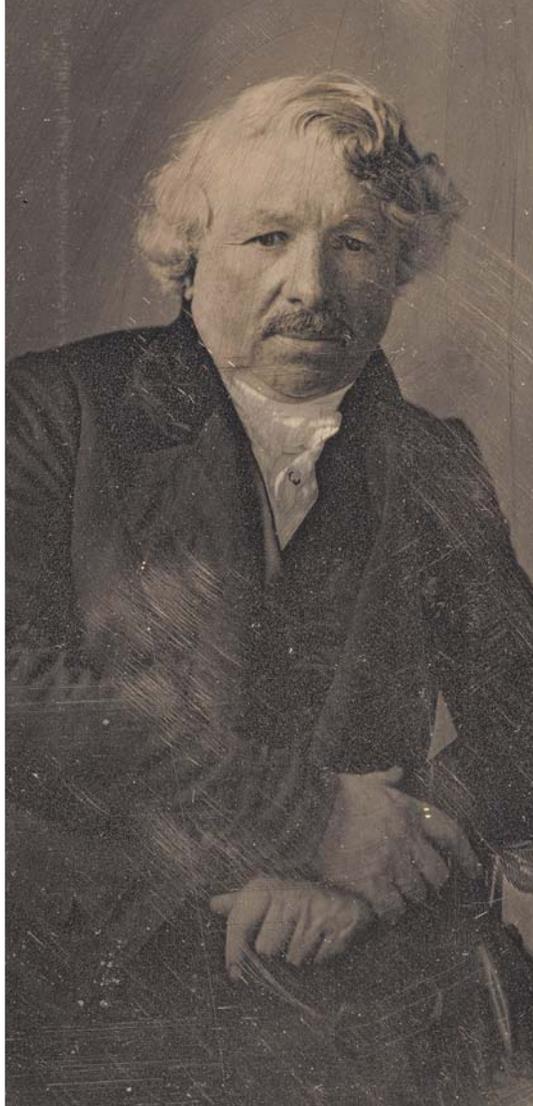


NOVEMBER DECEMBER 2015

AramcoWorld





4 Stories My Father Told Me

Written by Helen Zughuib
with Elia Kamal Zughuib
Art by Helen Zughuib

A daughter's lifetime of listening to her father's tales and anecdotes about growing up in 1930s and '40s Syria and Lebanon inspired a collaborative oral history and painting project that was exhibited most recently at the Arab American National Museum.

16 Capturing the Light of the Nile

Written by Jeff Koehler

The announcement in 1839 of Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre's formula to fix a camera's image on a metal plate set off a race to be the first to produce *daguerreotypes* of the world's great monuments. High on the list—Egypt.

24 The Art of the Dowry Chest

Written by Caroline Stone

Wooden chests have been carved, painted, studded with metals and inlaid with colorful woods and mother-of-pearl for centuries, producing heirlooms from West Africa to the Middle East, India and Indonesia. Many of the most elaborate ones were crafted to hold a woman's dowry.

 2 FIRSTLOOK

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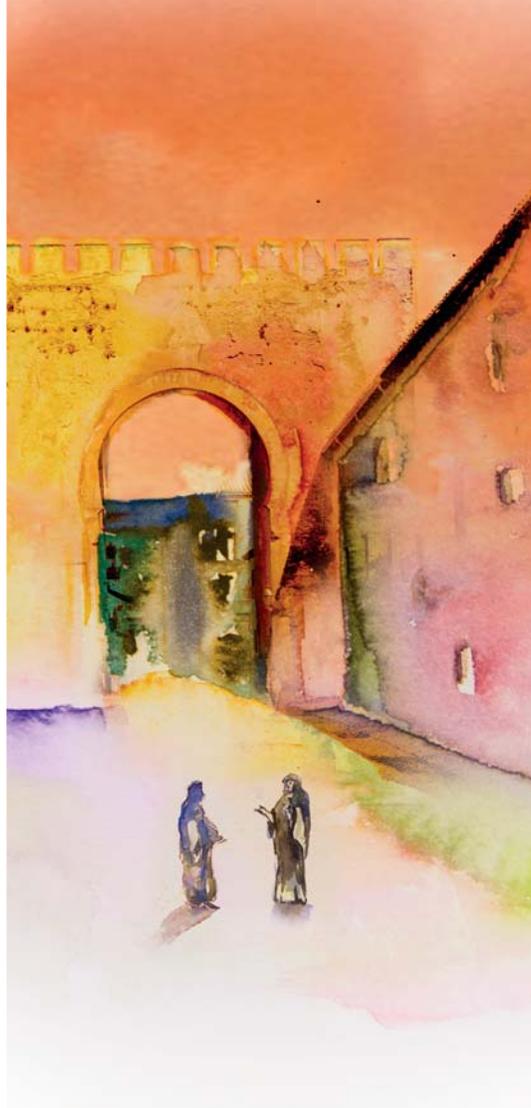
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We distribute *AramcoWorld* to increase cross-cultural understanding by broadening knowledge of the histories, cultures and geography of the Arab and Muslim worlds and their global connections. In print, *AramcoWorld* is distributed six times a year, without charge, to a limited number of interested readers; online, it is archived and indexed from 1960 to the present.

Front Cover: Making Raisins and Drying Figs: "To harvest the figs, my grandfather and I would climb the fig tree, fill our basket with ripe figs and then lower it to my grandmother and my sister. They spread the figs on cloth sheets, flattened them and then covered them." Art by Helen Zughuib.

Back Cover: Mosaic artists at Khirbat al-Mafjar used eight colors to create this ribbon-and-vegetal motif that encircles a 5½-meter-diameter design at the center of nearly 100 square meters of mosaic floor. Photo courtesy of the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage of Palestine.



30 In Search of Ibn Battuta's Melon

Written and photographed by Eric Hansen

Peel of green, flesh of red and sweetness extreme, the 14th-century traveler's five-star food review from Central Asia led, 681 years later, to a market-by-market journey, from a farmer's field in California to melon stands along the road from Tashkent to Khorezm, Uzbekistan: Yes, Central Asian melons are *that* good.

42 Travelers of Al-Andalus, Part vi: The Double Lives of Ibn al-Khatib

*Written by Louis Werner and Hamid Triki
Art by Belén Esturla*

Minister in the Nasrid court of Granada both before and after exile in Morocco, Ibn al-Khatib was a poet, a polymath and an insomniac whose writings earned him renown and a prominent inscription on a wall at the Alhambra.

2016 Calendar: Mosaics

*Introductions by Hamdan Taha,
Donald Whitcomb and Paul Lunde*

Exuberant, eclectic and recently conserved, more than two dozen mosaic patterns dating from the early eighth century lie largely intact in the ruined Umayyad palace of Khirbat al-Mafjar near Jericho, unsurpassed masterpieces of their era.

 **46 EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS**

 **Online CLASSROOM GUIDE**

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FIRSTLOOK

Welcome to FirstLook, where you will find stories in a single image to captivate, inform and stimulate wonder. Find all FirstLook images amid many others posted @aramcoworld on Instagram, as well as on our Facebook page.

Walls, windows, doors and satellite dishes tessellate at twilight into a patchwork pattern in the *madinah*, or walled old city, of Fez, Morocco, as a pedestrian passes into view along one of the city's typically narrow stone streets. Nestled in a valley crowned by gentle hills, Fez is one of the Islamic world's great historic centers of the art of geometrically based patterns executed in tile, plaster, stone, wood and metal. Like all such patterns, those that adorn the mosques, *madrassahs* (schools) and *sabeels* (fountains) of Fez have their origins in simple, universal geometry that—through practice and elaboration—artists and craft workers developed into celestially intricate masterpieces.

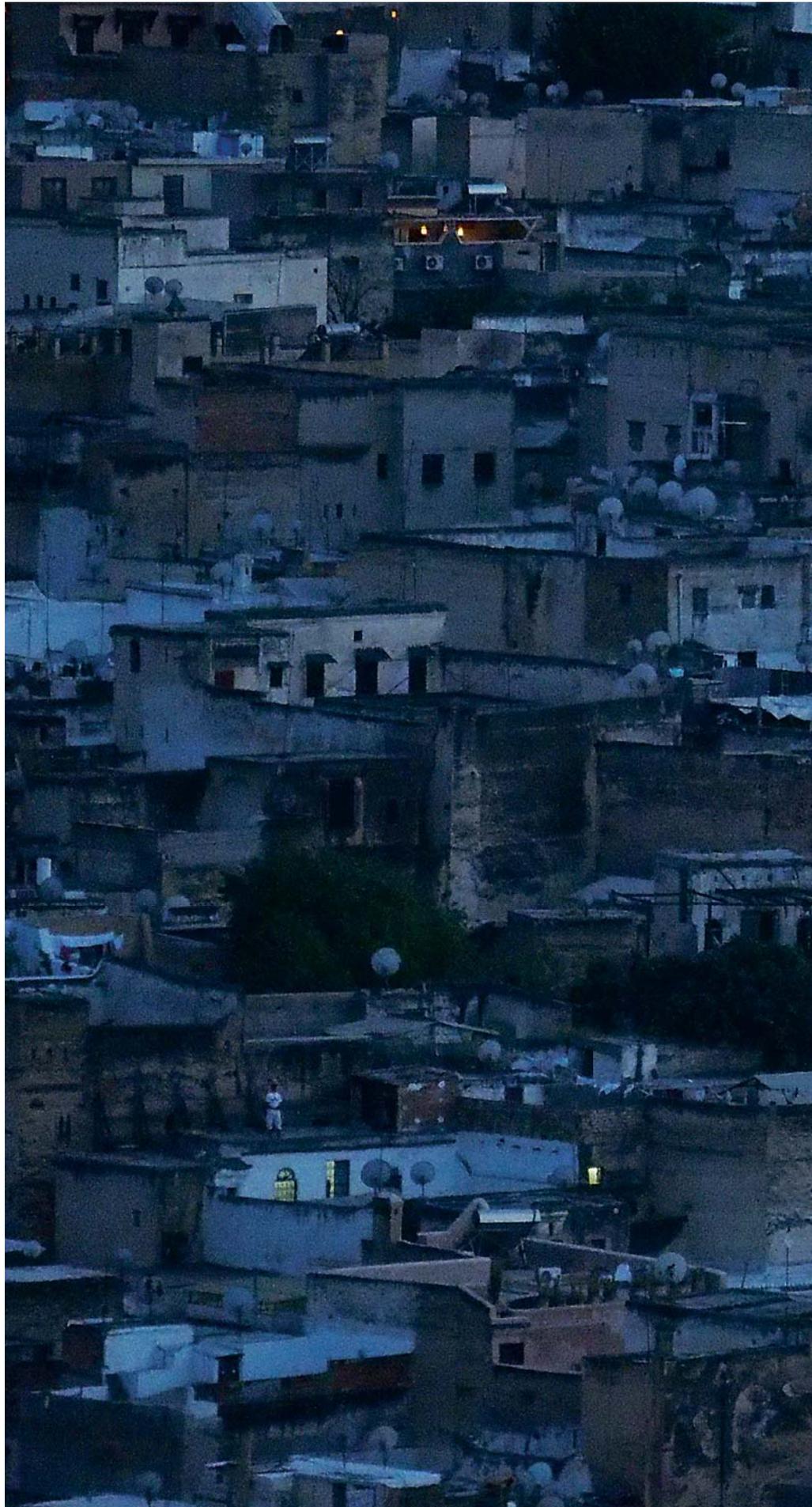
These adorn Fez in such numbers that the entire *madinah* is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In May *AramcoWorld* editor Richard Doughty joined a workshop to learn firsthand from the city's great works, starting with a straightedge, a compass, a pencil and paper.

(And an eraser.) Photo by Richard Doughty.



Watch "Learning from the Pattern-Masters" at www.aramcoworld.com.





STORIES MY

Father

TOLD ME

WRITTEN BY HELEN ZUGHAIB WITH ELIA KAMAL ZUGHAIB
ART BY HELEN ZUGHAIB



ONE EVENING about 10 years ago, after a family dinner filled with my father's stories of his childhood and youth in Damascus and Lebanon, my mother and I were in the kitchen when she said, "Someday, we ought to record your father telling his stories." Many of them told about experiences with his parents and paternal grandparents, whom he referred to using the affectionate Arabic *Jiddu* and *Teta*—Grandpa and Grandma.

A few weeks later, the Gallery Al-Quds in Washington, D.C., asked me to consider developing work for a solo exhibition. During the conversation I mentioned the possibility of a show centered around my father's true stories and, ultimately, his arrival in the us. I told the gallery I envisioned a series of paintings, each based on one of his stories, inspired stylistically by Jacob Lawrence's famous series, "The Migration of the Negro."

The gallery loved the idea, but then I had to ask my father for his approval. This turned out to be not so easy. Born in 1927 in Damascus, he moved to Beirut, Lebanon, in 1933, though he returned often to Damascus to visit family. In 1946, he was 19 years old when my grandparents brought him with them to the us.

At first, he refused my request, explaining that these were

private family stories. My mother said they would talk it over. About an hour later, my father agreed, reluctantly, to write down his stories.

Many times I would go to my parents' home in Alexandria, Virginia, and I would sit at the kitchen table while my father showed me a new story he was working on. They were not long, and with each one he added a bit more detail. This enriched my painting, and it also allowed a special intimacy during those conversations. I treasure those times.

We continued over several years, a story here and a story there, until there were 24. After that, he said that was the last one.

I keep hoping he will change his mind.

—Helen Zughaib



▼ CHARITY AND COMPASSION

When Jiddu told my father this story, he prefaced it by saying his father had told it to him and he must never forget it, and that is how he told it to me.

Once there was an *amir* [prince] who owned a horse so strong and beautiful that it was known all over the land. Other amirs were envious and tried to buy the horse, but the owner always refused. Selling the horse, he said, would be like selling a member of his family.

One day a crook came to one of the envious amirs and offered, for a price, to steal the horse. The bargain was made.

The crook waited by the side of the road where the amir and the wonder-

ful horse passed each day. When the amir approached, the crook began to cry and wail. The amir stopped to inquire why, and the crook replied he was very sick and needed a doctor, and he was too sick to climb up on the horse. The amir dismounted to help him, and as soon as the crook was seated in the saddle, he took off at a gallop.

The amir called loudly, "Stop and the horse is yours." The man stopped and returned, knowing that the amir would never go back on his word. "Do not say you stole this horse," the amir said. "Say that I gave it to you. Do this so that charity and compassion will not disappear from our community."



▼ MAKING RAISINS AND DRYING FIGS

In the summer, my sister and I loved to visit Jiddu's and Teta's house in the mountains. We were free to play in the garden, make new friends and ride on Jiddu's donkey. But the best days were those that we spent in the *kroum* [vineyard]. We had to leave the house very early in the morning because Jiddu insisted that the grapes and figs should be picked when the dew was still on them.

To harvest the figs, Jiddu and I would climb the fig tree, fill our basket with ripe figs and then lower it to Teta and my sister. They spread the figs on cloth sheets, flattened them and then covered them with a clean cheese-cloth to protect them from dust and insects. After about 10 days in the hot sun, the figs would be dried and ready to be put in storage for the winter.

Making raisins, however, was more complicated. Teta took the bunches of grapes and lay them neatly on white sheets covered with straw. My sister always wanted the rows of grapes to be separated by color in long neat stripes of purple, black and white. Teta humored her, even though once they were dried, they would be all mixed up together. After the grapes were lined up to my sister's satisfaction, Teta sprayed them: She had dipped bunches of herbs, called *tayyoun*, that grew wild on the slopes adjacent to the vineyard, into a mixture she had prepared from ashes, water and other ingredients, and she shook the liquid on the grapes.

Every day we would return to the vineyards to check on the drying figs and raisins and to moisten the grapes. When it was time to return home, we always left with dried figs, raisins and new stories to share with our friends in the city.



PLANTING OLIVE TREES ►

Visiting Jiddu and Teta in their mountain village was always a treat. Teta would have special sweets and my favorite food prepared for me. Best of all though was Jiddu taking me with him to the fields. Sometimes it was a brief trip to see how the plants were growing. But sometimes Jiddu would ask me to be "Jiddu's helper" and assist with the small chores. During one visit, Jiddu told me that we would be planting olive trees. Because we would be staying in the olive fields all day, we had to bring with us a *zuwaidy* [picnic lunch], water and other provisions.

The next morning, Jiddu and I set out for the fields much earlier than usual, with a donkey carrying our provisions and small olive plants. We worked hard planting the young olive trees in furrows Jiddu had dug earlier. My job was to hold the plant straight while Jiddu would dig a small hole in the ground for each plant. Then I ladled some water from the water drum on each new olive tree.

During our break for lunch, I told Jiddu that next year I would return to help him harvest the olive crop. He smiled and said that would be difficult because olive trees take many, many years before they bear fruit. Disappointed, I asked him why we were bothering to plant olive trees if we would be dead before they would give us any fruit. He looked at me with a serious expression and said, "*Zara'u fa akalna, nazra'u fa ya'kulun.*" ("They planted so we would eat; we plant so our descendants will eat.")



◀ THE SHOW BOX (SANDUK AL-FIRJI)

Long before cinemas or television entertained Lebanese children, there was the *sanduk al-firji*. This was a brightly decorated, semicircular box that was strapped to the back of an itinerant entertainer. He would come into the village loudly chanting previews of the stories he had, going from *hara* to *hara* [street to street] and ending in the village square.

First he unstrapped the *sanduk*. It was about 18 inches high and had five or six glassed portholes equidistant from each other. On either end of the box were two small inner poles attached to a scroll with bright glossy pictures telling one or more of the fabled Arab stories such as “Antar and Abla” or “Abu Zayd al-Hilali.”

He placed the box on a stool and set up a circular bench facing it. The village children took turns handing him their *kharjiyyi*, spending money, and in groups of five or six, they peeked into the box and watched the story through the portholes. The entertainer rolled the screen, chanting about the beauty of the ladies, the courage of the men and the strength of their horses. Usually the lucky viewers would briefly give up their place to siblings or friends who did not have enough *kharjiyyi*.

When all those who wanted to see the show were accommodated, the entertainer strapped the show box to his back, picked up the stool and bench, and walked to the next village, chanting previews and enticing new viewers.

It was an amazement to me at the time how he synchronized the chanted story with the pictures on the rolling scroll. And the box, the beautiful *sanduk*, with its colorful pictures and many tiny mirrors, was a source of wonder, even without the stories.





◀ WALK TO THE WATER FOUNTAIN (MISHWAR' A AL-'AYN)

In the old days, the only water supply for the village was the communal water fountain. Young women, the *sabaya*, walked to the fountain at sunset, balancing large colorful water jugs on their heads. This walk to get water had become, over time, a much anticipated social event known as the *mishwar* ("walk").

At the fountain, the *sabaya* would show off their fine dresses, chat and gossip. The young men of the village, the *shabbab*, would also go to the fountain at the same time to watch and innocently flirt with the young women. Occasionally a young man or woman would muster enough courage to say a word or two to a special person.

In time, the *mishwar* remained an accepted custom, as the young people in the village would take walks in the late afternoon, whether they now had running water in their homes or not. The *sabaya* and *shabbab* would meet, admire each other and flirt from a safe distance.

PLAYING BASARA IN TETA'S ROOM ▼

In Syria and Lebanon, Basara is one of the simplest and easiest card games. Older members of the family teach the younger ones how to play it. When everything else fails and you want the younger kids to quiet down and stay out of trouble, playing Basara is the answer.

My grandmother, Teta, was no exception. During inclement weather when we could not play outside, a Basara game would be proposed by Teta. Sometimes we would suggest a game knowing full well there would be treats after the game.

Teta would sit on the rug in her room. We completed the circle sitting around her. Usually she dealt the cards, though sometimes, to please us, she would ask one of us to deal instead.

We liked playing Basara with Teta. She overlooked minor cheating and made sure one of us won. To us, she seemed very old. At the time, we did not know of anyone older. Her colorful headscarf, her *mendeel*, trimmed with beads, was wrapped around her head. Teta wore several skirts, one over the other, with a bright apron on top. We were fascinated with the skirts. Under two or three of them, she had a homemade cloth bag, a *dikki*, tied around her waist with a ribbon. In this bag, Teta kept some change and keys. One key, the most interesting to us, opened a small wooden cupboard in her room in which she kept cookies and sweets. Another key opened a large enameled wooden box in which she kept her finer things, her valuables and any large-denomination money.

After the game, we would begin to pester Teta by asking her to show us what she had in her cupboard. When an indirect request to view the inside of the cupboard did not succeed, a united plea for sweets would be uttered. That demand, in various forms, ultimately succeeded, and sweets would be produced and passed around. If and when the sweets were not in abundance, small change we called *nigl* would be distributed.



▼ EVENINGS IN THE KROUM

Every summer I spent several weeks at my grandparents' house, which was in Zahle, a mountain village in Lebanon. The best part of the visit would be a trip Jiddu and I would make to the kroum, or vineyard. There we would spend a week working, talking and just being together. During the day, Jiddu and I worked in the field. He would tell me what to do and explain to me why things were done in a certain way. Jiddu spent the day not just talking to me, but he would talk also to the trees and grapevines as if they were people visiting us. In a way, the kroum had become intertwined with the family, part of the community.

As he worked, he would tell me that this tree was planted

when Uncle Jamil was born, or this tree was planted when Aunt Wadi'a was married. Every place and plant in the vineyard was connected to something. Sometimes it related to national events or world events, but mostly the connections were to family events. The fields and the kroum had become a diary of family history that he was passing on to me.

Jiddu was also an authority on the wild plants and herbs that grew in and around the kroum. This is good for curing a cold, he would say. This is good for an upset stomach, and this is good to flavor a stew. We would collect many of these herbs and wildflowers and dry them to be used in winter.

Every evening after supper, Jiddu would light the kerosene

lamp, brew some herbal tea over the charcoal fire and then begin telling stories about our family. He would tell stories about those who had gone abroad, those who did well and those who did not; the good sheep and the black sheep. And then, if he wasn't tired, Jiddu would recite poetry or tell stories that usually had a moral or lesson to learn. He never preached to me, but he always made sure I got the message.

More than anything else, Jiddu loved to recite poems, and he loved to hear poetry being recited. Sometimes he would ask me to recite poems I had learned in school. I tried my best, but I could not satisfy his thirst for hearing one poem after another.

Once when I was about 13, he asked me to recite, but I could only remember one poem and part of another. When I stopped reciting, he turned the kerosene lamp off and we went to sleep. The next night he asked me to recite more poetry. I repeated the same poem that I had recited the night before. Jiddu protested that this was the same poetry that I had recited the previous evening. I confessed that it was all I knew. Jiddu looked at me for some time before saying that if after eight years of school, all I could remember was a poem and a half, then I was wasting my time and my parents' money and that I had better quit school and start working.

After that, Jiddu never asked me to recite anything, though he continued to tell me stories and to teach me about various plants in the vineyard. Poetry, however, never re-entered our life in the kroum.



▼ SUBHIYYI AT TETA'S HOUSE

This ritual was a morning routine that never varied. We grew up with the impression that we, the grandchildren, were not to interfere with the morning's activities.

Usually, six or seven older women, all widowed, would gather at my grandmother's house. In the fall, spring and summer, the gathering would take place in the courtyard around the water fountain. In the winter the meetings were held in the living room around the charcoal brazier. Two or three *argillas* [water pipes] were prepared, and the flavored tobacco mixed and dampened. I loved the smell of the tobacco being prepared because it was usually mixed with carob or grape molasses. The aroma made me hungry for a molasses and tahini sandwich, which we called *arouss*, the same word for a wedding.

At about 10 o'clock the women would begin to drift in. They did not knock on the door, which was always open anyway. My grandmother would be seated in her usual place, and each woman would sit in her same place. They all dressed the same: black *tannouras* [long skirts] over several slips, tied around the waist with a sash. On top they wore a black jacket over an embroidered vest, and a light blue or gray mendeel covering their hair. It would be coquettishly tied at an angle, a practice carried over from their younger days.

After they arrived, usually within minutes of each other, my grandmother would begin the coffee ritual. The coffee beans were placed in

the *mahmassi*, a small steel pan with a long handle so that the hand holding it would not be burned. The slowly roasting beans were stirred with a long-handled spoon until my grandmother would determine the color was just right. They were spread on a tray to cool, and then one of the women ground them in the *mathani* [coffee grinder]. When my grandmother decided enough ground coffee had accumulated in the little wooden drawer in the *mathani*, she added it to the boiling water in the pot on the brazier and began to stir. When the coffee threatened to boil over, she removed it quickly from the heat, stirred it and returned it to the fire. This process was repeated three times, and the second time, a few teaspoons of sugar were added. Coffee was served in tiny cups, and the conversations began.

What impressed me at the time and until now was that the stories were always the same, told each day by the same woman, and yet the women never seemed to tire of telling or hearing them. They were almost always dated by some important occurrence they all seemed to remember, such as a flood or drought, epidemic or revolution. They recalled their birthdates in the same manner, almost always the time of some calamitous event. My grandmother was born during the *tawshi* [revolution] of 1865. After any of these events were referred to, there was a chorus of "*tinthaker ma tin 'aad*" ("may it be remembered but never repeated").





▲ THE HALLAB

As a small boy, living in Bab al-Mussalla in Midan, the old quarter of Damascus, I remember being fascinated by the various peddlers who wandered the narrow streets chanting about their products and services. Sellers of fruits, vegetables and sweets, as well as knife sharpeners, pruners and buyers of old items, all filled the air with their melodic chants. These rhyming chants never actually mentioned the name of the item being offered, but described in detail the color, freshness and taste. Buyers knew by the traditional chants what was being offered for sale, which also would dictate the day's menu. The streets were crowded with loaded donkeys, pushcarts and peddlers carrying large trays (*sddur*) piled high with cakes and other tasty things.

Children playing in the street or on their way to school would keep an eye out especially for the sellers of sweets. These were mostly seasonal. Cooked, steaming sweet beets and popcorn were sold in winter. Ice with syrup called *sweeq* was sold in the summer. *Kaak* and *manaquish* were sold year-round, while tamari with molasses were sold only on feast days. Invariably the daily allowance was exchanged for a kaak with *za'atar* (bread with spices and olive oil), a tamari or a handful of *hanblas*, a tasty fruit that can be carried in the pocket without being damaged. Usually the sweets were shared or bartered

with others, thus expanding the purchasing power of the daily allowance.

I remember the nicest of the peddlers was the Hallab who chanted about his fresh milk. The Hallab had a small flock of eight to ten Damascene goats. The goats were mostly brown, large and gentle. They had two dangling strands from their necks. The small children would stand eye to eye with the goats to pet and hug them on their way to school. The Hallab did not mind, and both the goats and the children loved the attention.

The Hallab carried a pail, a measuring can and a long bamboo stick. When the housewife opened the door and asked for milk, the Hallab would milk one of his goats right there. If she planned to make yoghurt that day, more milk would be required. If the goats began to wander, the Hallab gently guided them back to the herd. After the fresh milk was delivered and the Hallab was paid, he continued on his route, chanting about his beautiful goats.

The other peddlers could not compete with the Hallab, his wonderful goats and the pleasure of petting the gentle and loving animals. I remember that after powdered milk appeared on the grocery shelves, milk never tasted the same again.



▲ WHEN A CHILD IS BORN

In the past, children were born at home with a midwife assisting. This was an occasion when the female members of the family actively participated. They helped the midwife by encouraging the new mother to “bite on a hanky,” to stop her screaming by telling her “*sa’adi waladik*,” to a certain extent meaning the equivalent of “push.” They also made coffee, tea, *zhurat* and *yansoon* drinks for the visitors who flocked in to participate or just to satisfy their curiosity.

As soon as the child was born, the midwife completed her professional duties by informing the father and menfolk of the successful birth and the sex of the child. This was an occasion to pay and tip the midwife. The size of the gratuity depended on the sex of the child and whether the family had desired a boy or girl.

After the midwife was gone, the new mother was dressed in a fancy silk bed jacket, and the baby was wrapped like a papoose in fancy swaddling clothes. The new father entered the room, and depending on his financial circumstances, he put a piece of jewelry on the mother’s pillow and one or more gold coins in the baby’s crib.

From the mother’s bedroom, the *zalagheet* would begin, which is a kind of chant they did on feast days and other special occasions. It was led by

the grandmother, until all the neighbors and family had joined in.

Then for 40 days, the mother stayed in bed pampered and served, changing silk jackets as often as her husband’s wealth permitted. Neighbors, family and friends dropped in to congratulate the parents and to give unsolicited advice and gossip. During this time, the guests were treated to a dish called *mughly*, which was a mix of spices, powdered rice and sugar.

The *mughly* is followed by *snaniyyi*, which is served when the baby gets its first tooth. *Snaniyyi* is made from boiled wheat, sugar, sweet meats and brightly colored candy. It is piled high on a large tray with *maward* and *mazahar* [flowers and rosewater] sprinkled on top. It is beautiful to look at as well as to eat.

To protect against the evil eye and other misfortunes, blue beads, small icons and *hijabs* are pinned to the clothes and baby’s crib. Blue beads and hands of Fatima protect against the evil eye, while *hijabs*, amulets and talismans protect the child from illness, microbes and other calamities. The *hijab* is a sewn small package, triangular in shape, that conceals a talisman or written prayer with spiritual powers to protect the child. When the child grows up, the *hijab* can be sewn into the inner shirt, to keep the protective powers working. The *hijab* is never to be opened or disrespected in any way.

▼ BLIND CHARITY

One day my father and I were chatting about everything and nothing in particular when he told me the following day he was going to Dayr Saydnaya, and I could accompany him if I wanted to.

The Dayr was a convent in the outskirts of Damascus, and it was his favorite charity. I accepted gladly, as this was one trip I enjoyed and looked forward to.

He asked me what I thought of charity. I replied that people appreciate good deeds because such acts meet their special needs. He then asked me about blind charity, where the donor does not know the recipient and has no idea what the need may be. He proceeded to tell me a story exemplifying this kind of blind charity, which he described as the most sincere.

Once there was a very rich woman, the wife of a governor of a prosperous port city. Once a week she would take a big basket and seal it with tar to make it waterproof. In the bottom of the basket, she would write a line from a poem, "Do charitable deeds even if they may be out of place, for no act goes unrewarded." Then she would fill the basket with food, water and clothing and drop it in the sea to be carried away by the waves and the wind.

After some time, she and her family took a long boat trip to visit relatives in another port city. Heavy storms demolished their boat, and many on board drowned. She also would have drowned had she not clung to a plank of wood. In time, she drifted to shore where she collapsed with hunger, thirst and exhaustion.

She woke up in someone's garden. The lady of the house told her the servants had found her on the beach and thought she was dead, but then realized she was still alive, and so they brought her to the garden. The lady

of the house said she could stay with them as a washerwoman, and she gladly accepted.

One day the lady brought a big bamboo basket full of laundry and asked the woman to wash them. When the woman reached the bottom of the basket, she saw the line of poetry that she herself used to write in the bottom of those baskets before dropping them in the sea. She had recognized her own basket. She sat down and began to cry.

When the lady of the house came to check on the laundry, she found the woman sobbing. Asking her why she was crying, the washerwoman explained that the basket was one of hers, and she went on to describe how she would fill them with provisions and drop them into the sea thinking that some shipwrecked people would find the baskets and use the food and water to survive.

The lady of the house was amazed, and she told the woman that once she and her husband were shipwrecked. They had lost everything. Then a big basket drifted by, and they clung to it until they landed on shore nearby. When they revived, they walked to the city, found jobs and, in time, prospered. Out of sentimentality, they kept the basket and used it, thinking someday they would learn more about it and the line of poetry written on the bottom in praise of blind charity.

The lady took the washerwoman into her own quarters and, when her husband returned home, told him about the day's events. He suggested the woman live with them as a member of the family. They also decided to continue to fill the baskets with provisions and drop them into the sea, in hope that someday a needy person would find them and survive.



▼ SAYING GOODBYE

After a very long wait, permission to travel to America had been granted. Reservations on a ship from Beirut to New York City were made, and a departure date became certain. The goodbyes began in the village. Relatives, friends and neighbors came to drink coffee and exchange stories about others who had emigrated.

Finally, two days before the actual departure, the entire family traveled

to Beirut to stay in a hotel and say their final goodbyes. My mother could not believe that she was finally emigrating with her family to America. She got all the passports, tickets and whatever jewelry and money she had in a special handbag, which she held onto even in her sleep.

She also had to be certain that the suitcases packed with gifts for her relatives in America were safe. A large Oriental rug, purchased in Damascus

as a gift for her sister, had been wrapped separately and was always kept in her sight. Hotel employees, relatives and I were all fully occupied on guard duty for two days.

On the morning of the departure, it was determined that the ship was too big to come to the pier. The passengers, suitcases, last-minute gifts and the carpet all had to be put in a large rowboat manned by four sailors. My mother insisted that she sit on top of the rug no matter what that did to the stability of the boat. When they were safely on board the big ship, she demanded that the sailors put all the suitcases and carpet in her cabin. They argued that everything not needed on the voyage must be put in the hold. It finally took an officer of the ship to inter-vene and guarantee that nothing would be stolen.

Today, that carpet rests in a place of prominence in my daughter Karen's home.

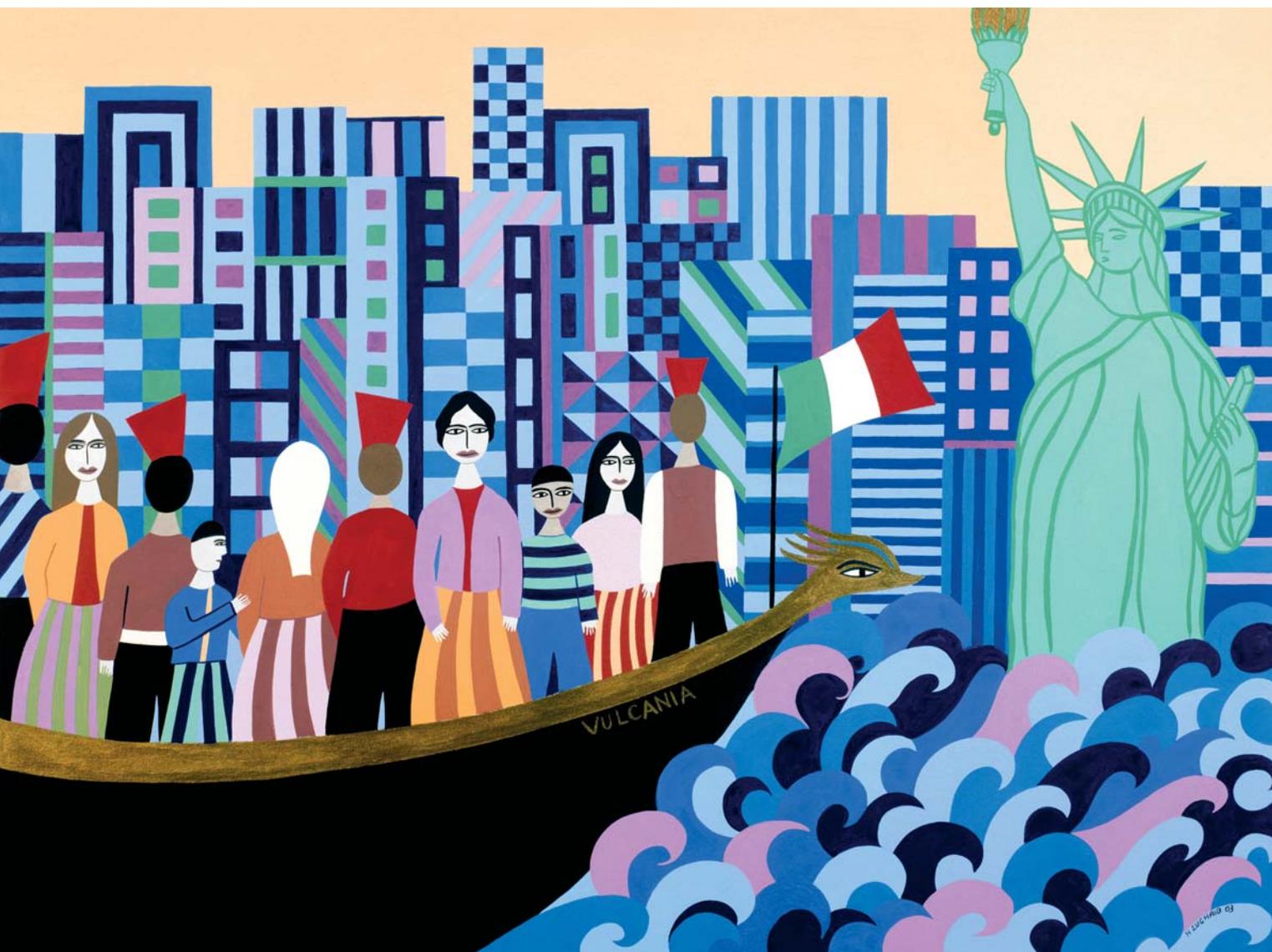


▼ COMING TO AMERICA

It was the end of the long sea voyage. During dinner the night before we arrived, we learned that the ship, the *Vulcania*, would be passing by the Statue of Liberty at about four a.m. the next morning. A spontaneous decision was made by some of the younger passengers to see the Statue of Liberty.

And so, 16 days after leaving the port of Beirut for New York City, an exuberant group of us, from Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, stayed up all night to greet with the dawn the Statue of Liberty.

I remember it was a clear morning. 🌍



Artist **Helen Zughaib** (www.hzughaib.com) was born in Beirut. She received a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Syracuse University's College of Visual and Performing Arts. Her most recent solo exhibitions were at the Arab American National Museum, which hosted the full original series "Stories My Father Told Me," and at University of Maryland University College and the Mamia Bretesche Gallery in Paris, which showed "Conflict Within." She lives and paints in Washington, D.C.



Elia Kamal Zughaib studied at Syracuse University, and in 1959 he joined the us Foreign Service to work in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait and France until his retirement in 1978. He lives in Alexandria, Virginia.



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CAPTURING THE LIGHT
OF THE

NILE

WRITTEN BY JEFF KOEHLER



Daguerreotype. Lierebours.

Imp. par Bougeard.

Riffaut. ac.

“To copy the millions of hieroglyphs that cover even the exterior of the great monuments of Thebes, Memphis, Karnak, and others would require decades of time and legions of draftsmen.... By daguerreotype, one person would suffice.”

—FRANÇOIS ARAGO, *January 7, 1839, during his announcement in Paris of the invention of photography by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre*

Speaking as an astronomer, physicist, member of parliament and secretary of the Académie des Sciences, François Arago’s words resonated throughout the land. Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt had ignited a national passion for all things pharaonic when, from 1798 to 1801, he brought not only occupying soldiers but also more than 150 *savants*—scholars, cartographers, artists, naturalists, draftsmen and even a musicologist—who recorded the details of ancient sites and modern customs. The result was the mammoth *Description de l’Égypte*, published between 1809 and 1829 in some two dozen volumes with around 900 plates of engravings. It revealed an Egypt full of more wonders than ever had been imagined, and it left its readers clamoring for more.

Arago even lamented that photography had not yet been invented during Napoleon’s time in Egypt. “Everyone will imagine the extraordinary advantages which could have been derived from so exact and rapid a means of reproduction during the expedition to Egypt,” he told the Académie.

There was little visual record beyond etchings, watercolors, drawings and oil paintings. And no *objective* record. These

were artists’ renderings, observed US scholar Andrew Szegedy-Maszak. “No matter how accurate, paintings, drawings, and prints are always acknowledged as interpretations shaped by the artist’s hand and eye. A photograph, on the other hand, was initially thought to offer a direct, unmediated slice of reality,” he wrote in *Antiquity & Photography: Early Views of Ancient Mediterranean Sites*. At the time, Daguerre’s invention wasn’t regarded as a process by which humans reproduced nature, but rather one by which nature reproduced itself, quickly and objectively.

Daguerre was a painter and stage designer who had created the diorama, a theater of illusion without actors that employed large painted scenes and clever lighting. But his obsession was to capture and fix an image using mechanical means.

Battling his own lack of scientific training, he spent years compulsively experimenting alone, to the point that his wife feared for his sanity. “He has for some time been possessed by the idea that he can fix the images of the camera,” she told a Parisian pharmacist. “He is always at the thought, he cannot sleep at night for it.... I am afraid he is out of his mind. Do

you, as a man of science, think it can be done, or is he mad?”

In 1826, Daguerre learned from an optician that another amateur scientist,

November 7, 1839: The first photograph taken of Egypt, and the first taken on the African continent, *left*, shows Ras el-Tin palace in Alexandria, as exposed on a daguerreotype by Horace Vernet and Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet. Days later, the pair photographed the Pyramid of Cheops in Giza, *opposite*. None of the original plates from their expedition survive today. Because daguerreotypes were one-of-a-kind, it was common for them to be reproduced as lithographs.



In 1848, American Charles Richard Meade coaxed publicity-shy Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre into this portrait using Daguerre's own invention.

Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, was conducting his own secretive investigations into a light-capturing process he called "heliography." Daguerre immediately wrote to him, and they met a year later. At first, Niépce was reluctant to divulge details of his work, but at the end of 1829, they formed a partnership.

When Niépce died suddenly in 1833, his son took over the partnership. Daguerre carried on experimenting until, in 1837, he managed to capture an image by sensitizing a silver-coated copper plate with the fumes of iodine, placing it in a wooden box camera, exposing it to the light and then developing it in mercury fumes. He claimed he happened upon this idea when he accidentally left a spoon on an iodized plate onto which light was striking: When he picked up the spoon later, he saw a perfect shadow of it on the plate.

Although the daguerreotype did not reproduce colors, it produced an image with rich tonal gradations that gave it almost a 3-D feel. It was a one-shot process that produced a positive image—in the manner of a modern Polaroid—on a highly reflective, polished surface. Daguerre showed the results of his work to the telegraph inventor Samuel Morse, who was awestruck at the fine detail.

"[The images] are produced on a metallic surface, the principal pieces about 7 inches by 5, and they resemble

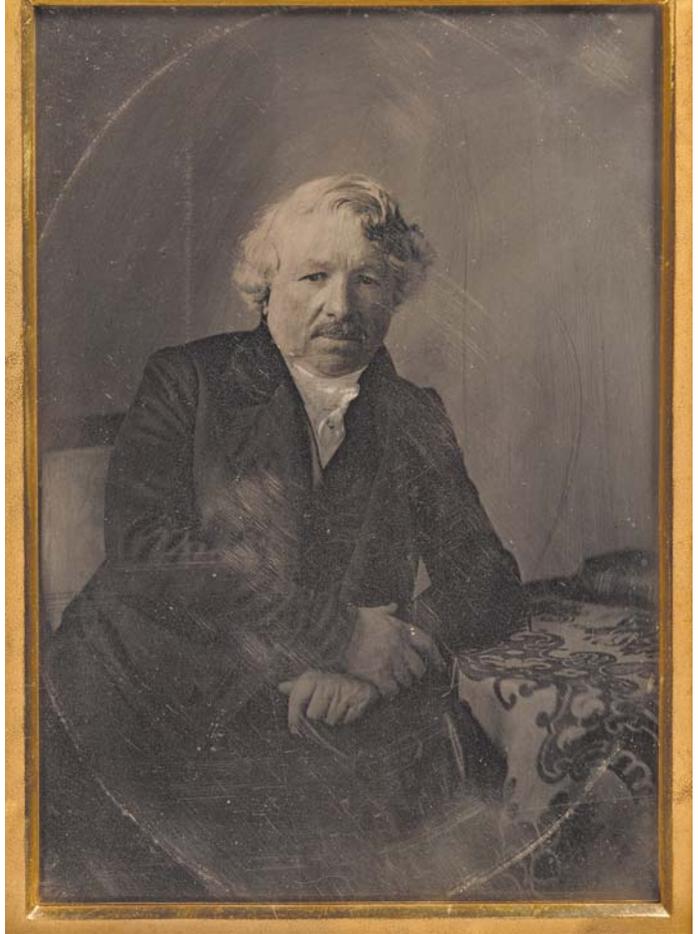


ILLUSTRATION: SUSANNA CELESTE CASTELLI, DENSITY DESIGN RESEARCH LAB; SOURCE: GEORGE EASTMAN HOUSE INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM

THE DAGUERRETYPE PROCESS

I. POLISH — A piece of silver-plated copper is polished with a soft cloth until the surface is mirror-like.

II. SENSITIZE — In a dark room, the plate is exposed to iodine, bromine or chlorine fumes to make the plate light-sensitive.

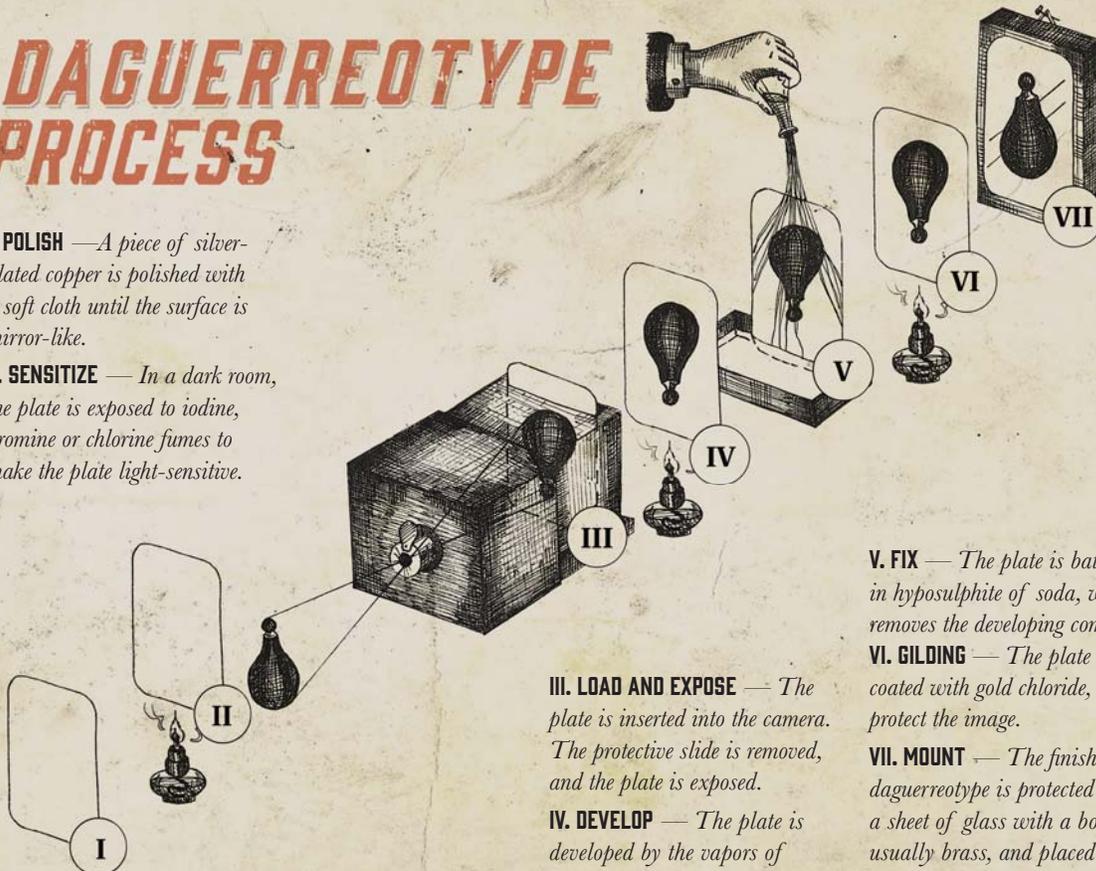
III. LOAD AND EXPOSE — The plate is inserted into the camera. The protective slide is removed, and the plate is exposed.

IV. DEVELOP — The plate is developed by the vapors of heated mercury.

V. FIX — The plate is bathed in hyposulphite of soda, which removes the developing compound.

VI. GILDING — The plate is coated with gold chloride, to protect the image.

VII. MOUNT — The finished daguerreotype is protected by a sheet of glass with a border, usually brass, and placed into a frame.

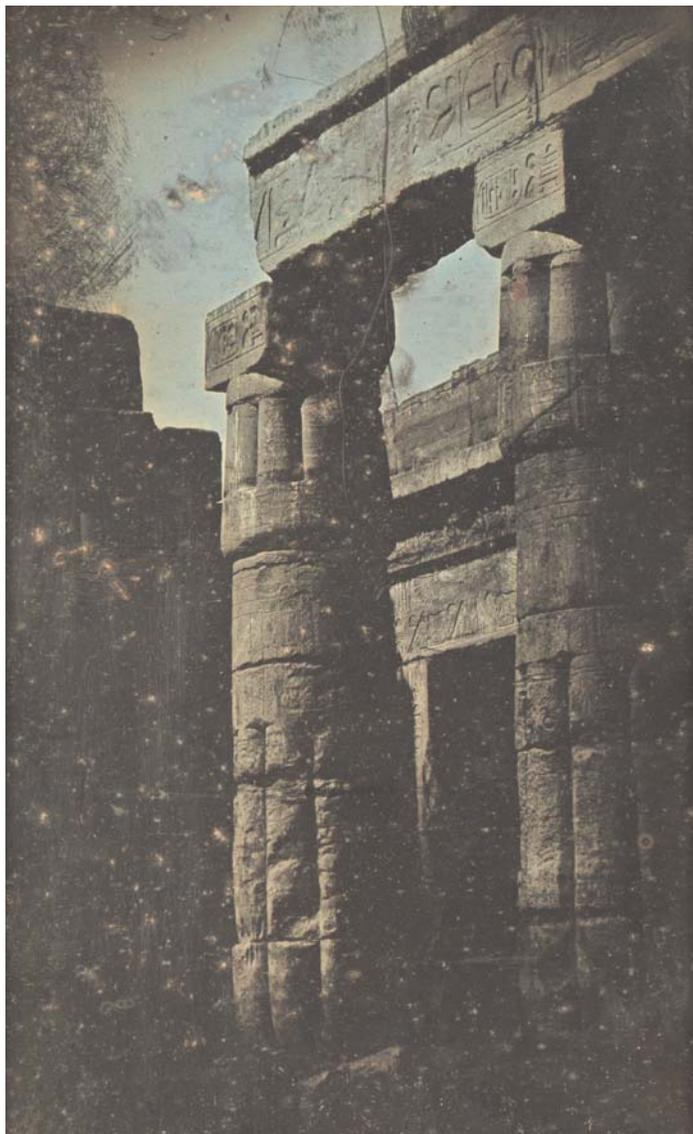
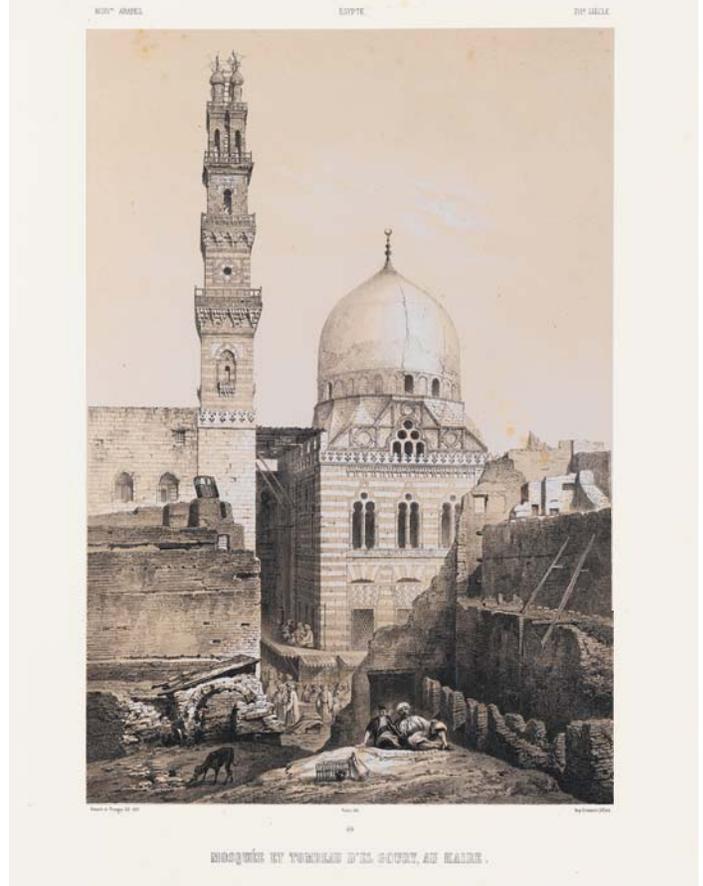


aquatint engravings, for they are in simple chiaroscuro, not in colors. But the exquisite minuteness of the delineation cannot be conceived. No painting or engraving ever approached it," Morse wrote to his brother, who published the letter in *The Observer*, the New York newspaper he edited.

Daguerre found a steadfast champion of his invention in Arago, one of France's most respected scientists. Arago not only understood the implications of Daguerre's invention but was also well placed to promote it. He saw its potential to be an important part of French intellectual life and lobbied the government to buy the invention outright and make it freely available.

"France should nobly give to the whole world a discovery that could contribute so much to the arts and sciences," which would demonstrate France's supremacy in these fields, he told the Académie.

On August 1, 1839, under a bill passed by the chambers of deputies and signed by King Louis-Philippe, the French government purchased Daguerre's invention, patent and all details regarding it. In return, Daguerre and Isidore Niépce, his late partner's son, received pensions. The government gave Daguerre just three weeks to draw up a plan for manufacturing the daguerreotype and to prepare an instruction booklet before making the process public. Daguerre quickly made an agreement with his brother-in-law Alphonse Giroux, whose family business made furniture and cabinets, to produce a



Coming to Egypt two years after Vernet and Goupil-Fesquet, Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey spent several years making more than 800 daguerreotypes of monuments throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Some, such as his view of the Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri *madrassah* and mosque in Cairo, top, were published as lithographs; many of his other plates, however, lay forgotten until the 1920s and became publicly known only recently, including a daguerreotype of the pillars of the mortuary temple of Seti I in Luxor, left. Above: A self-portrait made in 1841.

slightly improved, commercial version of the apparatus.

The mystery and suspense around the method had been building since January. On August 19, at a joint session of the Académie des Sciences and the Académie des Beaux-Arts packed with some 200 spectators and several hundred more who stood outside, Daguerre's photographic process got its first public showing.

Daguerre was a born showman, but perhaps a case of nerves at the prospect of explaining the science behind his invention to a room full of scientists prompted him to let Arago make the historic presentation.

The British magazine *The Spectator* had reported a few months earlier that the invention was "more like some marvel of a fairy tale or delusion of necromancy than a practical reality." Now the public saw that simply "making light produce permanent pictures" was not fantasy, reported a German attendee. "The crowd was like an electric battery, sending out a stream of

Also following in the footsteps of Vernet and Goupil-Fesquet was Alphonse-Eugène-Jules Itier, another daguerreotypist who traveled to document world treasures in the early 1840s. While he was working for the French Customs Service, his travels took him to Africa, the West Indies, China, the Pacific Islands, Borneo, Manila—and Egypt, where in 1845 or 1846 he exposed this unusually candid image of travelers on the Nile in a sailing boat.

sparks,” he noted. “A few days later, you could see in all the squares of Paris three-legged dark boxes planted in front of churches and palaces.”

The first models of the Giroux daguerreotype camera were ready for sale by the August deadline, and an advertisement for it appeared in the *La Gazette de France* on August 21. The price: 400 French francs—an average worker’s annual salary.

The kit consisted of a wooden box measuring 30 x 38 x 51 centimeters, with a brass lens mount. At the rear, a box where a ground glass viewing plate would be slid in to allow composition and focus could be switched out for a holder with the prepared, light-sensitive plate. It came with other boxes to hold the chemicals for sensitizing plates and developing the images. Within weeks, the 79-page instruction manual had been translated into both English and German.

Daguerreotypists raced to capture the world’s wonders with their new medium. Egypt was among their first and most desired destinations—along with Greece and Rome—but Arago’s lofty goal of photographing all of the country’s hieroglyphics remained a scholar’s wish amid newly fervent commercial competition.

Aiming to be the first to collect and publish images of the world’s great monuments, the wealthy Parisian optician Noël-Marie Paymal Lerebours equipped a handful of amateurs with cameras and chemicals.

In addition, he offered a commission to the Orientalist painter Horace Vernet, director the French Academy in Rome, and his nephew Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet—the latter to make photographs to complement his uncle’s sketches. The two traveled to Marseille and departed for Egypt on October 21, 1839. They stopped in Italy, Malta and Greece before landing in Alexandria on November 4.

Two days later, the French consul presented the pair to the pasha, Mohammed Ali, an Albanian who had become Egypt’s de facto ruler after the French withdrawal. Mohammed Ali was “lying on his divan in the corner of the living room,” Goupil-Fesquet wrote in 1844 in *Voyage d’Horace Vernet en Orient*. He questioned his guests on the state of the arts and sciences in Europe and expressed an interest in seeing how the new photographic instrument worked. Vernet and Goupil-Fesquet returned to Ras el-Tin



palace on the edge of Alexandria’s harbor the next day at seven a.m. to demonstrate the daguerreotype.

The operation lasted some minutes, and Mohammed Ali was wary. After being exposed, the sensitized, polished mirror was fumed with mercury in a wooden box. The fixed image was



then bathed in a solution of hyposulphite of soda and rinsed in distilled water. Although it was a mechanical process that applied science to the arts, it had a whiff of magic about it.

That image from November 7, 1839, is the first documented photograph of Egypt, and indeed of the African continent.

The original plate is long gone, but an engraving from it (see p.17) shows an ornate outer gate with two men, perhaps a guard and a doorman, lounging in the open doorway. Behind, with tall windows and low-peaked roofs, stands the palace harem. A couple of trees lean over the fence.

Like the crowd in Paris, Mohammed Ali was awestruck. “His Highness gave way to the increasing sense of wonder and amazement,” wrote Goupil-Fesquet. “It is the work of the devil!” he cried out.”

Nevertheless, Mohammed Ali soon embraced the camera enough to pose for it: a plump, white-bearded ruler with a broad sash, bejeweled belt and an apprehensive expression. According to Goupil-Fesquet, Mohammed Ali even learned to use the camera.

Egypt, it turned out, was an excellent place to work as a daguerreotypist, especially in the cool of winter. It offered photographers good and ample light, which was important for the long exposures daguerreotypes required. Most importantly, it had an abundance of historical places of the highest public interest to capture. Other photographers were not long in arriving.

That November, Vernet and Goupil-Fesquet met another daguerreotypist in Alexandria, Pierre Joly de Lotbinière. Born in Switzerland, raised in France and, at age 41, a wealthy landowner living outside Quebec, Canada, he was in Paris at the time of Daguerre’s announcement. He was about to embark on a tour of the eastern Mediterranean, and he was fascinated by the new photographic process. Caught up in “daguerreotypomania,” he, too, had secured a commission (as well as equipment) from Lerebours. En route to Egypt, Joly de Lotbinière had stopped in Athens, where in mid-October he had made the first photographs of the Acropolis.

Soon after meeting, the three daguerreotypists made their way south to the splendors of Cairo. “We have been daguerreotyping like lions,” Vernet wrote to a friend. The trio arrived in neighboring Giza to photograph the Sphinx on the same November day. There were just two cameras in all

TAKING DAGUERREOTYPES WAS FULL OF FAILURES. PLATES HAD TO BE DEVELOPED WHEREVER THE IMAGE WAS MADE.



Heavy fading lends a ghostly quality to this daguerreotype portrait made by Girault de Prangey in 1843 of a woman whose name he recorded as Ayoucha.

of Egypt, and the photographer behind each was jockeying for the best angle of the same famously enigmatic antiquity.

On November 20, Goupil-Fesquet captured another iconic monument, the Pyramid of Cheops, working from outside a gate that surrounded the complex. The scene, which is known today only

through a subsequent engraving (see p.16), is bucolic, with a saddled camel and three people quietly lounging in the foreground, the pyramid rising behind it in brilliant light. The exposure took 15 minutes.

While Vernet and his nephew began their journey back to

Europe soon after that, Joly de Lotbinière traveled up the Nile to photograph landmarks like the temple of Karnak, the Colossi of Memnon, the palace of Medinat Habu and other sites around Thebes, as well as the temples at Kom Ombo, Philae and Abu Simbel. His view of the last shows the 1200 BCE monument to Ramses II buried partially in sand.

Joly de Lotbinière wrote in his diary that he made 92 images on his trip back to France, via Jaffa, Jerusalem, Damascus and Lebanon. By modern standards, that is few for such an extensive journey, but the process to capture a daguerreotype, especially “in the field,” was laborious and demanding.

Daguerreotypists had to carry more than 50 kilograms of equipment, including the camera, plates, a developing box, bottles of chemicals, dishes for mixing, buffs for polishing and a heavy wooden tripod. Taking daguerreotypes was full of disappoint-

ments and failures. Plates would not always develop well or at all, due to mistakes on the part of the photographer, extreme heat that changed or neutralized the effects of the chemicals, lack of sufficiently clean water, even insects. Once finished, a plate was highly susceptible to scratches and to deterioration in light: It had to be stored in a velvet-lined case. Today, none

of the original plates from either Joly de Lotbinière or Vernet and Goupil-Fesquet survive, and we see their work only through engravings based on them.

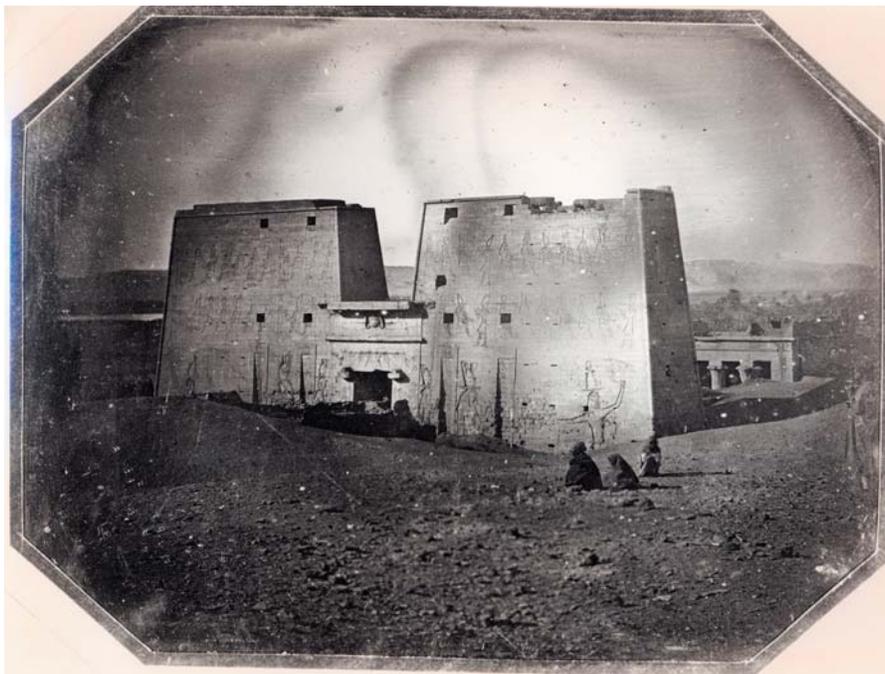
Because daguerreotypes were positive images on metal, they could not themselves be reproduced. The pictures had to be hand-copied by artists onto copper plates or engraved onto separate printing plates. Sometimes lines were engraved directly onto the daguerreotype plates.

A handful of images of the travels of Vernet, Goupil-Fesquet and Joly de Lotbinière were published in 1840 and 1841, first in Lerebours' *Excursions daguerriennes: vues et monuments les plus remarquables de globe*. Joly de Lotbinière's images of ancient ruins also appeared in Hécator Horeau's *Panorama d'Égypte et de Nubie* (1841).

The medium as a profession or considered as an art form remained in the future. These pioneering travel photographers were enthusiastic amateurs. Vernet and his nephew fulfilled their commission, but they were "primarily interested in gathering authentic raw material for their own paintings and etching," noted journalist and historian of modern Egypt Max Rodenbeck. There is no record of Joly de Lotbinière taking another photo after he returned to Quebec.

While the daguerreotype's importance was destined to remain in the history books, its role as the photographic medium of choice in Egypt was short-lived. By 1845, a new process that used calotype paper negatives, which could reproduce further images directly from the original, had already begun to replace it.

For the Egyptian traveler, paper negatives also were lighter and less bulky than the copper plates, and they could be sensitized weeks in advance. While daguerreotypes offered crisp and practically grainless images, the calotype paper negatives absorbed the light-sensitive chemicals and thus lacked the fine details of their predecessor. They looked like monochromatic watercolors in tawny oranges, sepia browns and grays. Yet today it seems that this made the process ideal for Egyptian subjects. The negatives' paper fibers evoke the textured surfaces of stones and desert, giving a tactile quality to the image, and the overexposed, sulfuric sky lent a feeling of the heat—all without sacrificing the objectivity



Itier photographed this daguerreotype of Madinat Habu in Luxor in 1845 or 1846.

of a photographic image. Their name was fitting: Calotypes came from *kalos*, Greek for "beautiful."

In his original announcement, Arago had pled for the daguerreotype in the service of science. But once the early practitioners had their tripods steadied on Egyptian soil, they seemed to have little interest in merely recording hieroglyphics. Instead, they captured the grandiosity and magnificence of the most famous monuments—and in

doing so, they also captured the beauty of the region.

The technology continued to improve and diversify, and the paper negatives were soon superseded by glass ones in the wet-collodion process that combined the sharpness of daguerreotypes with the reproducibility of calotypes. In 1889, 50 years after Daguerre's invention, a New York company owned by George Eastman marketed the first commercial, transparent roll film and the camera named Kodak No. 1, making photography accessible to the general public.

Ever since then, a camera has been an important traveling companion. "One of photography's most exalted and dependable functions over the last 150 years has been to supply reports on the look and life of far-off lands," wrote *New York Times* critic Andy Grunberg. Beginning with the Pyramids, "pictures have served as our first introduction to the splendid and the exotic."

The early daguerreotypists enlarged the public's sense of the world by offering the first mechanically objective images of Egypt's unique patrimony. They captured the moment when its monuments and murals were beginning to offer modern clues about millennia of culture. They spurred interest in the region and, with it, mass tourism. They stimulated the desire to go and see for oneself—and to capture it with a camera. 🌐



Jeff Koehler (www.jeff-koehler.com; @koehlercooks) is an American writer, photographer and traveler based in Barcelona. His latest book is *Darjeeling: The Colorful History and Precarious Fate of the World's Greatest Tea* (Bloomsbury, 2015). His work has appeared in *Saveur*, *Food & Wine*, NPR.org, *NationalGeographic.com*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Afar*, *Tin House* and *Best Food Writing*. He is currently working on a book about coffee.



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Early photography in Egypt: J/F 15, J/A 89

First photographs in Makkah: J/F 99

THE ART

of the

DOWRY CHEST

Written by

CAROLINE STONE



Made in India but referred to as a “Shirazi” chest due to its Persian-influenced style, this 18th-century hardwood chest with three drawers is extensively ornamented in finely tooled plate brass. Placing the chest on legs or a stand helped protect it against moisture and insects.

For centuries across much of the globe, it has been the custom for women to bring with them on marriage not only money, but also linen, personal clothes and jewelry.

Almost all but the most impoverished women would bring with them the basics needed to set up house. Giving money to enable girls to marry has been a charitable act in much of the Muslim as well as the Christian worlds, and, indeed, the custom of Santa Claus and Christmas gift-giving is thought to have originated with St. Nicholas of Myra (modern Demre in Turkey), who secretly provided money to dowry-less girls.

The value and significance of dowry items have varied greatly, from the sheets and household linen in the bottom drawer traditional in the UK to the “hope chests” of North America, to elaborate trousseaux of jewels, embroidery and weavings intended to show off the family’s wealth or the young woman’s skill.

In many parts of the world, gifts passed to a newly formed household for the new bride—the dowry, whether it may be called that or not—often set a course for a marriage, and sometimes affect its success. Often in times past—and in some places still today—these goods were packed into a chest, traditionally made of wood and typically decorated as richly as means would allow, the better to show it off as a status symbol when the bride arrived at her new home. Across the Middle East, where houses were traditionally sparsely furnished, such a dowry chest would often be placed in the woman’s area, where it could quietly continue to announce its status and serve as an item of



Shown working near the Euphrates River in Iraq in 1922 in this hand-colored photo, a craftsman is decorating a wooden chest. Although demand today is greatly diminished, the tradition of making chests continues, from ornate, handcrafted chests to mass-produced metal boxes.

practical furniture.

The basic form of most of these chests is large and rectangular. Usually they are flat on top (though some are curved), so that they could be used

as a bench or small table; sometimes they were built with drawers below the main compartment and, often, there was a smaller compartment inside the lid for holding valuables.

It can be difficult, even impossible, to determine whether a given chest was in fact intended to serve for a dowry or whether it was commissioned for some other purpose. However, it is probable that the most richly decorated pieces were marriage chests, particularly those decorated with good luck symbols and signs of red paint—the color of celebration, fertility and blood.

Along with one or more large chests, the young bride would often bring a smaller box for her jewelry and makeup. Some of the earliest surviving examples of these are also some of the finest known: for example, the ivory one from Madinat al-Zahra near Córdoba in al-Andalus, a modest-sized box that belonged to the daughter of Abd al-Rahman III and is dated to shortly after 961CE, is beautifully and richly carved. Around the edge of the cover, the Arabic inscription translates: “In the Name of God, this is what was made for the Noble Daughter, daughter of ‘Abd al-Rahman, may God’s mercy and goodwill be upon him.”

Small jewel boxes to accompany the bride continued to be popular well into the 20th century. A hardwood type with a “house roof” lid made of four flat, sloping slabs of wood with decorative brass hinges and locks was widely exported from India; another model, often made in Damascus using camel bone or mother-of-pearl inlay, has historically been favored by wealthy Bedouin. There are also the chests from



This ivory casket, shown here about two-thirds life-sized, was carved in about 961 CE near Córdoba for the daughter of Abd al-Rahman III.



Red paint under brass studs and appliqué plates of this 19th-century “Zanzibar” chest indicates that it likely was used for a dowry.

the Iran-Pakistan border region called *makran* with heavy brass decoration, which also seem to have been made for export, especially to East Africa.

Large chests for dowries and other uses of course also existed, but relatively few have survived. There are numerous mentions of them in Arabic literature, and they also appear among documents in the Cairo Genizah. (See sidebar, p. 27.) The 14th-century Mamluk-era historian Al-Maqrizi describes the chests available at the specialized market in Cairo. Some combined chest and *taht*, or a daybed (like those still being made in Java during the early 20th century), while others, also called *muqaddimah*, were made of leather or sometimes bamboo, and they seem to have been in use as cosmetics boxes.

Decoration on dowry chests varies from region to region, depending on local taste and available materials. Sheila Unwin, author of *The Arab Chest*, concedes it is hard to date many chests or even give them a provenance since little appears to have been written about them before the arrival of Europeans. Generically, they are known by a number of names: *mandoos*, *sandug* and *safat* are three of the most common. More specific types are often referred to by a place name—Omani, Kuwaiti, Bahraini, Zanzibari, etc.—but these often refer to where they were acquired, rather than where they were made.

Most of the older chests used to come from India, thanks to its abundance of hardwoods, teak and rosewood especially. Scholars have argued that the Portuguese sailor’s

chest—generally a plain strong-box with brass corners, hinges and a lock that served like the modern military footlocker—inspired the general idea, but the decoration was a purely local innovation. The more elaborate of the Indian chests might have had drawers at the bottom (generally three) and could be placed on a stand to protect them from damp and insects.

According to Unwin, chests imported from India could be classified into four main types. The top three were the most striking and sought after: Surat, Bombay and Shirazi.

This last was not made in Shiraz (now in Iran), but found in

the areas of Persian influence. All were built in long-lasting teak or other hardwoods, and they were decorated with designs of brass studs and sometimes brass plates cut into geometrical or scrolling appliqué, which became increasingly elaborate in the course of time.

Some of the most expensive were lined with camphor or sandalwood that protected the contents against insects and gave them a delicious scent. These chests sometimes have traces of red paint, indicating their use for holding the dowry, and they were often set on separate wooden feet painted in stripes. The carpentry of the finer chests cleverly inserts secret drawers and tuck-away compartments to hide special treasures. This is the style of chests that came to be copied around the eastern Arabian Peninsula, especially in Oman.

The Shirazi chests were particularly elaborate, as Unwin describes, with “sparse heavy cast brass plating ... [and] diamond-shaped disks.” One of the rare dated examples belonged to Sayyida Salme, the daughter of the early 19th-century Omani sultan of Zanzibar Said bin Sultan al-Said, and it is now in the



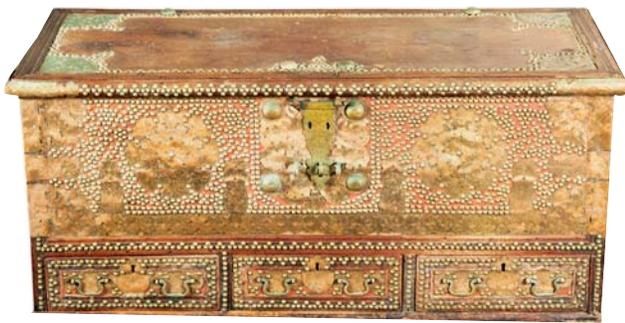
From the Dir Valley in northern Pakistan, this chest is carved from Himalayan cedar. Its pieces are joined, not nailed. Its legs are part of its design, and their rise above the lid is characteristic of the region’s style. The wooden tab on the right is used to pull open a front panel.

DOWER CHESTS in HISTORIC CAIRO

The more than 300,000 surviving documents in the Cairo Genizah are one of our richest sources of insight into daily life in Egypt from the ninth to the 19th centuries. Among them are numerous marriage contracts, and almost all refer to a dower chest. For it, we see two names used: The *muqaddimah* was specifically for the bride's personal possessions; *sunduq*, which normally came in matching pairs, were for other goods. They were not usually elaborately decorated, except in the case of the ruling class.

Genizah expert S.D. Goitein, author in 1983 of the multi-volume *A Mediterranean Society*, had this to say about dower chests in that region:

Along with the outfit, the future wife was expected to provide for its storage. And just as the objects brought in should be as beautiful as possible, so should their repositories. This was true, in particular of the *muqaddama*, the bridal trunk.... The term appears in almost every complete trousseau list, usually at the end.... *Muqaddama* means put first, leading, probably because the donkey carrying it headed the procession that transported the outfit from the bride's domicile to that of her future husband. The *muqaddama* was inlaid with ... tortoiseshell and ivory, as was the *kursi*, stool, or folding chair, on which it stood. Additional ornamentations are noted, also a cover of *kaymukht*, leather with a granular surface, shagreen [traditionally horse or wild ass, more recently shark or ray], which probably was a protection for the textile. Sometimes a mirror was included, a practical accessory since the trunk contained the wife's wardrobe. Finally, there was a *mandil muqaddama*, a piece of cloth, no doubt embroidered, serving as a decorative cover for the bridal trunk.



Top: An 18th-century Turkish or Syrian chest with mother-of-pearl inlay. *Middle:* A late 19th- to early 20th-century Zanzibar chest ornamented with engraved copper, alloy medallions and embedded studs. *Above:* Modern alternatives to the traditional wooden dowry chest are often mass-produced and made of galvanized steel painted in enamel.

Sultan's palace. Salme married a German merchant in 1866 and fled Zanzibar, which gives a probable date for the chest. Married as Emily Ruete, her autobiography, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess*, published in 1907, sheds unique light on the period.

Another less common type came from Malabar, in southwest India. The "Malabar chest" is carved, often in mahogany, rosewood, shisham or other hardwoods, and a favorite pattern uses a round central vase—*lota*—with trails of flowers and fruit, sometimes grapes or pomegranates. The design shows Portuguese influence, although that particular

motif suggests fertility and good luck from Europe into East Asia and it is particularly appropriate for weddings.

The mixture of cultural elements is not limited to Portugal, India and the Arab world. The traditional way of securing the chest was with a hasp, often very decorative, and padlock. While locks and keys were a Portuguese and Dutch innovation, another locking device, one that uses three rings and a padlock, came from China, as did the design of some of the handles and hinges.

Other evidence of cultural tastes and traditions appears in the ornamentation. Designs of metal wire with inlays of

Specific types are often referred to by a place name—Omani, Kuwaiti, Bahraini, Zanzibari, etc.—but these often refer to where they were acquired, rather than where they were made.

mother-of-pearl or camel bone, for example, originated in Egypt-Syria during the ninth and 10th centuries. This style was typically produced for the well-to-do urban classes, while most of the rest of the population used plain or carved chests. Complex woodworking crafts such as intarsia and marquetry were popular throughout the Ottoman territory, and in the 19th century such chests were exported to Europe, especially to France. Chests were commissioned, as were sets of furniture in the European style, for weddings. The patterns tended to be extremely elaborate, sometimes with the entire chest covered in mother-of-pearl and lined with scented wood or silk brocade or velvet.

The manufacture of these types of inlay was a specialty of Damascus, although by the late 20th century there were far fewer craftsmen working than in the past, with commissions arriving largely from the Arabian Peninsula. Again, changing traditions, fashions and economies have led to very few traditional dowry chests being made, and instead, chests of drawers, cupboards and other more modern designs are favored.

In North Africa, fine hardwood is difficult to come by, and as a result, dowry chests are generally painted, as soft woods such as pine or palm do not lend themselves well to delicate carving. Families of modest means might have a plain coffer decorated with a simple pattern, such as the row of arches common all across the Muslim world, in two or three colors. Damages to the lids, including nicks and burns, indicate that many chests served a variety of purposes besides containing valuables.

Wealthy homes would often have much larger chests, some even too tall to sit on or to serve as work benches.



shows a pair of doves drinking from a fountain, perhaps copied from early-Christian sarcophagi, which in the 19th century were still to be seen in the countryside, even being used as horse troughs. In Tunisia, fish are a popular motif, sometimes shown swimming in a circle, since fish not only represent fertility, but also are considered to bring good fortune and protection against the evil eye.

Morocco also has its own wider tradition of painted furniture, but here, geometric patterns that often match with the architectural decoration are the norm, and the arched design is particularly popular. Old pieces are rare, but there is a flourishing reproduction industry, although the colors used tend to be brighter than the originals. Traditional Moroccan chests sometimes have curved tops, a



Above: This very large, elaborately carved chest, photographed on display in the Azem Palace in Damascus, would have been used by only the wealthy. **Left:** Like many chests of softer woods from North Africa, this chest from Djerba, Tunisia, is painted rather than carved.

detail that is probably the result of Spanish and Portuguese influence, particularly along the coast.

In contrast to North Africa where hardwood was scarce, far to the east, in the Swat Valley of Pakistan, good-quality Himalayan cedar wood was so abundant that it was a prime material for everything that could be made out of it, from buildings to plates and bowls—and of course chests. Carving there is a highly prized skill, and chests form an important part of the furnishings of every house, although once again it is hard to establish

which particular ones have been specially made for the dowry.

Chests from Swat normally stand on quite high legs that continue up above the body of the chest to recall slender minarets. The top and bottom borders of the chests are often worked in a toothed or scalloped pattern. Like the fine chests found in the Arabian Peninsula, they are made with fitted joints rather than nails. The fronts of the chests often have two or more panels, and they normally open with a sliding or hinged door at the front, rather than from the top; the door is closed with a hasp and padlock instead of a key. The carving is generally geometric or with stylized garlands of leaves and flowers—which likely symbolize the sun’s disk—and the usual architectural arches. Some chests have completely different patterns on the two front panels, and some experts have suggested that these distinct designs represent bride and groom, but this is not certain.

It must be added that chests, while very widespread, were by no means a universal tradition for dowry objects throughout all the many Islamic cultures and regions of Islamic influence. For example, baskets, which are cheaper than chests though less durable, are favored in rural Yemen. Many areas of Indonesia have a strong tradition of container-making from a variety of leaves and fibers, and some dowry boxes made this way are worked in different colors and sometimes embellished with cowries. Wealthy Indonesian families would sometimes have chests of the Omani type, imported through their trade connections, or ones of the Dutch colonial type, or yet others showing Chinese influences. Village Java, in particular, produced magnificently carved hardwood chests—*grobog*—one style of which was designed to double as a daybed; yet again, it is rarely clear which of these were specifically intended for the dowry.

Fashions, traditions and social expectations change. In the US, the hope chest has long since given way to the “bridal shower.” Dowries, too, have changed and often disappeared—and so have the chests. Few of the very beautiful and elaborate ones are still being made, or, if they are, it is more for neo-traditional interior decoration than a bridal trousseau. Where they still exist, scarcity of fine wood and skilled craftsmen, and the abundant competition of inexpensive, industrial alternatives have perhaps forever changed the style of the dowry chest. When a dowry chest is still used, it now tends to be a tin or galvanized steel trunk, a footlocker, rather than a artisanal wooden chest. Better than wood against damp and insects, the metal chests are still called *sanduaq ‘arus*, or “wedding box,” and they are still often imported to Arabian Gulf countries from India. But instead of brass studs, carving and marquetry, they are painted with enamel designs



Top: Many ordinary antique chests show great wear today, such as these on sale in a market in Oman. Above: The cultural role of the dowry chest is highlighted in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, in this public artwork in a traffic roundabout.

that often show mosque domes, reminiscent of the architectural designs on the older chests, although in color, red still tends to predominate.

Dowries of embroidery and weaving may be long out of fashion, but the chests themselves become more and more desirable as they become rarer, social and artisanal artifacts of a bygone era. ☺



Caroline Stone divides her time between Cambridge and Seville. Her latest book, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*, translated with Paul Lunde from the medieval Arab accounts of the lands in the Far North, was published in 2011 by Penguin Classics.



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The Arab Chest. Sheila Unwin. Arabian Publishing, Ltd., 2006. 978-0954479268.

in *Search of*
Ibn Battuta's
Battuta's
Melon

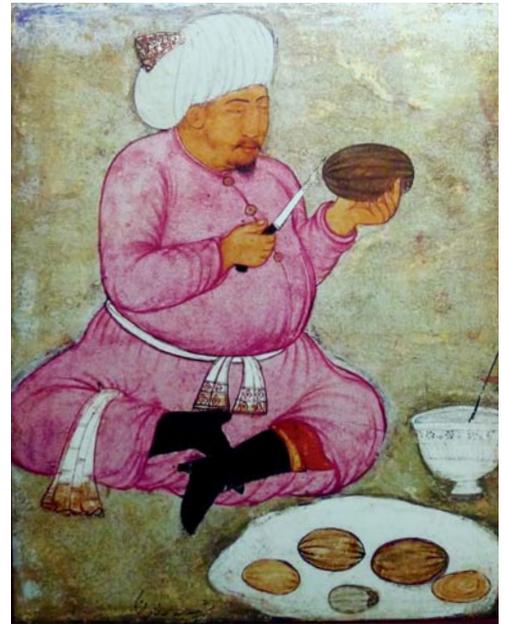
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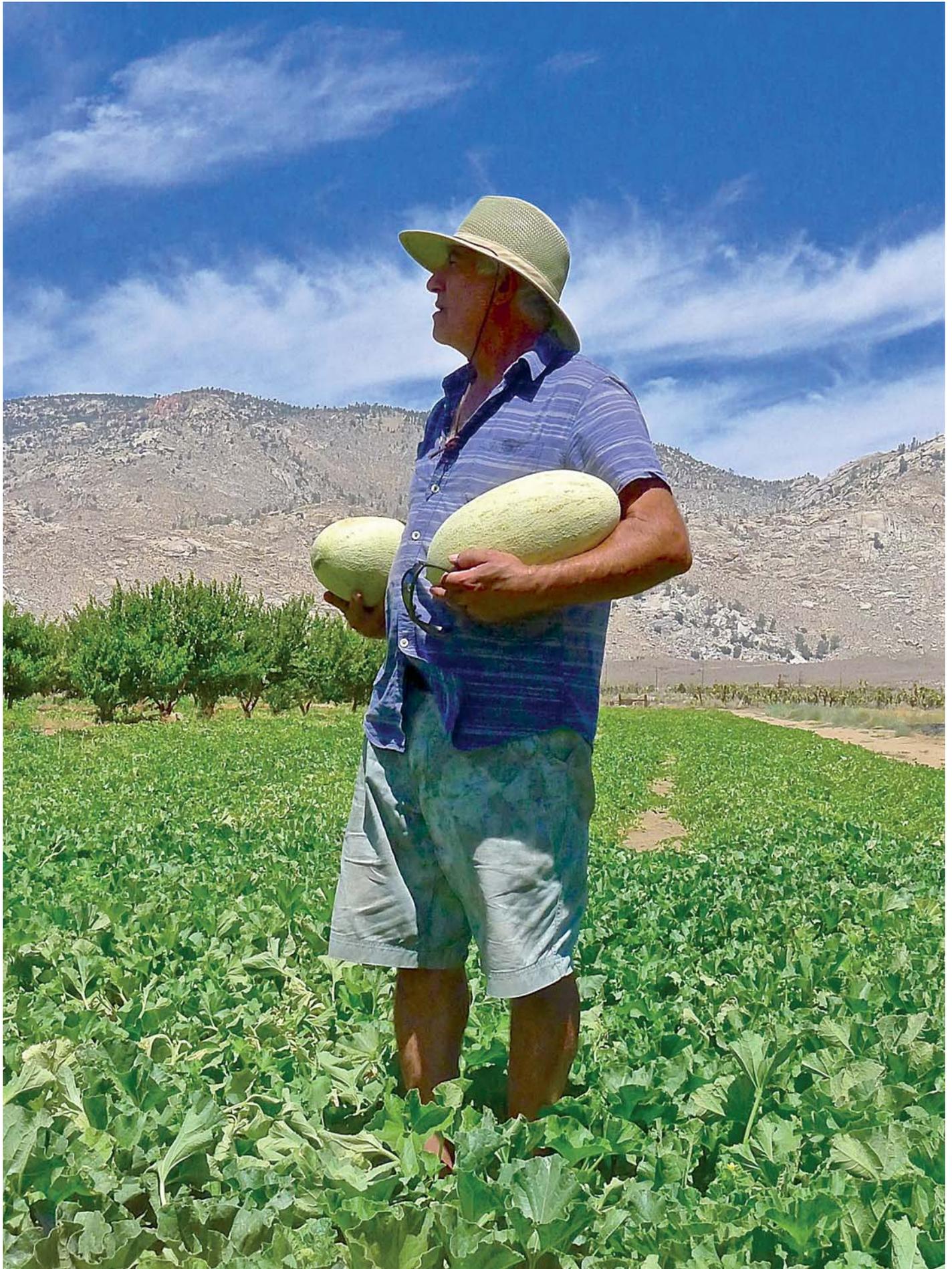
On a bleak, dusty day in 1333, Ibn Battuta, the great traveler from Morocco, finally arrived at the Silk Road city of Urgench (which he called Khorezm) on the banks of the Amu Darya river. After the grueling 30-day march across the desert by camel-drawn wagons from Saraichiq, on the Ural River near the Caspian Sea, he wandered into a crowded market, and there he tasted the most delicious melon of all his travels.

“*There are no melons like Khorezmian melons,” he wrote, “maybe with the exception of Bukharian ones, and the third best are Isfahan melons. Their peels are green, and the flesh is red, of extreme sweetness and firm texture. Surprisingly, they cut melons into slices, dry them in the sun, put them into reed baskets as it is done with Malaga figs, and take them from Khorezm to the remote cities in India and China to sell. They are the best of all dried fruit.”*

Six hundred and eighty-one years later, I arrived in Urgench in early August after a bone-jarring, 12-hour drive by vintage, Russian-built Lada



Painted in the late 16th century by an unknown artist, Abdullah Khan Uzbek II, penultimate Shaybanid Khan of Bukhara, is shown slicing melons in his home. *Opposite:* Kern County, California melon farmer Ruben Mkrtychyan holds two of his Mirza melons in the field where he tested some 28 Central Asian varieties.





The varieties of Central Asian *Cucumis melo* that Mkrtychyan found adapted best to California’s soil and climate were Obinavat and Mirza, above left and right. At his melon stand at the Santa Monica Farmer’s Market, Mkrtychyan, at left, helps restaurateur and celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck make a selection.



taxi from Bukhara across the forbidding wasteland of the Kyzyl-Kum (“Red Desert”). I had come in search of Ibn Batutta’s melon.

Cucumis melo, the sweet dessert melon that we know today, belongs to the family *Cucurbitaceae*—the gourd family, which also includes zucchini, pumpkins, squash and cucumbers. The sweet melons of Central Asia have a convoluted and complex history that continues to confound taxonomists and botanical experts. According to the book *Melons of Uzbekistan*, which was based on a scientific survey by the Uzbek Research Institute of Plants carried out in 2000, *Cucumis melo* is thought to have come from a bitter, sour-tasting melon still found growing wild in Central Asia.

It is unclear exactly when sweet melons were first developed in Khorezm, an area encompassing much of modern Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and northern Iran, as well as ancient Persia, which included part of northeastern Iraq. These two areas are likely the source of all sweet melons grown throughout the world today.

The earliest written mention of the sweet melons of Khorezm appears in *Paradise of Wisdom*, written in 850 CE by Ali ibn Sahl al-Tabari, who mentioned long, sweet melons in his chapter on vegetables. In the Arabic translation of Dioscorides’ first-century CE *De Materia Medica* (*On Medical Matters*) produced around 990 in Samarkand by Al-Husayn ibn Ibraim al-Natili, there is an illustration depicting the vines and ripe yellow fruit of *Cucumis melo*. The caption names it *qawoun*; in modern Uzbek, the word for sweet melon is *qovun*. Writing a bit earlier, in 955, Muhammad Abu al-Qasim ibn Hawqal, who traveled widely in Khorezm, described a long melon that was *qabih al-mandar* (ugly), but *ghaya fi al-halawa* (highest sweetness). He also mentioned that the melons were cut up, dried and “sent to numerous places in the world.”

According to descriptions in the 11th century by Abu al-Khayr, sweet melon seeds, most likely of the casaba variety, made their way from Khorezm to al-Andalus around that time as a result of Islamic territorial expansion, trade and agricultural development. The seeds were conveyed along the maritime trade route linking the western Indian subcontinent to Egypt via the Red Sea and from there across the Mediterranean to Muslim Iberia—al-Andalus. Around the mid-15th century, Armenian merchants brought melon seeds overland to Italy. Sweet melons’ wild popularity there is evidenced by the fact that in 1471 Pope Paul II died from eating too many of the sweet melons from the papal gardens of Cantalupo (from which we get the name “cantaloupe”).

In his 1895 book *Travels in Central Asia*, ethnologist and British spy Arminius Vambrey described the melon route from Khorezm east to China and northwest to St. Petersburg, in which melons were carried by caravans of 1,000 to 2,000 camels. Vambrey wrote:

... and fruits, the superior merit of which not Persia and Turkey alone, but even Europe itself, would find difficult to contest ... but above all, to the incomparable and delicious melons, renowned as far as even in remote

Pekin, so that the sovereign of the Celestial Empire never forgets, when presents flow to him from Chinese Tartary, to bring some Urkindji [Urgench] melons. Even in Russia they fetch a high price, for a load of winter melons exported thither brings in return a load of sugar.

Captain Frederick Burnaby, in his 1876 book *A Ride to Khiva*, made similar observations:

Melon traders would shovel up snow and ice during winter and store it in deep underground cellars. Then in summer the most succulent melons were packed with ice and placed in large lead containers. These were then heaved onto camels to journey across the deserts to the banqueting tables of the Tsar of Russia, the Emperor of Peking and the Mogul rulers of Northern India.

Burnaby had the good fortune of tasting an aged Khorezm melon in the middle of a Khiva winter. "Anyone accustomed to this fruit in Europe," he wrote, "would scarcely recognize its relationship with the delicate and highly perfumed melons of Khiva." He added that "throughout the winter, melons are preserved according to an old method where they are put into straw or net bags and then hung from the ceiling of a special warehouse called a *kaunkhana* [*qovunxona*, or melon house]."

Today, Central Asia and in particular Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkmenistan (where Melon Day is a national holiday) are considered to grow the world's best aromatic, sweet dessert melons. Of the older varieties, the Gurovak of Khorezm in Uzbekistan, the Gulobi of Turkmenistan, the Asqalan of northern Afghanistan and the Jharbezh Mashadi from Iran are legendary among experts. The farmers of Uzbekistan, in

Along the road between Tashkent and Samarkand, melon salesman Mirza Baxodir offers passersby samples of one of his Obinavat melons at his stall at the Sirdaryo bazaar. "Anyone accustomed to this fruit in Europe," wrote Capt. Frederick Burnaby in 1876, "would scarcely recognize its relationship with the delicate and highly perfumed melons of Khiva."

the areas of Khorezm, Karakalpakstan, Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya, and Fergana Valley have been developing and improving sweet melons

for thousands of years, and these types of melons are just now beginning to appear in specialty and ethnic grocery stores and farmer's markets in California.

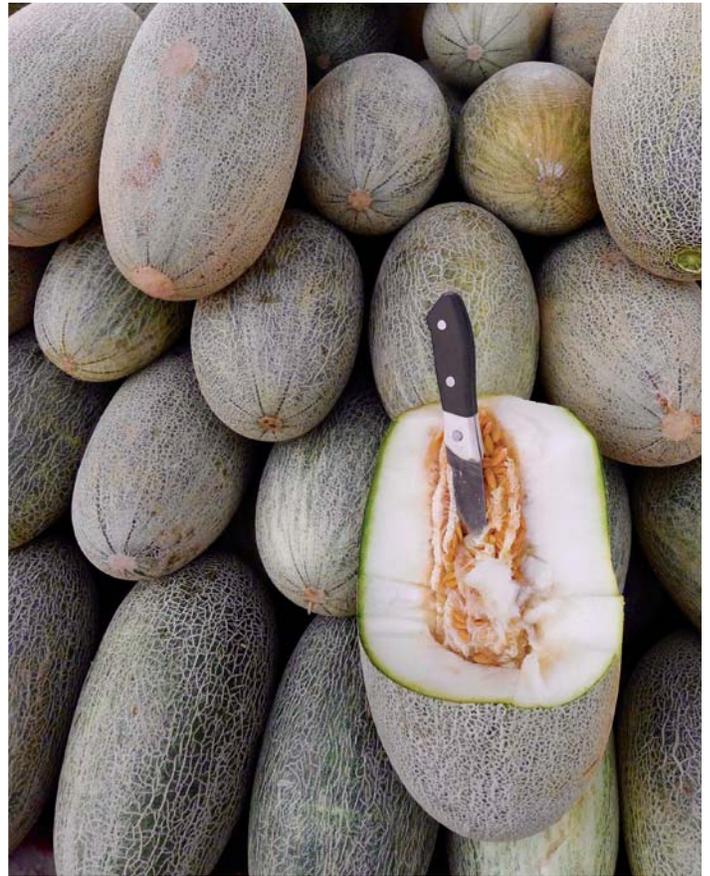
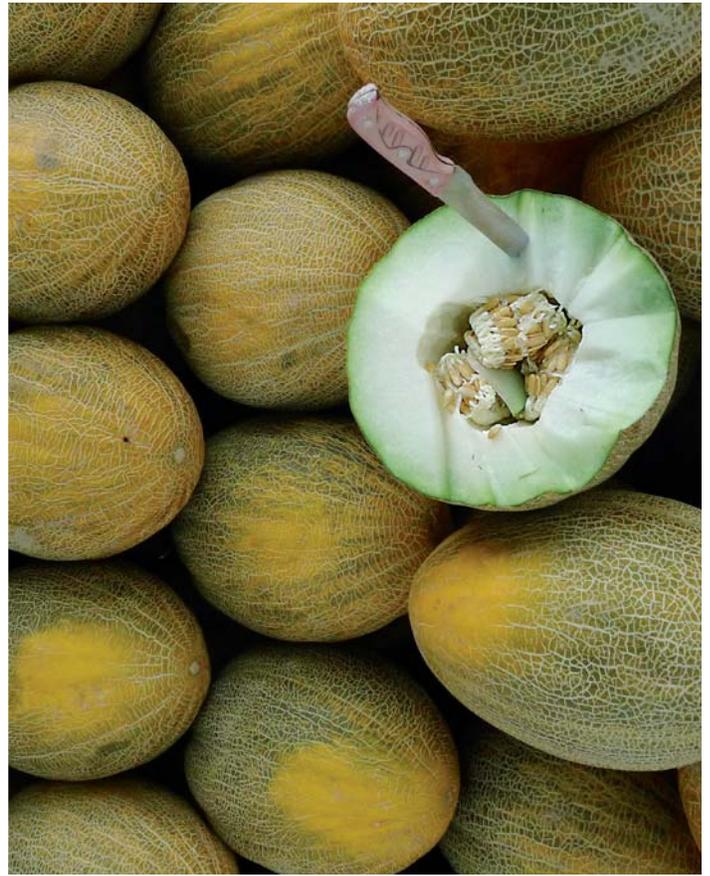
My journey to Khorezm started in Sacramento, California, when I paid a visit to Corti Brothers, a family-owned grocery store. There I found a towering

pile of long, cream-colored melons called Mirza. They were priced at \$2.50 a pound; other more conventional melons were selling for 25 to 60 cents a pound. I had never paid \$22 for a melon, but I drove home with my purchase and,

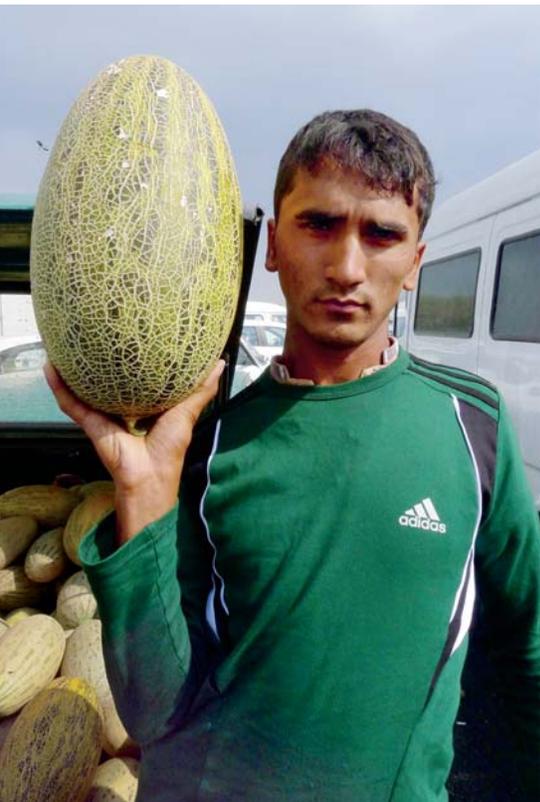


Researchers have identified more than 160 varieties of melons in Uzbekistan, but no one had given much thought to exactly which one Ibn Battuta had described.





Clockwise from top: Qo'yboshi melon; Kirkma melon; Ko'kcha melon, and Kampir Qovun (Old Lady Melon), all from Sirdaryo bazaar on the Tashkent-Samarkand road.



From left: Vendor with a Mirza melon in Chorsu bazaar, Tashkent; vendor Gulistan selling an Andarxon melon at Beruni bazaar along the road in Khorezm province; and a Maxallyy melon, in a sling to help keep it longer, also at Beruni bazaar.

within two hours, had eaten the melon at a single sitting. The next morning I went back for more. The texture, taste, fragrance and melting sweetness of the luscious pale green flesh was like no melon I had ever eaten. It made me think of Ibn Battuta's melon, and it made me wonder if it was still in cultivation.

Store owner Darrell Corti gave me the name of his Mirza melon supplier, and within a week I was in the high desert of Kern County, California, driving a rutted gravel road in search of Armenian immigrant and farmer Ruben Mkrtchyan, who had 1½ hectares of Uzbek melons under cultivation. After field trials of 28 different varieties in 2012, Mkrtchyan had settled on two: Obinavat and Mirza. Overripe or cosmetically flawed Mirza melons are sliced, sun dried and braided into a traditional Uzbek delicacy.

Mkrtchyan told me of his difficulties obtaining rare seeds

from older varieties that are now starting to disappear. For example, he said, the seeds of one variety, the Jarbezh Mashadi, which has been in continuous cultivation for 700 years, were smuggled from Iraq to France and then into the United States in the heel of a shoe (not his). Another variety, Battikh Samarra (melon of Samarra, a city in northern Iraq), goes back to the Abbasid Dynasty of the 11th century. (In Arabic, *battikh* can refer to either





Top: Melon shoppers look at Kampir Qovun, left, and Mirza melons, foreground, at the Sirdaryo melon bazaar on the road between Tashkent and Samarkand. Middle: This cart at Krity bazaar in Bukhara is loaded with Gulobi (Flower-water) melons. Lower: A vendor naps with his Mirza melons at Sirdaryo bazaar.



watermelons, *Citrullus lanatus*, or sweet melons, *Cucumis melo*.) When I heard the age of these two varieties, my idea to go in search of Ibn Battuta’s melon no longer seemed so far-fetched.

A month later, while visiting Mkrtychyan’s melon stall at the Santa Monica Farmer’s Market in Los Angeles, I fell into conversation with one of his first and most loyal customers: celebrity chef, restaurateur and philanthropist Wolfgang Puck, who was there to buy melons for his family. Puck was ecstatic about Uzbek melons, and he referred to Mkrtychyan as “The King of Melons.” Two weeks later I was on my way to Uzbekistan.

In Tashkent, I met Muhabbat Turdieva and Abdumalik Rustamov, co-authors of *The Melons of Uzbekistan*. Of the 160 varieties they described, there appeared to be several that matched Ibn Battuta’s description, but when I asked which *exactly* it might be, there was a long silence followed by a robust and lengthy professional debate over the numerous possibilities. Clearly no one had given much thought as to just which variety Ibn Battuta had described, or whether it was still under cultivation. There were almost too many to choose from.

Central Asian melons, they explained, are roughly divided into the following groups: Early ripening Khandalaks; early-summer, soft-pulp Bukharica and Gurvak; summer solid-pulp Amiri; summer and autumn-winter Cassabas and autumn-winter Zard. Many of the 160 varieties also had different common names according to regional dialects. One variety named after a certain breeder in one area might be known elsewhere by the distinctive color pattern on its rind, or even by an “expression of feelings.”

At lunch that day, Turdieva, whose title is forest genetic resources scientist, described her work assessing the distribution, diversity and conservation of local tree species, fruit crops and melons in Central Asia. Sustainable use of local varieties and conservation of their wild relatives are some of her special interests. During the melon expedition in 2000, she



was involved with the survey of melon-growing areas, the study of farmers' plots, the listing of melons grown and the description and collection of melon seeds from old varieties. In addition to cataloging melon varieties, her work aimed at "enhancement of the use of melon genetic resources."

Uzbekistan's melons enjoy their well-earned reputation for their unusual flavor and sweetness. Of the countries in the region, Uzbekistan has the largest amount of land devoted to melons. The total cultivated area comes to nearly 40,000 hectares of land, which yields approximately

450,000 - 500,000 tons of melons every year. Domestic consumption is high, and the largest export market is Russia. Turdieva expressed her concern about the loss of old melon varieties not only due to agribusiness pressures but also because generations of farmers and amateurs were no longer saving seeds the way they used to. To help protect the diversity of these historic and precious melon varieties, scientists now carry out regular seed-collecting expeditions and seed exchange programs to save these melon varieties for future generations of growers, breeders and researchers.

A boy unloads a trunk full of assorted melons for sale at Beruni bazaar.





Of dried melon, Ibn Battuta recounted that it was “the best of all dried fruit.” At his melon stall at the Santa Monica Farmer’s Market, Ruben Mkrtychyan offers dried, braided strips of Mirza melon.

To protect the old varieties, Uzbekistan now has one of the largest melon germplasm collections in the world with 1,330 accessions.

With only 12 days and an entire country to search, I had little time to waste. I contacted my friend Zafar Jahongirov, and that afternoon we began the melon hunt at Tashkent’s sprawling market, Chorsu bazaar. We sampled Mkrtychyan’s varieties—Obinavat and Mirza—and I found them as delicious as their California counterparts. We wandered into the cavernous dried fruit section, where I saw braided, dried melon and dried melon strips rolled up by hand, stuffed with large, seedless black raisins called *Qorakishmish*. The melon strips looked like caramelized dried apples, but that is where the similarity ended. Imagine the flavor of an entire, ripe melon, at the peak of perfection, concentrated into a single, chewy, toffee-like, melon-scented bite.

Marco Polo, in the late 13th century, had also sampled these: “They are preserved as follows: a melon is sliced, just as we do

with pumpkin, then these slices are rolled and dried in the sun, and finally they are sent for sale to other countries, where they are in great demand for they are as sweet as honey.”

Jahongirov explained that autumn and winter melons of the Zard variety are still hung up to slowly ripen in *qovunxona*, the traditional drying sheds (“melon house”) mentioned by Burnaby. Harvested as early as September, properly stored winter melons can last from two to eight months. The melons become sweeter and juicier with the passage of time as the starches gradually convert to sugars until they attain a complex musky, perfumed melon flavor. After exploring the markets of Tashkent, we hit the road, stopping at every roadside stall, market place and melon shop along the way to Urgench, 1,119 kilometers down the road.

“*Tatip ko’ring! Tatip ko’ring!*” (“Taste it! Taste it!”) cried out the vendors at every stop, generously cutting samples from their best and offering them to us on the tip of a knife.



Clockwise from top left: Mkrtychyan's dried and partially rolled Mirza melon strips at Santa Monica Farmer's market, Los Angeles. At Chorsu bazaar, Tashkent, dried and rolled melon, called *qovun qoqi* in Uzbek, is stuffed with black raisins (*Qorakishmish*) and walnuts. Braided Mirza melons sit in plastic wrapping at Chorsu bazaar. A Tirshek melon in Khorezm province is tied and ready to be aged over the winter in a traditional *qovunxona*, or melon-drying shed.

We tried Kampir Qovun, known as “Old Lady melon” because it is wrinkled on the outside but sweet on the inside. We caught the very end of the season for Gurovak, which seems to be most people’s favorite. We sampled Andarxon, a fall and early winter melon; the Bishagi, which means “formless” because the melon comes in an assortment of shapes, and another favorite, Oq Novvot (White Sugar). There was a wrinkled, canary-yellow melon called Tirshek that is eaten fresh or hung up to age over the winter months. Many of the melons were not even among the 160 listed in *Melons of Uzbekistan*. One was nicknamed The Dog’s Head; another, Flower-Water; and yet another, The Queen Mother.

I asked many of the melon growers and their customers if they had heard of Dioscorides’ first-century CE advice to place a hollowed-out melon rind on the head of a child to bring down a fever or as a treatment for heat stroke. No one had heard of this, but all laughed and agreed a melon-rind helmet would be an excellent idea for anyone in the heat of an Uzbek summer.

After nearly two weeks on the road sampling dozens of melons each day, I finally arrived in Khorezm province at the well-known roadside Beruni melon market, near the banks of the Amu Darya river—very close to where Ibn Battuta tasted the best melon of his life. At the market, I met a kind, elderly, white-haired melon vendor by the name of Gulistan (Land of



One was nicknamed The Dog’s Head; another, Flower-Water; yet another, The Queen Mother.

Flowers) and her two grandsons. Like most melon growers I encountered, she knew the story of Ibn Battuta’s melon, and she soon set her mind to deciding which variety it might be. As she mulled this over, I realized that in the previous two weeks I had not seen a single melon with a green rind and red flesh. I was beginning to wonder if Ibn Battuta had described a watermelon, *Citrullus lanatus*.

Gulistan dismissed my skepticism. She told me that it sounded like Ibn Battuta was describing a late-summer melon such as an orange-fleshed Gurovak, or the light reddish-fleshed Ichi-qizil (“red-core”), or possibly a long-ripening winter melon of the Zard variety. Unconvinced, I continued my search.

That evening, I sent a hasty email to my friend Tim Mackintosh-Smith, the Oxford-educated Arabist, writer and lecturer who lives in Sana’a, the capital of Yemen. Mackintosh-Smith is the author of an award-winning book and BBC trilogy in which he followed in the footsteps of Ibn Battuta, and he is arguably one of the

foremost scholars on all aspects of Ibn Battuta. I mentioned the passage in the Gibb translation of Ibn Battuta’s *rihla*, or account of his journeys, that described the Khorezmian melon with the green rind and the crisp red flesh.

Mackintosh-Smith wrote back: “IB’s Arabic word is *ahmar* which can indeed be plain ‘red’. But Arabic colours are notoriously slippery. Sometimes they have a ‘green’ donkey for sale in the donkey market behind my house, but I think it is a shade of what we would call grey. Poets often describe the skin of especially beautiful women as ‘green’. I am pretty sure that *ahmar* for IB would have covered anything from watery pastel pink to deep purple; and green could mean anything from the palest shade of lime green to the densest pine forest at midnight. And the precise time of year is also problematic because Ibn Battuta was notoriously vague about dates. He describes a frozen lake to the south of Urgench, so this would suggest he was describing a fall/winter melon.”

Taking all of this into consideration, I expanded my search to include all melons that might or might not have a vaguely greenish rind with a flesh possibly, but probably not, tinged with a light reddish orange—or something similar. We were running out of time, and I had to make my best guess.

At 3:30 a.m., two days before I left Uzbekistan, Zafar and I drove into a meandering and nameless open-air roadside melon market. The vendors were all asleep. We approached a stall with a large selection of the Ichi-qizil melons that Gulistan had mentioned. It wasn’t a winter melon, but in all other aspects it matched Ibn Battuta’s description in terms of taste, texture, color and region of origin.

Zafar woke the woman who ran the stall. She climbed from her wooden bed piled high with blankets and surrounded by a sea of hundreds of melons. Other nearby vendors were sleeping with their own melons. She turned on a single overhead bare light bulb. Zafar explained our long journey in search of Ibn Battuta’s melon.



The earliest known depiction of *Cucumis melo*, or sweet melon, is in an Arabic translation, produced around 990 in Samarkand by Al-Husayn ibn Ibraim al-Natili, of Dioscorides’ first-century *De Materia Medica* (*On Medical Matters*). The word at the top transliterates as *qawoun*: The modern Uzbek word for sweet melon is *qovun*.

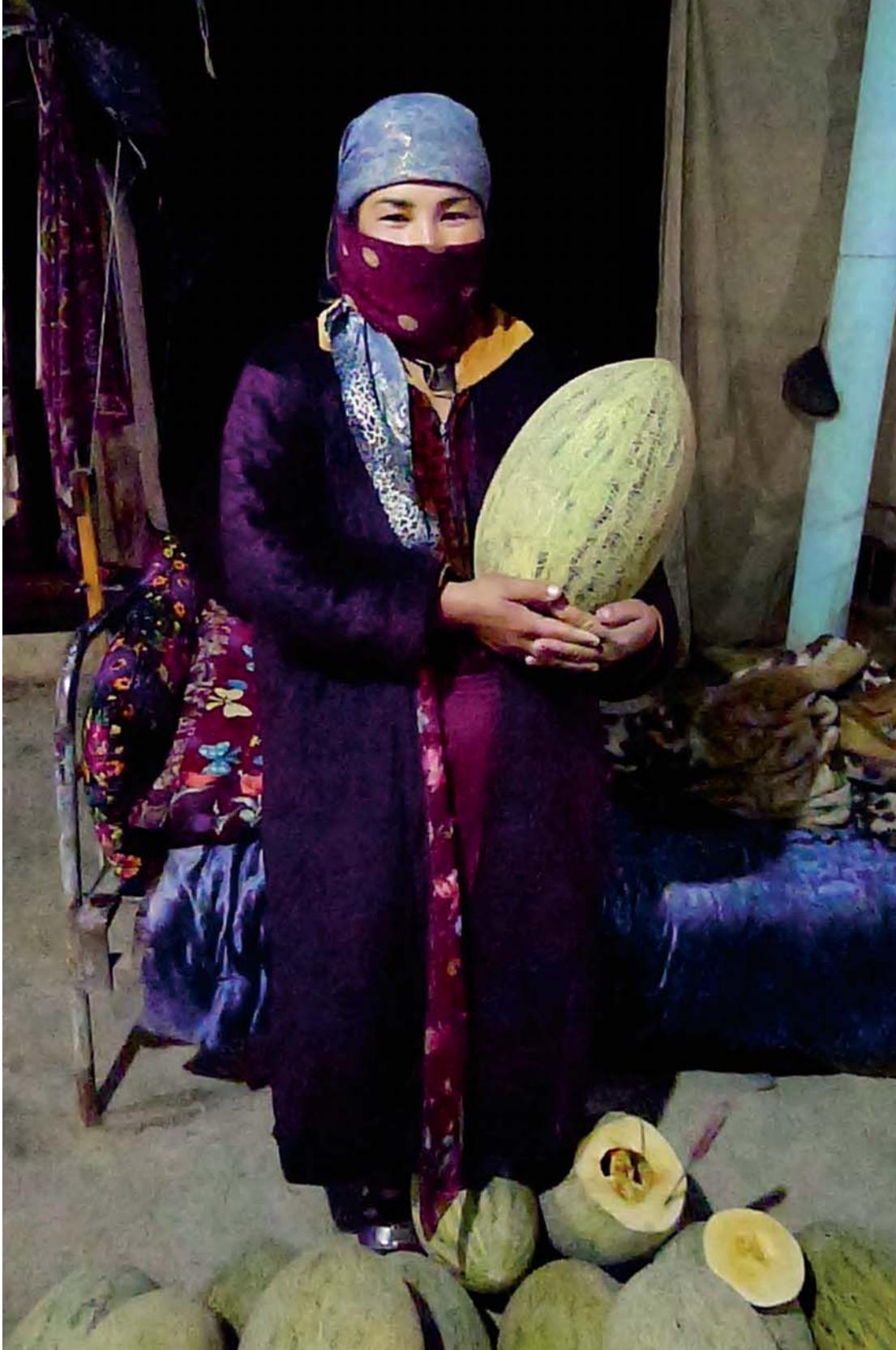
Holding an Ichi-qizil ("red-core") melon: Of all, it came closest to Ibn Battuta's description in taste, texture, color and region of origin.

"Ibn Battuta's melon, at this time of the night?" she laughed. Half asleep and wrapped in multiple layers of robes, she picked up an Ichi-qizil melon, cut samples for us and posed for a photo. She was flattered that of all the melons we had seen in Uzbekistan, we had selected hers.

In the closing hours of my quest, I realized that over the 681 years since Ibn Battuta's visit to Khorezm, Uzbek farmers had been hard at work perfecting the art of melon breeding and growing. By saving old local melon seeds, creating and improving new varieties and passing down specialized horticultural practices according to regional water quality, soil types and climatic conditions, they had no doubt improved the disease resistance, shelf life, yield, texture, degree of sweetness and complexity of flavors of melons throughout the different growing areas. And then there was the issue of random variations due to natural hybridization in the melon fields to consider. With all

of these factors in mind, it would not be surprising—even likely—that Ibn Battuta's melon had evolved into something quite different, disappeared entirely, or simply fallen out of favor because other, more recent varieties were better.

Standing in the cold night air, one thing was clear: Ichi-qizil was as close as we were going to get. I paid for the melon, and the woman thanked us. She turned off the light and climbed back into her bed. We closed the car doors and drove into the night. 🌍



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TRAVELERS of AL-ANDALUS

part 17



The Double Lives of Ibn al-Khatib

Written by LOUIS WERNER and HAMID TRIKI

Art by BELÉN ESTURLA

Some travelers look forward to packing their cases and hitting the road, but for those forced out of their hometowns and away from their mother countries against their will, travel has an entirely different meaning—one of separation, loss, and an often desperate act of survival.

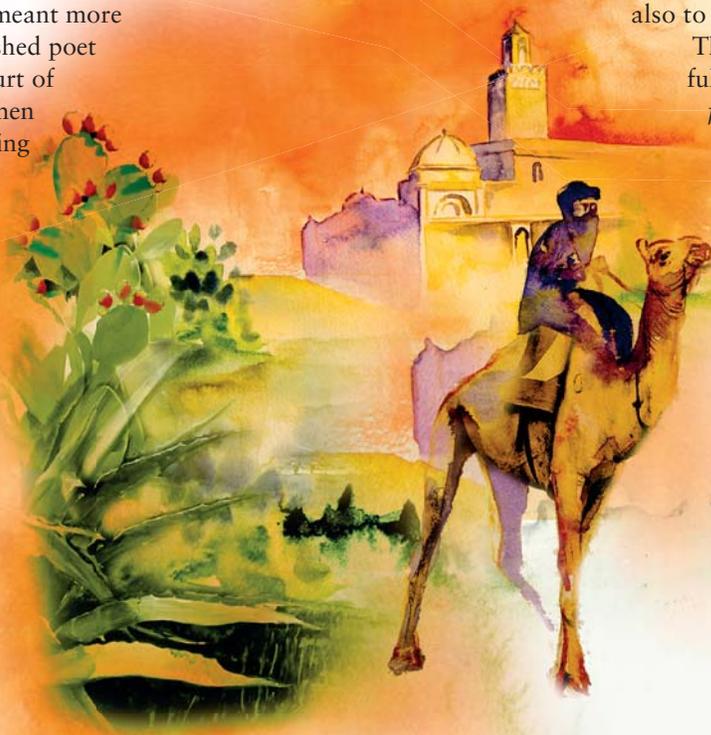
For Muhammad ibn Abdallah al-Salmani, born in the town of Loja near Granada in the year 1313, travel abroad meant more than mere exile. An accomplished poet and minister in the Nasrid court of Granada during its heyday, when the Alhambra palace was getting its most brilliant finishing touches, he and his sovereign, King Muhammad v, were obligated to flee for their lives to Morocco and the safety of the court of the Merinid Sultan when the king's half-brother launched a palace coup in the year 1359.

And it was in Morocco, based in the seaside town of Salé but often camped outdoors in the wilds of the mountainous interior, that this most erudite and

refined man—author of more than 60 works ranging from political theory, veterinary medicine and history to mysticism, administrative science and collections of his prodigious correspondence (which included a letter sent to none other than the Arab world's most famous traveler of all time, Ibn Battuta, by then long retired from his own journeys around the world)—began also to write travelogues.

Three of them are most playfully entitled: *Mi'yar al-ikhtiyar fi ahwal al-ma'ahid wa al-diyar* (*The Measurement of Choice in the Conditions of Places and Buildings*); *Khatrat al-tayf fi rihla al-shita wa al-sayf* (*The Appearance of a Ghost During a Trip of Winter and Summer*); and *Nufadat al-jirab fi 'ulalat al-ightrab* (*The Shaking of the Bag for Entertainment While Abroad*).

His contemporary polymath and friend Ibn Khaldun said he “possessed an unequal linguistic habit and his pupils followed in his footsteps.” What Ibn



Khaldun did not say was that his pupil and equally brilliant poet Ibn Zamrak was the source of his friend's eventual undoing. Spanish Arabist Emilio García Gomez called him the last great man of letters in Al-Andalus because "after having thrown away the key, he turned out the lights and left it in the dark."

Those who doubt the excellence of his poetic voice need only read his verses, some in gilded letters on a lapis background inscribed in stucco on the walls of the Alhambra.

*See with your own
eyes the delight in me,
And admire my shape and adornments ...
Let God who is without form or space give shape
To my creator's most remote desire.*

Known to history under the delightful name Lisan al-Din Ibn al-Khatib (Tongue of Religion, Son of the Sermon-Giver) or, more simply, Ibn al-Khatib, he also accrued three other more telling nicknames. During his lifetime he was known as *Dhu al-wizaratayn* (He of the Two Ministries) because, after three years in exile, he was able to return to Granada, when Muhammad v reclaimed the throne, and resume office.

After his death in 1375, which occurred during his second Moroccan exile and in the shadow of yet further intrigue, his biographer, al-Maqqari, renamed him with the dual monikers *Dhu al-'Amrayn* and *Dhu al-Mayy-itayn* (He of the Two Lives and He of the Two Deaths). These were references to the fact that Ibn al-Khatib's prolific writing was due in part to insomnia: Working by day and night, he accrued the equivalent of two lifetimes; his death, indeed, was by a kind of double execution—strangulation followed by immolation.

Of his travelogues, *The Appearance of a Ghost* is the more straightforward. It recounts a 21-day journey in the spring of 1347 from Granada to Almería in the company of his Nasrid sovereign Yusuf I, father of Muhammad v, to inspect the kingdom's defensive perimeter.

Ibn al-Khatib seemingly does the impossible by turning a dry trip report into a literary *tour de force* of rhymed

and rhythmic prose, touching on the descriptions of towns large and small, many of whose names come from the Arabic—Guadix (*wadi*, or "valley"), Gor (*ghor*, or "declivity"), Almazora (*mahsour*, or "restricted"), Almanzora (*mansour*, or "victorious") and Purchena (*burj*, or "tower")—before arriving

at his destination, "a city that guards the independence of the realm, a flourishing city where caravans and fleets keep their rendezvous, a town that hoists its flag of pristine honor and shows itself to be first among its rivals."

The Legado Andalusi Foundation in Granada has created a tourist itinerary called Ruta de Ibn al-Jatib (Spanish scholars transliterate "kh" as "j"), which tracks this exact route, with stops along the way to see a *mudéjar* wooden inlaid ceiling in a former mosque in the town of Baza and the Moorish castle in Lorca. The narrative has been translated into Spanish by Jacinto Bosch Vilá and Wilhelm Hoernerbach.

The Measurement of Choice was written as a *maqama*, a short-barrel, scattershot literary form invented by the Arabs that aimed to impress readers with impossible-to-match rhetorical extravagances. In his *maqama*, Ibn al-Khatib wrote of 34 cities in Al-Andalus, including Malaga, Granada and Ronda, which he compared to the Moroccan towns Tangier,

*Working by day and night,
he accrued the equivalent of two
lifetimes—in addition to two
stints as vizier.*



Meknes, Ceuta and Fez that he had more recently visited as an exile. Despite being far away, he fondly recalled his childhood home of Loja and its women “who cure broken hearts and rabbits that seem awake while sleeping.”

On the other hand, *The Shaking of the Bag*—a miscellany of praise poems, history and geography, and personal narrative based on his trips from the High Atlas back finally to Al-Andalus—is far less straightforward. Its vocabulary has been studied for covert meanings, of the inside story within the outside story of a physical journey.

“I am nothing but a wanderer of the road,” he wrote, “who has fled this world as a lion, to isolate myself from it, just as I separate body from soul.... Abstinence from all that men desire brings me wisdom and money to give as alms to others.” Simple travelogue it is not, but rather a kind of secret diary

of a man-in-exile’s attempt to save himself from the political storms back home and those he felt were sure to come again.

One might find it strange that Ibn al-Khatib chose his place of exile in Salé rather than the more sumptuous Merinid capital of Fez, calling it “a sandy ground, with water of poor quality ... with mosquitoes ... its people avaricious and of low intelligence.” But historians speculate that at this point in his life he was set on establishing his own identity, to avoid being too closely associated with a deposed king whose time and fortune he feared were now finished.

These thoughts play out most evidently when he goes up the High Atlas to meet the shaykh of the Hintata tribe, Amir Ibn Muhammad ibn Ali. In the person of the amir, Ibn al-Khatib was eager to find a patron unrelated to and in fact more powerful than the ruling Merinid dynasty, because a



royal protector, he knew, could be as easily deposed as was his own patron, Muhammad v.

Indeed, the greatest Merinid sultan of all, Abul Hassan Ali ibn Othman, had expanded his territory across the Algerian coast as far as Tunis, commanding at one point some 40,000 Zinata Berber cavalrymen and troops of Andalusí Arab footmen, and then, following a bad turn in his military campaign, had been dethroned, captured and executed by his son Abu Inan in 1351.

Ibn al-Khatib calculated that he would need friends in high places

whose power was enduring, not fleeting, and thus he looked beyond political dynasties toward the Atlas tribe that had once loyally sheltered Abul Hassan. For a man fluent in the recondite language of diplomacy, to approach and praise such rough-hewn mountain men meant that Ibn al-Khatib felt deeply pressed to seek far and wide a fail-safe insurance policy offering both haven and protector in the event he once again must flee for his life.

Outside Marrakesh in the direction of the Hintata territory, near North Africa's highest summit, Jebel Toubkal, lies Aghmat, the first capital of the Souss region. It had fallen into such decline—"a place as ugly as it tried to be beautiful," he wrote—that it had become a miserable place of exile for many former rulers of the petty kingdoms of Al-Andalus, the so-called Taifa states, broken away from the Caliphate in Córdoba.

Two of these were also men of high literary talent, the poet and last Abbadid king of Seville, Al-Mu'tamid ibn Abbad, and the last Zirid king of Granada, Abdallah ibn Buluggin, who wrote his memoirs there. In visiting Aghmat in the footsteps of his fellow Moors, Ibn al-Khatib must have been making a literary pilgrimage as much as he was reconnoitering a safe haven.

We propelled ourselves to climb the crowning mountain like a rapacious bird hanging over our ascent, flanked by the tribal lands of the Hintata, they who are supporters of the state, intimates of the Merinid dynasty, sworn to its obedience, noted for their loyalty, ready to risk their life before they would profane it, to keep a promise and a friendship, deserving above others all prestige. This was the chief incentive for my route, the most simple reason for my trip.

Ibn al-Khatib relates how he sought to make the Merinid amir's acquaintance, concluding

One poem by Ibn al-Khatib is inscribed in the Alhambra's famous Court of the Myrtles.

with a 12-line *qasida* addressed directly to him whose lines include "By God, how you maintain happiness! / By God, what lucky fortune keeps you safe!" The central part of the narrative is not the difficulty of the steep ascent but rather the luxury of its banquet at the summit: "Barely were we seated, relieved of our shoes, when a meal was served that drowned the very sea and flooded its very waves."

The Shaking of the Bag recounts the return of Ibn al-Khatib to Granada following the reinstatement of Muhammad v to the Nasrid throne, before finally concluding with the account of a ceremony at the Alhambra, the Proph-

et's *moulid*, or birthday celebration, on December 30, 1362. He describes the guest list, menu, palace décor and the king's attire. "The sovereign's visage dazzled the eyes," he wrote, "and what pleased him most was that instead of a crown, he wore a special turban which as of that night became the royal-most symbol of Al-Andalus.

"Scribes, travelers and officials jaded by other such festivals all recognized that this convocation, as much for its location as for its cuisine, music and chronometer [a timekeeping device for measuring the night hours that had been demonstrated], was an event without precedent, that never would be outdone or even repeated."

A poem by Ibn al-Khatib inscribed in the Court of Myrtles captures the night's magical setting:

*With my jewels and with my crown I surpass the most beautiful,
And before me the stars of the zodiac all bow down ...
It is as though I had received the gift of that bounty which
Flows from the hand of my lord Abu al-Hajjaj [Yusuf I, his former patron]*

Thus out of his shaken bag poured many jewels and stars. In his travelogues, Ibn al-Khatib always wrote about more than simple arrivals and departures and the stopping places in between. He wrote in the highest form of Arabic literary prose, and signed his name upon the Alhambra itself. The millions of tourists from all over the world who visit the palace each year see his verses adorning its walls in praise, even if few can now read them. ☺

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EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS

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CURRENT

CURRENT NOVEMBER

The Woman on the Wire is a solo exhibition by Gülay Semerciöglü, who carefully loops by hand thin, colored, enamel-coated wire to create knitted structures. The surfaces appear from a distance like shimmering, glossy blocks of smooth color, while up close the viewer witnesses fluctuating tonal modulations as light is reflected from one strand to the next. Within this body of work, the artist investigates authority and control, with particular attention to the curtailment of women's agency and free will. PiArtworks, **London**, through November 28.

The Guardians: Adel Quraishi. Quraishi was commissioned to produce portraits of the eight remaining "Guardians" of the Prophet's Mosque by the Governor of Madinah, Saudi Arabia. Once numbering in the hundreds, the Guardians are keepers of the keys to Prophet Muhammad's burial chamber. Quraishi is the only man to have been permitted to photograph these subjects, the last of their generation. Quraishi's sensitive handling is evident in the emotion conveyed by his sitters, while his technicality shines through in the radiant composition of the photographs. Leighton House Museum, **London**, through November 29.

Art from Elsewhere explores different realities of profound global change. The show features works in a variety of media that examine questions of trade and exchange, urban and international migration, frontiers and failed utopias. Artworks address issues including life in conflict zones, oppressive government regimes, and the advent of capitalism and post-colonial experiences. **Preston**, UK, through November 30.

Islamic Motifs is a collection of 60 photos of Islamic geometric and floral decoration by Emirati photographers Marwan Al Ali and Yusif Harmoudi. The exhibition includes photos of Islamic motifs inspired by many of the mosques and the interior elements of other Islamic architecture found in the UAE, such as the interior esthetic design, calligraphic script and Islamic motifs used to decorate doors, halls and walls. **Sharjah** Calligraphy Museum, UAE, through November 30.

CURRENT DECEMBER

Light Show explores the experiential and phenomenal aspects of light by bringing together sculptures and installations that use light to shape space in different ways. The exhibition showcases artworks created from the 1960s to the present, including immersive environments, freestanding light sculptures and projections. From atmospheric installations to intangible sculptures that one may move around—and even through—visitors can experience light in all its spatial and sensory forms. **Sharjah** Art Foundation, UAE, through December 5.

Barjeel Art Foundation Collection: Imperfect Chronology—Debating Modernism I. Continuing the Whitechapel Gallery's programme opening up rarely seen art collections, a series of four chronological displays highlights works from the Barjeel Art Foundation's rich collection. Artists from Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and elsewhere in the region tell the story of Arab art from the modern to the contemporary period. This first display of works explores the emergence and subsequent development of an Arab art esthetic through drawings and paintings from the early 20th century to 1967. Whitechapel Gallery, **Liverpool**, through December 6.

Khalil Gibran. Lebanese-American artist, poet and writer Gibran Khalil Gibran is one of the most influential figures of the modern age; his philosophical ideas were mainly delivered through his essays and poems both in Arabic and English. His most internationally known and celebrated work, *The Prophet*, a set of poetic essays originally published in English, expresses some of these ideas. Born in 1883 in Bsharri, Lebanon, he immigrated with his family to the US at age 12. Settling in Boston, he was first exposed to the rich world of art—theaters, opera houses and art galleries—all of which influenced his artistic talent. The exhibition showcases around 50 works and manuscripts of different media, including watercolor, oils and charcoal on paper and canvas. **Sharjah** Art Museum, UAE, through December 7.

In the City, an exhibition of graphic design and sound art, provides a rare glimpse into four Arab cities. A first of its kind in London, it showcases a series of commissioned and preexisting works from an eclectic lineup of established and emerging Arab designers, illustrators, video makers and sound artists. It transports the audience

through four enigmatic, often overlooked Arab cities—Alexandria, Algiers, Baghdad and Nablus—by recapturing and reimagining elements of them. The collection explores each city's panorama through its streets, landmarks, people, signage and sounds; P21 Gallery, **London**, through December 15.

Cleopatra and the Queens of Egypt shows how mothers, wives and daughters not only supported reigning pharaohs, but also played significant roles in politics and religion. Their magnificence is conveyed through masterpieces of ancient Egypt from a number of renowned museums around the world. The National Museum of Art, **Osaka**, Japan, through December 27.

Lasting Impressions: George Bahgory. Bahgory was born in 1932 in Bahgory, Egypt. A painter, sculptor, novelist, actor and writer of children's books, he is most famous for his political satire in *Al Ahrām* newspaper. Known for reflecting popular Egyptian sentiments, as in his many portrayals of the legendary Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum, Bahgory is shown to be more than just the "Grandfather of Caricature" in the sixth edition of *Lasting Impressions*, which showcases more than 90 works, some dating back to the 1950s when he was a student. **Sharjah** Art Museum, UAE, through December 31.

CURRENT JANUARY

Arts of the Islamic World. The arts of the Islamic world flourished in a vast area extending from Morocco and Spain to the islands of Southeast Asia. Distinct in their cultural, artistic, ethnic and linguistic identities, the peoples of this region shared one predominant faith: Islam. The works on display represent three principal media for artistic expression in the Muslim world: architecture (religious and secular), the arts of the book (calligraphy, illustration, illumination and bookbinding) and the arts of the object (ceramics, metalwork, glass, woodwork, textiles and ivory) and date from the ninth to 17th centuries. Freer Gallery of Art, **Washington D.C.**, through January 3.

Les fables de Kalila et Dimna originated as a collection of tales composed in India around the fourth century CE for the education of princes. By giving voices to animals, the author is able to speak freely and teach principles of good governance and moral standing. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, through January 3.



TRANSITIONS:

A New Photography from Bangladesh teeters on moments of change, brought by forces that both reach in and push out. Memories checker our thoughts; we wonder what decisions will be carved into the borders that frame our histories, and futures. What hangs in the balance, what will reach its limit, and where? And afterward, what tokens will we be left with: a hesitant embrace, a scar, a burst of light? Our stories weave in and out of these visions. With the rise of factories, investors and development, the landscape of Bangladesh is changing. The spotlight has been turned on, and the people are trying to figure out what it means. This exhibition features nine Bangladeshi photographers whose work reflects shifting economies and changing lands, aiming to collect and exhibit photography not only as art, but also as

ideas about the country of Bangladesh. The photos on display navigate the stories of the country's people, landscapes and its position in the world. Most importantly, the works provide viewers with perspectives of artists who are connected to the places they are capturing. The **Bronx Museum of the Arts**, New York, through February 14.



Manir Mrittik. *The Lovers Redux*, 2015.

Pattern, Color, Light: *Architectural Ornament in the Near East (500–1000)* features examples of architectural ornament from Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Turkey that were found at sites ranging in date from approximately 500 to 1000 CE. Few buildings from this period survive fully intact, but the pieces of walls, ceilings and floors that remain shed light on the ingenious ways that artisans created sumptuous interiors and stately façades. Far from being mere embellishment, the decorative programs to which these pieces belonged created memorable experiences for viewers, conveying the power of a patron or the depth of a religious concept. These enduring esthetic concepts are explored further through the lens of the exhibition's three themes: pattern, color and light. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through January 3.

The Youth//Dhallinyarada. Mohamud Mumin's 13 dramatically larger-than-life portraits feature young men who are actively and positively engaged in their Somali community and American society. Through video and text, these men tell us of their personal journey

from Somalia, the challenges they face in the US and about the work they are doing each day to improve the lives of others. Presented as part of a continuing effort to dispel stereotypes and build community through the arts, this exhibition explores an emerging and often misunderstood community in America's heartland. Arab American National Museum, **Dearborn, Michigan**, through January 3.

Ragmala: *Musical Moods and Amorous Moments* is an assembly of Indian miniature paintings presenting images of tenderness—seemingly depicting episodes in the love relationships of various couples. But the paintings also show moments of despair and melancholy, with each artwork representing a specific mood, as defined by Indian musical theory that originates from a complex system of esthetic experience. Museum für Asiatische Kunst, **Berlin**, through January 6.

Daido Moriyama. Marrakech: Shooting Light. Daido Moriyama (born Osaka, Japan, 1938) is widely acknowledged as one of the world's preeminent living photographers. This

exhibit comprises three groups of works in three spaces. In Room 1, a selection of Moriyama's most iconic and recognizable images from Japan in the 1970s and '80s; in Room 2, an extensive body of work made in the north of Japan since the late 1970s and works published by Moriyama of photographs of cities around the world from 1972 to the present day, and in Room 3, an installation of photographs taken during Moriyama's first visit to Morocco in 1989. The **Marrakech Museum for Photography and Visual Arts**, through January 10.

The Fabric of India. The highlight of the India Festival at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), this is the first major exhibition to explore the dynamic and multifaceted world of handmade textiles from India. It includes a spectacular 18th-century tent belonging to Tipu Sultan, a stunning range of historic costume, highly prized textiles made for international trade and cutting-edge fashion by celebrated Indian designers. Showcasing the best of the V&A's world-renowned collection together with masterpieces from international partners, the exhibition features more than 200 objects ranging from the third to the 21st centuries. V&A, **London**, through January 10.

Orientalist Glass Art: Masterpieces from the Museum of J&L Lobmeyr. Vienna features nearly 90 items of

glass art made over some 200 years by Austria's foremost glass manufacturers. Part of the private collection of the Lobmeyr family, a number of the artifacts on display have not been shown since the 19th century. Included are pieces inspired by the Islamic art traditions of Mamluk Egypt and Syria, Nasrid Spain, Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India, culminating in the presentation of a chandelier designed for the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah. **Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization**, UAE, through January 16.

Luxury in the Golden Age. With 170 objects from China, Japan, India and Batavia, this exhibition tells the story of the excitement created by the Asian treasures that were shipped to Holland during the Golden Age. Lacquer works, ivory, silver, silk, ebony, jewelry and enormous quantities of porcelain poured into Amsterdam to enrich the interiors of the increasingly prosperous Dutch bourgeoisie. *Luxury in the Golden Age* also presents many 17th-century paintings: still-lives and portraits of citizens who had themselves been painted among their newly acquired items of Asian luxury. Rijksmuseum, **Amsterdam**, through January 17.

2050: A Brief History of the Future uses more than 70 contemporary works, from paintings and sculptures to photos, videos, installations and digital art, to question the future up to 2050. The exhibition addresses



EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS

major societal themes such as over-consumption, global conflicts, scarcity of natural resources, social and economic inequality and the mutation of the human being. However, these complex topics are challenged by positive and constructive visions, sometimes even humor. Belgian and international artists such as Sugimoto, Boetti, Kingelez, Warhol, LaChapelle, Gursky, Op de Beeck, Yongliang, Turk and Alj's invite viewers to rethink the future based on a subjective reading of the past and translated by artistic creations from previous millennia, inspired by Jacques Attali's book *A Brief History of the Future*. The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, **Brussels**, through January 24.

Ancient Egypt Transformed: *The Middle Kingdom*. The reunification of ancient Egypt achieved by Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II—the first pharaoh of the Middle Kingdom—was followed by a great cultural flowering that lasted nearly 400 years. During the Middle Kingdom (mid-Dynasty 11–Dynasty 13, around 2030–1650 BCE), artistic, cultural, religious and political traditions first conceived and instituted during the Old Kingdom were revived and reimagined. This transformational era is represented through 230 objects and groups in

this major international exhibition. Fashioned with great subtlety and sensitivity, and ranging in size from monumental stone sculptures to delicate examples of jewelry, the works of art are drawn from the preeminent collection of the Metropolitan and 37 lenders in North America and Europe. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through January 24.

Arts of Islamic Lands: *Selections from the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait*. This newly expanded installation more than triples the display to some 250 works that present an impressive and comprehensive spectrum of Islamic art. Objects from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, India, the Iberian Peninsula and Central Asia from the eighth to the 18th centuries demonstrate the development of techniques, craftsmanship and esthetics in Islamic visual culture. Among the highlights are a 16th-century Ottoman prayer carpet; a glass mosque lamp from 14th-century Cairo; an extraordinary earthenware bowl from ninth-century Iraq that transcends its humble function; early gold jewelry from Afghanistan and Syria; and opulent Mughal jewelry crafted in the refined *kundan* technique, Museum of Fine Arts, **Houston**, through January 30.

Images of Women in 19th-Century Iran demonstrates the centrality of women in the artistic expression of Iran and how they continue to inspire contemporary artists. The most popular representations of the Qajar era (1794-1925) have been of male sovereigns, whose life-size portraits exaggerate masculinity to depict power. Yet this era also saw a period of artistic modernization in Iran, particularly in paintings and photography in which depictions of women became essential elements of the scenes. Showcasing women at the court and in private, alongside images of female musicians and aristocratic women, this exhibition explores rarely told narratives of the Qajar artistic tradition. Museum of Islamic Arts, **Doha, Qatar**, through January 30.

Europalia Arts Festival: *Turkey*. Turkey is the invited country for the 25th edition of the *Europalia Arts Festival*, which will feature a rich and extensive program of events, including two major exhibitions hosted by the Palais des Beaux-Arts (BOZAR) in Brussels: *Anatolia: Home of eternity* and *Imagine Istanbul*, which explore the various transformations of this constantly evolving capital city. Various locations, **Brussels**, through January 31.

Pearls on a String: *Art and Biography in the Islamic World* presents the arts of Islamic

cultures from the points of view of authors and artists from historical Muslim societies. 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. It highlights the exceptional art of the Islamic manuscript and underscores the book's unique ability to relate narratives about individuals. A series of vignettes introduces the visitor to the art inextricably linked to the men and women who shaped the Islamic past and contribute to its future. Walters Art Museum, **Baltimore**, through January 31.

Shoes: *Pleasure and Pain* looks at the extremes of footwear from around the globe, presenting around 200 pairs of shoes ranging from a sandal decorated in pure gold leaf originating from ancient Egypt to the most elaborate designs by contemporary makers. v&a, **London**, through January 31.

CURRENT FEBRUARY

Creative Dissent: *Arts of the Arab World Uprisings* is an immersive, multimedia exhibition capturing the creative vitality of the continually evolving uprisings commonly referred to as the Arab Spring. Freedom of speech merges with artistic expression to capture the anger, elation, frustration



This belt scoop with a dragon protome handle is made of raised, chased, engraved and polished gold. It was produced among the *Ulus* of Jochi—the "Golden Horde"—in the 13th century.

the various spheres of life the traveler encountered along the way. Bringing together works of art from places as far apart as Spain, China, the Volga basin and Central Africa, the many ceramics, fabrics, metal objects, glassware and numismatic items from the Hermitage's collection and the more than 30 unique Islamic, Christian and Judaic manuscripts, together show both the variety and the interconnectedness of the Late Middle Ages. The State Hermitage Museum, **St. Petersburg**, through December 13.

A GIFT TO CONTEMPLATORS:

Ibn Battuta's Travels. The *rihla*, entitled *A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Traveling*, is a synthesis of personal experiences and popular conceptions of contemporaries, whom he wished to please, as well as a fantastical record of the "wonders and marvels" of the time. The exhibition, featuring around 300 items, the majority of which are on display for the first time, presents the world of Ibn Battuta's day, follows the routes he took and demonstrates



and hope of these revolutions through call-and-response chants, graffiti, video, blog postings, cartoons, music, photography, posters and even puppetry. Arab American National Museum, **Dearborn, Michigan**, through February 9.

CURRENT MAY

Showing Off: *Identity and Display in Asian Costume*. Fashion is a form of language. What we wear broadcasts critical information about us and serves as a visible indicator of social rank, profession, ethnicity or status. This exhibition of Asian textiles and other works from the Cantor's collection demonstrates how costume and objects of personal adornment functioned as a method of identification and display from the late 18th century to today. Ranging from Qing court costumes to Indonesian textiles, the selection on view spotlights visual symbols while showcasing rarely displayed garments. Cantor Arts Center at **Stanford University, California**, through May 23.

Old Patterns, New Order: *Socialist Realism in Central Asia*. Under Soviet rule, artists across Central Asia created images that embraced modernity and idealized the past. This exhibition examines the socialist-realist art movement in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and other areas of Central Asia, pairing 20th-century paintings with examples of the traditional textiles they depict. The show is organized in partnership with George Washington University's Central Asian program. The George

Washington University Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, through May 29.

Gold and the Gods: *Jewels of Ancient Nubia* draws upon the world-class collection of jewelry from ancient Nubia (located in what is now Sudan), accumulated by the museum that comprises the most comprehensive collection outside Khartoum. The exhibit focuses on excavated ornaments from an early 20th-century expedition by the museum and Harvard University. Dating from 1700 BCE to 300 CE, they include both uniquely Nubian works and foreign imports prized for their materials, craftsmanship, symbolism and rarity. Museum of Fine Arts, **Boston**, through May 14, 2017.

Egypt's Sunken Secrets displays 293 artifacts from different Egyptian museums: 18 from the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square, 22 from the Graeco-Roman Museum, 31 from the Alexandria National Museum, 15 from the Bibliotheca Alexandria Museum and 207 from the Sunken Monuments Department. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, through January 7; Martin-Gropius-Bau exhibition Hall, **Berlin**, April 15 through August 15; **London**, November 15, 2016, through March 15, 2017.

COMING

COMING NOVEMBER

Bejeweled Treasures: *the Al Thani Collection*. Spectacular objects, drawn from a single private collection, explore the broad themes of tradition

and modernity in Indian jewelry. Highlights include Mughal jades, a rare jeweled-gold finial from the throne of Tipu Sultan (r. 1782-1799) and pieces that reveal the dramatic changes that took place in Indian jewelry design during the early 20th century. The exhibition examines the influence that India had on avant-garde European jewelry made by Cartier and other leading houses and concludes with contemporary pieces made by JAR and Bhagat. Part of the India Festival at the Victoria & Albert Museum, **London**, November 21 through March 28.

Abbas Kiarostami: *Doors without Keys*. Prepare yourself for a journey through memory and imagination with this remarkable installation piece by the acclaimed Iranian photographer, poet and filmmaker. Walls and doors are both boundaries and barriers. Yet doors offer us hope of entry or of escape—hope for connection, for

finding another world, for finding freedom. With this evocative premise, Kiarostami presents the world premiere of his installation piece. Photographed over two decades in Iran, Italy, France and Morocco, these weathered doors have been witnesses to the many lives lived behind, through and before them. Presented at life size on canvas, they are works of art that transcend their origins of time and place. This is the first solo artist exhibition at the Aga Khan Museum, **Toronto**, November 21 through March 27.

Please reconfirm dates and times before traveling. Most listings have further information available online and at aramcoworld.com. Readers are welcome to submit information for possible inclusion.

See more upcoming events at aramcoworld.com

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