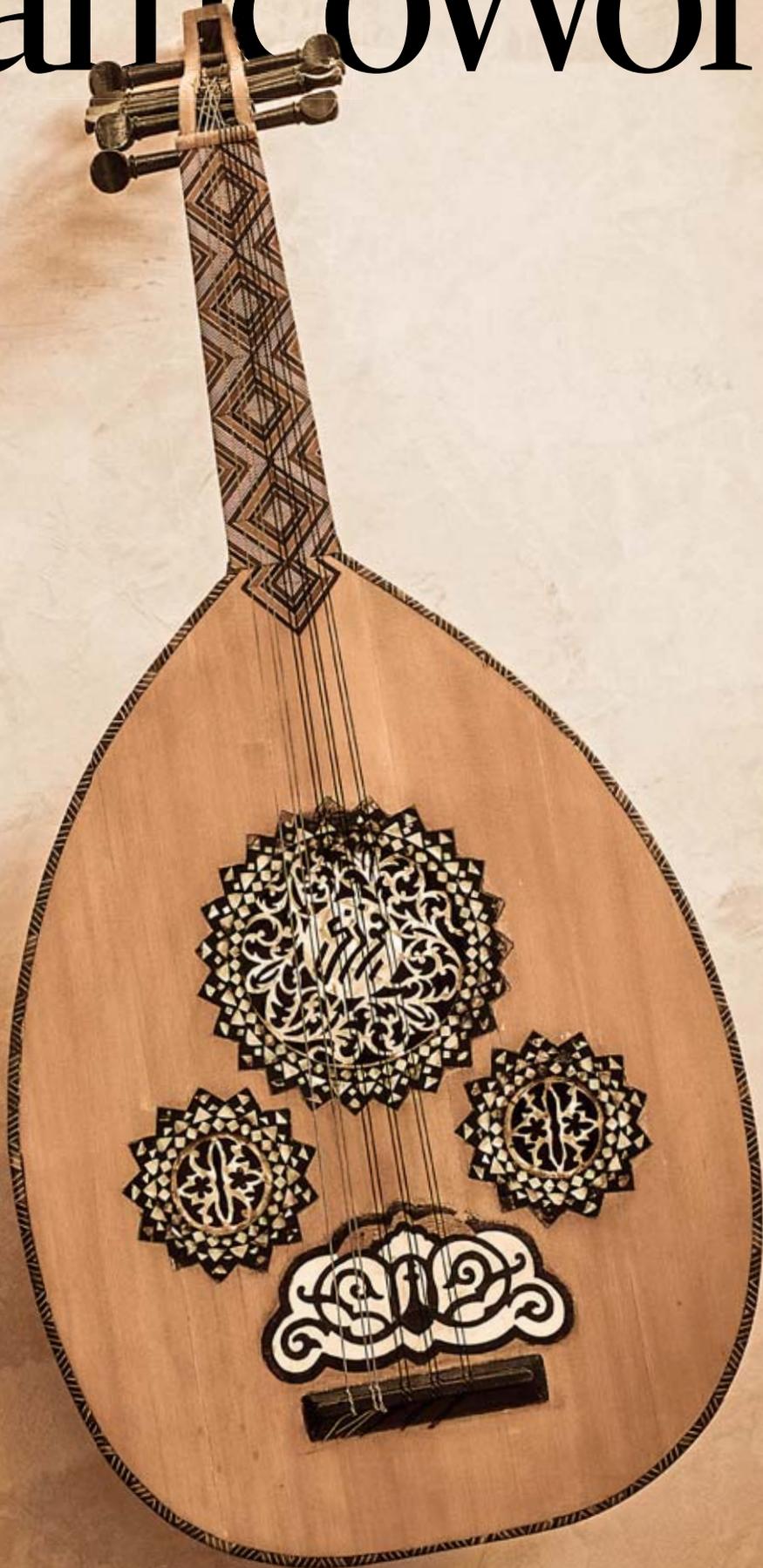
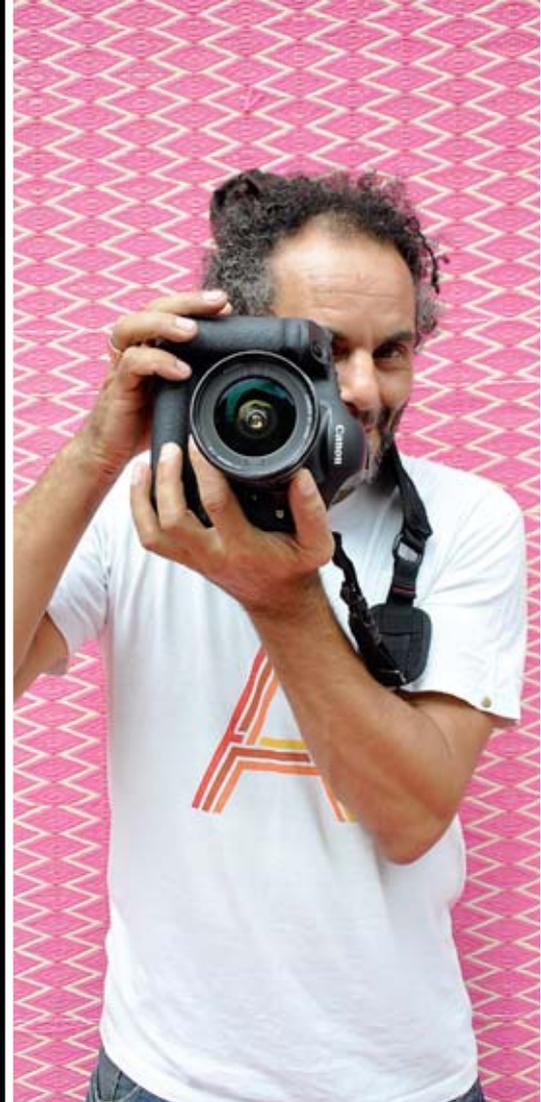


MAY JUNE 2020

# AramcoWorld





## 6 The Hidden Treasures of Nubia

Written by Jane Waldron Grutz  
Photographs courtesy of the  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

To the south of ancient Egypt, there was another civilization, at times a rival, at times a vassal, and always a source for coveted gold: Nubia, which rose to its peak of conquest 2,700 years ago when its king, Piye, sailed an army down the Nile.

## 10 Hajjaj's Hot Remix

Written by Juliet Highet  
Photographs courtesy of Hassan Hajjaj

With brilliant colors, bold patterns and unbridled exuberance, photographer and designer Hassan Hajjaj has become one of the world's most popular artists, remixing esthetics from Marrakesh to London with photography, clothing and attitude that blends heritage and pride with hip-hop style and playful, subversive swagger.

## 18 The World's First Oils

Written and photographed by  
Ken Chitwood

Pressed, extracted or distilled from any of hundreds of plants, pure "essential" oils are not just a rising multibillion-dollar global industry: They are among the world's oldest organic wellness products, now available almost everywhere.

🌐 2 FIRSTLOOK

🌐 4 FLAVORS

🌐 38 REVIEWS

🌐 40 EVENTS

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We distribute *AramcoWorld* in print and online to increase cross-cultural understanding by broadening knowledge of the histories, cultures and geography of the Arab and Muslim worlds and their global connections.

**Front Cover:** Strung here with four courses of double strings and a single bass string, this 'ud shows an instrument-maker's craftwork. Variations in stringing, tuning, materials and other details all reflect the instrument's long history. Photo by Graham Salter / Bridgeman.

**Back Cover:** A raking afternoon sun brings out the design and texture of one of the brick walls that make streets in Tozeur, Tunisia, both distinctive and appealing. Photo by Jeff Koehler.



## 24 Brickwork in the Land of Palms

Written and photographed by Jeff Koehler

Along the northern edge of the Sahara, in the part of Tunisia called *Bled el-Djerid*—Land of the Palms—the regular pruning of vast date-palm orchards literally fuels a centuries-old brickmaking industry, and local bricklayers have taken the kiln-fired masonry to heights of artistry. Throughout the city of Tozeur and the nearby town of Nefta, bricks set in patterns decorate facades, windows, doors and arches with motifs from desert life, textiles and other traditions. The results not only dance with the changing angles of the sun, but also create just enough shade to help cool the buildings behind them.

## 30 The Prince of Enchantment

Written by Kay Hardy Campbell

Often regarded as the forerunner and namesake of the European lute, the 'ud is among the world's oldest continuously played string instruments. In Arab and other musical traditions, its deeply resonant, emotionally evocative tones earned it, over the centuries, the sobriquet *amir al-tarab*.

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# FIRSTLOOK

## Jaffa Gate, Jerusalem

Unknown  
photographer,  
circa 1909



I bought them at a consignment shop this winter: a stereoscope viewer and a set of 21 card-mounted stereographs in a worn slipcase. Published around 1909, the cards showed views of Jerusalem. The contraption felt like a wood-and-metal prototype vr headset, and indeed it was with stereoscopes that 3D imaging was born in the mid-19th century. So popular were stereoscopes in the us that many were sold door-to-door, and not just as entertainment but as education. The publishers of this set of Jerusalem images, Keystone View Company, was the largest us stereoscope producer. It employed photographers and published thousands of views of towns, cities, monuments, wonders and curiosities around the world. One of Keystone's selling points was its extensive explanations of the images,

touching on history, geography, peoples and culture. In this stereograph, we see the imposing stonemasonry of old Jerusalem's Jaffa Gate, but perhaps most interesting now are the parked carriages and the routine procession of people and horses. This makes its era relatable to our eyes. We see also the unidentified man at lower right: As an editor interested in relationships among those who make and publish images and those who appear in them, I wonder, was he asked to sit there? Was he an assistant to the photographer? A porter for equipment? Or was he, like us, just curious about a pair of lenses peering out from a box, eyes of a new technology that would, over the next century, become what we call "virtual reality"?

—Richard Doughty





# FLAVORS

## Watermelon, Feta and Red Onion Salad With Mint

Recipe by  
Joudie Kalla

Photograph courtesy of  
Jamie Orlando Smith

**The ingredients in the title represent everything that Palestinian people enjoy eating: fruits, cheese and onions.**

Onions play a perfect role here, a sharp hit against the sweetness of the watermelon and the smooth creaminess of the cheese, which is also tart. This will take about three minutes to make and will remind you of a time when you were on vacation, enjoying the sunshine. It always puts me in a very good mood, remembering all the times I've eaten this with my family, sitting on a balcony, on a beach or at home after a month of Ramadan, satisfying every taste bud and quenching my thirst.

(Serves 4)

1 small watermelon

250 grams (9 ounces) good-quality feta cheese

½ red onion, sliced into half-moons

Handful of fresh mint leaves, chopped

1 tablespoon sugar

Slice the top off the watermelon. Cut slices into the flesh lengthwise, then horizontally, and carefully hollow it out by removing the lovely big chunks of flesh with a spoon. If you're lucky, your watermelon won't have many seeds, but if it does, try to discard as many as possible. Place the chunks in a large bowl.

Cut the feta cheese into cubes slightly smaller than the melon cubes and mix with the watermelon. Mix in the slices of red onion.

Combine the mint leaves with the sugar to create a sort of sugared mint. Scatter this all over the salad—you get the sweetness of the sugar, the sharpness of the onion, the creaminess of the cheese and, once again, sweetness from the watermelon.

Serve and eat within an hour of cutting the ingredients, otherwise the watermelon starts to lose all its liquid and the salad becomes soggy.

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**Baladi Palestine**

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**Joudie Kalla** has been a chef for more than 20 years. She trained in London at Leiths School of Food and Wine, and she has worked in many prestigious restaurants before going on to run her own successful catering business. She opened a Palestinian deli, Baity Kitchen, in London, from 2010–2013 to much acclaim before turning her sights to writing her first bestselling cook-book *Palestine on a Plate*. She runs cooking classes, catering events and pop-up supper clubs and consults on food projects.

JOUDIE KALLA



THE HIDDEN  
TREASURES  
OF  
NUBIA



WRITTEN BY Jane Waldron Grutz  
PHOTOGRAPHS courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Since the hieroglyphs on the Rosetta stone were deciphered in 1822, scholars have learned a great deal about early Egypt. But the language of Nubia, Egypt's rival to the south, remains untranslated, with the result that far less is known about Nubia. Now, nearly two centuries of archeology and scholarship is helping us see more clearly the power and artistic beauty of Nubia's unique civilization.



**T**hree thousand years ago, things were going badly for the Ramesside dynasty. In 1068 BCE it fell apart altogether, and its collapse marked the close of ancient Egypt's greatest era. In the times that followed, Egypt was divided among four rivals who did unite over one issue: the land they called Kush, which today we call Nubia. The Kingdom of Kush lay south, in what is now southern Egypt and northern Sudan. Though the two lands often mutually benefited from trade, Egypt had been dominating Kush for more than 500 years. The collapse of central power in Egypt, viewed from Kush, looked like opportunity.

Egypt largely held its upper hand for another three centuries. But in 744 BCE Kushite King Piye had his best men swear their loyalty, string their bows, strap on swords, prepare the army's horses and sail for conquest down the Nile.

Piye devotedly worshipped the Egyptian sun god Amun Ra. He thus saw his victories as divine fate and favor—and so did the vanquished Egyptians. Piye took the Egyptian capital of Thebes and, the following year, advanced further downstream, sieging and subduing, accumulating vast treasure in tribute all the way to Memphis (near Cairo) and north into the Nile Delta. The crown he took as pharaoh he would wear for nearly 30 years until his death around 716 BCE.

It was the beginning of Egypt's 25th dynasty, the dynasty of four Kushite kings, sometimes called “the black pharaohs,” that would endure for 75 years.

Much of what we know about Piye is thanks to his own victory stele, a stone slab more than two meters tall found in the Nubian royal cemetery at el-Kurru, near the Nubian capital of the time, Napata. We can read it because Nubia had yet to establish writing for its own language, and so Piye had his stele inscribed using the hieroglyphs of Middle Egyptian. His extensive narrative describes his victories over Thebes, Memphis and the string of cities along the Nile in between.

At times the detail is vividly personal, perhaps nowhere more so than in the description of Piye's defeat of King Nimlot of Hermopolis, roughly halfway down the Nile from Thebes to the Delta. After succumbing to Piye's siege, Nimlot proffered “much silver, gold, lapis lazuli, malachite, bronze, and all costly stones” and even offered Piye his royal wives and daughters. But Piye “turned not his face to them.”

What interested Piye far more were Nimlot's horses, which Piye found poorly cared for. The account quotes Piye's condemnation of Nimlot: “How much more painful it is in my heart that my horses have been starved than any other crime you have committed.” Piye took the horses, and Nimlot's “possessions were assigned to the treasury, and his granary to the divine offering of Amun.” Of the women there was no further mention.

After victory, Piye did not remain to rule from Egypt. He returned to his capital at Napata, where his newly acquired wealth and power turned the city into an even greater center of trade, culture, jewelry and art and raised the status of the temple of Amun Ra at nearby Jebel Barkal.

Piye's conquest turned around the historical relationship between Egypt and Nubia, which relied fundamentally on trade. Egypt was rich in agricultural land. Nubia had virtually none. What Nubia did have was gold from mines in Egypt's Eastern Desert. That Egypt had for so many centuries been the more powerful and plentiful of the two lands only further convinced Nubians that Piye's victories were divinely ordained.

Gold was much sought by both Egyptians and Nubians. This was not only for wealth and prestige, but also for religion. Vivian Davies and Renee Friedman, authors of *Egypt Uncovered*, explain that gold “was not simply a precious commodity ... The color of the sun, untarnishable, unaffected by time, gold was the symbol of eternity. Transformed by ritual, gold became the flesh of Ra and other immortal gods.”

The gold of Piye's Nubia was particularly fine. Both Nubian and Egyptian goldsmiths took advantage of its malleability to craft intricate replicas of animals and gods.

Denise Doxey is curator of Ancient Egyptian, Nubian, and Near Eastern Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which holds one of the world's largest collections of Nubian artifacts and last year mounted the exhibition, *Ancient Nubia Now*. She says Nubian jewelers not only created works as accomplished as those of their Egyptian counterparts but, in some ways “surpassed the Egyptians in terms of their inventiveness, ingenuity, and willingness to experiment.” The intricate

designs often feature Egyptian deities, who took the form of powerful animals such as rams and lions.

The Nubians also favored rare or unusually colored stones.

“They are among the most sophisticated and beautiful pieces of jewelry created in the ancient world,” she says.

One of the most popular, spectacular pieces in the collection



**Opposite, main:** Steeper but otherwise similar to their more well-known counterparts in Egypt, the Nubian pyramidal burial tombs at Jebel Barkal, in present-day Sudan, photographed here in 1920 by one of the first US archeological expeditions, are among more than 200 throughout the region then known as the Kingdom of Kush. Among them are those pyramids at the nearby royal cemetery site of el-Kurru, where King Piye and his queens were buried along with four upright horses. **Lower:** This gold pectoral, shown life-size, represents the winged goddess Isis kneeling with outstretched wings, holding in her right hand an ankh, an Egyptian symbol of life, and in her left a hieroglyph denoting a sail, the breath of life. Dating from 538–519 BCE, the Nubian artisan used four metalworking techniques. **Above:** Because this gold ram's head is so much like the amulets that appear in representations of the pharaohs who wore them tied to thick cords on their necks, this Nubian one was probably made for a Kushite king between 712 BCE and 664 BCE.



**Above, left to right:** A Nubian collar made of polished electrum—a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver—features a figure similar to the winged Isis on page six. A string of 63 blue faience ball beads with a pendant composed of natural quartz crystal glazed blue dates from 1700–1550 BCE. The glazing of quartz crystals was a practice unique to the Nubian city of Kerma, where the crystals were believed to have amuletic powers. This necklace was made after the capital had been moved from Napata to Meroë, and it is comprised of 54 repoussé beads of hollow gold, each fashioned in images of composite deities. It dates from between 270 BCE and 50 BCE. **Lower:** This pendant, with a gold, ram-headed sphinx atop a cloisonné pedestal of gilded silver, lapis lazuli and glass, was made during the reign of Piye or shortly thereafter, between 743 and 712 BCE.

is a delicate gold pectoral depicting Isis, wife of the ruler of the afterlife, Osiris. Fashioned about 100 years after Piye using several goldsmithing techniques, it is clearly the work of a master craftsman, Doxey says, who also points out an equally remarkable, small, rock-crystal pendant capped with a detailed figure of Hathor, goddess of protection for women.

The pendant, she says, was discovered at el-Kurru in the tomb of one of King Piye's queens. Little is known about the queens, and Piye may have had three or as many as six. All were buried at el-Kurru, surrounded by gold and other items of wealth, in steep-sided

pyramidal tombs.

Piye himself died in 716 BCE. Buried also at el-Kurru were his four favorite horses, standing upright, draped in nets of fine beads. The two kings who followed Piye consolidated his conquests in Egypt and settled in Memphis, from where they ruled both Egypt and Nubia.

Piye's son Taharqa, declared the fourth Kushite pharaoh, proved the last. In 676 BCE Assyrians invaded Egypt from the northeast. Taharqa retreated to Napata, where he spent his remaining years erecting temples, shrines and statues throughout the upper Nile Valley and making an architectural showpiece of Jebel Barkal, the Nubian holy



mountain they believed to be the real birthplace of Amun Ra.

Not long after the Assyrian conquest, however, in 590 BCE, the Kushites quit Napata and moved their capital farther from Egypt, up the Nile to Meroë, between the river's fifth and sixth cataracts. Meroë was already an important entrepot for gold, ebony and ivory to Egypt and increasingly also to Greece and Rome. By 300 CE Meroë had become known as one of the wealthiest cities of the period, and one of the most beautiful, and its temple to Amun Ra rivaled the one at Jebel Barkal. It was also known for the abundance of steep-sided pyramids that dominated its cemeteries and that remain its most distinctive sight today.

Although damaged in the 19th century by tomb robbers—notably the Italian Giuseppe Ferlini, whose spectacular loot remains on display in Munich and Berlin—the pyramids of Meroë and other Nubian sites were still largely intact when American archeologist George Reisner arrived in 1907. He came at the request of the Sudanese government, which asked him to salvage as much as he could before parts of the area were flooded by the first dam at Aswan. (In the 1960s the Aswan High Dam would flood more Nubian sites, as would the Meroë Dam in 2005.)

Reisner worked until 1913 when he was appointed director of the Harvard University-MFA Egyptian Expedition, which conducted digs until 1932. "A satisfactory collection," he called his results, which were divided between the National Museum of Sudan in Khartoum, and the MFA, which paid for the excavations. The objects found were, he said, "entirely the work of royal craftsmen and represent all that will ever be recovered of these classes of objects from this period of Ethiopian history."

Though correct in assessing the quality of the artifacts, Reisner failed to imagine that much more would yet be found. More tellingly, however, was his belief that only the Egyptians could have been capable of producing such masterpieces. To Doxey, his error calling the works "Ethiopian," even as a leading expert of his time, speaks to how little known, and even misunderstood, the story of Nubia has been.

"Reisner certainly got wrong this idea that the Nubians were

**Lower:** This Nubian gold bracelet from 100 BCE centers the goddess Hathor, who represented love, fertility, motherhood and music. **Above right:** Hathor also appears sculpted in gold above this crystal ball amulet likely produced during King Piye's reign. Though the treasures are separated by about 600 years, the depictions of Hathor, with her crown disk and horns, are remarkably similar.



never able to create any wonderful art or important monuments on their own," she says.

More recent archeologists, benefiting from new finds, new scholarship and new insights, are casting new light on Nubia and Kushite culture. One of their most important finds came in 2003, when Swiss archeologist Charles Bonnet uncovered seven statues, finely sculpted from black granite, each more than two meters tall. One of them depicts Piye's son Taharqa and another Taharqa's successor, Tantamani. In 2008 Stuart Tyson Smith discovered a horse tomb that predates those of Piye by 200 years, suggesting that Piye was not the first Nubian to so honor his horses.

At present, archeologists are conducting more than a dozen excavations in Sudan, and as they labor, stories of Nubia continue to be revealed. 🌐



**Jane Waldron Grutz** is a former staff writer for Saudi Aramco who now divides her time between Houston and London. She is a regular contributor to *AramcoWorld*.



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Hieroglyphs: Nov / Dec 2017

First traders: Mar / Apr 2015

Meroë: Jul / Aug 1983

# HAJJAJ'S HOT REMIX



WRITTEN BY  
JULIET HIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF  
HASSAN HAJJAJ



**N**oss-noss. That's how Hassan Hajjaj has been described. It's an Arabic term that literally translates as "half-half."

"My work is from Morocco and London," he explains.

But like many shorthand terms, *noss-noss*, which he also chose in 2007 as the name for his first solo show—can be more complicated. Moroccan by birth, Hajjaj has lived in London since he was 12, and the city remains his principal home.

"I see myself as a human being first, and then as a Moroccan, a North African, and as a Londoner, *not British*," he emphasizes, "a Londoner."

As an artist, he is before anything else a photographer, but one who also designs funky fashion and furniture that supports Moroccan artisans through boutiques in London and Marrakesh. He produces videos and the occasional sculpture installation, too. He encourages traditional Moroccan artisans to experiment with playful, contemporary, pop-influenced touches such as solid and patterned Day-Glo colors.

His photography is an essentially urban art, rooted in popular culture that remixes visual elements of fast-evolving subcultures from Arab and sub-Saharan African to hip hop, consumerism and high fashion. Always exuberant, sometimes challenging—and frequently both—he freely blends heritage and pride with street style and swagger. Though he avoids the explicitly political, his images are tinged with gently subversive, often light-hearted social satire on issues such as gender

*"Time Out," Vogue, the Arab Issue series, 2007/1428, framed photography.*

expectations, cultural appropriation and the ambiguities that come with noss-noss identities. Hajjaj's response to his own Moroccan noss, he says, is to celebrate in particular its inner-city aspect, "the glamor of its street fashion, the energy, the attitude and the inventiveness of its people, as well as the fantastic graphics of everyday objects and products." This, he explains, dates back to 2000, when his work on a documentary called *Pop Art in the Kasbah* inspired a photographic series on street iconography of Marrakesh, *Graffix from the Souk*, which was shown in London that same year.

His unique blend of pop-art esthetics, in particular his embrace of iconic consumer brand labels and North African culture, has led more than one observer to dub him "the Moroccan Andy Warhol," a label he refutes.

"People say that," he says, "but it's really a label the West has given me, because the West controls the art world. We have to fight extra hard as non-Western artists because of these labels." Nevertheless, his spirit of mischievous reappropriation often wins out: Hajjaj designed a bar in Paris named Andy Wahloo. In Northern African Arabic dialect, *wahloo* translates "I have nothing," and Hajjaj still uses Andy Wahloo as a tongue-in-cheek trademark for clothes and installations.

Today, far from having nothing, Hajjaj is a highly acclaimed contemporary artist. For curator Michket Krifa, author of "Hassan Enchanting Afropolitan," an essay for the catalog of last year's major Paris retrospective of Hajjaj's work, he is "a rooted cosmopolitan." The retrospective, *Carte Blanche à Hassan Hajjaj*, really did give Hajjaj free rein to transform the entire premises of the prestigious Maison Européenne de la Photographie (MEP) into his own "house" or "Maison Marocaine de la Photographie." The show became a celebration of his technicolored take on pop art, an instant cultural bridge between the upbeat rhythms of contemporary Moroccan

street life and counter-parts in cities including not only London, but also Lagos, Johannesburg and New York.

On display were Hajjaj's most important photographic series, video works and sculptural installations, including *Dakka Mar-rakshia*; *Hand-prints*; *Kesh Angels*; *Gnawa Riders*; *Hand-painted Portraits*; *Vogue*, *The Arab Issue*;

*Legs*; *Graffix from the Souk*, and *My Rockstars*.

Even the MEP's normally sacrosanct bookshop became a Hajjaj boutique selling his furniture, homeware and clothes, many of them designs based on the Moroccan *djellaba* (robe) and *babouches* (slippers). In depicting them, Hajjaj debunks cultural clichés such as camels and veiled women. "Moroccan women are so strong," he says. "The veil is still worn because of tradition; it's their heritage. I'm not putting women behind veils to repress them. In fact there's still flirtatiousness behind it in my photographs, and I'm trying to emphasise the mischievous aspect. It's double-edged here now. Look how modern and defiant they are," he adds. "They're blending tradition with pop fashion." Indeed, last year both in Paris and in Marrakesh he invited young, and especially female, photographers to exhibit in the same venues as his own shows.

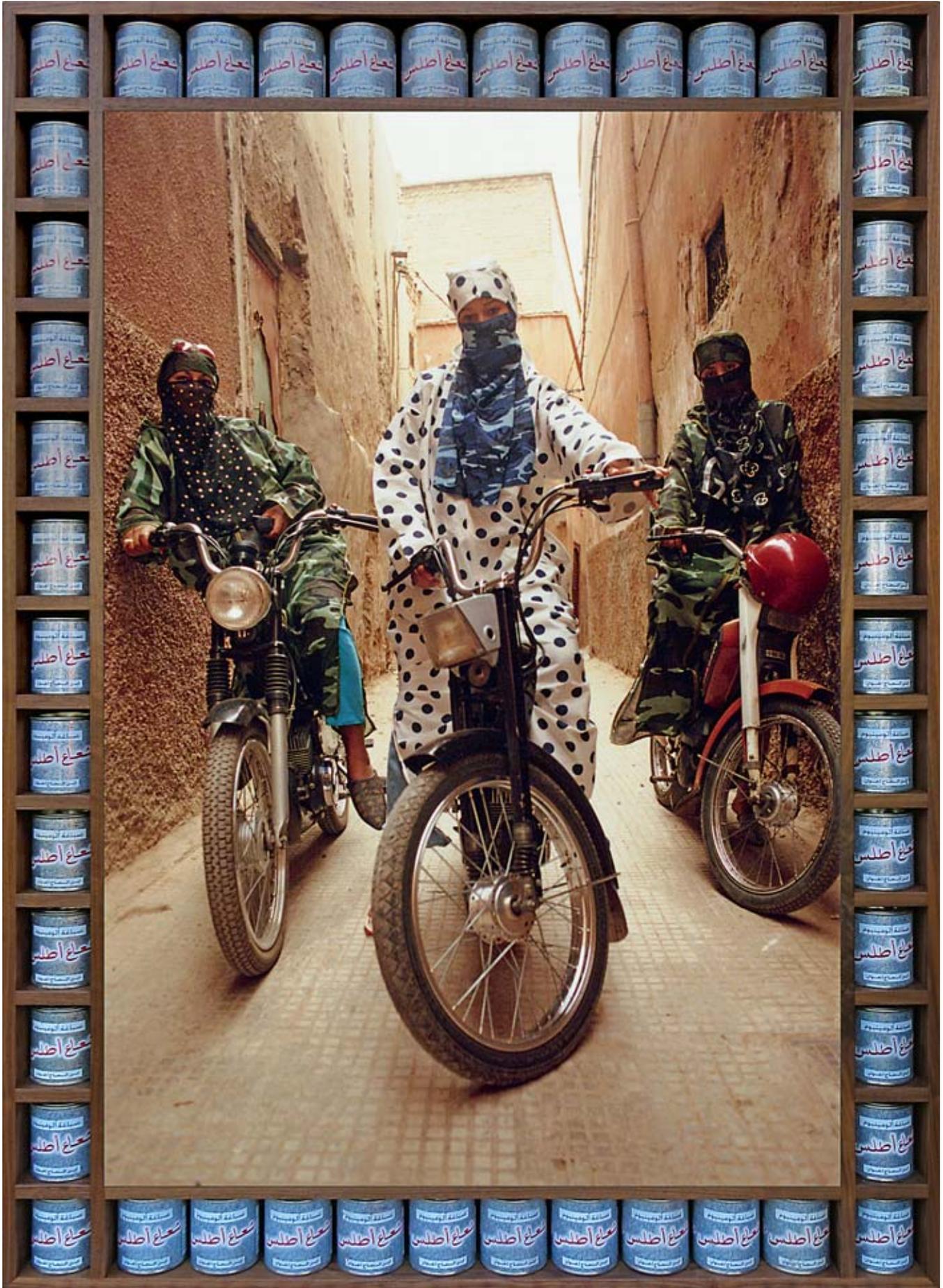
This year, part of that same Paris exhibition traveled to Stockholm as *Vogue*, *the Arab Issue*, and if global health conditions permit, it is scheduled to show in New York in September. Clearly ironic, the name of this series appropriates and reinterprets the iconography of decades of fashion shoots by Western photographers using Western models wearing Western clothes in "exotic" locations—like the madina, or old city, of Marrakesh. In Hajjaj's iconic image of the series, two Moroccan



Dress with zebra motif, amber beads and fez, Riad Yima, Marrakesh. Lower: "Alia Ali," untitled series, 2014/1435, framed photography. Opposite: "Joe Legs," *Legs* series, 2012/1433, framed photography.







women sit coolly reading *Vogue* and *Elle* through cheap plastic, comically wing-tipped sunglasses, bottles of Coca-Cola set on the table between them.

In this series as in his now-famous *Kesh Angels*, the models are dressed in kaftans and veils of counterfeit material printed with internationally recognized brand logos such as Chanel, Gucci and Louis Vuitton, plus traditional Moroccan slippers stamped with Nike or Adidas. The two series show how fusions of traditional and contemporary style can be hip and fashionable. The irony is extended by locating some of the images in front of actual Chanel and Dior shops in London's elite Bond Street. "When my friends and I were growing up, of course we weren't able to wear real brands," he says. "These imitations of brand names were aspirations. They represented hope."

So how did his journey from Larache, the small fishing town in northern Morocco where Hajjaj was born in 1961, blossom into global art recognition? In 1973, aged 12, he left Morocco, which was suffering harsh economic times, together with his family to join his father, who could neither read nor write, in London.

"I found London difficult, strange and sad," says Hajjaj. "It was a really tough time." Arriving speaking only Arabic and French, he dropped out of school at 15. "I spent some troublesome years trying to fit in and figure out what it meant to be a streetwise Moroccan in London during the '70s." Odd jobs followed just as London was becoming ever more of a vast cosmopolitan remix of the cultures of the former British Empire, including Caribbean, Asian as well as African, all striving to assert themselves in the socially constrained, class-bound society of that era.

"We're people who've been moved around a lot, some centuries ago, or like me, recently," he says. While some confronted this militantly, others like Hajjaj embraced a multicultural alternative lifestyle defining themselves in music, fashion, and cinematic and visual arts. It was an essentially metropolitan,

**"HAJJAJ BELONGS TO THAT GENERATION HAVING GROWN UP WITHIN THE PARADOXES OF POST-COLONIAL SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONFLICTS. BUT RATHER THAN SEEKING CONFRONTATION, HE DEFUSES THE IMPACT OF THOSE CONFLICTS BY EXTOLLING THE HYBRIDITY AND MULTICULTURALISM THAT MAKE HIM WHO HE IS."**

—ROSE ISSA

affirmative culture that rejected victim identity, one that has deeply influenced UK society to this day.

Today, he sells them all exclusively in his outlets in East London's Shoreditch and in Riad Yima, his home, gallery, shop and cafe in the madina of Marrakesh.

Initially, RAP's customers were friends and fellow creatives striking chords on the alternative scene who revelled in his fresh mix of logos and ethnic influences fairly vibrating in the clothes. It wasn't long until RAP became *the* funky hangout.

Simultaneously Hajjaj began working with filmmakers, taught himself photography and started using those images to celebrate his noss-noss identity. The results created a world Krifa describes as "an unashamedly glamorous pop aesthetic, the visual equivalent of the samplings, mixing and blending essential to popular music since the birth of hip-hop."

But as yet, his photographs had not been published. Rose Issa, an independent London curator and one of the city's leading promoters of Arab arts and film, having known him as a friend for more than 15 years, one day received an unexpected phone call.

"He wanted to show me some of his photographs," she recalls. And so, in pre-digital 2006, Hajjaj arrived at Issa's gallery with a battered suitcase packed with contact sheets and prints he had kept secret for years, until he was ready for this body of work to be shown to the public. It was, Issa says, an astounding amount of work. "No full-time artist or young photographer that I knew had gathered as many images." *Dakka Marrakashia (Marrakesh Beat)* was the result of that meeting and his first solo exhibition in the UK, in 2008.

"Rose was the first person who understood my work," says Hajjaj. "She was the



**Right:** "Rilene," *My Rock-stars* series, 2013/1431, framed photography. **Opposite:** "Odd 1 Out," *Kesh Angels* series, 2000/1421, framed photography. "I plan the shoot with the sitter, but then I always let loose and see what happens," Hajjaj says.



“Dior,” *Vogue, the Arab Issue* series, 2012/1433, framed photography.

one who opened doors for me, intellectually and businesswise to appropriate collectors, art galleries and auction houses.” She comments that Hajjaj “loves and has compassion for the underprivileged, ordinary people, incorporating their first-hand experience of street life into his work. These young Moroccans sometimes look menacing but have a smile in their eyes.” Indeed, one of the women who posed for his *Kesh Angels* series winks at the viewer above her veil. Another shows a bit of leg astride a motorbike.

Issa continues: “They are free of tragedy, ideology and morality. But they are defending their world, their turf, their style and their right to have problems and aspirations. Like the artist, they have guts and attitude, expressing black power, Arab power, pride and joy in being street-wise.” However, many of them eke out a living painting designs on the arms, legs and backs of tourists using henna dye.

These young women are Hajjaj’s friends, on whom he based another empathetic enterprise, *Karima: A Day in the Life*

*of a Henna Girl*, a documentary film that premiered in 2015 in Los Angeles and a year later at the British Museum.

Earlier, in 2010, Issa mounted another solo photographic show of one of his most famous series, *Kesh Angels*, celebrating the biker culture of young women who ride the streets of Marrakesh on scooters and motorbikes. She describes the highlight of the exhibition as an installation of Hajjaj’s customized motorbike “covered in fashion logos and kitscheries” like the clothes, veils and slippers of the “angels” themselves, which he had designed.

Another signature aspect of Hajjaj’s work is the way he constructs frames to display his photographs. “I love Arabizing them in a cool way. Growing up in Morocco, recycling is something that comes naturally. Mothers



Full of brilliant colors and objects from custom-made crafts to recycled bottle crates and other “found objects,” Riad Yima in Marrakesh serves as one of Hajjaj’s two retail boutiques as well as a cafe and gallery.

make cans into mugs. My frames contain Arab products, such as tins of olives and sardines. This creates a potentially kitschy, humorous effect, and sometimes the frames create repeating patterns, like our mosaics. They also include what were to us desirable brands like Coca-Cola, the bottle tops referencing symbols of international consumerism.

“When I started to show my work, the frames were intended to bridge the two worlds, East and West, and make the photos come alive. Now they are much more global, so if I’m photographing a Nigerian, I try to find something Nigerian to put in the frames,” he said.

Just as he did first for his RAP shop, wherever he travels, and of course in Morocco, he scours markets for cheap materials, clothes and backgrounds for his shoots, which are always in streets, not in studios. “When people don’t have anything, they have to make something out of nothing. How can they still stand out, look grand?” And grand and glamorous they do look. “For people on our continent who don’t have money, looking great alleviates the pain of poverty. And this becomes street chic.”

Hajjaj is now such an international celebrity that stars such as Madonna and Will Smith visit Riad Yima, which as well as being a gallery is also a shop and cafe and one of the city’s top spots to see and be seen. Madonna, who celebrated her 60th birthday in the Moroccan city, was photographed as a Berber woman, totally transformed from her showbiz persona.

Hajjaj has similar though smaller premises in Shoreditch, the newly go-to East End of London. Inside, seating is on upturned, red plastic crates, which once contained globalized consumer goods like Coca-Cola, often printed with Arabic calligraphy. They’ve been given new life as usable furniture, topped with cushions across which a velvet camel may nonchalantly step, or brightly printed flowers trail. Road and shop signs are reappropriated as tabletops. Product tins are repurposed as light fixtures. This remixed art and post-consumer recycling celebrates discarded items, essentially a new take on the culture of the poor, as opposed to an Orientalist viewpoint in which 19th-century Western artists depicted sumptuous, often imaginary traditional Arab interiors. “For me, being Moroccan, it’s taking ownership, control of that fantasy idea and giving that back to our own people,” says Hajjaj. Indeed, in 2012, Issa presented his solo exhibition, *ReOrientations* in Brussels.

Such is the global reach of Hajjaj’s creativity, it has placed him, as Krifa observes, “at the center of a genuine movement, driven forward by interdisciplinary and international artists, both known and lesser known, together forming his circle of friends.”

Some of these friends have become Hajjaj’s subjects in his



“Gretchen,” *My Designer Hijabs* series, 2012/1433, framed photography.

ongoing series titled *My Rockstars*, photographed over a decade primarily in the streets of Marrakesh, London, Paris, Los Angeles, Dubai and more. Each portrait is characterized by warm, loyal empathy. There’s Kezia Jones, a Nigerian hard-edge funk singer/songwriter and global luminary, and there’s also Che Lovelace, a little-known Trinidadian conceptual artist. “They’re a blend of people I believe in,” Hajjaj says. These include Gnawa musicians, whose presence in Morocco is due to their forced removal as slaves from sub-Saharan Africa, whom he has been photographing for some time, together with exponents of capoeira, a Brazilian form of self-defense Hajjaj has been practicing since 1990. Capoeira also comes from African roots, and it originated among those enslaved in Brazil.

“I want my photography to become more like teaching rather than pretty pictures,” he says, adding that since 1998 he has been working on a series called *Gnawa Riders*. “Nobody had documented these musicians, and I want to record them to pass it along to the younger generation—to give something back to my culture, not just take things away.”

Growing up, he says, he and his friends never went to museums or art galleries because they felt uncomfortable there. He says he wants his work to speak to people like that. “My work is about people, the same kind of people as me. I’ve always tried to present local events for British people in schools and other institutions,” such as *Le Salon*, a Moroccan installation with live art and fashion, as well as classes for music, dance and henna body painting. New series of work in progress include his photographs of women who pick potatoes in the north of Morocco, acrobats in Tangier and women refugees in Beirut.

“I want my photography to communicate with somebody like myself, who originally wouldn’t go to a gallery, as well as somebody who’s an intellectual,” he says. “I want it to appeal to everyone, whether they’re a cleaner or an art critic.”



Trained as a photographer, **Juliet Hight** has lived in both East and West Africa as well as India. In Nigeria she began writing and later edited magazines and books from the UK. Widely published on travel, the arts and culture, she is the author of *Frankincense: Oman’s Gift to the World* (Prestel, 2006) and a specialist in traditional and contemporary Arab, African and South Asian culture and heritage.



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THE  
**World's  
FIRST  
OILS**

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY  
KEN CHITWOOD

Petite, iridescent bottles and bulk household products filled with or using pungent, concentrated, natural “essential” oils have become so common on retail shelves and websites that they are almost unremarkable features of the modern consumer landscape. Essential oils are increasingly part of a lifestyle—like yoga or organic foods—that appeals to young and old, men and women. As recently as a decade ago, anything infused with the sweet-smelling fragrances of essential oils may have been associated more with patchouli-redolent bohemians. But today, buying, wearing and diffusing essential oils is nearly as commonplace as the online shopping that has helped popularize them.

According to market research firm Statista, the global market value for essential oils is projected to reach \$27 billion by 2022, based on estimates done before the COVID-19 outbreak. The market in the US alone is currently worth \$4 billion, and



essential oils now help scent perfumes, soaps, cosmetics, flavorings, cleaning products, lotions, candles, aromatherapy products and even aerosols such as “Sleep Serenity Moonlit Lavender,” a “bedroom mist” by Febreze. Mixed with jujube bark extract, they are also found in Sephora’s Christophe Robin shampoos. The list could go on.

The growing popularity of essential oils is the latest chapter in a history of use and fascination that dates back more than 3,000 years. Used through the centuries for staying healthy, worshipping, sleeping well, de-stressing, making dinner and just smelling nice, what were known in classical Greece and Rome as “odiferous oils and ointments of the Orient”—as the late organic chemist A. J. Haagen-Smit alliterated in 1961—have wafted west. Along the way they have infused not only scents but also dollars into major retail chains such as Carrefour and Walmart, as well as independent specialty companies, from boutiques to multilevel marketers that now rank nearly alongside Avon and Mary Kay Cosmetics. The passage of essential oils from East to West is a story of encounter and exchange, invention and inquiry, trade and transcendence that continues today.

**B**ethany Brubaker, a mother of three from Los Angeles, says she attended a class on essential oils in 2013 when she was pregnant with her second child. The class was sponsored by Utah-based doTERRA, one of the largest essential oils companies in the world. As of 2015 doTerra had surpassed \$1 billion in sales.

“I was desperate for natural remedies to help me combat migraines induced by a prescription of mine,” she says, adding that she also was seeking to provide a healthy environment for her children and natural ways to relieve regular aches and pains.

In oils, Brubaker says, she found not only a remedy for her migraines but also relief for her daughter’s allergies and “answers for joint pain and natural ways to support my little family through so many situations.”

“It’s not surprising to me that more and more people are using essential oils,” says Lisa Bollinger, a homemaker in Michigan who sells oils for one of doTerra’s competitors, Young Living. Founded in 1994, Young Living imports many of its oils from the Middle East and Asia, especially Oman, the Philippines and China, and it sells mainly across Europe and North America.

“They’re gaining more positive attention,” says Bollinger. “People have incredible testimonies of how they have helped them overcome huge sicknesses and health issues.”

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), while not contesting the appeal of oils for their scents of beauty, has cast a skeptical eye on medicinal claims that remain debated among medical and pharmaceutical communities.

Bollinger invokes history.

“It’s what we used to use before pharmaceuticals took over,” she says, “and if that’s what we always used for centuries and it works, we should keep doing it.”

In all their varieties of scent, origin and use, essential oils all have this in common: They are naturally distilled by either steam or cold pressure from plants, and this includes combinations of seeds, stems, roots, leaves and blossoms.

Trygve Harris, originally from California, now lives in Oman, home to *Boswellia sacra*, the frankincense tree whose resin and oil once brought centuries of riches to the southern Arabian Peninsula. Founder of New York-based essential oils boutique Enfleura, Harris says her distillery in Oman’s capital of Muscat allows local shoppers to experience the natural method of making and using essential oils.

“When you buy an essential oil, you are buying beauty, serenity, posterity,” she says, noting that in particular, Frank—that is her affectionate nickname for it—allows buyers to connect with Oman—its history, its people, its geography, its national soul. “That’s why people are drawn to it,” she says. “That’s why people come on pilgrimage to Dhofar. They go out and sit with the trees.”

It was only after traveling through the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa and studying aromatherapy in Australia, Harris says, that she decided to launch Enfleura in 1997 in New York’s SoHo. In her company’s early years, Harris sold a variety of wellness products and essential oils, her own and those made by others. She found that frankincense in particular, already among the best

**Opposite:** A bottle of frankincense essential oil sits on a branch of a frankincense tree (*Boswellia sacra*) in the Dhofar Governate of Oman, where a semiarid climate and limestone geology have proven especially hospitable for its cultivation for more than 3,000 years. Frankincense from Oman was instrumental in the rise of early kingdoms in the region, and today it is a center for one of the most popular of essential oils. **Lower:** A wide range of organic products on display at BioFach 2020, one of the largest organic food fairs in the world, held in Nuremberg, Germany, include essential oils of various varieties, scents and purposes, including cooking and baking.





known among a family of oils that include lavender, cedar, eucalyptus, orange, peppermint and dozens of others—offers many uses in each of its drops and earns many claims of wellness among those who use it. While each oil offers unique benefits, Harris says that over time, she began to lean more passionately toward Frank—so much so that she now even offers frankincense ice cream.

“When people ask me, ‘What can this oil do for me?’ I am at a loss at what to say!” she says, because to view them in only utilitarian ways can overlook the sensual pleasure of their delightful, evocative scents which are, well, their *essences*. “I try to help them recognize the beauty of the oils themselves.”

“Miraculous,” Harris calls them, noting that like many other essential-oil enthusiasts, on a typical day she might use oils for sleep, headache, a burn or a cold.

This year, as the world faces the pandemic of COVID-19, such wellness concerns and interest in the purported healing properties of oils have sharply increased. Some representatives of Young Living and doTERRA have been active on social media claiming that blends containing clove, cinnamon bark, eucalyptus, rosemary and lemon—all traditional medicinal plants—could help “boost immune and respiratory function” and that a range of oils could help “balance emotions” and “keep your family healthy and strong” in a time of stress and uncertainty.

And looking back, it turns out that if one follows the history of essential oils and their journeys, uses and prestige as they traveled west, it is apparent they have been deemed valuable—indeed essential—elements and accoutrements of comfort, wellness and belief in their efficacy.

The earliest records of essential oils point to around 3000 BCE when botanists and physicians in Egypt, China and India were using essences and oils for perfumes and medicines. Actual human practice, however, probably began far, far earlier. When oils crossed into classical Greece and Rome, Greek physician Hippocrates of Kos, of “Hippocratic Oath” fame in the fourth century BCE, drew on sources from Egypt and India to document the effects of lathering patients and research subjects in oils and essences

## 8 POPULAR ESSENTIAL OILS and their COMMON WELLNESS USES

### Lavender

Relieves anxiety headaches, nurtures skin and improves sleep

### Frankincense

Relieves chronic pain and anxiety and strengthens against illness

### Rosemary

Controls cortisol and enhances memory

### Eucalyptus

Eases cold symptoms

### Peppermint

Relieves headaches, aids respiratory and increases mental calm

### Lemongrass

Boosts mood, reduces depression and increases energy

### Tea Tree

Has antibacterial effects, relieves congestion, aids respiratory and fights against infections

### Ginger

Treats dizziness, reduces fatigue and increases mental health

from more than 300 different plants. Hippocrates and his contemporaries believed the pungent smell of the oils had effects beyond powerful perfumery. Theophrastus, born a year before Hippocrates passed away, in 371 BCE, became the successor of Aristotle, and he wrote that “It is to be expected the perfumes should have medicinal properties in view of the virtues of their spices.”

Later, other Greeks produced materials on plant oils and essences, including Dioscorides who, in 70 CE, wrote *De Materia Medica*, whose insights informed Romans, including Galen in

Essential oils are part of “what we used to use before pharmaceuticals took over,” says Lisa Bollinger, center, who leads classes in her home on the uses of essential oils. Which is her favorite? Lavender, she says, and in that she has company: Of all essential oils, lavender is the bestselling of more than 90 organic oil varieties available in the us.





**Top:** This decorated wooden box of flasks and jars for fragrances, oils and cosmetics was found in the tomb of Merit, wife of a royal architect during Egypt's 18th dynasty in the court of Amenhotep III, who ruled between 1386 and 1349 BCE. **Above:** Marbled, elaborately decorative glass vases for essential oil made by Phoenician artisans in the fourth century BCE in what is now Lebanon would hardly look much out of place if used to hold and market today's essential oils.

the second century CE, as well as later Byzantine and Arab physicians. The Romans built upon Greek aromatic practices and expanded their application of the uses of oils, bathing in them, perfuming their beds and bodies and using them in massage. One of the Roman favorites was frankincense, and the trade from the

southern Arabian Peninsula was so great the path from there to the Mediterranean ports became "the Frankincense Road."

Following the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 CE, the oils continued to be distilled and widely used from Constantinople (now Istanbul) to Damascus, Cairo, Baghdad and across North Africa to Córdoba. Preeminent among the scholars of the scientific flourishing of the 10th century was Abu-'Ali al-Husayn ibn-'Abdallah ibn Sina, who was called Avicenna in the West. Born near Bukhara, in modern-day Uzbekistan, Ibn Sina was a polymath—philosopher, poet, physician and more—with a wide grasp of his Greek, Indian and Persian predecessors. Part of his oeuvre included detailed commentary on the therapeutic applications of more than 800 plants, and he is often credited with the discovery of the distillation process by which essential oils are extracted still today.

In the early 13th century, Ibn al-Baytar of Damascus, author of *Kitab al-jami' li-mufradat al-adwiyah wa-al-aghddhiyah* (Compendium on simple medicaments and food) expanded to various applications for 1,400 plants and oils, with a particular focus on the popular orange and rose waters of his day.

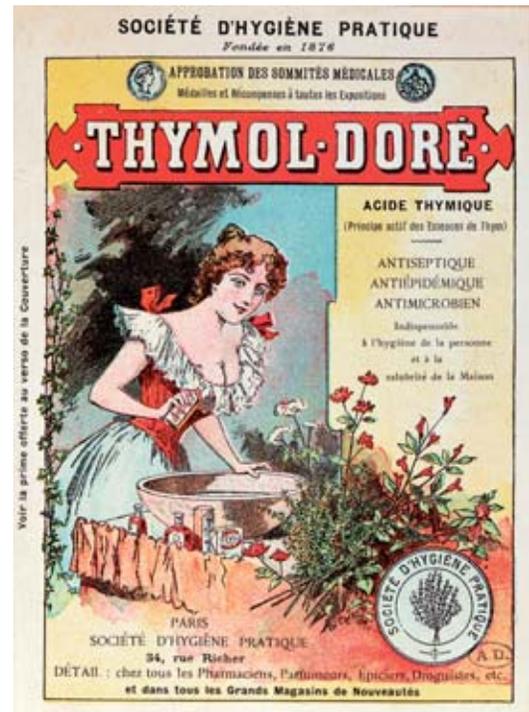
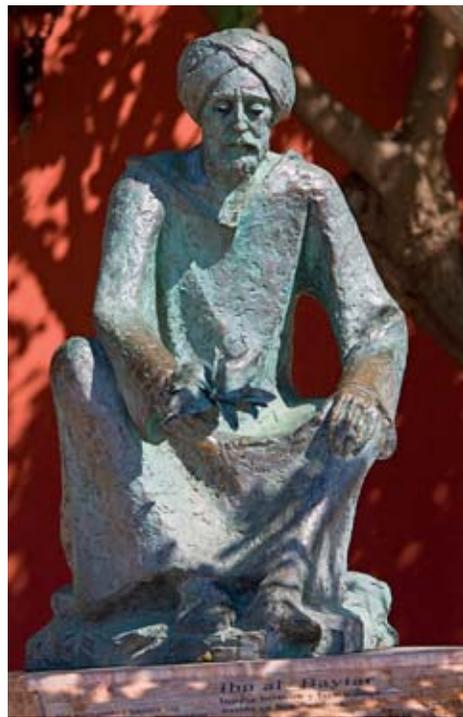
It was from these scholars that much knowledge of plant-based medicines, essences and oils emanated to Europe, where often it was monks who tended to the sick with herbal extractions. Oils were burned in attempts to ward off pestilence, such as when frankincense and pine were burned in the streets against bubonic plague, whose first wave appeared in 542 CE and killed more than 25 million people. In the later Middle Ages, perfumes and oils were carried back to Europe by returning soldiers of the Crusades, and later, Renaissance European

herbalists, alchemists and spiritual leaders, such as Hildegard von Bingen, Nicholas Culpepper, Hieronymus Braunschweig and Paracelsus, all borrowed from the knowledge of Islamic forbears to begin dabbling in distilling oils such as lavender, rosemary, nutmeg and clove.

Historical imagery showing the popularity of essential oils in Europe includes, at **right**, a colored woodcut of a late-14th-century distillery whose extraction process is not much different from the earliest distilleries often credited to 10th-century polymath Ibn Sina. **Lower right**: A statue near Malaga, Spain, commemorates botanist and pharmacologist Ibn al-Baytar of Damascus, who in the 13th century researched 1,400 foods, plants, drugs and their uses, including essential oils. **Lower, far right**: This French advertisement marketed thyme-based essential oil for health in 1908.



This set the stage for the Western fascination with using essential oils for aromatherapy in the early 20th century, widely credited to René-Maurice Gattefossé of France. Alongside his brothers, Gattefossé inherited an essential-oil business from his father in 1907, where they produced oils for the popular French perfume and medicinal industries. It was during the First World War that Gattefossé developed his method of using essential oils to aid injured soldiers, and modern aromatherapy was born.



Of the more than 90 types of essential oils on the market worldwide, frankincense remains among the top five, and among them it is the most historically referenced. Sourced from *Boswellia sacra* trees not only in the southern Arabian Peninsula, frankincense can also be found in the Horn of Africa. Its sap is still tapped, collected and sold

on to global markets. Valued for its fragrance, taste and remedial effects, frankincense once was worth more per pound than gold throughout the Middle East, and it was sold as far as India, other areas in Asia and throughout Europe. Rather than being sold as resin, it is now most often distributed in the form of essential oil.

“The trade in frankincense has been going on since before the time of [the Great Pyramids], and people from outside Oman have long prized it,” says Ashad Chaudry, co-owner of Salalah Frankincense Oil, LLC, which is one of doTERRA’s suppliers. Chaudry has

been in the business for more than 40 years.

In Oman itself, says Chaudry, frankincense remains most popular in its resin form, which is burned for insect repellent and relaxation. It is also used as a base for *oudh*, pure perfumes, or blended in *attar* (aromatic sprays). Chaudry’s wholesale customers in the US and Europe “use them for a variety of purposes,” he says, including blending, reselling, cooking, cosmetics, perfumes and more.

“The uses of essential oils are endless,” says Chaudry, and



**Above:** At New York-based Enflourage’s essential oils distillery in Muscat, Oman, frankincense is the favorite. It begins as a resin harvested from the sap of *Boswellia sacra* trees, and steam distillation extracts its essential oils. **Left:** Essential oils are bottled for perfume, flavoring, aromatherapy and other popular wellness uses. Worldwide, essential oils are enjoying a fast-rising market that is projected to reach \$27 billion by 2022.



despite mixed reviews from science, the myths of essential oils only continues to move around the world and deepen its appeal. On blogs and social media, in pamphlets and advertisements from companies,

the historical uses of these oils—factual and semilegendary—are being told and retold. Yet the science on essential oils remains mixed at best. A few have shown some antifungal or antibacterial properties, but evidence that essential oils can do all that some claim is anecdotal and lacks in clinical evidence.

But science does not deny that of our senses, the most powerfully memorable is that of scent. In that may be a clue to the enduring perception, the personal and often very individual

experience that there’s much more to essential oils than what they do for one’s ailments.

Bollinger says she often shares the history of oils with her clients as they peruse the oil selections or oil combinations. She notes her own enthusiasm for the oils grew when she began noticing that “there are hundreds of essential oil references [in early religious writings], and we don’t even realize it.”

Brubaker had a similar experience.

“They’re not just old accounts of random plants,” she says, but “plants with specific purposes in mind for our well-being.”

Companies see this too. DoTERRA spokesperson Timothy Valentiner says it is “extremely important” to provide historical education to both salespeople and consumers. This educa-

tion, he says, includes both “historical uses and benefits” as well as “scientific research and evidence.”

That potent promise—venerable wisdom and research-based results—explicitly advocated by leading essential oils companies, makes oils a kind of “soft science” for anyone today looking for natural paths to wellness.

It might come pure in an iridescent, apothecary-sized, hand-labeled bottle in a boutique, or it might come mixed as an ingredient in a family-sized bottle of what-have-you in a hypermarket. Either way, they come from one of the world’s oldest traditions for good living, one that still thrives where it began, and that still moves not only west, but to the world. 🌍



**Ken Chitwood, Ph.D.**, ([www.kenchitwood.com](http://www.kenchitwood.com)) is an award-winning writer on religion, travel and culture. He is currently a Fritz Thyssen Foundation Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies of Freie Universität Berlin. He is also a journalist-fellow with the University of Southern California’s Center for Religion and Civic Culture’s Spiritual Exemplars Project, and he lectures in Islamic science at Otto Friedrich Universität Bamberg.



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Musée d'arts  
Tozeurous

# BRICKWORK

## IN THE *Land of Palms*

WRITTEN *and* PHOTOGRAPHED by  
JEFF KOEHLER

The narrow lane passed under a vaulted passageway and emerged back into the bright sunshine as it wound through Tozeur's Ouled el-Hadef quarter. The houses in this centuries-old neighborhood open privately onto interior courtyards, offering the narrow streets only tall exterior walls with high, slitted windows and stout doors made of palm wood. The walls, though, are not smooth and whitewashed as in much of the country. Protruding and receding bricks form intricate geometrical patterns around windows, above doors and on many of the walls, creating contrasts of light and shadows.

Standing at a distance from a smattering of earthen, brick mosaics in this Tunisian southern city, the walls come alive in patterns, dancing and shape-shifting in the light of midday. In the fore, the small bricks appear bland, yellowish-green, and unadorned. But one only needs to move back a few steps and put distance between their eyes and the 15th-century

Berber edifices to relish the complexity of the intricate masonry emerging from the walls.

Amid the Sahara, Tozeur's famed brick mosaics are as celebrated as the town's safari excursions, sunset camel rides and guided tours to the nearby *Star Wars* sets of Tatooine, the fictional original home of the movie's hero, Luke Skywalker. But the bricks, arranged in their many unique geometric patterns—they delight the residents and tourists alike.

"They're beautiful," Tozeur resident Imed Chorfi says, gazing at the familiar walls.

Motioning to a row of inverted Vs situated across the top of an archway in the mosaic, he says, "This is a camel train." He then points out stylized palm trees and a zigzagging snake design.

"We represent what is around us."

Only a small number of brick artisans remain, keeping alive a tradition of brickmaking that hasn't changed much

**Opposite:** Sunlight and shadows highlight a brick-patterned facade in the Ouled el-Hadef quarter of Tozeur, a city of about 50,000 in southwest Tunisia. Laid horizontally and vertically, some protruding and some recessed, the handmade, kiln-fired bricks are staggered into shapes that recall textiles and other traditional patterns and scenes. The results are motifs that are both mesmerizing and useful: The fractional shadow cast by each sunlit brick helps cool the wall. **Lower:** Tozeur's *palmeraie*—date palm orchards—grow some 400,000 trees whose regular cuttings fuel the brick kilns.





Surrounded by stacks of drying bricks, eighth-generation Tozeur brickmaker Antar Chorba pushes a wet mix of clay into block form as many as 600 times in a day. The bricks dry in stacks that will later be fired.

in the region that continues the tradition of the early brick masons. Chorba explains that structures erected in the Djerid, or southwest region of Tunisia, in the early days were originally made of sun-dried bricks, molded of mud and straw, and in Arabic called *fankar*. The clay was dry enough to be cut into blocks, he says, but was vulnerable to the powerful rainstorms that often swept the area. The *fankar* also tended to erode from wind and sandstorms and the intense heat of the Saharan sun. Soon locals began experimenting with firing the clay in handmade kilns,

through the centuries. Chorfi has seen the local artisans using the same method of brick creation and design as the town's Berber predecessors did, including setting afire the abundance of fronds from the local date palm orchards, which are used to fuel the brickmaking ovens. Tozeur became prosperous through its plenty of dates, even referenced by 11th-century Andalusian historian and geographer al-Bakri, who wrote: "There is no other place in Ifrikiya that produces so many dates; almost every day a thousand camels, or even more, are loaded with this fruit."

Today the date orchards of Tozeur, or *palmeraie*, spread some 15 square kilometers and contain 400,000 palms, famous for their amber-colored, near-translucent dates, or *deglet nour*. The region is known as the "Land of the Palms," or in Arabic, *Bled el-Djerid*. Without the numerous palms, the brick ovens could

not burn—the bricks could not be.

Antar Chorba, an eighth-generation Tozeur brickmaker, is from one of the families

which over time the masons observed improved durability. Baked bricks were a response to what the Berbers and the desert lacked—stone—but also what they had in abundance: clay-rich soil, water from 200 natural springs, and ample fuel from the cut palm fronds. Simply explained, Chorba says, "because there were no quarries."

As in the tradition of those who came before him, Chorba uses two types of soil to prepare the bricks: a reddish clay, which is excavated near El Hamma, about eight kilometers away from the city, and a lighter shade of sand-like mix brought from an area near the brickworks. Put into a bathtub-size trough, the soils are sunk to absorb water for 12 hours before being mixed by hand into a paste.

Working quickly, Chorba can form over 600 bricks a day. With the paste ready, he scatters ash from the kiln across a patch of courtyard. This prevents sticking and absorbs moisture. He then sets a simple bottomless wooden mold on the ground and works a handful of clay into one of the rectangular holes until there are no air bubbles. He then repeats the process to form more bricks. After filling a section of the courtyard he's working on, he generously tosses more ash over the top of the freshly molded bricks. Along with blotting up excess moisture, the protective layer of ash stops cracks from forming on the surface of the bricks as they dry.

"In the summer, when the temperature is over over 45 degrees [Celsius], we can make them in the morning and be ready to stack them in afternoon," says Chorba, mentioning in the winter bricks may take three or four days to complete.

While Chorba molds bricks, an assistant patiently scrapes with a knife each of the six sides of the bricks, which were formed a few days before, to remove the ash and give them their final shape. Then, the bricks are stacked in *harsai*, pillars of 10 or 12, allowing for ventilation as the bricks dry. This method also helps the masons keep count of production. At the final stage, they are stored until there are enough to fill the oven, which can hold between 10,000 and 20,000 bricks.

The open-top, updraft kilns measure upward of 3 meters, with a narrow, door-like gap for loading bricks. The fuel pit is subterranean and directly beneath the oven, and between the two parts of





Brickmaking in Tozeur begins with a mix of clay and sandy soil that soaks for some 12 hours before being pressed into a rectangular mold. The ground below and the tops of the damp bricks are sprinkled with ash to absorb moisture, drying in the open air for hours to days depending on the weather. In the kiln the bricks are baked at almost 1,000 degrees Celsius. Nasri Chabani, **right and far right**, uses fronds cut from the palmeraie as fuel. It takes around 6,000 of them to keep a kiln going for the 24 hours a load of 10,000 to 20,000 bricks requires. Afterward, the bricks cool for three or four days.



the kiln is a wheel-like chamber floor known as a sieve, an eight- or nine-spoke platform supported by vaulted arches. Loading takes four or five workers a full day to complete.

“Stacking needs to be done in a way that the heat can get to all the bricks,” Chorba says. Once the kiln has been filled, the loading gap is plugged with clay and the ovens set ablaze.

Nasri Chabani, another of Tozeur’s brickmakers, works in a nearby oven. He explains the importance of drying the clay molds before placing them in the ovens, “Drying is the most important step because if not done right the bricks will break in the kiln.”

As he feeds a 3-meter-long palm into a firing kiln, Chabani also mentions how the brick production in Tozeur has created an opportunity for date palm cleanup.

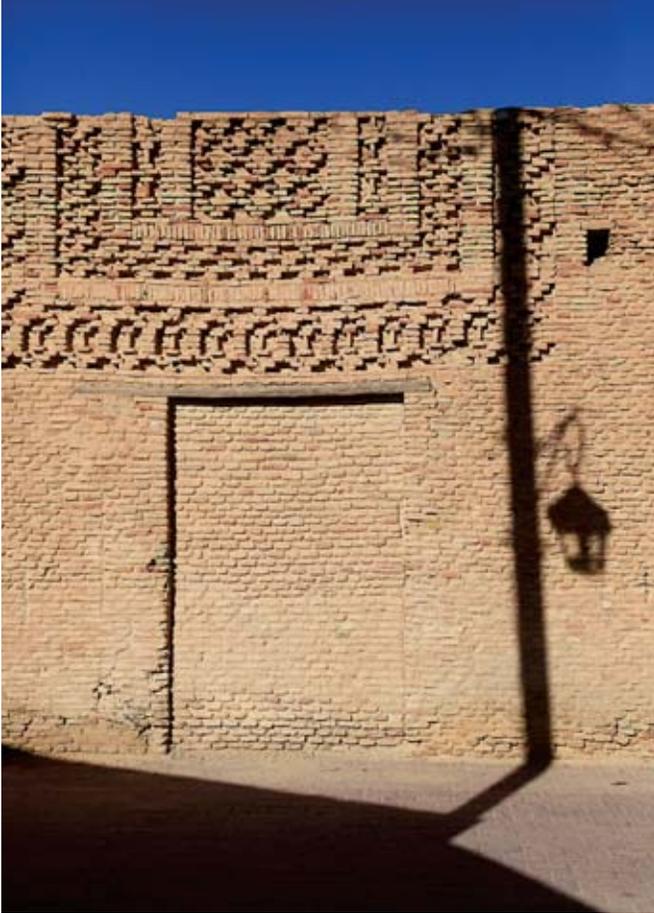
“It can be said that brickwork is the waste disposal industry created by the date industry,” he says, describing the annual trimming of palm trees which are then sold to the brickmakers for the kilns.

To fire a load of bricks, it takes around 6,000 fronds and 24 hours with

temperatures inside the oven reaching nearly 1,000 degrees Celsius. It takes three to four days for the bricks to cool. Then the bricks are removed through the temporarily plugged loading door, which is broken open; each brick is then sorted.

Both Chorba and Chabani describe the original brickmaking process that took place centuries ago. In those early years, the masons pushed fired bricks into the adobe of each structure to protect the walls on the outside. But they soon discovered by using this method, it created a natural barrier from the sun’s heat, leaving the structures cooler inside. This region has the highest average temperature in Tunisia, and walls thickened with bricks helped insulate against extreme climate, Chorba says.

Deposits of clay and an abundance of palm fronds were not the only reasons local masons turned to using baked bricks in wall construction. They are highly durable, in part due to low density that allows them to



absorb and expel water.

“It is also an extremely resistant material,” says Nidhal Hedfi, an engineer from Tozeur, explaining why the bricks rarely crack. “(A brick’s) low expansion rate allows it to withstand large thermal amplitudes.”

But the bricks also offered something else—decoration. Maghrib historian and professor at Université de Sousse Abdellatif Mrabet opined in his *L’art de Bâtir au Jérid* (The Art of Building in the Djerid), as an authority on the region’s architecture, the use of baked bricks as a “coating ensures a whole panoply of decorative patterns.” French historian, geographer, and traveler Augustine Bernard in 1924 was also beguiled by the bricks, describing a “checkerboard of the recessed bricks” with “all combinations of diamonds.”

For masons, the bricks were infused with possibilities. Placing them horizontally or vertically, lengthwise or crosswise, masons could coat facades to create decorations inspired by weaving, carpets and local motifs to achieve total originality.

“The solid bricks are meticulously arranged in a sort of ornamental grammar with the possibility of infinite combinations of decorative motifs,” Hedfi says, mentioning the local Berbers who were a likely source of the brick decor.

The decoration itself also added another level of protection from heat.

“The sets of recesses which characterize the arrangement of bricks allow the creation of minimal fractions of shadow on the

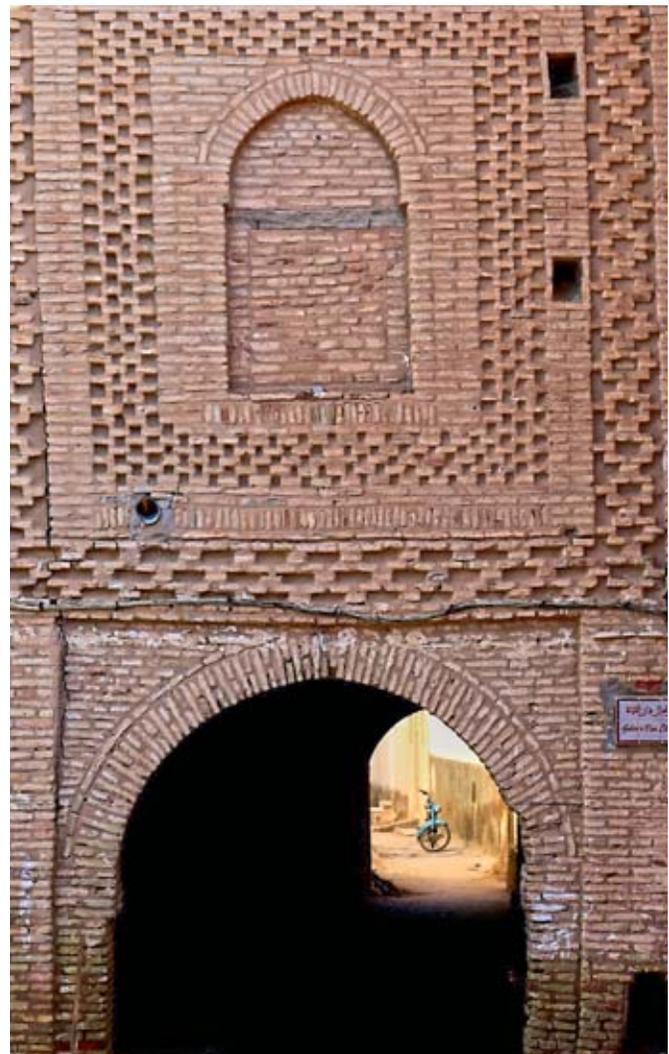
**Top:** Sunlight illuminates a banded pattern of bricks over a bricked-in passageway in Ouled el-Hadef. A banded pattern also appears over a vaulted passageway under a house, **right**, where a central arched window may have once been an opening in the wall, or the window may be a bricklayer’s design device.

entire facade, which minimizes the surface directly exposed to the sun’s rays and consequently reduces the heat that penetrates the wall,” Hedfi explains.

These gradually shifting patches of shade generate convection currents, lowering the surface temperature by creating a naturally ventilated wall. Hedfi’s observations are not merely based on his credentials as an engineer. He was born in Tozeur and spent his childhood in a traditional brick house.

Hedfi’s beloved Tozeur takes its name from the Latin *Tusuros*, bestowed by the Romans when they built a citadel fortress as part of their chain of fortified outposts meant to contain nomadic Berber populations, the original inhabitants of Tunisia. The city soon became a major trading post and important stopover for caravans traveling from the Sahara to the Tunisian coast, as well as those in transit to Makkah from the Maghrib region of Africa.

Tozeur’s antiquity and lasting importance through the centuries can still be seen in the city, through its kilns and brick mosaics. The city and its residents demonstrated technological sagacity even centuries ago. On Tozeur’s outskirts, where a bumpy dirt road opens toward the desert, some 35 cylindrical ovens jut up like large termite mounds. Beside each oven are smooth courtyards for molding and drying bricks with rudimentary frames of palm trunks that can be topped with fronds for shade, and a simple area to rest and store tools.



The lack of archeological digs makes it difficult to pinpoint when Tozeur shifted toward baked bricks. Oral tradition points towards Mesopotamia—including Iraq, but also parts of modern-day Iran and Syria, where a long-held tradition of ornate brick structures remain—somewhere between the 9th and 11th centuries.

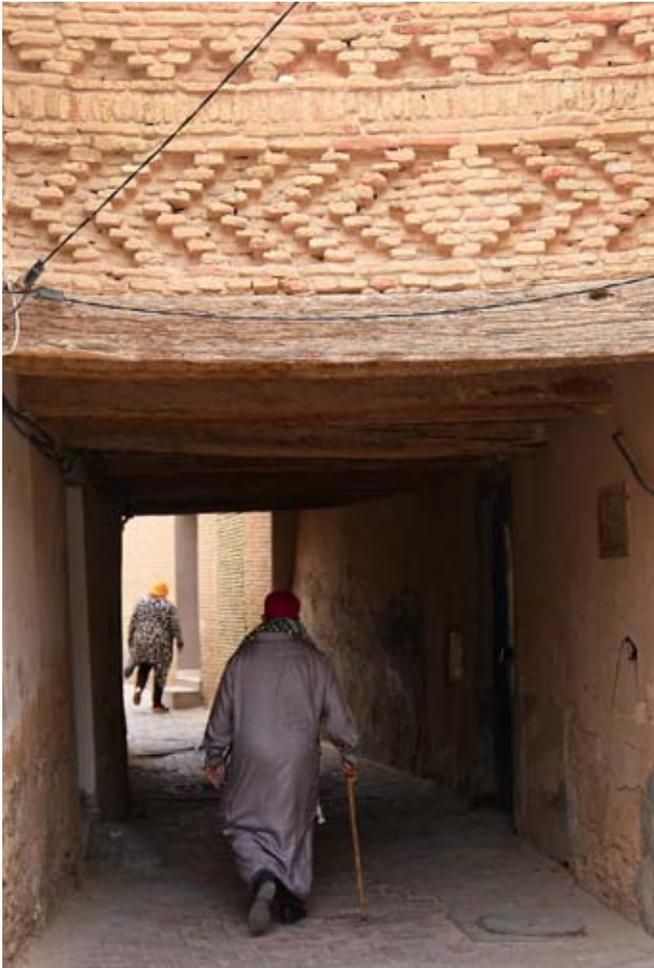
Thirty minutes' drive west of Tozeur, near the Algerian border, sits the town of Nefta, population 25,000. Mekki Khnissi, whose family has been making bricks there for 300 years, says it was settlers from Kufa, Iraq, who brought the tradition a millennium ago. "We still call it 'Little Kufa,'" he says of the town.

Not everyone, though, is fully convinced. Mrabet says the brickmaking tradition could have begun before Islam arrived in Tunisia the seventh century.

"We talk about Iraq as well as Iran, but there is no more evidence there than to the contrary," he says, pointing out a 2018 discovery near Tozeur of a late-Byzantine church, dating between the fifth and seventh centuries, with a north facade built of brick, and to a brick oven he discovered amid ruins of the ancient city of al-Halbah, which lies on the edge of Tozeur. The Djerid has long had a diverse population, drawing travelers, merchants, and, from the earliest days of Islam, pilgrims.

Equally ambiguous is why this beautiful and particularly

**Below:** Inverted V-shapes create what is known in Tozeur as the "camel train" on top of an alley in Ouled el-Hadef. "We represent what is around us," says resident Imed Chorfi. **Above:** A hotel window is framed in brick designs.



effective architecture in such a hot, sunny climate is almost exclusively found in these two oases. Perhaps the prevalence of quarries in other areas, which did not offer an abundance of date palm fronds for fuel, allowed for differing variations of styles. Across the Algerian border, some buildings in two places—Tamacine and Tamellaht—do share similarities with the Tunisian towns, though. Mrabet surmises, "there is no doubt that Djeridian brick was exported to Tamacine and Tamellaht," but the brickwork, he adds, shows a lack of mastery.

Until some 30 years ago, brickmaker Khnissi says Nefta's kilns were in the center of town. Tunisian officials moved them because of pollution, and the large weekly *suq* now gathers on the flat expanse where they once stood. Before then, there were 20 families making bricks.

"Now there is just two. No one wants to do it. It's tough," Khnissi says.

Yet, the tradition of artisanal masonry continues in Tozeur and Nefta. New houses are erected using the bricks, and an area luxury hotel ordered 1 million of the bricks to use in its recent construction. Brickmaking is a cherished gem for those who grew up in the region, and those visiting for the first time. So, while tourists may come to experience the desert and its many timeless offerings, the bricks underscore the history of two towns and centuries of residents who have cemented their identity in the patterned facades of their homes. 🌐



**Jeff Koehler** is a us writer and photographer based in Barcelona. His most recent book is *Where the Wild Coffee Grows* (Bloomsbury, 2017), an "Editor's Choice" in *The New York Times*. His previous book, *Darjeeling: A History of the World's Greatest Tea* (Bloomsbury, 2016), won the 2016 IACP award for literary food writing. Follow on Twitter @koehlercooks and on Instagram @jeff\_koehler.



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# *The Prince of Enchantment*

WRITTEN BY  
KAY HARDY CAMPBELL

“Uds differ from each other in their size, their smallness, their length, width and depth, in their forms, in quality, in crudity and by the elegance of correspondence of their different parts to one another.”

—ABU YUSUF AL-KINDI, CIRCA 870 CE

S

itting in his Pennsylvania workshop, surrounded by hanging tools and worktables, Najib Shaheen cradles a hand-crafted, wooden ‘ud in his arms.

As he strums and picks, the nylon strings resonate along an Arab musical scale. Similar in size to an acoustic guitar but far different in shape and sound, the ‘ud is to many the most iconically Arab of all musical instruments. And Shaheen, whose expertise has earned him the nickname “Oudman,” would know.

Growing up in the Mediterranean coastal city of Haifa in the 1950s, the instrument has never been far from his reach. As a boy, he learned to play the round-backed, half-pear-shaped instrument amid an extraordinarily musical family. This included his father, Hikmat Shaheen, a well-known music educator, composer and ‘ud performer, and his younger brother Simon, who is today a virtuoso on both ‘ud and violin.

“Hundreds and hundreds of ‘uds passed through our house in those days. Every day there were four or five musicians coming and playing ‘ud,” Shaheen says, remembering how his father also repaired small instruments and that his uncle crafted ‘ud picks from goat horns. “And in the evenings, when the radio stations had to fill time between programs, the Shaheen house would stop to listen to a few minutes of ‘ud improvisation by the era’s great players.”

Soon he began learning the basics of woodworking after school at his grandfather’s

carpentry shop, which would later beget a decades-long career.

When he arrived in New York in 1967, he says, players of his beloved instrument were mostly of Turkish and Armenian backgrounds.

“There was a vibrant nightclub scene with excellent singers and musicians,” he recalls, though outside of his musician’s community, “nobody knew what an ‘ud was.”

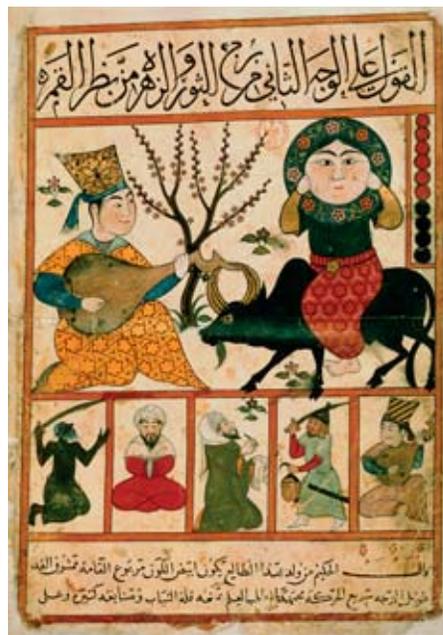
Shaheen spent years honing his craft, studying under ‘ud-maker Eddie Berberian, father of the well-known Armenian American ‘ud player John Berberian, before later apprenticing with New York-based luthier David Segal. Today, the Oudman is known for perfecting the acoustics on his clients’ ‘uds, and he is one of a few in what has become a much larger, much more diverse cultural scene committed to preserving and advancing the instrument’s craftsmanship and the sounds fast-plucking, virtuoso fingers can make.

For more than a thousand years, musicians across the Middle East, North Africa and southern Europe and Central Asia, much like members of the Shaheen family, have played the ‘ud for audiences large and small. It is frequently compared to the lute: *Encyclopedia Britannica* refers to the ‘ud as the “parent of



**Opposite:** Warmed by a campfire and the notes of an ‘ud, hiking guides near Saint Catherine, Egypt, fill an evening with song. **Right:** Master ‘ud-maker and virtuoso Najib Shaheen says the instrument has been so long and deeply embraced as to be culturally emblematic, and in Arabic it is often called *amir al-tarab*, “the prince of enchantment,” in a musical sense.

COURTESY NAJIB SHAHEEN; OPPOSITE: DAVID DEGNER / GETTY IMAGES



**Left:** Appearing on a fresco painted around the middle of the eighth century at Qusayr 'Amra in Jordan, an 'ud player plucks a four-stringed instrument: A fifth string was not added to the 'ud until the ninth century. **Above:** Venus is depicted playing an 'ud, and Taurus appears as a bull on this page from the Mamluk-era manuscript *Kitab mualid al-rijal wa al-nisa'* (Book of birth charts of men and women) by astrologer Abu Ma'shar al-Balkhi.

dedicated musicians, including popular stars such as the late Farid al-Atrash of Syria, the late Egyptian-born Mohamed el-Qasabgi, Simon Shaheen, and Iraqi composer Naseer Shamma, who currently resides in Cairo.

But the greatest achievement of the 'ud perhaps has been its own longevity. It has enchanted listeners through more centuries than perhaps any other stringed instrument. Its range spans three octaves, but that is a technical view, one that

belies the deeper power of the 'ud, the range of expression those octaves can achieve in the right hands. "It makes [people] weep when it sings, as though it / repeats to us what the doves have murmured in its ear," wrote al-Hilli, a poet of the late 13th and early 14th century. Two hundred years earlier, poet al-Husayn praised its ability to express the pangs of the soul, "the pain of tribulation."

At the same time, says George Sawa, an Egyptian-born and now Toronto-based scholar of Arab music history, "its sound is so warm, gorgeous and gentle, especially the low notes. There's something about it that's just magical."

In addition, each design of the 'ud is often a unique celebration of fine woodworking. For 'ud builders like Shaheen, the 'uds are opportunities to express creativity not only through acoustic design, but also through choices of wood and ornamentation.

The distinctively pear- or egg-shaped soundboard, he explains, is made from softwoods like spruce. One or three sound holes adorn it: The large one in the center is called *shamsiyah* (meaning from the sun) and it is often—but not always—flanked by two smaller ones called *qamara* (from the moon). These were traditionally decorated with elaborately carved bone rosettes, but today, wood and plastic do the job just as well. The bowled back frame is constructed from thin strips, or ribs, of hardwood.

the European lute" because of its fretless fingerboard, short neck and bent pegbox, as well as its similarities in pitch range. But its true derivation is quite an independent journey, and like most instruments, its history involves many varieties of 'uds that have been developed through the centuries. These include the half-sized *tuhfat al-'ud* as well as the narrower, longer-necked sister of the 'ud, the *kuwitra*, which offers a smaller and shallower sound, four double strings, and it remains more common across the western regions of North Africa. The name *lute* itself, however, likely came from Arabic: *al-'ud*, which rhymes with "food," may have moved into Spanish as *laud*, and from there the change to *lute* would have been easy.

"It's earthy and rounded, close to the cello," Shaheen says. "And in a great instrument, there is an evenness of sound among all the strings."

Shaheen says the Middle East has long embraced the instrument as culturally emblematic, so much so it is often called *amir al-tarab*, "the prince of enchantment," in a musical sense. Today, the instrument has a global following of avid listeners and

**"IT MAKES [PEOPLE] WEEP WHEN IT SINGS, AS THOUGH IT / REPEATS TO US WHAT THE DOVES HAVE MURMURED IN ITS EAR."**

—al-Hilli, early-14th-century poet

Above its unfretted neck, the tuning pegs for the strings are offset at an angle. The result is a remarkably lightweight instrument, averaging about a kilogram.

The 'ud is picked with a *rishah*, a long, narrow plectrum often made of plastic or animal horn, though in the past an eagle quill was regarded as ideal. Rishah in Arabic means bird feather. Strings were once made from silk or gut, but most now are made with durable nylon, steel or silk covered in copper wire.

Rachel Beckles Willson, a professorial research associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies University of London, is currently working on a book about the history of the 'ud. She explains the challenges of the undertaking.

"The 'ud has become a significant cultural icon, which means that many groups of people want to claim it," she says. "It's caught up in national and regional historical claims, so its historiography carries those tensions."

She continues, "Its name has a history that begins long after its existence, and its name encompasses many similar, but not

identical, objects."

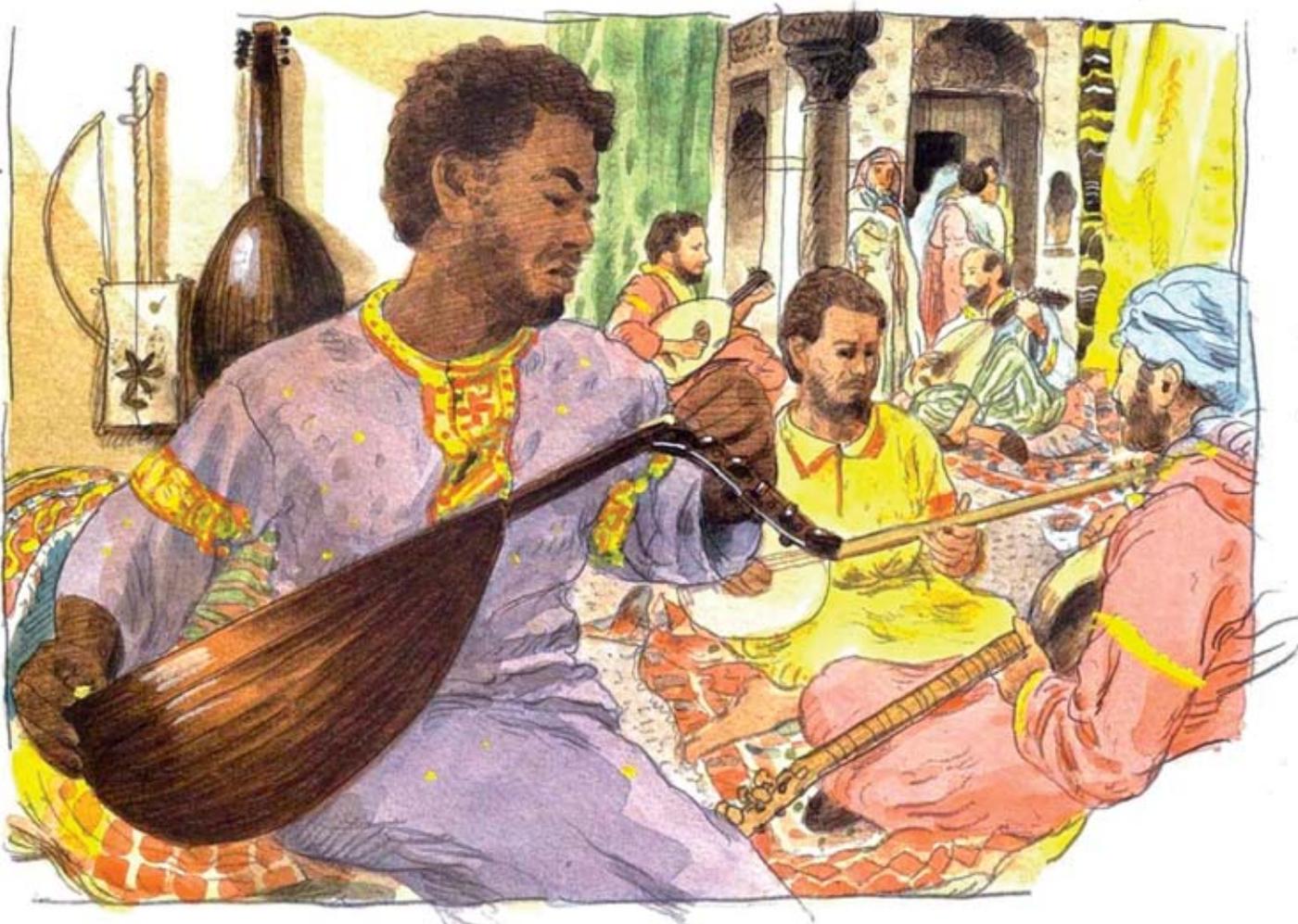
The earliest forms of the 'ud appeared in the second and first centuries BCE. A commonly recited story about its origins,

## FRETWORK

Modern 'uds are unfretted, which means they do not have bars across their necks that mark the placement of notes on the scale. In this way, 'uds are more kin to violins and cellos. But unlike these European unfretted instruments, 'uds are plucked, not bowed. The absence of frets allows 'ud musicians to play the subtle microtones that are integral to Arab music's system of modes known as *maqamat*. From the seventh to approximately the 13th century CE, however, frets were often used on both the 'ud and the related *barbat*, of pre-Islamic Persian origin. 'Ud frets transitioned over the centuries into more complicated systems, which included new tones and opened up the possibilities of new *maqamat*.

Historic images of 'uds show some with frets and some without, which suggests that while this might have been due a musician's preference, it might also suggest that not all musicians required them. For example, Ibn al-Tahhan, a musician and music teacher in the court of Cairo in the 11th century, wrote that frets were widely used, but that he had no need of them, since he already knew the exact finger positions of all the notes.

In the early ninth century, in the court of Abbasid Baghdad, singer, composer, poet and virtuoso 'ud player Ziryab ("Blackbird") added a fifth string to the 'ud that he said symbolized the soul. When he immigrated in 822 CE to the court of 'Abd al-Rahman II in Córdoba, Ziryab taught his techniques there, too, in the music school he founded.



The 'uds constructed by the Nahat family of Damascus, from about 1870 through the 1980s, are often regarded as the finest ever made. This 1927 'ud, made by Toufik Nahat, is currently in New York under restoration by John Vergara. "They would define the classic Damascene 'ud," he says.

according to ninth-century CE scholar Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Farabi, attributes its invention to Lamech, an eighth-generation descendant of Adam. Al-Farabi says Lamech was inspired to build the instrument after seeing a vision for its shape in the bones of his deceased son, which were hanging—as in a period of mourning—from a tree. A more likely explanation may be found in the 14th-century writings of Abu al-Fida and Abu al-Walid ibn al-Shihnah, who placed the origins of the 'ud between 270 and 240 BCE, during the reign of Persian King Shapur I, though this, too, is mostly speculative.

Instruments with long necks with one or two strings do appear in early Mesopotamian and Egyptian iconography, though the first known image of a pear-shaped, short-necked, 'ud-like instrument dates from a first-century CE relief in the Graeco-Bactrian city of Gandhara in present-day Afghanistan. In the centuries that followed, another short-necked string instrument, the *barbat*, took hold in Persia.

The 'ud came to prominence in al-Hira, in what is now central Iraq, just south of Kufa. Capital of the Arab Lakhmid Kingdom from 300 to 602 CE, al-Hira gained a reputation for its literary and musical culture. In the late sixth century CE, when the 'ud arrived in the Hijaz, in present-day western Saudi Arabia, musicians there were already playing other short-necked string instruments such as the *kiran*, the *muattar* and the *mizhar*, which were



## THE LUTE AND THE 'UD

In Muslim Spain, known as al-Andalus, rulers patronized and enjoyed music—especially the 'ud—as much as their counterparts in the Middle East.

In 822 CE Ziryab ("Blackbird"), the genius musician of the Abbasid court in Baghdad, arrived in Córdoba, seat of the western Umayyad court of 'Abd al-Rahman II. There Ziryab became one of the most culturally influential figures of his time. He brought with him his understanding of the five-string 'ud, with its lion-gut bass strings; he also set up a music school. The region became renowned for its music.

Later Christian rulers also patronized musicians. Alphonso X, who ruled Seville from 1252 CE until his death in 1284 CE, commissioned the compilation of a song book in honor of the Virgin Mary called the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* illustrated with images in which musicians, both European and Arab, appeared. It was said to reflect the makeup of his own

court musicians: included are valuable historic images of 'uds.

But after the expulsions of Muslims and Jews began in earnest in 1492, the 'ud seems to have disappeared from what became Spain. In its place, the *vihuela* became popular, and though it was tuned exactly like an 'ud, it is regarded by music historians as an ancestor of the guitar. In addition, the Renaissance lute did appear in Spain, but it was not developed there; rather, it entered Spain, and by the time it arrived, it had been altered to suit European musical styles and scales.

Thus, it was in Sicily the 'ud-influenced lute's journey north really began. Sicily was governed by Arab rulers from 827 CE until 1061 CE when Norman forces took control. Many Muslims stayed on, and many participated in the administration at the highest levels. The result was a powerfully multicultural society.

Norman King Roger II ruled there from 1130 to 1154 CE. Among his commissions was the Cappella Palatino, a royal chapel in Palermo whose ceiling featured frescoes of musicians that included several 'ud players. His grandson, Frederick II, hailed from the German Hohenstaufen dynasty and also spoke and wrote Arabic, and he was also a poet and an enthusiast for eastern music and musicians. Frederick and his lute-playing son King Manfred, who reigned 1258 to 1266 CE, are said to have invited Tuscan poets to Sicily, where they may have sung their verses to lute accompaniment. They also brought to Sicily music teachers from their native Germany.

When the Hohenstaufen dynasty was defeated in battle in 1266 CE, these poets and musicians returned to the mainland. With their return, the 'ud's influence diffused farther north into Italy, Germany, and later France.

covered with animal skin.

In Arabic, *'ud* means “piece of the tree” or “piece of wood,” which may refer to its wooden sound board, its stem-like neck or to the wooden plectrum first used to play it. This may account for a description by 11th-century poet al-Qayrawani, who wrote, “From which branches grew and groves were fragrant ... When the *'ud* was green birds sang on it ... When the *'ud* became dry, maidens sang on it.”

Though musicians continued playing the earlier instruments, the *'ud* gradually became the favorite, and further varieties followed. In eighth-century Baghdad, a musician named Zalzal introduced the *'ud al-shabbut*, perhaps referring to an *'ud* shaped like a large river fish of the Tigris and Euphrates. This was around the time the *'ud* was playing a leading role in the flowering of Arab music and culture that peaked beginning with the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid. *'Ud* players also provided entertainment for the wealthy.

It was also around this time that Muslim scholars approached

## IN ARABIC, '*UD* MEANS “PIECE OF THE TREE” OR “PIECE OF WOOD,” WHICH MAY REFER TO ITS WOODEN SOUND BOARD, ITS STEM-LIKE NECK OR TO THE WOODEN PLECTRUM FIRST USED TO PLAY IT.

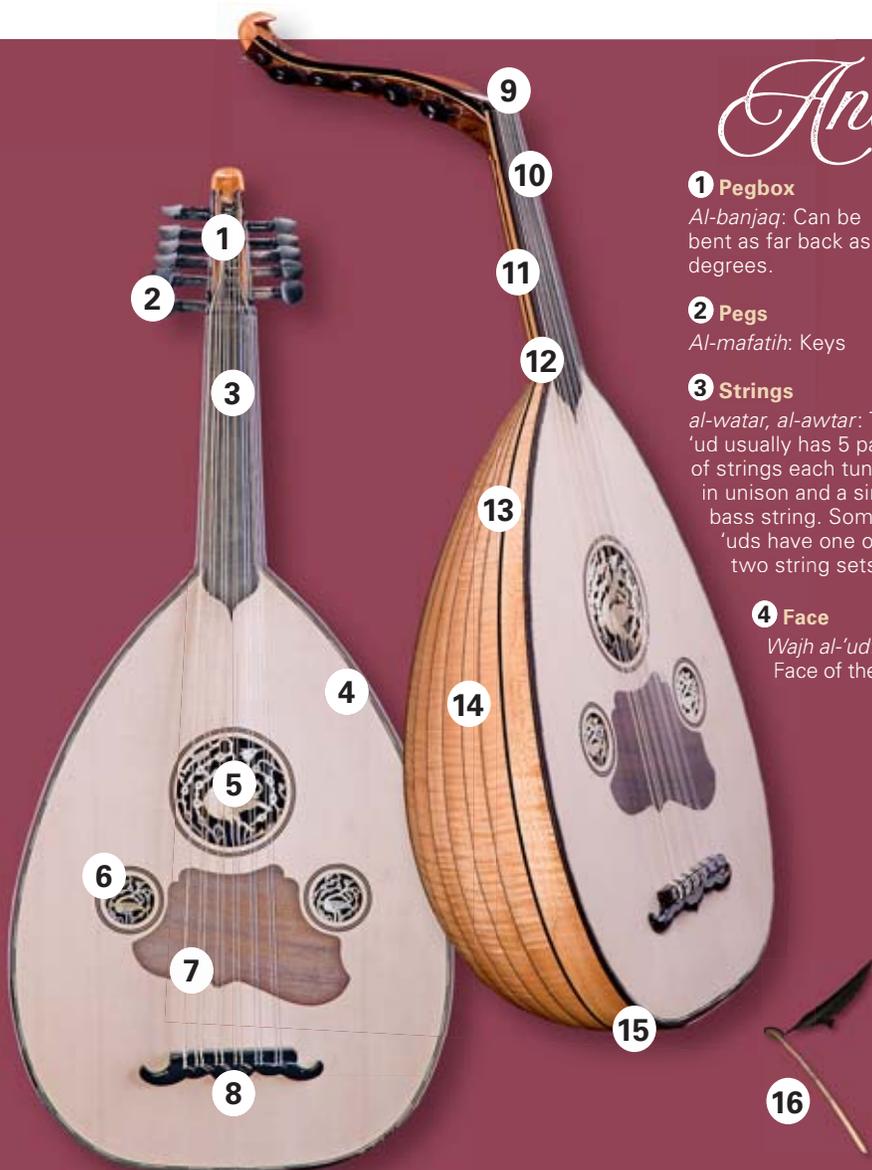
the *'ud* using Greek musical concepts to explain Arab music theory. They studied the mathematical relationships among the notes and the *maqamat* (modes or scales) from Arab, Persian, Greek and Byzantine sources, proposing tunings and fret placements that used movable gut or string.

Over the centuries, scholars have classified *'uds* according to the numbers of strings on them. Some early instruments offered four, while modern ones offer six. The *'ud al-qadim* (old *'ud*), for example, had

four strings. It was this design that was popular in ninth-century Baghdad, where the musician Ziryab added a fifth to make the *'ud kamil* (perfect *'ud*). Habib Hassan Touma, author of *Music of the Arabs*, explains that the four well-known strings were named after the Greek concept of the body's four “humors,” but the fifth string “symbolized the soul, since the four body humors, as [Ziryab] maintained, could not exist without the soul.”

Later players added a second string to each of the five, creating a course, or a set of double strings, tuned identically, which

## Anatomy of an *'ud*



### 1 Pegbox

*Al-banjaq*: Can be bent as far back as 90 degrees.

### 2 Pegs

*Al-mafatih*: Keys

### 3 Strings

*al-watar, al-awtar*: The *'ud* usually has 5 pairs of strings each tuned in unison and a single bass string. Some *'uds* have one or two string sets.

### 4 Face

*Wajh al-'ud*: Face of the *'ud*.

### 5 Large rosette / soundhole

*Shamsiyah*: This term is from *shams* for the sun. Some sound holes have decorative dampers. Others do not for a louder sound.

### 6 Small rosette / soundhole

*Qamariyah*: This word relates to the moon. Some people call all the sound holes *qamara*.

### 7 Pick guard

*al-Raqamah*

### 8 Bridge

*Al-faras* or *al-ghazaal*

### 9 Nut

*Al-anf* (the nose): Nuts can be made of bone, plastic and ebony, with shallow grooves to raise the strings off the neck.

### 10 Fingerboard / mirror

*Al-mir'at*

### 11 Neck

*Al-raqabah*: The standard Arabic *'ud* neck is about 20 centimeters long (nut to bridge

about 60 centimeters) and about 5.5 centimeters wide. The neck is fretless, allowing the instrument to create shorter intervals of tones.

### 12 Collar

*Al-tuq*: This connects the bottom of the neck to the top of the base.

### 13 Back of the *'ud*

*Dahr al-'ud*

### 14 Ribs

*Al-adla*: *'Uds* typically have between 16–21 ribs made of hardwood whereas the face is made from softwood like spruce.

### 15 Heel of the *'ud*

*Al-ka'ab*

### 16 Plectrum

*Rishah*: Meaning feather, this is used to pluck the strings of the *'ud*. Today commonly made from plastic, this can also be made from cow horn, tortoise or eagle feather.



“Rich historically and also variegated, so every single instrument was different in size, shape, story, sound and type of decoration,” says music historian and musician Rachel Beckles Willson, center, whose fascination with the ‘ud led her to the founding of oudmigrations.com. At the site’s launch party in 2016, **above**, she played flanked by two other stringed instruments, a *kabak kemane*, left, played by Karim Othman Hassan, and a qanun, right, played by Nilufar Habibian.

added volume. By 1500, a six-course, ‘*ud akmal* (more perfect ‘ud) appeared, followed by the yet more-extended ‘*ud mukamal* with seven courses. In recent years, even an eight-course ‘ud has popped up. Today, however, most have five courses and a single bass string, for a total of 11 strings.

The stories of surviving antique ‘uds link to the instrument’s recent past, and Beckles Willson champions their stories in her research. A classically trained musician, composer and saxophonist, the professor traveled to Israel and Palestine in 2006 to research classical music in Arab communities. There she met Nizar Rohana, a musician and instrument collector.

She was thus introduced to the ‘ud, she recalls, “as something rich historically and also variegated, so every single instrument was different in size, shape, story, sound and type of decoration.”

She connects ‘uds with her experience in the region, equating their little-known musical stories with both the larger stories of the cultures of the region and more personal family stories like Shaheen’s.

Beckles Willson’s research led to ‘ud lessons, and also to founding *oudmigrations.com*, a website for sharing stories on historic ‘uds and musicians.

Oudmigrations.com collaborator Karim Othman Hassan writes about

what may be the oldest existing ‘ud, now housed in the Musical Instruments Museum in Brussels. The Egyptian instrument arrived in Brussels in 1839, and it is an example of the seven-course ‘ud mukamal.

Well into the late 19th century, the ‘ud persisted in popularity as Arab music blossomed and, in the 20th century, transitioned into recordings and film. Virtuoso ‘ud players rose to celebrity on the airwaves, and ‘ud makers flourished too. Today, musicians and collectors have their prized ‘uds, and among them, the highest reputation is accorded those made by the Nahat family of Damascus from the 1870s to the 1980s. Their ‘uds are considered some of the best around, combining exquisite craft and outstanding sound. Over the generations the Nahat family made thousands of ‘uds, and many still exist.

Shaheen attributes part of the Nahat family’s success to their proximity to high-quality instrument makers in Turkey and Europe.

“The Nahats set up the structural sound bracing of the ‘ud, and that’s what most Arab ‘ud makers use today,” Shaheen says.

To achieve their preferred range of sounds, ‘ud players consider a combination of features. And ‘ud makers will also customize instruments to the

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**‘UD MAKERS AROUND THE WORLD NOW POST VIDEOS OF THEIR SHOPS AND THEIR CREATIONS, BOOSTING THE INSTRUMENT’S POPULARITY TODAY.**



Egyptian singer and 'ud player Bal Qeis performs at a free street concert near Shamsi stairs in Amman, Jordan, during the capital city's annual jazz festival. **Left:** In his workshop in Beacon, New York, John Vergara restores 'uds and other wooden instruments.

years removed from his childhood living room, where he once listened to stoppers-by playing the 'ud, he continues to connect with other 'ud enthusiasts worldwide. He is one of many Arab musicians carrying the story of the 'ud into the future, and with every song his fingers direct, the tradition lives on another day. 🌍



A former resident of Saudi Arabia, freelancer **Kay Hardy Campbell** writes often about Middle Eastern culture. She also plays the 'ud and helps direct the annual Arabic Music Retreat.

changing sound preferences of their clients. For example, Shaheen notes that some Arab players prefer Turkish 'uds, while some Turkish ones prefer Arab 'uds. Turkish 'uds he explains, tune one note higher than Arab 'uds, and Turkish 'uds are built to withstand that higher tension, thus bringing out bright, higher tones. Arab 'uds, which often feature elaborate inlay decorations around the sound holes and on the neck, can be wider and larger, and offer warmer, richer tones than their smaller counterparts.

'Ud makers around the world now post videos of themselves working in their shops and playing their creations as part of a movement online that has aided the instrument's long popularity. Teachers of the 'ud share technique tips on YouTube, and dedicated students study with teachers continents away. Even for Shaheen, as he sits in his workshop, so far from his homeland and so many



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Ziryab: Jul / Aug 2003

Simon Shaheen: May / Jun 1996

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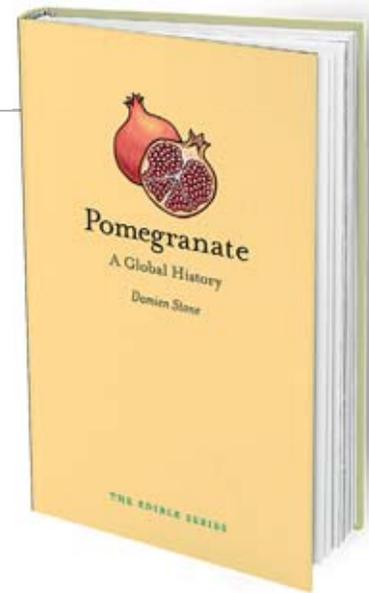


# REVIEWS

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**“The Prophet Muhammad told his companions that each pomegranate contains an aril [seed covering] from heaven itself: ‘There is not a pomegranate which does not have a pip from one of the pomegranates of the Garden (Jannah) in it.’”**

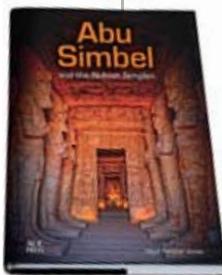


## Pomegranate: A Global History

Damien Stone. 2017, Reaktion Books, 978-1-78023-7-497, \$19.95 cl.

Damien Stone delves deeply into the lore and lure of the ruby-red fruit native to Iran and northern India that is so closely associated with Middle Eastern cuisine, revealing little-known facts about how the pomegranate has found its way into art, architecture, iconography, food, medicine and religion over millennia. One example is how the distinctive Navajo “squash blossom” bead of New Mexico in fact represents the pomegranate—following the style of pomegranate-shaped buttons worn by Spanish colonizers. Introduced to Spain by Arabs in the eighth century, the pomegranate became well established there. Stone also examines the pomegranate’s modern uses in everything from drinks to cosmetics. He includes a chart of pomegranate varieties and a small collection of international recipes that span centuries. Sadly lacking are classic dishes from the region where the pomegranate first flourished, such as *fesenjan* (Persian chicken in pomegranate walnut sauce) and *muhammara*, the Syrian Lebanese dip featuring red pepper and pomegranate molasses.

—RAMIN GANESHAM



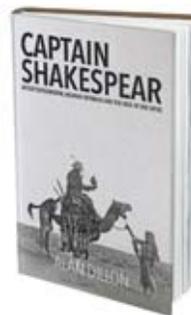
## Abu Simbel and the Nubian Temples

Nigel Fletcher-Jones. 2020, Auc Press, 978-9-77416-8-789, \$29.95 hb.

The stone temples of Abu Simbel in Upper Egypt loom large in many ways. Carved in the 13th century BCE under the command of Pharaoh Rameses II, a key purpose of the main

temple’s colossal exterior statues was to communicate clearly to travelers journeying through the desert along Egypt’s southern border with Nubia that they were approaching a land where Rameses ruled as both king and god. But as the author of this richly illustrated examination of the site asserts, “there is more to Abu Simbel than that.” It is one of the few examples of an ancient Egyptian temple complex constructed for both a husband and wife, in this case Rameses’s favorite (out of more than 100), Nefertiry. The book offers a detailed study of, and guide to, the extensive carvings on the temple walls representing many of ancient Egypt’s 1,500 deities, together with a summary history of the discovery and relocation of Abu Simbel.

—TOM VERDE



## Captain Shakespeare: Desert Exploration, Arabian Intrigue and the Rise of Ibn Sa'ud

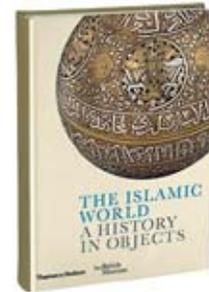
Alan Dillon. 2019, Medina Publishing, 978-1-91148-7-333, \$30 hb.

Who was the first European ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Al Sa’ud (Ibn Sa’ud) laid eyes on? Probably Captain William Shakespeare, a Kuwait-based political agent for Britain’s India government who met the future founder of Saudi Arabia in the Kuwaiti desert in 1910. Shakespeare, a shadowy, Arabic-speaking operative, did the groundwork in building Britain’s relationship with Ibn Sa’ud before World War I. He and the future king connected on a personal level from the very beginning. They met often as Shakespeare undertook desert explorations through eastern and central Arabia. Shakespeare collected valuable anthropological data about the deserts and the Bedouin tribes, including a detailed record of 75 tribal *wusum* (camel brands). He kept Britain’s door open for the

Al Sa’ud, constantly seeking ways to keep the Ottoman Turks out of the Arabian heartland. Ibn Sa’ud was heartbroken when he learned Shakespeare had been killed, possibly by a stray bullet, while trying to photograph a desert tribal skirmish in 1915.

## The Islamic World: A History in Objects

Ladan Akbarnia, Venetia Porter, Fahmida Suleman, William Greenwood,



Zeina Klink-Hoppe and Amandine Merat. 2018, Thames & Hudson, 978-0-50048-0-403, \$39.95 hb. Islam has been described as a mighty river that absorbs the colors of the channels through which it courses. We discern this in the material culture of Muslim societies in lands from western Africa to southeastern Asia. Examples range from the elegant batiks of Indonesia to the sensuous chromatics of Mughal art, and from Ottoman storage chests with inlaid



mother-of-pearl, ivory and tortoise-shell exteriors to the essential geometry of Islamic art in general. These and many other representative objects are beautifully presented in this book. Among the most striking are Mamluk metalwork pieces from 13th- and 14th-century Cairo. Short texts and detailed captions describe the heritage of the objects and show how Muslim society absorbed new ideas by interacting with other cultures, even in times of conflict. Islamic metalwork originated in 12th-century Afghanistan, for instance, and then spread to Syria; by the late 1300s it reflected Chinese influences engendered by contacts with the Mongols.

—STEVEN DARIAN

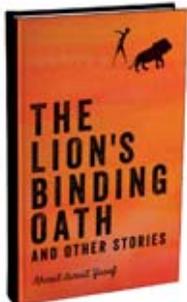


**The Journeys of Motifs: From Orient to Occident**

Margarita Skinner, 2018, Rimal Books, 978-9-96371-5-107, \$65 pb. The origins and movement of motifs, esthetic or literary, is a fascinating subject, but it is not one that the author explores in a very systematic way, beginning

with the extremely rich tradition of Palestinian embroidery. The glory of this volume, therefore, are the numerous cross-stitch motifs from a wide range of sources, presented on a squared background so that they can easily be copied. The Palestinian originals are shown in beautiful examples of traditional dress, mainly from the Widad Kamel Kawar collection. Statues from Palmyra and medieval tapestries allow unexpected comparisons. In addition, there is a useful section on early travelers and their—surprisingly scant—descriptions of costume. The author also provides some very interesting glimpses of her experiences with embroidery during her many years in Palestine, and one longs for more! The book is beautifully produced and a treasure for designers, embroiderers and anyone interested in the history of costume or the region.

—CAROLINE STONE



**The Lion's Binding Oath and Other Stories**

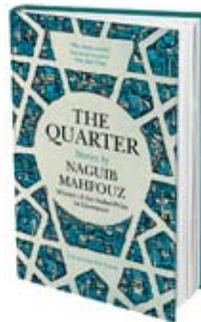
Ahmed Ismail Yusuf, 2018, Catalyst Press, 978-1-94639-5-078, \$15.95 pb.

The author, raised as a nomadic herder in war-torn Somalia in the 1980s, informed his mother at age eight or nine that he “was tired of herding sheep and goats.” Poignantly, the first story in this collection, “A Slow Moving Night,”

concerns young Somali herders attempting to protect their sheep and goats from predators, a metaphor for the perpetual threats of civil-war violence. That threat appears more directly in “The Vulture Has Landed,” in which Ayaan, a

young married woman, seeks to protect her little sister, Amran, by creating a secret safe space for her in a jumbled shed. The story’s title is the code phrase Ayaan uses to alert Amran to hide in the shed. These are dark, realistic stories, told in a simple, straightforward voice, that yet offer hope through the bonds of family, religion and friendship with which the Somali people have endured great hardship.

—TOM VERDE



**The Quarter: Stories by Naguib Mahfouz**

Naguib Mahfouz. Robert Allen, tr. Elif Shafak, fd. 2019, Saqi Books, 978-0-86356-3-751 \$14.95 hb.

This delightful little book is a related cycle of 18 very short stories discovered among the papers of the prolific Egyptian author after his death

in 2006. The book’s original title is *Hams al-Nu-jum* (Stars Whisper); the English title refers to the imaginary quarter of an unnamed city in which these mysterious tales are set. The quarter is populated by archetypal beggars, madmen, fortune tellers and market traders; their stories are enigmatic, fable-like glimpses of life, in which goodness and wickedness are elaborately entangled. Presiding over their quarrels, crimes and crises are two figures of dubious authority: the headman of the quarter and the imam of the mosque. In language of great subtlety and simplicity, Mahfouz presents a timeless allegorical world of human passions. Included in the book are facsimiles of Mahfouz’s handwritten manuscripts of four of the stories and the text of his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, given in 1988.

—EDWARD FOX

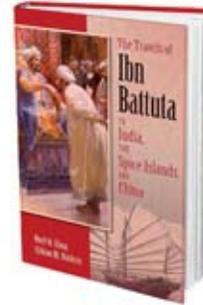
**Trading Territories: Mapping the Early Modern World**

Jerry Brotton, 2018, Reaktion Books, 978-1-78023-9-293, £9.99 hb.

First published in 1997, this book was a groundbreaking approach to telling the story of trade and diplomacy from the 15th to the 17th century—through maps. However, it was heavily skewed toward Western traditions. The author has updated the volume in light of recent new approaches by Renaissance scholars, along with fresh research revealing the extent of Arab and Muslim contributions to mapmaking and world commerce, in particular Ottomans like the admiral Piri Reis (ca. 1465–1554). Entire chapters are devoted to him and other major actors like the Portuguese—with entertaining accounts of explorers such as Prince Henry the Navigator (1394–1460) and Ferdinand Magellan (1480–1521). For the more scientifically oriented, there’s much on pivotal figures like 16th-century Flemish cartographer Gerard Mercator, whose methodology for globes and maps is still used today.

Brotton’s prose, though occasionally academic, is compelling, with well-researched detail.

—GRAHAM CHANDLER



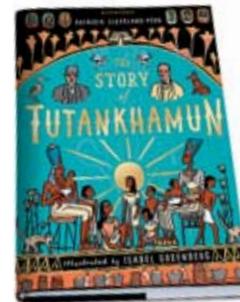
**The Travels of Ibn Battuta to India, the Spice Islands, and China**

Noël Q. King, tr. Albion M. Butters, ed. 2018, Markus Wiener Publishers, 978-1-55876-6-334, \$24.95 pb.

This is a good introduction to *Rihla* (Travels) by Ibn Battuta, focusing on the

Moroccan’s 1342–1349 sojourn in India, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and China. Ibn Battuta gave Arabic readers a view of the Far East in ways analogous to what Marco Polo, traveling some 60 to 70 years earlier, had given Europeans. King’s colloquial translation of Ibn Battuta’s travels brings them alive for readers. Welcomed as a *qadi* (judge), he gained access to the highest levels of Muslim and non-Muslim society and government. Rulers gifted him generously and he joined discussions with religious leaders. He writes about political intrigue; food; punishments meted out by local chiefs; and trade. In Calcutta, he discovered 13 Chinese ships in the harbor and a Bahraini heading the merchant community; in China, he found paper money in use. The book’s introduction, references for further reading and appendices identifying the positions of people and location of places in the text add to its value.

—CHARLES O. CECIL



**The Story of Tutankhamun**

Patricia Cleveland-Peck, Isabel Greenberg, il. 2017, Bloomsbury Children’s Books, 978-1-40887-6-787, £14.99 hb.

This graphic novel/biography of Tutankhamun and the discovery of his tomb

by Howard Carter in Upper Egypt’s Valley of the Kings in 1922 is one that parents and grandparents will enjoy sharing with youngsters. Although Tutankhamun was a minor pharaoh, becoming king at nine and dying at 19 in 1334 BCE, the discovery of his mostly intact burial chambers provided an immense amount of information about him, his court and everyday Egyptian life. There are still unanswered questions, but more clues are being discovered today. Lively and informative illustrations cover the main points, and the author provides a wide range of facts about ancient Egyptian life and 20th-century archeologists. The book includes a section about how to write in hieroglyphics.

—MARGARET POWIS



# EVENTS

## Highlights from aramcoworld.com

*At the time of printing, public health protection measures have necessitated the closing of many events, and some are migrating to online exhibition platforms. Please verify a venue's schedule before visiting, and find out more at aramcoworld.com.*

### CURRENT / JUNE

**Hassan Hajjaj:** *Vogue, The Arab Issue* bursts with the vibrant colors, kinetic energy and rhythmic sway that has become the hallmark of Hajjaj's unique blends of Moroccan pride and heritage and street-smart, contemporary pop fashion. This exhibit shows several of the artist's photographic series, several with frames made from common consumer goods, from bicycle tires to food cans with Arabic product names. The title alludes to how he is using Moroccan friends and local designs in his fashion photographs, as opposed to Western ones. Fotografiska, **Stockholm**, through June 7.

### CURRENT / AUGUST

**Saqqara:** *Life in a City of the Dead* displays papyri, a bronze cat sarcophagus and a facial fragment of a mummy chest to highlight the religious traditions of the people of ancient Egypt. The exhibition focuses on the museum's own excavation project near the Egyptian village of Saqqara, which has examined the millennia-old cemetery in detail: who was laid there to rest; how the graves were used in daily life, and by whom. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, **Leiden, Netherlands**, through August 2.

### ONLINE / DIGITAL

**Reclaiming Identity:** *Dismantling Arab Stereotypes* conveys that Arab

Americans have been an integral part of us society since its inception; there is a discrepancy between who Arab Americans are and how they are generally perceived by the us public; this discrepancy is the result of Orientalism: over-generalized and distorted images and ideas produced by us institutions, particularly the media; stereotypes of Arabs are part of a longer history of othering that has been faced by many ethnic groups; and stereotypical representations are not harmless images but come with a range of consequences and impacts. Arab American National Museum, **Dearborn, Michigan**, online.

**Art Dubai 2020** is one of the world's leading international art fairs, reflecting the unique qualities of the city it takes place in: future-facing, ambitiously international and culturally vibrant. Featuring four gallery sections, the fair drives meaningful engagement with the rich cultural heritage and contemporary art practices of the region and extending to territories across what is known as "The Global South," including South East Asia, Africa, Latin America and Australasia. Usually held annually in March, the 2020 edition focuses on digital content that features works from almost 100 artists. **Art Dubai**, online.

**Hazem Harb Solo:** *Contemporary Heritage* sees the Palestinian Italian artist observe the notion of heritage

as unfixed and fluid. Underscoring the late Palestinian intellectual Edward Said's conception of Orientalism, Harb observes that while transferred from generation to generation, heritage also collides with colonial discourses resulting in new meanings that subsume the stories of the original owners who are often forcibly absent. A consistent thread throughout Harb's practice has been a deep focus on the Palestinian people and their collective and subjective narratives. **Tarabi Art Space, Dubai**, online.

**Ithra Connect** is a new online platform for children, families, creatives, art enthusiasts and professionals of varying levels of experience and interests. The new programs feature a variety of themes focused on literature, technology, art, architecture, theater, design, learning and innovation that include kids' audio books and learning kits, weekly competitions and online monthly social meetups. **Ithra, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia**, online.

Most listings have further information available online and at aramcoworld.com. Readers are welcome to submit event information for possible inclusion to proposals@aramcoservices.com, subject line "Events".

**SEE MORE EVENT LISTINGS AT ARAMCOWORLD.COM**

**Imran Perretta:** *The Destructors* explores ideas of state power, identity and biopolitics, drawing on the artist's own experience as a young man of Bangladeshi heritage, and explores personal and collective experiences of marginalization and oppression. Set within the Bangladeshi community of Tower Hamlets, the film's script is informed by conversations with young Muslim men invited to participate in a series of roundtable

discussions about issues affecting them. Through the work, Perretta mediates on the complexities of adolescence and "coming of age" for young British Muslim men living in the UK. **Baltic Plus, Gateshead, UK**, online through June 28.

*Still from The Destructors, a 2019 film by filmmaker Imran Perretta.*





# ONLINE CLASSROOM GUIDE



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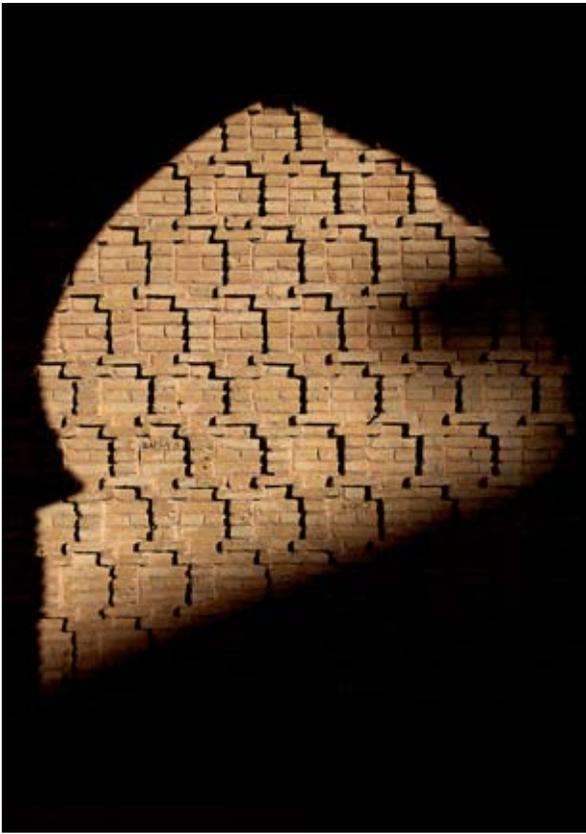
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