Pamuk’s *My Name is Red*, telling multiple stories that dare not be disbelieved even when historical characters meet fictional counterparts in a backdrop

based on the eyewitness accounts of 16th-century Istanbul by diplomat Ogie Ghiselan de Busbecq and traveler Evliya Çelebi. And to anyone who appreciates Sinan’s exquisitely understated mosque dedicated to Mihrimah more than his grandiose masterpieces the Suleimaniye and Selimiye, Jahan’s unrequited romance provides its personal blueprint, however fictionalized it may be.

—LOUIS WERNER



### Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologists, Museums & the Struggle for Identities from World War I to Nasser

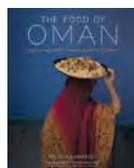
Donald Malcolm

Reid. 2015, Auc Press, 978-9-77416-689-1, \$59.95 hb.

It took a while—the so-called long 19th century (1798-1914), in fact. But with the discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb in 1922, Egyptian archeologists began embracing their own past with the same rigor as their French and British imperialist predecessors. In this sequel to his *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeologies, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, Donald Reid traces the evolution of Egypt’s four major branches of archeological study: Islamic, Coptic, Greco-Roman and ancient Egyptian. The nascent national movement went hand-in-hand with Egypt’s drive towards independence. “Revolutionary times are anything but predictable, and so it proved for the careers of Egyptian Egyptologists,” such as Amhad Kamal (1851-1923), founding father of native Egyptian archeology, Coptologist Murqus Simaika (1864-1944) and Islamic archeologist Ali Bahgat (1858-1924), he writes. Yet by the last half of the 20th century, busts of many of these pioneering scholars appeared alongside their European counterparts outside Cairo’s Egyptian Museum, indicating “not [a struggle]



of revolutionary overthrow but one of evolutionary inclusion," Reid observes in this fascinating history of historians. —TOM VERDE

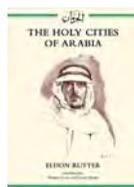


**The Food of Oman: Recipes and Stories from the Gateway to Arabia**

Felicia Campbell. 2016, Andrews McMeel, 978-1-44946-082-2, \$40 hb.

This is a well-informed and beautifully photographed love letter to a country and a cuisine that should lure many of its readers into joining the love-fest, either in their own Western kitchens—techniques and measurements are adapted—or, even better, in Omani restaurants and homes. Campbell made her initial culinary connection with the Middle East as a 17-year-old us Army private, went on to a master's degree and an award-winning career in food writing, and now lives permanently in Muscat. Thus she has all the riches of this multicultural cuisine available to her—the original dishes from or influenced by the Gulf, Iran, the desert, the mountains, the cliff coast, East Africa, Zanzibar and even Madagascar, as well as the many fusions they have brought forth, and also the new dishes that modern life has made possible. She includes a recipe from the back of an Omani vegetable-oil bottle—novel, but with traditional ingredients—that makes "one of the tastiest stews I've ever eaten." Campbell paints Oman as a most welcoming and delicious place.

—ROBERT ARNDT

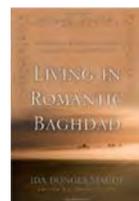


**The Holy Cities of Arabia**

Eldon Rutter. William Facey and Sharon Sharpe, intro. 2015, Arabian Publishing, 978-0-99298-082-5, £40 hb.

On its publication in 1928, *The Holy Cities of Arabia* was much admired, but since then it has been almost completely neglected. It is a pleasure to have it available again in a new edition. Not only does Eldon Rutter provide probably the best description of Makkah and Madinah written by a European, but he was in Arabia at a particularly significant moment: 1925–26. This was the time that Abdulaziz Al Sa'ud brought the Hijaz region of the western Peninsula into his realm, and Rutter—who had embraced Islam in Malaysia where he worked after serving in the British Army in the Middle East in World War I—met him on several occasions. Fluent in Arabic, Rutter immersed himself in traditional life in the Holy Cities, providing a vivid picture of the people and

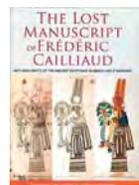
customs there. His book is therefore an important historical resource as well as a fascinating travel account. The introduction does an excellent job of tracing Rutter's tangled life, a story almost as intriguing as the one he tells himself. —CAROLINE STONE



**Living in Romantic Baghdad: An American Memoir of Teaching and Travel in Iraq, 1924-1947**

Ida Donges Staudt. John Joseph, ed. 2012, Syracuse UP,

978-0-81560-994-0, \$29.95 hb. Few have described early 20th-century Baghdad as "romantic," but American educator Ida Staudt found it just that. She and her husband, Dr. Calvin Staudt, traveled there in 1924 to open the American School for Boys, arriving the day Iraq's Constituent Assembly began work on a constitution for the fledgling nation. Staudt admitted that her perceptions of Baghdad were colored by readings of the *Thousand and One Nights* and other tales set in the great Abbasid capital. But she wrote frankly and compellingly about Baghdad of her day. She socialized with the city's movers and shakers, sat in on deliberations of the Iraqi parliament, explored the maze of narrow streets and markets, rowed on the Tigris and traveled far from the capital, describing with sensitivity the social customs and traditions of Iraq's many ethnic communities. She also pioneered girls' education, creating new learning opportunities for females. This book was completed in 1951, a year before her death, drawing details from diaries that have been lost. The manuscript was buried among family records and surfaced only in 2006. —ROBERT W. LEBLING



**The Lost Manuscript of Frédéric Cailliaud: Arts and Crafts of the Ancient Egyptians, Nubians, and Ethiopians**

Andrew Bednarski,

ed. and trans. 2013, Auc Press, 978-9-77416-616-7, \$49.50 hb. This tome will appeal to readers who feel compelled to complete their library of the 19th-century European literature on Egyptology. In that already extensive bibliography, Cailliaud is a leading figure of the century's first half, and his personal narratives of travels far up the Nile are nothing short of heroic in their daring and discoveries. A more recent discovery—in fact just 10 years ago in the dusty inventory of a London bookseller—was a manuscript he wrote later in life to

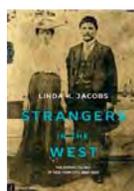
accompany a published suite of 66 color plates of tomb drawings of everyday objects and daily activities, from sandals and chairs to milking cows and preparing feasts. Chapters such as "On Games," "Transport of Statues" and "The Art of Preparing Hair"—which include his comments on contemporary practice and manufacture as observed in local homes and markets—amplify the meaning of the exquisitely reproduced images, on par with those in *Description de l'Égypte*. When he states, for instance, that a king in Ethiopia is coiffed the same way shown in a royal relief at the Temple of Apedemak in central Sudan, Cailliaud is certain because he had seen both, the carving and the king's hair, probably in the same week. —LOUIS WERNER



**On the Nile in the Golden Age of Travel**

Andrew Humphreys. 2015, Auc Press, 978-9-77416-693-8, \$34.95 hb.

In the late 19th century, a winter cruise on the Nile was one of the most glamorous social events of the season. Andrew Humphreys recreates the early heyday of the Nile cruise through diaries, period guidebooks and illustrations, vintage photos and travel posters. Prior to the arrival of steam, sailboats—in particular the *dahabiya*, a vessel with at least two sails and a number of cabins—conveyed travelers from Cairo to Aswan on a voyage lasting months. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 helped usher in the steam age and Thomas Cook & Son became the sole agency for Nile passenger-steamship service. Over time, the boats grew larger and more sumptuous, but the itinerary hardly varied. The golden age faded in the 20th century and boats were scrapped or converted to floating hotels and houseboats. The opening of the Nile Hilton in Cairo in 1959, along with two new cruise ships, heralded a resurgence of the trip, if not the style. —KYLE PAKKA



**Strangers in the West: The Syrian Colony of New York City, 1880-1900**

Linda K. Jacobs. 2015, Kalimah Press, 978-0-98353-925-4, \$29.95 pb.

Do not be put off by its seemingly restrictive title, for this wide-ranging history of Arab immigration to New York provides rich back stories to the families that came to America: why they arrived when they did, and how other ethnic

communities established before their appearance viewed and finally accepted them as New Yorkers. The author's deep dive into private and public archives—including letters to and from the old country, signboards and handbills from Arab grocery stores and vaudeville theaters, and court transcripts and church wedding registries (most of these early Arab immigrants were Christian)—illustrates with her trained anthropologist's eye how a foreign people became naturalized Americans. Turkish tobacco smoking parlors—"more ubiquitous than Starbucks," she writes—were popular among the Irish and Italians. Belly dancing was one of Thomas Edison's favorite film subjects. The orientalist taste for exotic wares even in the Midwest, stimulated perhaps by blue-blooded Washington Irving's bestselling *Tales of the Alhambra*, attracted New York's Arab peddlers to the country's heartland. When their original neighborhood in Lower Manhattan was cut into pieces by the building of the new car tunnel to Brooklyn, it was not a total loss—most of them had already moved there and beyond. —LOUIS WERNER



**The Zodiac Arch**

Freya Stark. 2014, Tauris Parke, 978-1-78076-688-1, \$17 pb. British explorer and travel writer Dame Freya Stark (1893-1993) was a remarkable

woman for her time—or any time. After university studies in history, Arabic and Persian, years of travel took her from North Africa and the Mediterranean through the Middle East and as far as Afghanistan. In Iran and in the Hadhramaut in southern Arabia, she explored sites where no Westerner had gone. She wrote more than two dozen books about her journeys. *The Zodiac Arch* is a collection of 34 essays, most no longer than eight pages, originally published in periodicals over nearly 50 years, beginning in 1919. In 1967 she gathered the essays into this book, linking those with common themes. Some are autobiographical; others are philosophical social commentaries on such topics as silence, greed or the meaning of life. Most, however, are about her travels: descriptions of landscapes, histories, economies and sometimes-whimsical stories of encounters with people, their animals and their customs. "The Golden Domes of Iraq and Iran" is an example of her sometimes-surprising historical insights, in this case that the first domed mosques were inspired by the architecture of Byzantine churches. —WILLIAM TRACY

—WILLIAM TRACY



# EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS

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## CURRENT

### CURRENT APRIL

**do it** **يدير**. Co-curated by Sharjah Art Foundation Director Hoor Al Qasimi and Serpentine Gallery Co-director Hans Ulrich Obrist, this exhibition is a new iteration of the ongoing publication and exhibition project founded and curated by Obrist in 1993. The exhibition is interactive and features artwork instructions by artists from 10 countries, some of which have been previously created and others that visitors can use to create artworks of their own. Everyone is invited to join in the workshops, activities and performances. Bait Al Shamsi, **Sharjah, UAE**, through April 23.

**One God—Abraham’s Legacy on the Nile:** *Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Egypt from Antiquity until the Middle Ages.* Seen for the first time from this unifying angle, the exhibition takes a closer look at the many facets of religious life and the day-to-day coexistence of the three faith communities in the country from the time of the Romans through the rule of the Fatimids in the 12th century. The exhibition starts in Alexandria—the political, cultural and theological capital founded in 331 BCE by Alexander the Great. Egyptian Christians emerged and splintered off

from the Alexandrian Jewish community, with Christianity eventually becoming the dominant state religion until the arrival of the Arabs in 641. In the following centuries, Muslim rulers developed their own cultural and artistic identity, incorporating elements of the long-standing Greco-Roman tradition. Bode-Museum, **Berlin**, through April 30.

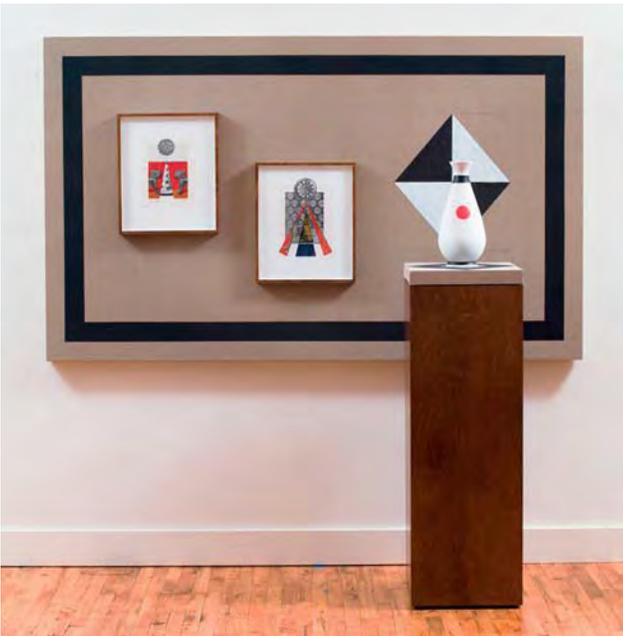
### CURRENT MAY

**The Carpet and the Connoisseur:** *The James F. Ballard Collection of Oriental Rugs.* At the turn of the 20th century, prominent St. Louis businessman James F. Ballard became one of the country’s foremost collectors of oriental carpets. Celebrated for his approach to collecting at a time when most other rug connoisseurs were acquiring classical Persian and Indian carpets, Ballard traveled the world, purchasing Anatolian carpets directly from provincial centers in Turkey. In addition to being a passionate collector, Ballard was also a patient teacher, inveterate traveler and, above all, the first student of oriental carpets to acknowledge the importance of Turkish influence on the history of the pile carpet—an approach that continues to advance the field of oriental carpets today. While the holdings clearly demonstrate strength in Anatolian material, the exhibition begins chronologically with three Cairene rugs, a Spanish rug and examples of “Lotto” and small-pattern “Holbein” carpets, all important

examples from the late 15th and 16th centuries. **Saint Louis Art Museum**, through May 8.

**Pearls on a String:** *Art and Biography in the Islamic World* presents the arts of Islamic cultures from the point of view of authors and artists from historical Muslim societies, offering an alternative to impersonal presentations of Islamic art. The exhibition focuses on specific people and relationships among cultural tastemakers threaded together as “pearls on a string,” a Persian metaphor for human connectedness, especially among painters, calligraphers, poets and their patrons. The exhibition highlights the exceptional art of the Islamic manuscript and underscores the unique ability of the book to relate narratives about individual people. Through a series of vignettes, the visitor is introduced to the art linked to the men and women who shaped the Islamic past and contribute to its future. Asian Art Museum, **San Francisco**, through May 8.

**Life and Sole:** *Footwear from the Islamic World* uses some 25 pairs of shoes, slippers, sandals, clogs and boots from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, Central Asia and South Asia to look at past and present beliefs, customs, pastimes and traditions. Dating from 1800 onward, the footwear on display demonstrates the important role it has always played in the social and cultural life of these regions. Together, these shoes express identities and lifestyles from around



## ART DUBAI

Now in its 10th edition, **Art Dubai** has become a cornerstone of the Middle East’s fast-growing contemporary arts scene. It is recognized as the region’s largest art fair and one of the most globalized meeting points in the art world today. Known for its innovative, global approach, Art Dubai offers works by more than 500 artists in spaces hosted by 90 galleries from UAE and around the world. The fair presents broadly across three programs: Contemporary, Modern—devoted to masters from the Middle East, Africa and Asia—and Marker, a curated section of art spaces that focus each year on a particular theme or geography. Madinat Jumeirah, **Dubai**, March 16 through March 19.

Hera Büyüktaşçıyan, “Tetralpegia,” 2014.



the Islamic world as well as the impact of international trade and politics on footwear fashions. The British Museum, **London**, through May 15.

**The Map is Not the Territory:** *Parallel Paths: Palestinians, Native Americans Irish* examines relationships and commonalities in Palestinian, Native American and Irish experiences of invasion, occupation and colonization—not as novelty or polemic, but as history and current events. Although many peoples worldwide have suffered long and brutal intrusions, these three groups have intersected for centuries in specific and unusual ways. Thirty-nine contemporary artists—most of them Palestinian, Native American or Irish, including Helen Zughaib (author of “Stories My Father Told Me,” see N/D 2015)—confront history, investigate personal and political dialogue, and present vibrant and penetrating narratives that reflect the multiple truths in philosopher/scientist Alfred Korzybski’s dictum that “the map is not the territory.” Arab American National Museum, **Dearborn, Michigan**, through May 15.

## CURRENT JUNE

**The Time is Out of Joint** was developed as a continuation of the exhibition for Beirut, in 2013. Curated by Tarek Abou El Fetouh and commissioned by Asian Culture Complex-Asian Arts Theatre and Sharjah Art Foundation, it builds on Ibn Arabi’s concept of time as a fluid place and place as a frozen time,

examining current and future locations and conditions. It confuses different times, places, cities and artistic events that took place in the past or will take place in the future. It reenacts two key exhibitions that took place at transitional moments in history and completes them with a look into the future: the first Arab Artist Biennial in Baghdad in 1974 and China Avant-garde exhibition in Beijing in 1989, and the future Jogja Equator Conference in 2022, questioning constraints of time and place by suggesting leaps among those different places and times, and among basic laws that governed and continue to govern thoughts. **Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE**, through June 12.

**Simone Fattal’s** solo exhibition highlights works she created between 2006 and 2013, including sculptures and non-figurative, simple formations made of clay, as well as works centered on textual compositions. Also displayed are some of the artist’s “Warrior” sculptures: large standing figures that are representative of those continuously withstanding war and struggle. Fattal’s practice has always been informed by war and its historical contexts. The ancient material of clay, both fragile and strong, allows her to trace the past into the present. Fattal situates herself along the continuum linking images, histories and their consequences, which she feels are all present in her psyche and, by extension, in her work. **Sharjah Art Foundation Art Spaces, UAE**, through June 12.

**A City Transformed:** *Images of Istanbul Then and Now.* The city now

known as Istanbul has been a cultural and commercial hub for centuries. Under its many guises—first as Byzantium, then Constantinople and finally Kostantiniyye/Istanbul—this magnificent metropolis has witnessed a succession of empires, migrations of peoples and, in the last generation, astounding urban growth. Experience the many faces of this city through the historical collection of the noted Turkish collector and art philanthropist Ömer Koç, and a selection of works by the renowned contemporary photographer Murat Germen. Albums, panoramas and photographs from the 1850s to the early 1900s are combined with 21st-century views that seem almost futuristic in their rendering of scale and space. Aga Khan Museum, **Toronto**, through June 26.

## COMING

### COMING APRIL

**She Who Tells a Story:** *Women Photographers from Iran and the Arab World* is a landmark exhibition of more than 80 photographers that challenges stereotypes surrounding the people, landscapes and cultures of its subject regions. Refuting the conventional idea that Iranian and Arab women are oppressed and powerless, and illuminating that women are in fact creating some of the most significant photographic work in the region today, the exhibit’s title is inspired by the Arabic word, which means “she who tells a story.” (It is also the name of

a collective of women photographers based in the Middle East that was founded in 2009.) Developing an expansive series of images that create sophisticated, nuanced narratives about identities, events, and social and political landscapes, each artist offers a vision of the world she has witnessed. The images invite viewers to reconsider their own preconceptions about the nature of politics, family and personal identities in the greater Middle East. National Museum of Women in the Arts, **Washington, D.C.**, April 8 through July 31.

**An Oasis in Glass** showcases fourth-century mosaics, beads, flasks and other glass objects created during the Roman occupation of Syria and Egypt. Displayed in a space that replicates the desert’s dunes and wide expanses, each object serves as a kind of tiny experiential oasis where lightboxes amplify the works’ sparkle and transparency. The show also incorporates themes from classical Arabic poetry. Cantor Arts Center at **Stanford University, California**, April 13 through August 8.

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