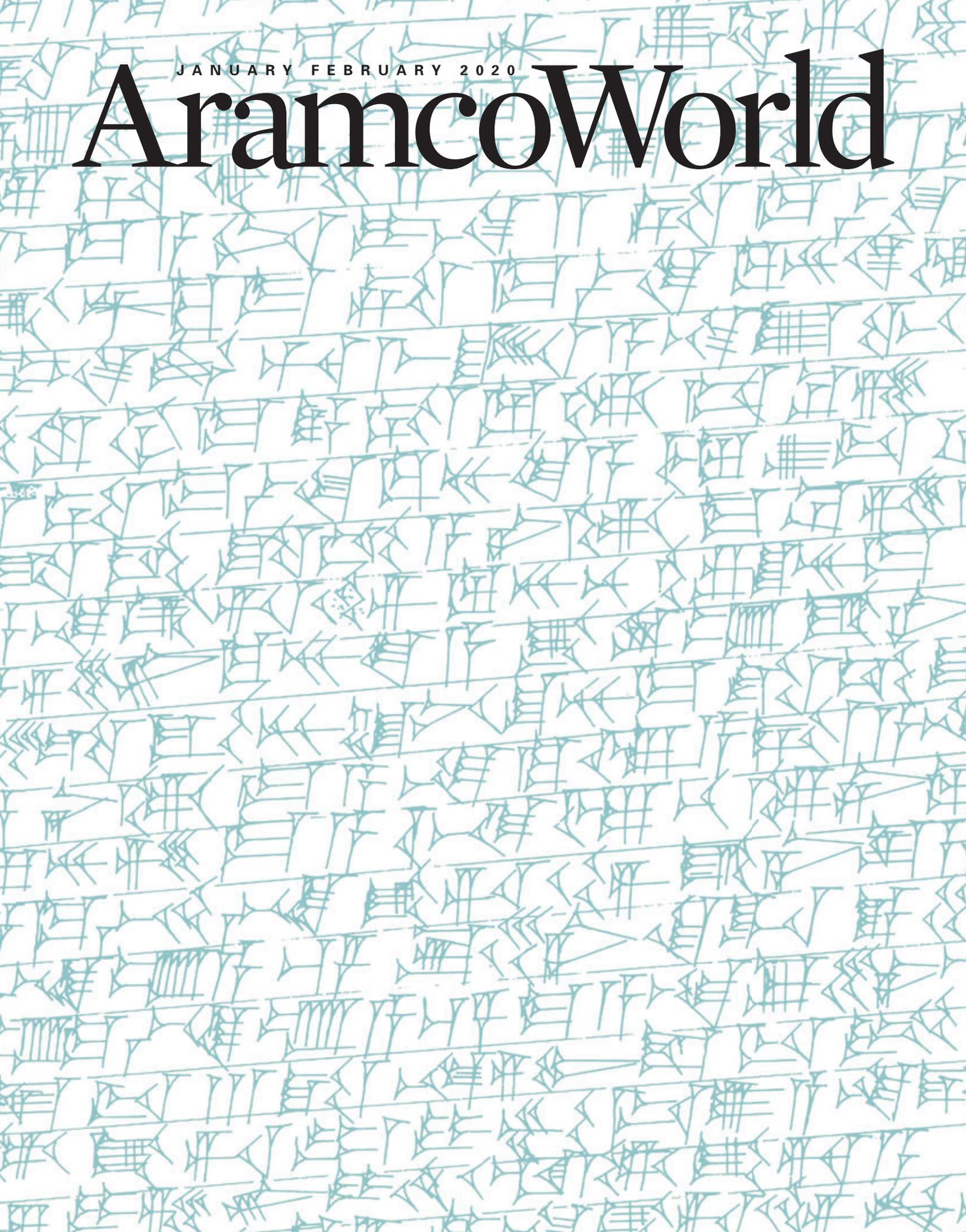


JANUARY FEBRUARY 2020

AramcoWorld





6 Sahara Blues

Written by Banning Eyre
Photographed by Charlotte Doughty

Coming out of the struggles of post-colonial desert Africa, Tuareg band Tinariwen adapted blues rock 'n' roll guitars to North African traditions. The result has been nearly four decades of a sound that has inspired an entire genre of "desert blues," in which themes of loss, home, hope and unity transcend language for audiences around the world.

10 The Emperor from Africa

Written by Barnaby Rogerson
Photographed by Don McCullin

One of two sons of a wealthy, politically ambitious, olive-farming family, Septimius Severus grew up in Leptis Magna, along what is now the coast of Libya, in the second century CE. At first not the most promising of teenage scions, he matured to take high command posts on the Danube frontier and, at 48, became the Roman Empire's first emperor born on the African continent. Over his 18-year reign, he rarely sat on a throne in Rome, preferring travel with the legions to frontiers and far reaches where his efforts expanded the empire to its greatest extent and left legacies and law and architecture that endure today.

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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: Digital filtration helps scholars today produce black-and-white images of cuneiform tablets such as this detail of a legal document produced on a clay tablet 4,000 years ago in Assyria. Photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Back Cover: Opening the us leg of the band's 60-show 2019 tour in Austin, Texas, Tinariwen vocalist, guitarist and songwriter Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni leans into a song. The band's name means "desert people" in Tamasheq, the Tuareg language. Photo by Charlotte Doughty.



22 The Arts Come Home to Bethlehem

Written by **Mariam Shahin**
Photographs courtesy of Dar Jacir

From urban gardening workshops to artists in residence, gallery shows, cinema and a historical archive, Dar Jacir is one of the oldest and most stately homes in Bethlehem and one of the Palestinian town's newest touchstones for creative expressions.

28 Making Lawrence of Arabia

Written by **Vyvyan Kinross**

In 1919 American journalist and filmmaker Lowell Thomas glamorized British Army officer Thomas Edward Lawrence first in war propaganda and then in commercial cinema. His show traveled the world and gave birth to one of the most popular modern legends of Western involvement in the Middle East.

32 Texting Cuneiform

Written by **Jane Grutz**

The world's first palm-sized tablets were made of clay, and they had enough surface for only a few wedge-shaped impressions of a reed stylus. That was how students in Sumer—all boys—learned to write cuneiform. Those who did well could upgrade to bigger clay and go into accounting, law or literature.

 **2 FIRSTLOOK**

 **4 FLAVORS**

 **38 REVIEWS**

 **40 EVENTS**

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FIRSTLOOK

The Stepwell of Chand Baori

Abhaneri, Rajasthan, India

Photograph by
Victoria Lautman

The experience of looking down into architecture rather than up at it is a subversive one. Of India's hundreds of stepwells, Chand Baori is one of the largest, deepest and oldest. Its mesmerizing geometry of more than 3,500 steps and its plunge down 30 meters through 13 stories never fails to excite.

The first function of stepwells, which are unique to India, was to provide a year-round source of water.

Their design offered two advantages over simple draw-wells. Stepwells had, first, great capacity. Many were built along trade routes, where they could serve both residents and travelers. Stepwells were also cooler down at their water-table's surface than up on the ground above. Especially under Islamic rule, architectural enhancements were made to stepwells, such as loggias with small chambers—such as the one near the center of Chand Baori—in which one could take relief from the sun.

Chand Baori was built around 800 CE by Raja Chand, a Hindi surname that means "moon." In the 18th century, Mughal rulers added rooms, galleries and arches. Today it is fenced, its stairs being regarded as too steep to allow public access anymore.

—Victoria Lautman

author of *The Vanishing Stepwells of India*
Merrell Publishers, 2017

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FLAVORS

Pistachio, Zucchini and Lemon Cake

Recipe by
Joudie Kalla

Photograph courtesy
Jamie Orlando Smith

I started making this cake years ago when I was running my deli.

I really prefer it to carrot cake and the green of the pistachio slivers running through it make it not only beautiful but delicious. It is lighter because it has an oil base, which keeps it fluffy and moist, rather than a crumbly butter base. The pistachios must be good quality, so please do make sure you use the best you can find.

(Serves 6-8)

1 cup (250 ml) olive oil

4 eggs

Generous 1 cup (8 oz / 225 g) sugar

1¾ cup (8 oz / 225 g) all-purpose flour

1 heaped tsp baking powder

½ tsp baking soda

½ tsp salt

1 tsp ground ginger

Generous 1 cup (6½ oz / 180 g) grated zucchini

1¼ cup (5 oz / 150 g) pistachios, chopped

For the Icing

1¼ cup (5 oz / 150 g) confectioner's sugar, sifted

Juice of 1 lemon

Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Line an 8-inch (20-cm) cake pan with parchment paper.

In a large bowl, mix together the olive oil, eggs and sugar.

Sift the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt and ginger into a separate bowl, then add the sugar and eggs and stir to combine. Now add the zucchini and pistachios and mix together, then transfer the batter to the pan.

Bake the cake for 50–60 minutes until a skewer inserted in the center comes out clean. Leave the cake to cool for a few minutes in the pan, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

For the icing, mix the confectioners sugar and lemon juice together to create a smooth texture, then pour over the cooled cake. Serve in lovely slices.



Joudie Kalla has been a chef for more than 20 years. She trained at Leiths School of Food and Wine, London, and 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 cookbook *Palestine on a Plate*. She runs cooking classes, catering events and pop-up supper clubs, and consults on food projects.

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SAHARA BLUES

WRITTEN BY BANNING EYRE | PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHARLOTTE DOUGHTY



With droning electric guitars and gravel-voiced lamentations, the collective of Malian Tuareg musicians named Tinariwen—pronounce it tee-NAH-ree-wen—has risen to become one of central Saharan Africa’s global voices and a pioneer of a new musical genre. Made up of some 20 guitarists, composers and various accompanists, the band traces its origins to a young Tuareg refugee and musician named Ibrahim Ag Alhabib, who in 1979 began singing and composing guitar-based songs in Algeria’s southernmost city, Tamanrasset.

His socially aware lyrics expressed Tuareg identification with other indigenous inhabitants of North Africa, mainly Amazigh (Berber) peoples. Throughout the southern and western Sahara, centuries of Tuareg pastoralists and nomads have moved with herds and caravan traders, and the Tuareg became known to outsiders mainly by distinctively deep-blue, indigo-dyed headscarves. Since the postcolonial independence movements of the 1960s, Tuaregs have lived mostly among four countries—southern Algeria and Libya, as well as northern Mali and Niger—where decades of desertification and conflict have given another meaning to blue.

Guitarist, singer and composer Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni is Tinariwen’s principle spokesman. Born to a nomadic family, he arrived in Tamanrasset, long a crossroads for Tuareg clans, as a young man in 1982. The city then had a population of around

70,000, and Alhousseyni recalled, in a telephone interview in 2004, how already “Ibrahim [Ag Alhabib] was a celebrity,” and it was the place to find cassettes of Bob Marley, Jimi Hendrix, James Brown, John Lee Hooker, Dire Straits and others. These tapes had been finding their way into the desert for a long time, he said. When local musicians started playing guitars, they had influences from all these genres of music, and also Maghrib music from Morocco and Algeria, like Nass el Ghiwane and Jil Jilala, he said. “In the quarter where I stayed ... there were a lot of young people nearby, my neighbors, who listened to the same songs.”

The name Tinariwen means “desert people” in the Tuareg language, Tamasheq. Officially, the band formed in 1985—not in Tamanrasset, but in a military camp in Libya, where its core members had joined the on-and-off conflict with the Malian government that had begun in the early 1960s. Alhousseyni had already been listening to Tinariwen cassettes when, at a rebel camp in Libya, he met Alhabib and the rest of the new band. They welcomed Alhousseyni as both a musician and a soldier.

The band recorded its early music in makeshift studios and even around campfires in the open desert. It produced cassettes locally and distributed them clandestinely. The songs resonated with Tuareg youth because they paired worldly, plugged-in musical sounds with acute social and political realities. Lyrics of

longing, loss, separation and faith in the face of hopelessness—classic themes in blues as well as Tuareg poetry—resonated, too, and all the more so when entwined in Tinariwen’s bluesy tangles of guitar lines that also reflected North African rhythms and vocal styles.

In September, Tinariwen performed to a packed crowd of folk- and world-music fans at the annual FreshGrass Festival in North Adams, Massachusetts, 10 shows into their latest global, 60-show tour. Framed by the green ridges of the Berkshires showing the first flashes of fall colors, the scene could not have been farther from the band’s desert homes. Afterward, Alhousseyni reflects on the band’s achievements. “From the

would reach so far and wide. It was in the early 2000s that the term “desert blues” began to circulate, and it works in the sense that the melismatic singing and minor pentatonic scales of Tinariwen are elements shared by American blues with clear roots in Islamic West Africa. But there is particularity in the emotional heart of Tuareg blues: *asuf*, it is called, a sound that translates—imperfectly—as profound melancholy. “Exile, suffering, separation from relatives,” said Alhousseyni. “Our music



beginning,” he says, “our idea was to create a new style. That was the objective of Tinariwen and of Tuareg rebellion, the same goal, the same feeling: to create something new for the people of the Sahara.”

From the beginning, the guitar-based sounds offered a popular alternative to the traditional music of Tuareg griots, hereditary musicians whose song repertoire focused on past glories to the accompaniment of a spike lute called a *tahardent*.

“The history of the Tuareg in the desert needed to be revived,” says Alhousseyni. “But you can’t revive it in the way it was sung in the past. You have to use an instrument that people did not know before. But you also have to let them find a logic that they know within the sound. This group had to be something modern, not traditional. Because with the traditional system, it’s difficult to wake people up.”

Little did these musicians imagine that their wakeup call



Tinariwen’s acclaimed global-debut album, *The Radio Tisdas Sessions*, was made in 2000, after they had been playing and recording regionally for 15 years. Their seventh album, *Amadjar*, released last year, stays true to their founding themes of Tuareg unity and freedom. On stage, dressed in traditional robes and singing in Tamasheq, their sound has powered them to countless festival appearances and numerous world tours that in 2019 included Austin, Texas, among 59 other cities.

was created in some of the same conditions as the blues.”

After a peace negotiated in the north of Mali became official in 1995, Tinariwen’s music began to circulate more widely. One of the people whose ears it reached was

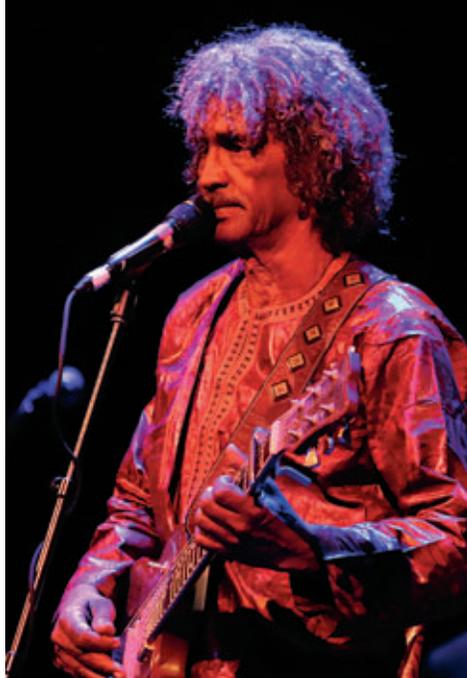
British guitarist and producer Justin Adams. In 2000 he met up with Tinariwen in Kidal, in eastern Mali, where together they recorded an album they called *The Radio Tisdas Sessions*, after the radio station they used as a studio.

“Their music had been banned [in Mali] during the war,” recalled Adams in a 2004 interview. “I think you could spend three months in prison for possession of a cassette. It seemed like everybody in the whole of Kidal knew Tinariwen’s songs.

When they did a concert in town, it didn't really matter who was doing backing vocals. Anybody could just get up from the audience and get on the mic and join in the choruses."

Released in 2001, the album proved catnip for the fast-growing world-music industry. Tinariwen's rough authenticity, beguilingly relaxed guitar lines and loping rhythms were perfect complements to the more highly produced African sounds emerging from studios in Paris, London and elsewhere. Tinariwen was in demand before it ever mounted a tour.

Today, seven albums later and



Left: Founder, lead guitarist and vocalist Ibrahim Ag Alhabib combined influences from Western blues-rock with Tuareg and northwest African traditions to inspire Tinariwen's uniquely hypnotic, melodic tangles of guitar blues.



Joining Alhabib in Austin, Texas, on the 2019 tour were fellow long-time members Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni, **left**, and Hassan Ag Touhami, **lower**. **Above:** bassist Eyadou Ag Leche.



with a 2011 Grammy Award, buoyed by sustained global fame, Tinariwen seems unchanged in its essentials. The 2019 tour, in support of its new album, *Amadjar*, featured just six musicians, including both early members Alhabib, Alhousseyni and Hassan Ag Touhami together with three younger players. All of them, along with the 14 or so other non-touring band members, still live in various parts of Mali and Algeria. They come together in various groupings two or three times a year to tour, but the foundational blends of hypnotically coiling, guitar-driven grooves and mournful, asuf-inspired melodies that address toils and aspirations of the Tuareg peoples—always



sung in Tamasheq—remain constants.

The word *amadjar* means "stranger," and for Alhousseyni, it is an idea that takes him back to his childhood. "Nomadic people," he says, "must welcome strangers a lot. So they keep aside a cache of food that they don't eat for the time when a stranger comes. We children were always happy when we saw a stranger come and stay overnight in our encampment

because we knew there would be extra food that night."

The album began after Taragalte Festival 2018, an annual gathering of world musicians in the Moroccan desert. From there, the Tinariwen musicians moved south to Mauritania, where they met up with famed griot vocalist Noura Mint



Describing the band's sound and its depth of emotional appeal to audiences who may know little to nothing of the band's origins, Tinariwen member Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni points both to the universal appeal of blues and to *asuf*, the deep, melancholic yearning that he says is the beating heart of Tinariwen.

Seymali and her guitarist husband Jeich Ould Chigaly. Over 15 days they recorded basic tracks in the desert, later overdubbing contributions from Western artists, including mandolin from Micah Nelson (Willie's son) and violin from Warren Ellis of The Bad Seeds.

This, Alhousseyni explains, is part of their global outreach, but guests must find themselves within the band's sound, not the other way around. "We don't tell them anything. I've never told a musician, 'Do this, do that,'" says Alhousseyni. "We created the style of music, so it's natural that we defend it. Even if we bring other elements into it, we keep the structure, the basis, the same."

DESERT BLUES

"Desert blues" is a term developed by the music industry to describe and promote the contemporary, guitar-based, minor-pentatonic music of the Sahara pioneered by Tinariwen but now a stylistic marker of many other musicians from the central Saharan region. Its connections with traditional American blues with their still largely undocumented links to West Africa are more a matter of tonality, mood, vocal style and subject matter than song form or repertoire. Indeed Tinariwen's desert blues—they prefer to emphasize their roots in *asuf*—came from the fusion of American blues with rock that arrived in the 1970s with recordings by artists including Jimi Hendrix, Santana, Dire Straits and many others.

In lyrics, too, Tinariwen remains committed to common Tuareg aspirations. The new album features Alhabib merging his guttural baritone moans with soaring, nimble vocals from Seymali, together longing for unity and freedom and "return to our homeland." Alhousseyni points out that *Amadjar* is really a collection of songs that date from as far back as 25 years ago, "but it's as if they were written in advance. The problems that they spoke about are the same problems that still exist in the north of Mali. It is really not necessary to create new songs."

Andy Morgan, a writer and onetime Tinariwen manager, once observed that many of Tinariwen's songs begin with "*imidiwan*," a greeting that means "my friends."

"They are talking to their circle, to people like them," he says. The implications follow: "My friends, wake up, be aware. We're erring in the desert. We're thirsty. What is our future? Where are we going?" Among the most persistent themes in Tinariwen's songs is the call for unity, not only between Arabs and Berbers, but especially among Tuareg clans and factions.

"The Tamasheq [-speaking peoples] are too small to be divided," laments Alhousseyni, adding that those who understand this are, like the Tuareg themselves, a minority. "When you want to do something good," he adds, "you are always in a minority. But you have to know that one person who has the will to do something good is equal to 20 who want to do something bad." 🌐



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



Doughty is a student majoring in journalism and Latin American studies at the University of Texas at Austin.



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Agadez: Jan/Feb 2001

Timbuktu: Nov/Dec 1995



The
EMPEROR
from
AFRICA

WRITTEN BY **BARNABY ROGERSON**

PHOTOGRAPHED BY **DON McCULLIN**







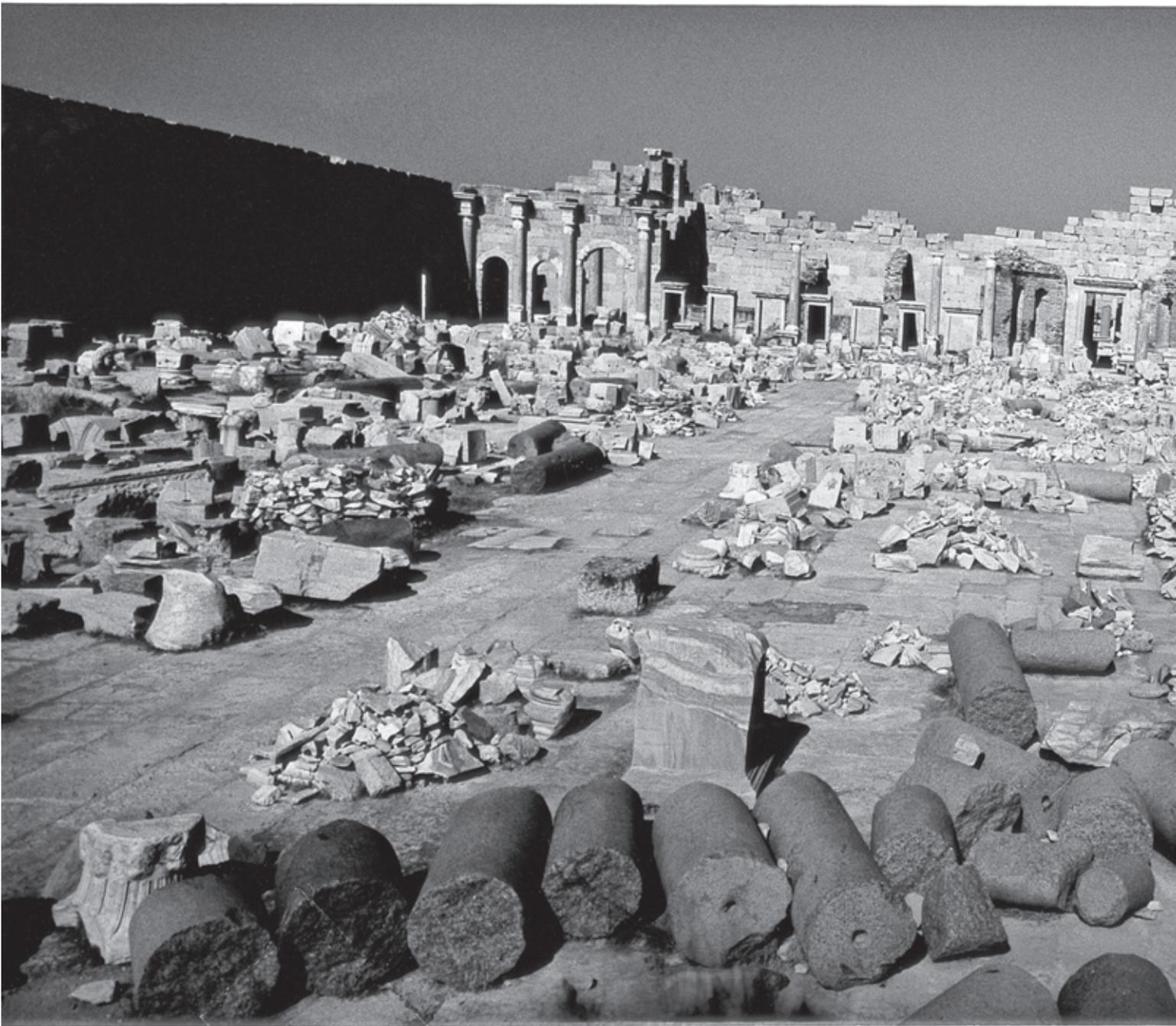
“Toward friends not forgetful, to enemies most oppressive; he was capable of everything that he desired to accomplish, but careless of everything said about him.”

— CASSIUS DIO

It is tranquil these days at the triumphal arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna, on the coast of Libya. The cube of white marble, scooped through by four arches and decorated with friezes of Septimius and his family, stands like a museum piece on the city’s southern edge. But it’s easy to imagine dusty foot, hoof and cart traffic bustling around the edifice some 18 centuries ago when the arch straddled the coast road running west to Carthage, in what is now Tunisia, and the road south into the Sahara.

Like many of the city’s magnificent ruins, the arch speaks to the power and resourcefulness of the first African to rule the Roman Empire. Septimius, who ruled from 193 to 211 CE, was the 18th emperor in a line dating back to Julius Caesar in the first century BCE.

Previous spread: Septimius Severus, who ruled the Roman Empire from 193 to 211 CE, dedicated this triumphal arch in 203 CE at a crossroads in his home city of Leptis Magna, on the coast of modern Libya, where his family ran profitable olive farms. **Left:** Septimius also built new harbor facilities that helped turn Leptis Magna into the third-largest port in the Mediterranean.

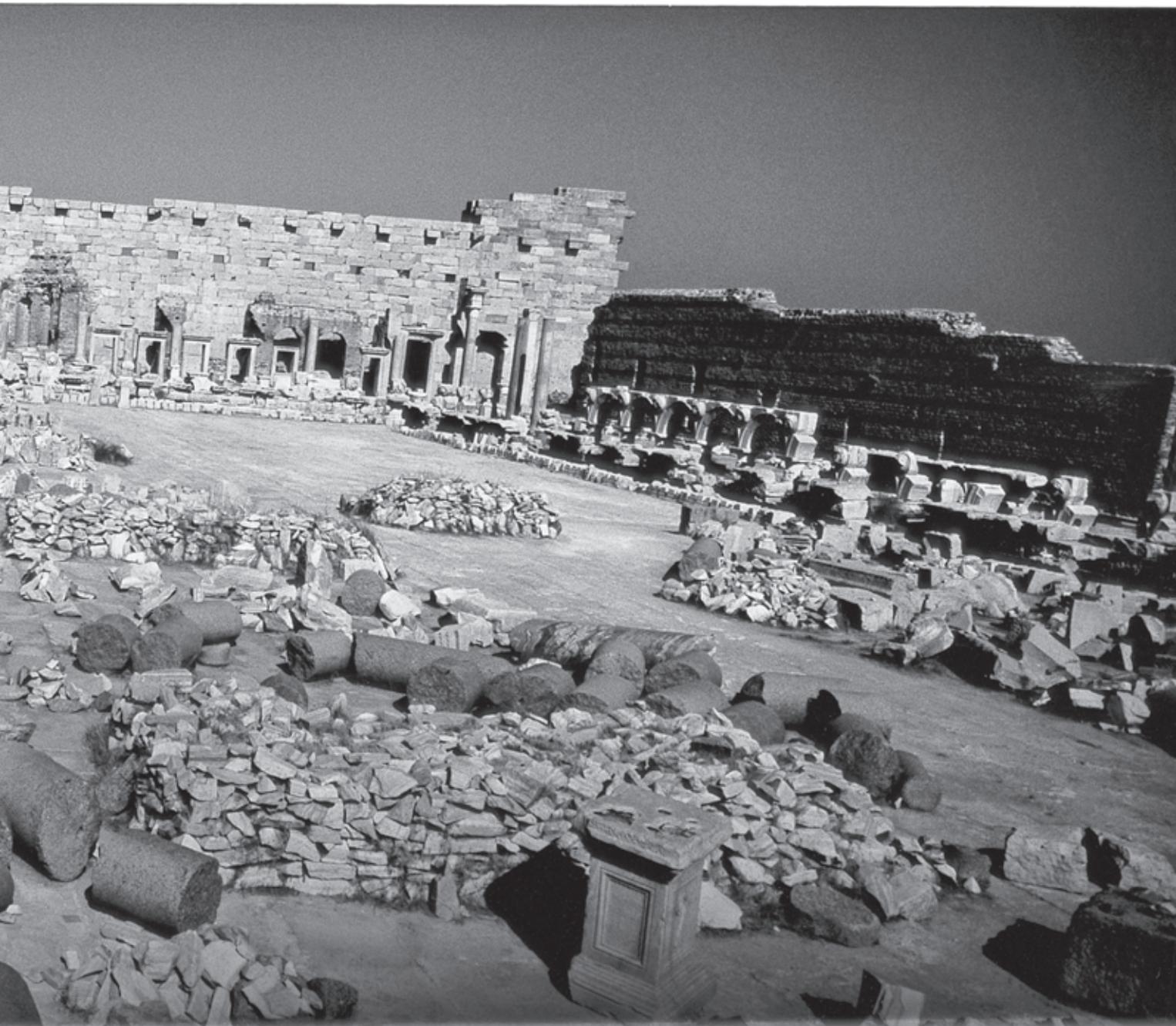


As a Briton, I have always been fascinated that this politician, military commander and architect, whose triumphs in western Asia, Europe and North Africa took the Roman Empire to its greatest extent, should die amid an unsuccessful three-year campaign to conquer Caledonia (in present-day Scotland). Of all the paths he might have taken from his triumphal arch, which he had dedicated in 203, the one that led to the empire's northwestern frontier seems the least likely. Or does it?

Septimius was born in Leptis Magna, a port city wealthy from its export of olive oil, in 145. His family, like those of most of the town's leading merchants and landowners, maintained ties to trading cities of the Phoenician coast (in modern Lebanon and Syria) that even then were regarded as ancient

places. Septimius grew up speaking Punic, the language of much of North Africa, and he was schooled in Latin, the language of the empire.

At first glance his ascent from the province of Africa to head of the world's superpower appears as improbable as his final trek to Britannia. Much of what we know about him comes from the writings of Cassius Dio, who became one of the greatest Roman historians. (See sidebar, p. 18.) Dio knew Septimius personally, and both also served as Roman senators. His portrayal of Septimius formed an important part of his 80-volume *Roman History*, which he began writing in the early third century. Notably, Dio wrote that he started the project with Septimius's blessing after publishing "a little book about the dreams and portents which gave Severus



Ruling the Roman Empire at its richest and most expansive, Septimius built extensively. On the east side of Leptis Magna, beside a processional avenue, he had constructed the magnificent New Forum. Its walls enclosed a rectangular piazza measuring 100 by 60 meters. The remains of a stone arcade enclosing the square and the shops that stood beneath them now cover the forum's floor.

reason to hope for the imperial power.”

To understand Septimius's achievements, we must strip away some modern assumptions and try to grasp his worldview. The first thing to discard is any sense of “national identity.” The determining facts about any individual during the time of Septimius were one's city, one's family and one's legal status. At his birth the Roman world consisted of a constellation of 2,500 self-governing cities, and of these, one-fifth of them were in North Africa.

Cities in Septimius's world ranged from ancient hilltop citadels such as Dougga in northern Tunisia, with a population

of 2,000, to sprawling ports like Carthage near today's Tunis, which numbered more than 100,000. Leptis Magna was in between, with a population of around 40,000. Each city, whatever its size, was dominated by a tiny minority of privileged landowners, the *curiales*.

To be a member of this class, a family had to own land worth at least 300 gold coins, or *aurei*, and produce an income of 30 aurei a year (values for the aurei are notoriously wide-ranging, from \$1,000 to \$10,000 in today's currency). Landowners collectively gathered taxes and remitted them to Rome, served as priests in the local temples and as magistrates who administered

the cities, and sat in the *curia*, the town council.

In their hometowns members of the curial class were part of a privileged elite, but from the perspective of the imperial court in Rome, they were very nearly chaff—among 65,000 provincial landowners. Only the top one percent of this body were wealthy and talented enough to aspire to become a member of the real ruling class of the empire—the 2,000-man Senate in Rome.

Septimius Severus became one of this number. His wealthy North African family, infused through marriage with Italian blood, had aspired toward this rank for four generations. The first step had been to acquire landed estates in Italy. Bankers or merchants could become senators if they turned their backs on trade and invested their fortunes in land.

The next step was to convert old North African names and provincial accents to Roman equivalents. Septimius's grandfather and namesake, Lucius Septimius Severus, had been placed as a young man in the household of Quintilian, who held the imperial chair of rhetoric in Rome (the equivalent

today of a Harvard professor who doubles as a popular television presenter). Speaking and writing proficient Latin was essential for anyone aspiring to a career in the law courts, and it was the first step on the ladder of imperial administration.

Lucius Septimius had been content with his modest public role as a barrister giving legal cases a first hearing. But he was also making social connections that would help the next generation of his family: He became friends with the historian Tacitus, the poets Martial and Juvenal, and Pliny the Younger, a literary-minded governor.

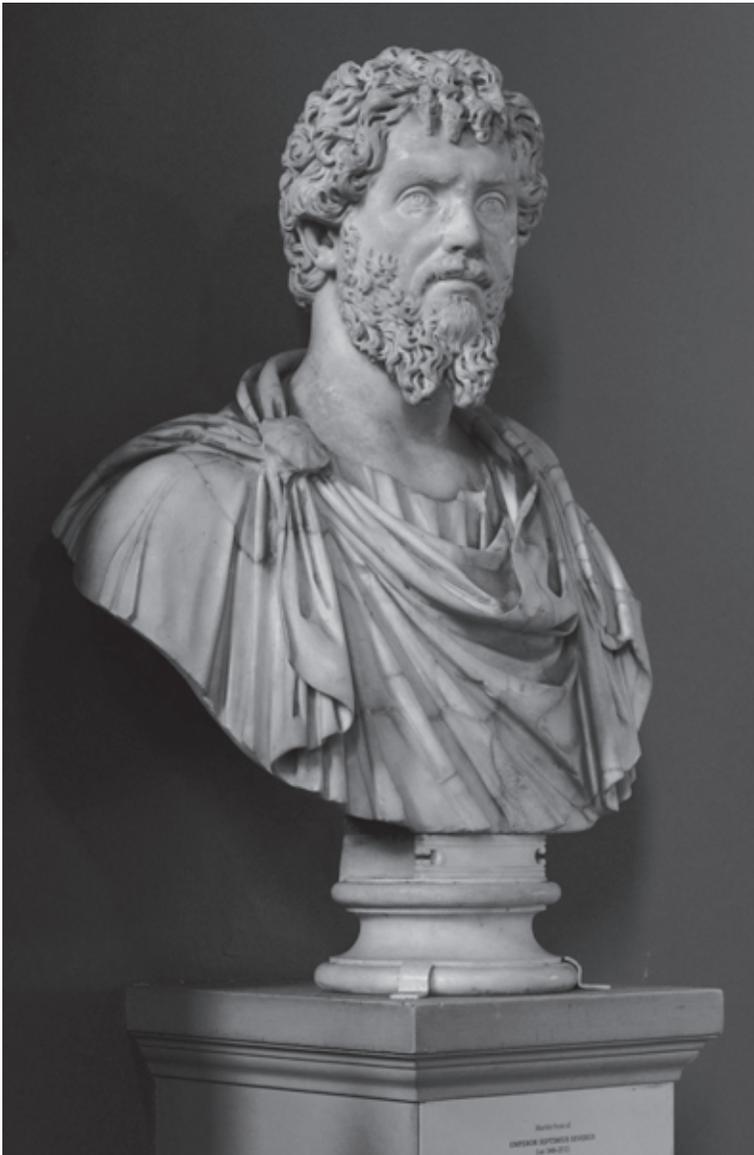
Two brothers from that generation, Publius Septimius Aper and Gaius Septimius Severus, both served appointments as consul to the top tier of administrative magistrates, starting in 153 and 160 respectively. Both were cousins to Septimius's father, who remained in Leptis Magna, perhaps helping to oversee the family's olive orchards and shipping business. Thus when 18-year-old Septimius Severus sailed to Rome, he did so as part of a well-established clan.

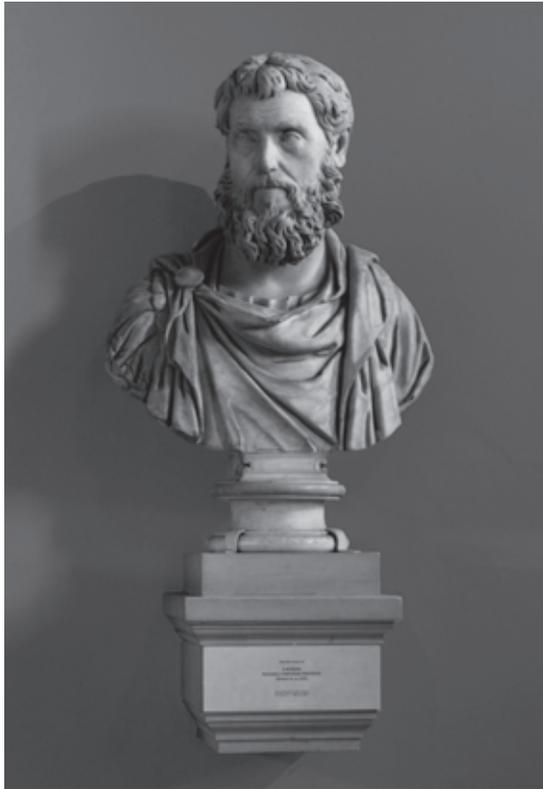
He followed in the path of his elder brother, Geta, who made a good start to a public career. Geta had secured a vital patronage connection with a brilliant young man named Pertinax, who would go on to briefly rule Rome himself even though he had no aristocratic clan behind him. Though Septimius's first appointment was to an unpromising post in Sardinia, through Geta and Pertinax, the brothers rose to leading military roles.

There were in all the Roman Empire only 25 legions. Geta commanded two of them on the lower Danube. Septimius led three on the upper Danube, in the neighborhood of today's Serbia and Hungary, beginning in 191. This made for an exceptional position of power for a single family, one critical to the defense of the empire from the Germanic tribes that would, in the late fifth century, finally conquer Rome. It reveals the degree of trust vested in them by Pertinax, who was then in Rome running the imperial administration on behalf of the increasingly insane Emperor Commodus.

Two years later, fortune threw down a challenge: Commodus was assassinated on the final day of 192 and was succeeded by Pertinax, who was killed three months later at the instigation of the Praetorian Guard, the elite military unit responsible for the ultimate safety of Rome, which then auctioned off the imperial throne. Septimius with his legions made a bid, his brother Geta now in his shadow, while legions in other parts of the empire acclaimed two other candidates. It was thus that 193 became

When Septimius was born in 145 CE, Africa was the Roman name of his home province on the north coast of the Mediterranean. He claimed a seat in the Roman Senate around 173 and became emperor 20 years later, founding a dynasty that outlived him by 24 years.





As emperor, Septimius succeeded his mentor and patron, Pertinax, who was assassinated by troops of Rome's elite Praetorian Guard in 193 CE after reigning just three months. The bust of Pertinax, **left**, as well as that of Septimius, **opposite**, are on display in the British Museum.

known as "The Year of the Five Emperors."

Septimius emerged triumphant in the internal wars that followed. He seized the capital and furthered his hold on legitimacy by standing as the avenger and heir of Pertinax. To crush the Praetorian Guard, he summoned its members to meet him in the open before he arrived in Rome, and "while they were ignorant of as yet of the fate that lay before them ... relieved them of their arms, took away their horses, and banished them from Rome," wrote Dio. Septimius then doubled his legionnaires' pay, a move that helped ensure their loyalty but also made him, and future emperors, increasingly dependent on the military.

A man from the provinces who saw his security in efficient government rather than greed and opulence, he displayed indifference

- | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Britannia | 16. Moesia Inferior | 31. Syria Phoenice |
| 2. Gallia Lugdunensis | 17. Macedonia | 32. Syria Palaestina |
| 3. Gallia Belgica | 18. Thracia | 33. Syria Arabia |
| 4. Germania Inferior | 19. Epirus Vetus | 34. Aegyptus |
| 5. Germania Superior | 20. Bithynia et Pontus | 35. Creta et Cyrenaica |
| 6. Gallia Aquitania | 21. Achaea | 36. Africa Proconsularis |
| 7. Gallia Narbonensis | 22. Asia | 37. Numidia |
| 8. Alpes Cottiae | 23. Galatia | 38. Mauretania Caesariensis |
| 9. Raetia | 24. Cappadocia | 39. Mauretania Tingitana |
| 10. Noricum | 25. Armenia | 40. Hispania Baetica |
| 11. Pannonia Superior | 26. Lycia et Pamphylia | 41. Hispania Lusitania |
| 12. Pannonia Inferior | 27. Cilicia | 42. Hispania Tarraconensis |
| 13. Dalmatia | 28. Osrhoene | 43. Sardinia |
| 14. Dacia | 29. Mesopotamia | 44. Corsica |
| 15. Moesia Superior | 30. Syria Coele | |



PROVINCES of the ROMAN EMPIRE

DURING THE REIGN OF
SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS
(193–211 CE)



for the privileges of Rome. For all but three of his 18 years as emperor, Septimius ruled from provincial cities and military camps as he led prolonged tours and campaigns through the provinces and frontier regions.

Success often traveled with him. On the eastern frontier, against the Parthian Empire, he captured their capital Ctesiphon, in present-day Iraq, and expanded Rome's reach. In Arabia he strengthened the frontier defenses with forts to guard

the trade routes that gave access to both east and west shores of the Arabian Peninsula, earning himself the title *Arabicus*. He journeyed to Egypt and traveled up the Nile, visiting ancient religious sites and relaxing longstanding restrictions on local religious expression. Then, as a dutiful son of Leptis Magna, he campaigned in the Sahara, extending the frontier to the outer edge of cultivable land, some 150 kilometers from the coast.

Personally pious, he disseminated a philosophy that

Reading About SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS

Cassius Dio, whose 80 years of life spanned 155 to 235 CE, wrote in the detached and reflective style perfected by the great Athenian historian Thucydides. Like his role model, Cassius had experienced the reality of power, as both he and his father served long careers as governors of Roman provinces. Cassius also shared an emotional sympathy with Septimius Severus, for he too came from a provincial city (Nicaea, or Iznik

in modern Turkey). Of this he remained proud all his life, while remaining a passionate upholder of the power and dignity of the Roman Empire.

We can also dip into two other Roman histories of the period, though both appear to be produced as much for entertainment value as strict history: Herodian, who covered the years 180–238 and relied much on Cassius Dio, and the *Augustan History*, now believed to be written

by an unknown author in the fourth century. These make up the three literary foundation stones from which a modern historian creates a study of Septimius, assisted by thousands of details divulged by the ever-expanding study of Roman inscriptions, coins and archeology. The most comprehensive book-length study is Anthony R. Birley's *Septimius Severus: The African Emperor*, written in 1972 and expanded in 1988.

underpinned his revival of traditional worship in temples across the Roman world. He also restored public monuments and built new ones that explored new architectural themes. He began the codification of Roman law to make it more consistent and accessible across the empire, a legacy that became part of the foundation of the sixth-century Justinian Code of the Eastern Roman Empire, principles of which are reflected in Western jurisprudence today.

Septimius seems to have undertaken these tasks with a conception of the empire as a commonwealth, with a reduced role for Rome's privileged ruling class, perhaps due in part to his own provincial origins and perhaps also to his wide travels. Likewise, his perspective led him to advocate religious tolerance and even what we would call today cross-cultural inclusion. Nor was he a one-off: His son, Emperor Caracalla, completed many of his father's building projects and extended Roman citizenship across the entire empire.

Septimius achieved his goals as much through logistics and engineering as anything else. Traces of his work are still visible in the shape of roads, bridges, storehouses and frontier fortresses. In addition to forts on the southern frontier, he

constructed the 120-meter Severan Bridge over the Chabina River on the frontier in southeastern Anatolia, one of the longest remaining Roman arched bridges; established Pomaria, the western frontier fort that would grow into the city of Tlemcen in today's Algeria, and he expanded forts at Coria (Corbridge) and Arbeia (South Shields) in Britain.

Today, color-coded historical maps highlight the boundaries of the empire under different rulers. The Romans also made maps but tended to visualize space in terms of itineraries, lists of place names fanning out from Rome (or any administrative base) and port cities connected with inland towns and legionary fortresses on the frontier. Formal gatehouses, often ornamented with a triumphal arch that the Romans delighted in building throughout the empire, were part of this system of imagining the world. They honored the emperor in their dedications, but also established a clear direction of travel for the next city, a measured starting point for the succession of milestones.

What is especially fascinating about Septimius is that as well as reinforcing and extending the empire's borders, he sustained and bridged parallel cultural identities, maintaining his North African ties while laying the foundations for an imperial

Opposite: The hilltop citadel of Dougga in what is now northern Tunisia was among 2,500 self-governing cities in the Roman Empire at the time of Septimus Severus. It had a population of 2,000, while Leptis Magna had some 40,000 residents.

Lower: In the far southwestern Roman province of Mauretania Tingitana, in today's northern Morocco, lay the city of Volubilis, among whose extensive ruins stands the Arch of Caracalla, named in honor of the son of Septimius Severus who succeeded his father as emperor in 211 CE.



dynasty that lasted 24 years beyond his death until 235.

He stayed true to his hometown heritage by the choice of his first wife, Paccia Marciana, around 175. After her death he married Julia Domna, daughter of the high priest of Emessa (Homs, in modern Syria) in 186 or 187. She hailed from an Arab dynasty that had ruled the Syrian desert as allies of one of the kingdoms established by heirs of Alexander the Great. Though this would have meant nothing in the Roman Senate, it clearly resonated with Septimius, who spent years campaigning in the East.

The temples that Septimius restored and the shrines and processional avenues that he built show both piety and an understanding of the political and cultural roles of religion. In this way, he was the last emperor to preside over an intellectually confident pagan world, one where far older beliefs were

honored alongside interests in new ones.

Temples housed libraries, oracles, healing priests and teachers. Above all this, there was a conscious attempt to assimilate different traditions of belief. Concepts such as the immortality of the soul and its migration, an ethical life, and judgement after death were already universally acknowledged.

This is not to paint a portrait of a saint. Septimius came to power by winning civil wars in Syria and Gaul (France). He had potential rivals killed. He purged the senate, and he gave his army license to sack conquered cities. In Caledonia, on what would become his last campaign, he gave his soldiers the pitiless instruction, quoting King Agememnon in Homer's *Iliad*, to "Let no one escape utter destruction, let no one escape our hands," observed Dio.

What precipitated this final, ultimately futile, campaign?

The ruins of Cuicul, a Roman city of an estimated 2,000 people built in the first century CE, lie on a hilltop in the mountains of northern Algeria. When the Arabs arrived in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, they gave the abandoned site the Arabic name Djemila (Beautiful).





These columns are all that remain of the Capitoline Temple at Timgad in northern Algeria. Along with the city of Cuicul, 175 kilometers to the northwest, the temple flourished during the reign of Septimius Severus and his dynastic successors.

Very few Roman emperors had ever wished to visit Britannia, let alone dedicate their later years to the conquest of the otherwise obscure island on the edge of the known world. It's likely that Septimius envisioned conquest as a prerequisite to later deploying his military more effectively. A single legion guarded the empire's entire Saharan frontier, for example. He likely also wanted to bond his sons, Caracalla and Geta, with the army in preparation to assuming rule themselves.

Septimius also at the time was suffering from gout. He had to be carried in a litter much of the way to the army's headquarters in Eboracum (York) in 208. His forces initially succeeded in occupying central Caledonia, but the highland clans struck back the next year, and the battlefield-trained Roman forces proved no match for the Caledonian guerrilla tactics.

The emperor's last words were advice to his sons: "Give money to the soldiers, and despise everyone else," Dio recorded. While they seem bleak, even cynical, we know that he did not always follow his own recommendations. He left a legacy of reformed laws, reinforced frontiers, restored temples and dozens of cities adorned with fountains, shrines, storehouses, processional avenues and marketplaces.

Among the loveliest is his cuboid marble triumphal arch

in Leptis Magna. By the 20th century, it had fallen to ruin, but archeologists recovered its fragments and, in 1928, pieced it back together. Now, it stands to commemorate this crossroads emperor from Africa whose sense of shared civilization stretched from Iraq to the border with Scotland, and from the Sahara to the Danube. 🌐



Historian, author and publisher **Barnaby Rogerson's** recent books include *A History of North Africa* (2012), and *In Search of Ancient North Africa: A History in Six Lives* (2018). He has also written guidebooks to Morocco, Tunisia, Cyprus and Istanbul. His day job is running Eland Books (www.travelbooks.co.uk), an independent publisher of classic travel books. **Don McCullin** is one of the most acclaimed photographers of conflicts and emergencies around the world. In 2017 he was knighted, and in 2019 the Tate Britain gallery mounted a retrospective exhibit. Recently he has pursued landscapes, still life and travel, which have come together in ongoing work on the fringes of the Roman Empire, including *Southern Frontiers* (2010), with Barnaby Rogerson.



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ART *Comes* HOME *to* BETHLEHEM

Written by **MARIAM SHAHIN** | *Photographs courtesy of* **DAR JACIR**

Scattered across an expansive outdoor stone patio, family members embrace and art connoisseurs gather shoulder to shoulder with a beaming Yusuf Nasri Jacir. The 83-year-old's adult daughters, Emily and Annemarie Jacir, and some 200 supporters, beneficiaries and children from a Bethlehem-area refugee camp reflect his pride in celebrating the reopening of the Jacir family home.

Seeing the garden alight with conversing guests and children cutting capers across the courtyard, running past the thick-trunked pine trees and the home's original 19th century stone walls, marks a fulfillment of a lifelong dream. The launch of Dar Yusuf Nasri Jacir for Art and Research culminates more than a decade of work he began with his daughters to keep the home running and standing under the guardianship of his family.

The house, he says, "has seen much happiness and much turmoil. I'm very pleased that it is full of people, of children, and art and positive energy," adding how delighted he is to see the house experiencing new life after years of disrepair.



At various times in decades past, hoteliers offered top dollar to turn the house into a trendy boutique hotel and restaurant. But Jacir's late father, Nasri Jacir, a modestly paid journalist and

Arabic language teacher, spent every dollar he had to keep the estate in the family even when he could not afford maintenance. In the late '90s, Jacir bought the family shares from his siblings and became the owner and custodian of the property, pouring his savings into upkeep.

A few years ago, when Jacir's daughters began envisioning an art space for the community, Jacir realized they could preserve the estate for future generations that way. Restoration plans in 2014 led to

renovations in 2017 while artists, writers, filmmakers and landscape artists were already in residence.

“This is a space where people gather and can ask questions, make mistakes and exchange ideas,” says Emily Jacir, 47, an acclaimed artist who uses film among other media in her work. As director and cofounder of Dar Jacir, she has brought her experience as both an artist and a teacher to all those who come through the door. “Education, experimentation and research have always been key to my practice as an artist, and I consider them essential components to this project.”

Entering Dar Jacir’s wrought iron gates is a fragrant experience: sage, thyme and mint perfume the terrace enclosure. A copper sign reads in Arabic: “Dar Yusuf Nasri Jacir for Art and Research.” (*Dar* is Arabic for home.) The name is especially fitting, as the Jacir family has been linked with the two-story limestone house on Hebron (al-Khalil) Road since Emily and Annemarie’s great-great-grandfather, Yusuf Ibrahim Jacir, laid its first stone in the soil in 1888.

Dar Jacir was one of the first homes built at the main entrance of Bethlehem, and it marked the historic expansion of

the city’s boundaries. In the home’s early days, the family members were merchants who traded worldwide in—among other goods—the famous Bethlehem craft of mother-of-pearl inlay. When renovations began for Dar Jacir, Emily uncovered historical documents from her ancestors in the basement, including 19th-century business letterheads displaying addresses in Bethlehem, Beirut, Paris and Barranquilla, Colombia—all indicators of the reach of her family’s trade in the early days of the home. Jacir’s great-grandfather, Yusuf Ibrahim, who was also



Opposite, top: Members of the Jacir family, friends and local dignitaries posed for this photo in 1911 during a Jacir family wedding at the home of al Mukhtar Yusuf Jacir, built in the late 1880s along the Jerusalem-Hebron road. In June, sisters Emily and Annemarie Jacir and their father Yusuf Nasri Jacir (**opposite, lower**) celebrated with several hundred supporters during the inaugural exhibition opening of the Dar Yusuf Nasri Jacir Center for Art and Research. Its programs include, **above**, urban gardening for youth and, **lower**, workshops such as this one led by artist Michael Rakowitz (at top left), in which participants posed on the same stairs as the wedding party generations ago.



TOP: MOTASEM AL-GHINMAT; LOWER: RULA HALAWANI; OPPOSITE, TOP: DAR JACIR; LOWER: AWAD HAMMAD



In this 2018 photo, a horse pulls a plough to till the soil in Dar Jacir’s garden—much as it might have been done a century ago. **Lower:** Donning gloves and masks, Dar Jacir staff and interns take on the delicate task of cataloging and archiving Dar Jacir’s extensive newspaper collection.



recipient of honors including the Golden Lion at the 52nd Venice Biennale and The Herb Alpert Award for the Arts—opening Dar Jacir for young and emerging artists was an essential contribution to Bethlehem.

Annemarie, a filmmaker and poet, also views restoring Dar Jacir as a passion project. She is a founder of the Palestinian Filmmakers’ Collective and member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which awards the Oscars. She understands the struggles many artists experience in finding the support, environment and tools with which they can flourish. The sisters have shared the vision of reimagining the home if only so that future generations of artists have a richer experience and fewer barriers.

Since programming first began in 2017, children from the nearby Aida Camp, home to more than 5,000 refugees, have been regular participants. They come to watch films and learn about local plants and participate in urban gardening projects. Mohammad Saleh, 34, an agricultural engineer and urban gardening expert, leads the program as one of his tasks as a resident instructor.

“There are no more green spaces left in Bethlehem since the city was cut off from most of its agricultural land by the wall,” Annemarie says, referring to the barrier near the home that often leads residents and agricultural experts to ponder food security solutions for the region.

Urban gardening, she says, can be useful as well as inspiring, innovative, beautiful and soothing—which means it fits right in with other art expressions taking shape at Dar Jacir. For all of these reasons, she says, “the art of urban gardening has taken on a new urgency.”

When visitors arrive at Dar Jacir, many take a few moments and tour the spaces on the lower floor, where they can admire photographs on the walls and investigate some of the many spaces in the home and its open gardens before participating in programs.

Some of the photos show the Jacir family through decades as far back as the late 19th century. Other photos are recent and contemporary artworks, showing wheat and seeds, photographed by Palestinian filmmaker Jumana Manna, whose work often deals with food security. There are also modern olive-wood sculptures sitting atop floors of hand-painted tiles. Traditionally, Bethlehemites carved olive-wood sculptures, and today, contemporary craftspeople and artists are reinterpreting themes with the same olive wood.

For local sculptor Ayed Arafah, Dar Jacir offers the right environment for creativity.

“For me, producing at Dar Jacir was a different atmosphere from sculpting in my own studio,” he says, referring to the home’s serenity, architecture and soft lighting that filters through colored glass above the windows and doors. “It provided the quietness

responsible for the town population registry in the late 1800s, had kept all his documents in the home. She also found early photographs, letters and other correspondences. Together, these records are now the Jacir Ottoman Archive, housed on site for study and preservation.

Nearly 140 years after the home was built, it continues to be a place where work and discovery meet. With Emily, Annemarie Jacir, 43, also serves as a cofounder of the space. Both have been inspired by the home since childhood, long before becoming successful artists and filmmakers. They understand, they say, the appeal of the home, and why it has become special to fellow artists.

“I spent months painting and sketching this house, the landscape, things which grew in the earth and the people in the house,” Emily says, remembering that when she first began to paint and draw, she looked to Dar Jacir for inspiration. “My feet are grounded here, in this house and on these stones, for as long as I can remember.”

Today, Dar Jacir offers a unique space in the Bethlehem area, with its two-meter ceilings and generous exhibition room. There is also a film-viewing hall and a schedule of educational programs teaching, among other subjects, urban farming. Most of the center’s programming is geared toward youth.

For Emily—a 2007 Prince Claus Award laureate and



Left: Attendees at Dar Jacir's inaugural exhibition in June view film stills from resident artist Jumana Manna. **Above:** German filmmaker Monica Maurer leads a discussion during a workshop. **Lower:** Led by resident landscape artist Mohammed Saleh, at center, children listen to his direction during his "Urban Farm" workshop.



In the Jacir Ottoman Archive, each item is now being read and analyzed by both Emily and Mounir Fakhreddin, a professor of Ottoman and British history in Palestine. Fakhreddin has determined the historic value of the collection of tens of thousands of photos, newspaper clippings, financial records, letters and other items from about 1860 to 1950, written in Arabic, Ottoman, Spanish, French and Italian. Many are still being restored and cataloged from the dozens of unopened boxes that were stored in the home for decades gathering dust.

"The history of this family, as reflected in its archive, tells us about local, regional and global connections in a very particular period of world and Levant history," Fakhreddin says. "Studying the archives of Levant families like Dar Jacir will shed new light on world historiography, local Palestinian history and help put the diaspora into better context."

Since the collection is one of the few from the late Ottoman period with an extensive and continuous record of finances and minute details of daily life, Emily notes the collection's value for scholars around the world who study the historical relationships between Bethlehem and cities in South America, France and Lebanon.

"The collection shows how ideas, people and goods moved and lived across continents," she says.

One of the critical aims of the home, Emily Jacir says, is to also engage diaspora Palestinians with roots in the Bethlehem region and encourage them to return to the city and use Dar Jacir.

"It helps artists produce work in Palestine and, hopefully in the process, reflect on Palestine," says Emily. 🌐

and isolation needed for artistic production."

One of Dar Jacir's central arts offerings is its residency program, which began more than a year before the inaugural celebration in 2019. It was conceived for artists to lead their own work and teaching efforts. Manna, whose 2017 film *Wild Relatives* explores how taxonomies of cultivating seeds and plants have contributed to colonialism, is one such resident. So, too, is us multimedia and graffiti artist Sam Durant, who left a literal mark on the home with his illuminated Arabic sign art placed on the roof. It read: "The food is at Dar Jacir." The sign was visible for kilometers, and it refers to an early 20th century Bethlehem saying lauding Dar Jacir for providing food to the needy.

"It is always important to be present in a place, especially one as important as Palestine. My experience there will certainly influence my work going forward," Durant says.

Dar Jacir also served as a temporary home for Duncan Campbell of Glasgow, who in 2014 won the prestigious Turner Prize. Campbell has shown and shot film projects on location at Dar Jacir during his residency and describes his work as renditions of "how the story of real events are told, in the reliability and unreliability of these stories."



Filmmaker and writer **Mariam Shahin** has produced and directed more than 70 documentary films, and she is author of *Palestine: A Guide* (Interlink Books, 2005) and coauthor of *Unheard Voices: Iraqi Women on War and Sanctions* (Change, 1992).



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THE
MAKING OF
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Written by VYVYAN KINROSS



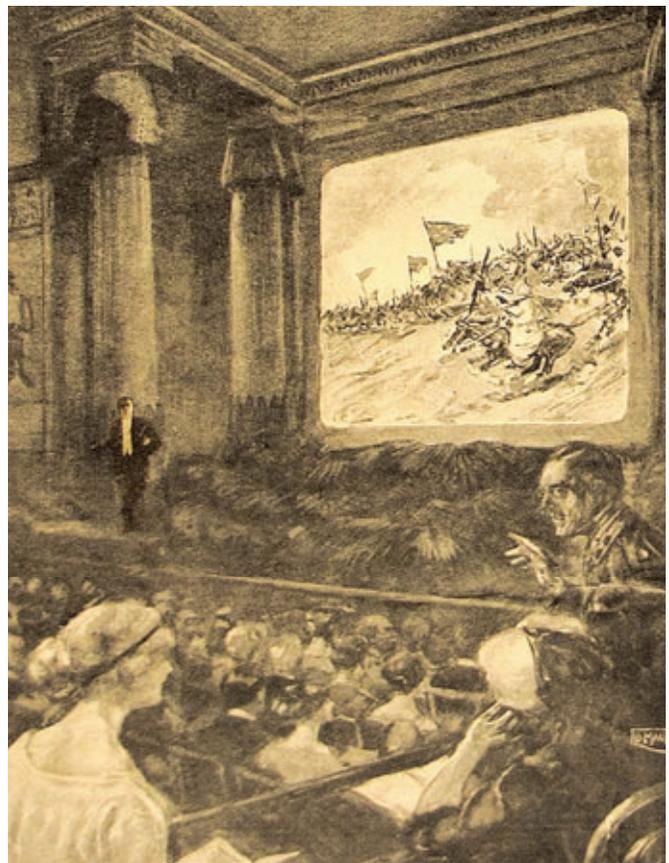
There are those who say that Lawrence has received altogether too much “publicity” through me.... There may be something in this, though I doubt it. But, if there is, the blame should all be mine.

—Lowell Thomas,
With Lawrence in Arabia, 1924

On the evening of August 14, 1919, a full house gathered at London’s Royal Opera House for a show about which they had heard extraordinary reports from New York society. So novel and so elaborate was the entertainment, now regarded as the world’s first multimedia event, that its producer, Lowell Thomas, had been invited to attend by King George v.

Those present were not disappointed. As the curtain rose, it revealed a scene that transported the audience to a place whose stereotypes loomed large in the popular mind—“the mysterious Orient.” Braziers of incense wafted musk across the stalls. A dancer swayed before backlit images of the Pyramids. Palm trees filled the orchestra pit, and the band of the Welsh Guards struck up a rousing musical accompaniment.

Expectations primed, the audience watched as the screen at center stage came to life. Black-and-white motion picture film opened a world of majestic desert and mountain landscapes filled with rifle-bearing Arab tribesmen, camels and horses



What *The Strand Magazine* called “the greatest romance of real life ever told” opened with live narration, orchestra, and a three-projector film, as depicted in an artist’s rendering, **above**. **Top**: Thomas Edward Lawrence, at left, also known as Lawrence of Arabia, came to London shortly after the film’s opening, and he posed with American broadcaster Lowell Thomas, right, as part of a photo session with Thomas’s cameraman Harry Chase, who also arranged costuming, lighting and pose for the image **opposite** that promoted Lawrence as an iconic, archetypal hero.





Cameraman Harry Chase accompanied Thomas and Lawrence for two weeks of filming as Lawrence helped lead the irregular Arab forces of Hashemite Prince Faisal, son of British ally Sharif Hussein of Makkah.

mixed in with British-supplied armored cars, uniformed soldiers and tented encampments, all wrapped in an air of noble purpose. Thus it was that a century ago, the story of what was called the “Arab Revolt,” and its part in helping win a distant war, began to unfold. As it did, the character at the heart of the story was British Army officer and former archeologist Thomas Edward Lawrence, who began his journey into the public imagination, establishing his legend as “Lawrence of Arabia,” the most enduring icon of heroism to emerge from World War I.

The mastermind of the show was Lowell Thomas, a us journalist, publicist, filmmaker and adventurer who, that evening, took up the live narration from a lectern on stage. He calibrated his script to deliver a hero: “At this moment, somewhere in London, hiding from a host of feminine admirers, reporters, book publishers, autograph fiends and every species of hero-worshipper, is a young man whose name will go down in history beside those of Sir Francis Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh,

Lord Clive, Charles Gordon, and all the other famous heroes of Great Britain’s glorious past.”

With the craft of a master storyteller, Thomas drew his audience into the scenes unfolding on the silent film. The production was made more thrilling and immersive by the novel use of three synchronized projectors that Thomas’s cameraman, Harry Chase, had configured to realize combinations of motion pictures and still images in full color alongside sound effects.

With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia proved as successful as it was ambitious. *The Strand Magazine* hyperbolically endorsed it as “the greatest romance of real life ever told.” The show, complete with its two-tonne projection booth and three carbon arc projectors soon relocated to play at the far larger Royal Albert Hall in London. More showings around the world followed and the film ultimately pulled in a total of four million people. Thomas and cameraman Chase earned \$1.5 million, worth around \$22 million today.

The show was spectacular enough for its era, but what made it so authoritative, riveting and convincing were Thomas’s direct experiences of the events he had filmed, which he went on to describe with oratorical brilliance. The combination created something altogether new and potent, a mix of news reportage, documentary record and propaganda tract with immediate significance in the ongoing political realignment of the post-World War I Middle East.

Supporting the us Entry into the War

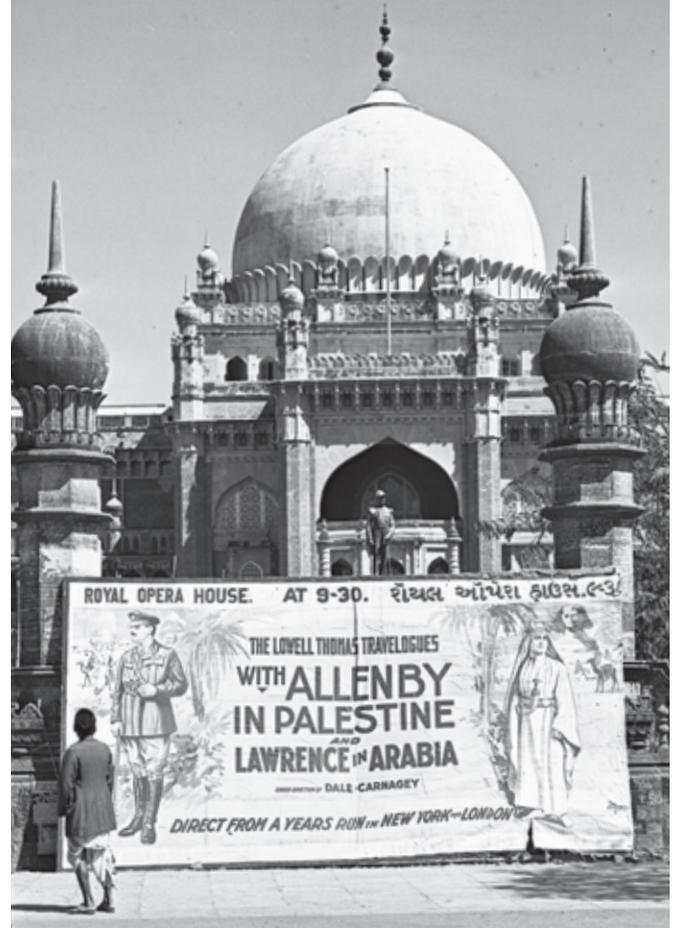
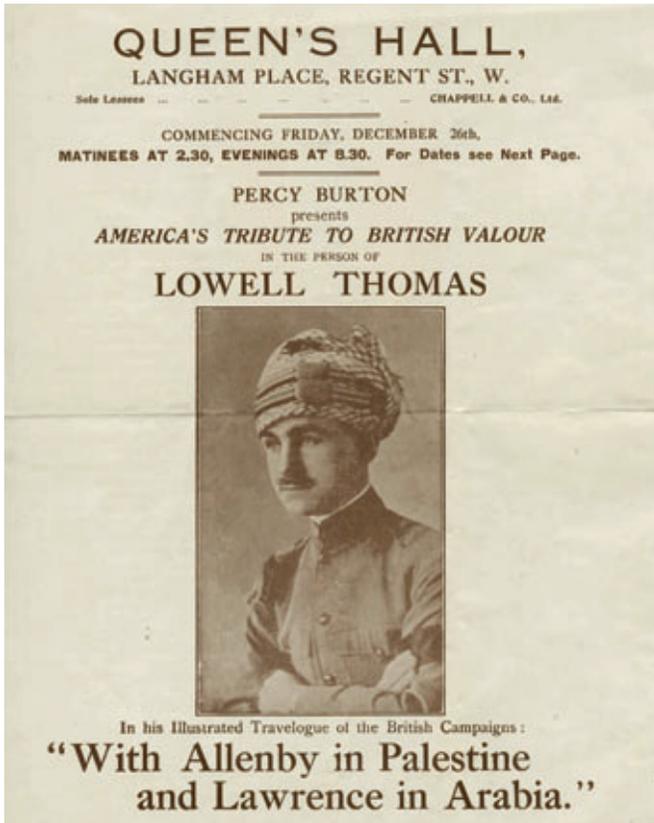
The us entered the war on April 6, 1917, but as its soldiers headed for the Western Front, us public opinion was not widely supportive. To help sell the case for joining the war, the us War Department approached Thomas with a request “to gather material and stories that would encourage the American people’s support” for the war.

Thomas was already a successful publicist and promoter. Born in Ohio to professional parents, he had moved with the family to Colorado and attended the University of Denver, followed by a stint on the *Chicago Daily Journal*. Thomas went on to earn a master’s degree and teach oratory classes at Princeton University. At 25, he persuaded railroad companies to let him travel free in return for editorial coverage; he had also completed an Alaska travelog for a campaign initiated by us Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane, titled “See America First”—a line that would appear for decades promoting domestic tourism.

For the war project, Thomas raised \$75,000 from a group of Chicago businessmen. With Chase, he made his way to France, seeking in the trenches a suitably heroic narrative. However, the mud and carnage proved far more tragic than inspirational.

David Lean’s Lowell Thomas

In the second part of David Lean’s 1962 *Lawrence of Arabia*, Lawrence launches his guerrilla war, dynamiting trains and harassing the Ottoman Turks that the Arabs, under Sharif Hussein, are trying to drive out of the region. War correspondent Jackson Bentley, played by Arthur Kennedy, publicizes Lawrence’s exploits and, as did Thomas, makes him famous. The fictional Bentley is based only loosely on Thomas, as Bentley is shown to be a cynical, middle-aged newspaperman who is there not just for two weeks, but for the whole of Lawrence’s later campaigns.



Thomas's production—now regarded as the first commercial multimedia production—traveled around the world from 1919 to 1924, and it was seen by a record four million people.

Thomas diverted to Jerusalem in November 1917 as an accredited war correspondent, intending to film the entry of the victorious British forces of General Edmund Allenby into the captured city at the start of December. It was there that on February 28, 1918, Thomas met Lawrence, who promptly agreed to allow him and Chase to film Lawrence's irregular Arab forces. Thomas and Chase subsequently spent two weeks with Lawrence and the Hashemite Prince Faisal, son of British ally Sharif Hussein of Makkah. Chase shot six reels of film.

From the moment he met Lawrence, Thomas recognized that he was in the presence of a potential public-relations powerhouse. Recalling their encounter in his book *With Lawrence in Arabia*, Thomas quoted British Governor of Jerusalem Sir Ronald Storrs' introduction: "I want you to meet Colonel Lawrence, the uncrowned king of Arabia."

The mobilization of Lawrence as a propaganda instrument, and the projection of his personality to frame a wider imperial ambition, proved groundbreaking. Thomas's blend of military prowess, distant-land romance and enigmatic heroism—all of which Lawrence offered—wove a cloak of glamor and intrigue for the raw material of battlefield success. It sold a vision of the war's nobility of purpose that had been largely lost in the trenches of the Western Front.

In realizing these possibilities, Thomas showed himself a

genius of populist publicity who understood the potential power of the moving image in the new style increasingly in demand from the Allied war effort. His firsthand, eyewitness accounts furthered the documentary medium that had been pioneered in 1916 by Geoffrey Malins's film of the Western Front, *The Battle of the Somme*. Later, the power of frontline documentary was to advance in World War II, in particular through US directors such as Frank Capra, John Ford and John Huston.

The Alliance of Convenience

As much as Thomas was using Lawrence as a vehicle for his ambitions, the reverse was no less true. The star of the show was by disposition introverted, complex and slow to reveal his deeper thoughts and emotions, and these were precisely the qualities

that contributed to his celebrity mystique. Lawrence and Thomas developed a mutual respect for one another during their brief time in the desert, and Lawrence engaged directly with Thomas's project in London in early 1919 in order to disseminate the facts of the Arab Revolt—and his own role in it—more widely.

He viewed the publicity generated by Thomas's films as potentially influential both in promoting his own work and in the larger British negotiations for the postwar settlement of the former Ottoman Middle East, which began at Versailles in January 1919 and lasted

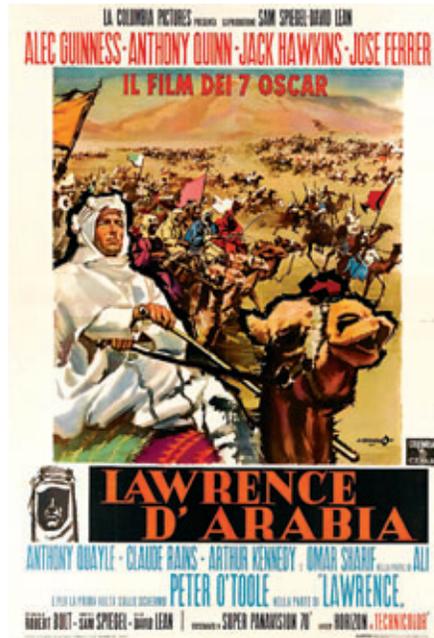
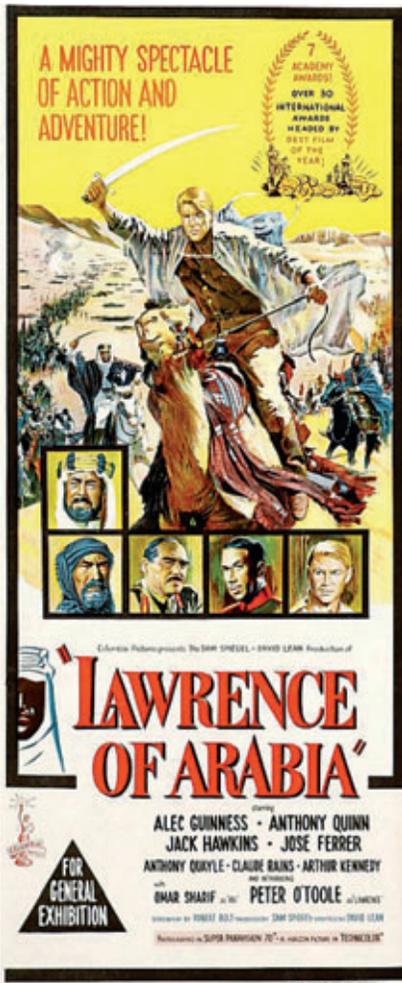
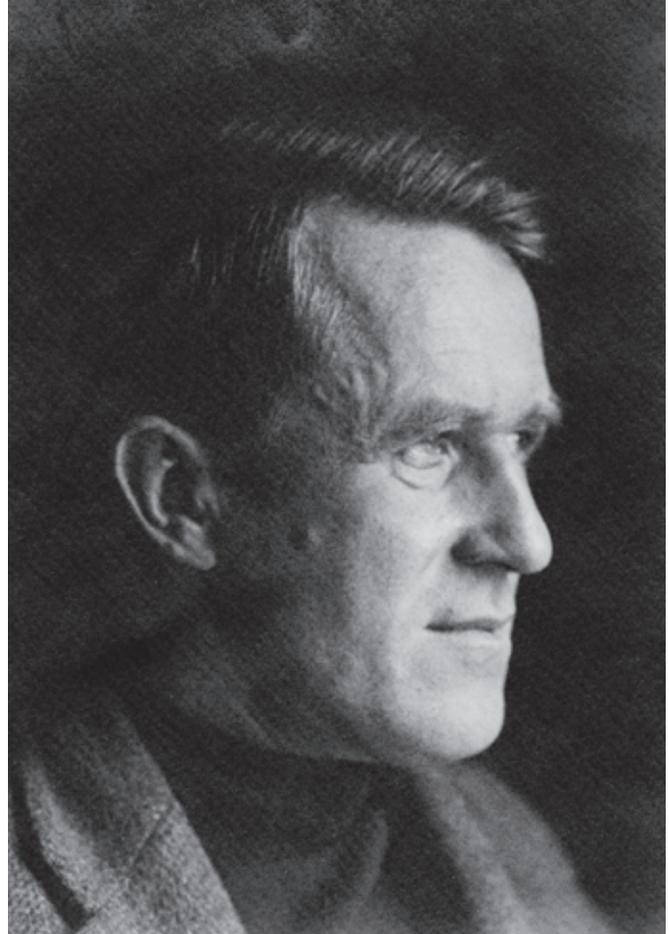
The mobilization of Lawrence as a propaganda instrument, and the projection of his personality to frame a wider imperial ambition, proved groundbreaking.

through the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920. Lawrence's interest lay in persuading leaders to favor Arab self-determination, both with an independent Palestine and with the interests of the Hashemite dynasty that had supported the British in their efforts to oust the Turks from the Arabian Peninsula. Secretary of State for War and Air Winston Churchill recalled his first meeting with Lawrence in Paris: "It soon became evident that his cause was not going well in Paris. He accompanied Faisal everywhere as a friend and interpreter. He scorned his English connections and all questions of his own career compared to what he regarded as his duty to the Arabs."

Lawrence saw Thomas's show a number of times. He even posed in London in early 1919 for portraits in Arab dress by Chase in order to strengthen his personal story line. However, it was not long until his struggle with fame made him ambivalent toward Thomas's project and his role in it. Thomas would famously articulate this growing contradiction in Lawrence's nature with the remark that Lawrence "had a genius for backing into the limelight."

Lawrence's political vision for the region was eventually eclipsed by the British and French imperial agendas. So, too, was Thomas's original purpose, as the war ended before his film could be deployed as an active tool in the battle for public opinion.

Today, Lawrence is seen largely through the no-less-seductive cinematic prism of the blockbuster epic *Lawrence of Arabia*, produced in 1962 and directed by David Lean, who



In 1962 Hollywood director David Lean built on the sweeping scope of Thomas's extravaganza to use 70-millimeter color film to produce his own visually sumptuous, award-winning, mythologizing classic. Like its predecessor, it proved a worldwide hit, and in 1988, **opposite**, it was remastered and rereleased.

cast Peter O'Toole as a tall, blond and blue-eyed version of Lawrence. The character of Thomas, and his role in lionizing Lawrence, figures into the second part of the film. (See box, p. 28.)

The events that underpinned what

became the legend of Lawrence of Arabia were extraordinary by any measure, but it was Thomas's genius to use those events to tell a particular story, one that ultimately focused less on facts than on celebrating wider Western cultural values of individ-



Thomas went on to become the first well-known American national radio news anchor; he traveled the world, wrote vividly dramatic adventure books and developed Cinerama. In contrast, Lawrence, **opposite**, shortly after the war largely withdrew from public life until his death at age 46.

ualism, courage, tenacity, loyalty and pursuit of grand purpose. Over time, however, this romantic characterization of Lawrence and his story has been understood alongside the contradictions of the vulnerable psyche. At its center, the ambitious yet self-doubting, reluctant yet vain leader is engaged in a struggle with his own nature that was as doomed as the political cause he advanced. This central fault line in Lawrence's character led him to withdraw from public life in 1922, when he enlisted in the Royal Air Force under the assumed name of John Hume Ross.

Across the Atlantic, Thomas's postwar story could not be more different. His ascent to fame and fortune seemed unstoppable. In the process of realizing *With Allenby In Palestine and With Lawrence in Arabia*, he had created a widely recognized masterpiece, an inspiring populist event and enduring cinematic milestone that drew the great, the good and the ordinary, including British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, Winston Churchill and even General Sir Edmund Allenby himself.

In his introduction to *With Lawrence of Arabia*, Thomas admits that he may have gone too far in praising Lawrence. Somewhat defensively, he wrote, "There are those who say that Lawrence has received altogether too much 'publicity' through me. They piously declare that this is not in accordance with military ethics. There may be something in this, though I doubt it. But, if there is, the blame should all be mine."

Thomas went on to become America's first iconic news anchorman, where at both CBS Radio and NBC his signature greeting, "Good evening, everybody," was recognized across the country. On the way, he was to host radio shows, front travelogs and write numerous travel-and-adventure books. In 1939, he anchored the first us television news broadcast. He went into business in 1952 to develop the Cinerama surround-screen movie format—33 years after he had debuted the concept with the three-projector booth in Covent Garden. Thomas lived to 89 years old.

Lawrence passed the post-World War 1 years with increasing troubles. Living in self-imposed obscurity, in 1935 at age 46, he fatally crashed his motorcycle to avoid a local cyclist near his Dorset home in southwest England. 🌐



Vyvyan Kinross is author of *Information Warriors: the Battle for Hearts and Minds in the Middle East* (Gilgamesh Publishing, 2019). He lives in London.



For viewing:

Lowell Thomas's film can be accessed as part of the digital archive of the Imperial War Museum at www.iwm.org.uk. The original six reels are reference number IWM41, and the edited version is IWM42. A separately edited 1927 film, *With Lawrence in Arabia: A Lowell Thomas Adventure Film*, is IWM1131a.



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Texting



Written by
Jane Grutz



It was more than 100 years ago that a German archeologist named Ernst Sellin began excavations at Tel Balata, an archeological mound near the city of Nablus in Palestine's West Bank. The mound, or tell, as archeologists call it, proved to be the site of a large Bronze Age city with stone fortifications, monumental gates and a temple with walls five meters thick.

Amid the grander finds were two much smaller ones: a pair of tablets, inscribed with cuneiform. One contained a list of personal names, and it was worn and incomplete. The other was far more intact, and it turned out to be a letter of complaint addressed to the prince of Sikmo (probably Shechem of the Bible), written around 1400 BCE by a scribal teacher who had not been paid the grain and oil he was owed for his work. It read, in part: "From three years ago until now thou has had me paid. Is there no grain nor oil nor wine? What is my offence that thou hast not paid?"

Hamdan Taha, former director general of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage and current dean of research and graduate studies at al-Istiqlal University in Jericho, is also codirector of the Tel Balata Archaeological Park. He says the tablets indicate a flourishing time in early Mesopotamia and point to dynamic relationships between teachers and pupils.

"It shows you how little has changed over the past 3,000 years," he says, mentioning the challenges students of the time often experienced, from rigorous standards to corporal punishment.

He shares a Sumerian folktale that begins with a boy who shows up late to school and is caned for tardiness. Then he is

Old Babylonian, ca. 2000–1600 century BCE, Mesopotamia

Using a reed stylus while the clay of this tablet was still soft some 4,000 years ago, a teacher used cuneiform to write, on the obverse side at **left**, the name of the Sumerian deity Urash, and a student copied it on the reverse, at **right**. Small, easily held clay tablets like this helped young scribes learn what became the hundreds of characters of some 15 languages that all used the cuneiform (literally, "wedge shaped") script. The tablet is shown life-sized.

caned a second time for speaking without permission. Then again for standing when he wasn't supposed to; yet again for being slow in answering a question and, finally, a last time for answering a question incorrectly. When he arrives home from school, he informs his father—not surprisingly—he wants to quit school, shouting, "I hate the scribal life!" But the boy's father is clever. He invites the schoolmaster for a sumptuous meal, and the father lavishes gifts upon the teacher. Sated and charmed, the schoolmaster says to the boy, "Young man, because you did not neglect my word, may you reach the pinnacle of the scribal art; may you achieve it completely. You have carried out well the school's activities. You have become a man of learning."

This humorous tale, probably written by a teacher in about 2000 BCE, was deciphered by Samuel Noah Kramer, a 20th-century scholar who interpreted more than 20 such "schoolboy tales." This apparent popularity, he maintained, suggested the story rose to become part of Mesopotamia's standard literature, an essential part of scribal education. Such tales from Sumer



In Nablus, Palestine, tourists visit the archeological site of Tel Balata, believed to be the Canaanite town of Shechem, where the site's finds included cuneiform tablets that link its early history to that of dozens of sites from the Mediterranean to Mesopotamia. **Below**, a tablet known as the "School Days" text found in Nippur, Iraq, tells the story of a young school boy and his daily life around the 20th century BCE.

remain relevant today—none more so than that of the hero-king Gilgamesh, about whom *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was written in the Akkadian language and today regarded as the earliest-surviving great work of Mesopotamian literature.

Students learned these stories and the other skills of literacy, Taha says, at *edubas*, the Sumerian word for tablet houses. It was in the *edubas* that they learned how to read and write using cuneiform, a writing system that originally used pictographs, but over centuries evolved into a system of hundreds of complex, abstract signs that were used, with variations, to write a number of languages, much as nearly the same alphabet can be used for many Western languages. The word cuneiform earns its name from the Latin *cuneus* (wedge): On the soft clay tablet, the blunt-cut reed used to impress the sign left a wedge-shaped mark.

In the *eduba*, students first learned to mix clay to just the right consistency for a writing surface. Then they would use water to form a tablet with one slightly convex surface and one flat one. Ideally, the convex side would sit comfortably in the palm of one hand, enabling the pupil to write with the other hand on the flat side. Once the tablets were prepared, the students learned how to cut a reed to use as a stylus. From that they learned the three most basic elements of cuneiform signs—analogueous to learning the strokes of a pen in forming a letter: the vertical wedge, the horizontal wedge and the oblique wedge.

After practice, when the student's wedge-marks reached a suitable level of proficiency, the student would begin to combine the wedges to construct simple signs. Then came sounds

represented by the signs. Finally, they learned how to put the signs together to create words, a process that was often assisted by one of the many Sumerian reference lists.

"Scribes wrote lists of names, lists of places, lists of sheep and other animals, lists of stars, lists of gods, lists of objects made from wood and metals, lists of professions and many other lists besides," writes Jonathan Taylor, a curator of cuneiform artifacts at the British Museum.

Old Babylonian, ca. 2000–1600 century BCE, Mesopotamia



“Lists were also used to store other kinds of information. For example, the Babylonians were renowned for their skills as astronomers, doctors and fortune-tellers; knowledge derived from each of these fields was also committed to writing in lists.”

All lists descended from the first lexical texts, or word lists, which were created at about the same time cuneiform itself developed in the late fourth millennium BCE. Pictographs used in the earliest form of cuneiform, called proto-cuneiform, ran either vertically, from top to bottom on the tablet or—and this was common—in no particular sequence at all. Four hundred proto-cuneiform tablets were first discovered at the Eanna temple in Uruk, now in Iraq, early in the last century, all dating between 3500 and 3000 BCE. Most were administrative lists, but a small percentage were lexical lists or tablets for school exercises.

Of the lists available, the information ranged from administrative titles—the king came first—to pottery types and domestic animals, especially sheep. There were no lists of wild animals, nor were there lists of the spoken sounds associated with words: Those kinds of syllabic lists were introduced only in about 2800 BCE. Signs for determinatives, or aids for word interpretation, came later still.

By the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur, which endured from about 2112–2004 BCE and is called “Ur III” by archeologists, all the formative elements of cuneiform were present. Ur III played a special role in the standardization of cuneiform, which supported what became—thanks in part to the power of writing—the Sumerian bureaucracy. Hundreds, if not thousands, of cuneiform tablets were written *every day*.

“Not only do the records attain their greatest volume in this last blaze of Sumerian glory, but also they become most

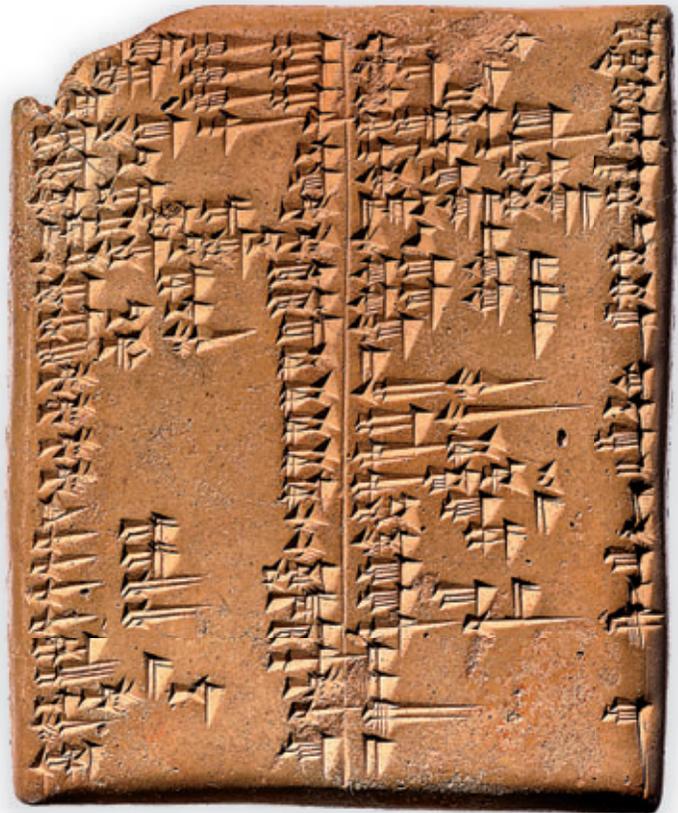


Above, left: **Sumerian, ca. 3200 BCE, Mesopotamia**



Above, right: **Sumerian, ca. 3100 BCE, Mesopotamia**

Cuneiform developed from pictographic characters, called proto-cuneiform, such as those that appear on the tablets **above, left and right**. Such very early writing was most commonly a way of recording economic information: The tablet at top right most likely documents grain distributed by a large temple, and it shows also faint imagery produced by the rolling of a cylinder seal. More than 2,000 years later, the pictograms had become complex signs skillfully impressed into clay. This tablet, **at right**, shows cuneiform entries in Sumerian in the left column and Akkadian translations in the right column.



Late Babylonian, ca. 1000 BCE, Mesopotamia

detailed,” wrote the late Assyriologist and University of Minnesota Regents’ professor of ancient history, Tom Jones, in the 1956 *Archaeology* magazine article, “Bookkeeping in Ancient Sumer.” “It was not enough, for example, to note the receipt of an ox, but it must be stated whether it was a grain-fed ox, a grass-fed ox, a young ox, an old ox or whether it belonged in any one of a dozen other categories.”

Jones suggested that the specificity Sumerians used in their writing styles were products of necessity in a society that grew increasingly specialized.

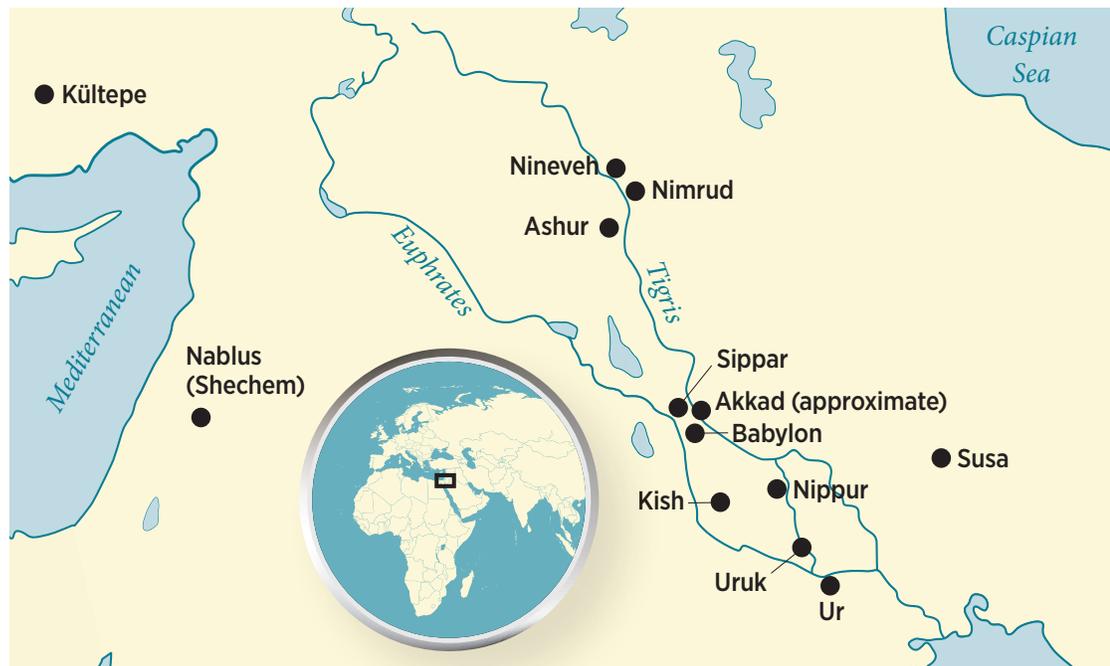
“In the first place, ancient Mesopotamia could support a dense population only if the canal system was kept in repair to foster irrigation and prevent floods. This involved the

organization and direction of labor; the whole country must be run like an efficient machine,” he added.

Keeping the country running efficiently was the duty of the king. Sumerians believed their king was chosen by the gods, who met to elect him in the religious city of Nippur. The king was also responsible for caring for his people, which meant he was tasked with defending his kingdom from outside aggression, keeping the irrigation canals open and in good repair, and distributing payment—usually food rations but sometimes silver—to those who accomplished this work.

Though other early economies followed these practices, the Ur III bureaucracy included far more details in its records. No transaction escaped the attention of the Ur III scribes, and often transactions were recorded more than once. A single dead sheep of a herd of more than 350,000 may be recorded three different times.

To write the vast number of tablets that an Ur III economy required, edubas flourished. King Shulgi, who ruled from 2029–1982 BCE, placed great emphasis on education, and in addition to many edubas, he built prestigious scribal



academies in both Ur and Nippur.

According to the eduba literature, these academies were staffed with the *ummi*, a word that meant teacher, expert or “school father.” The *ummi*’s assistants, or “big brothers,” were usually older students who did much of the actual instruction. The assistant was known as the man in charge of drawing or “the man in charge of Sumerian” and—remembering the tale of the unfortunate schoolboy—“a man in charge of the whip.”

When Ur fell in 2004 BCE, the edubas continued, though by the time of the Old Babylonian period that followed, between 2000–1600 BCE, they had evolved into a somewhat different form. The famous academies of Ur III had been replaced by small schools, usually in private homes grouped together in a scribal quarter. Many were owned by scribes themselves who taught their own sons and one or two other students in their courtyards where, in the light of day, pupils could make tablets and read easily.

Eleanor Robson, a Quondam Fellow of All Souls College in Oxford, has worked extensively on the Nippur scribal quarter. She suggests that a small home in the middle of urban Nippur known now as House F was almost certainly an eduba. Excavators of the area found thousands of fragments of pottery and figurines, as well as gaming boards and tablets, items that, if one leaves aside the electronic capabilities unimaginable to their Sumerian predecessors, could be associated naturally with students today.

That house, she says, also yielded 1,425 tablet fragments, of which very few were of the administrative kind that make up most of the writing in other tablet collections. In House F, half

Old Assyrian, ca. 2000–1800 BCE, Anatolia



This tablet recorded the repayment of a loan from the settlement of Karriya to that of Ashur-nada. The tablet is impressed with four cylinder seals, which belong to the three witnesses of the transaction: Two of the seals belong to the Old Assyrian stylistic tradition; the third is from an Anatolian-style seal with imagery borrowed from Mesopotamia; the fourth is from a seal belonging to a royal official.



Babylonian, ca. 1700 BCE, Mesopotamia

the tablets contained Sumerian literature, and some 40 percent were school documents.

They show that, as in the Ur III period, the Babylonian curriculum included mathematics, science, music, reading and writing, all in cuneiform, but with one important difference: For the first time, exercise tablets began to include two columns of signs, one for Sumerian and a second one in the Akkadian language.

Although cuneiform was invented to write Sumerian, by 2000 BCE, most Sumerians were speaking Akkadian, an early form of Semitic. This followed the conquests, in 2334 BCE, by the Semitic-speaking King Sargon of Akkad, a city in the north. Sargon consolidated an empire stretching from the Mediterranean in the west to the Zagros Mountains (now in Iran) in the east. Akkadian became the official language, and cuneiform was employed to write it.

Top: Cuneiform tablets were used to keep records, write poetry and stories, as well as to pursue science and mathematics. This tablet shows a list of mathematical problems, possibly ones that could address architectural questions. **Right:** This small fragmentary tablet contains enough characters to identify it as part of a copy of the flood story, often called *Atra-hasis*, written in Akkadian. The text, which reads left to right on both sides of the fragment, describes, on the obverse, the noise on earth that led to the decision of the gods to destroy humanity and, on the reverse, the conclusion of the story in which the gods promise to never send another flood. At **far right**, a private letter written by a man named Marduk-mushalim is addressed to his superior to report on the implementation of order from a king, possibly Ammisaduqa of Babylon. Written several decades before the fall of the city, he hints of possible unrest outside of the city and notes the king's request for increased security around Sippar-Yahrurum, north of Babylon.

Babylonian or Achaemenid, ca.7000–5000 BCE, Mesopotamia



By the time the Empire of Sargon ended about 2154 BCE, Akkadian had become the most widely spoken language. Yet Sumerian remained the language of scholarship. This meant eduba students continued to learn the signs for both.

To master this, students began school at age five or six, completing their studies as young adults. School began at sunrise and ended at sunset. There was little free time. One scribal student complained:

The reckoning of my monthly stay in the tablet house is (as follows):
My days of freedom are three a month.
Its festivals are three days per month. Within it, twenty-four days per month, (is the time of) my living in the tablet house.
They are long days.

Routine school days included lectures in Sumerian as well as cuneiform lessons. Rather like chalkboards, some edubas had sandboxes in which the ummia or his assistant could demonstrate to a group the signs and texts.

As Mark Wilson writes in *Education in the Earliest Schools: Cuneiform Manuscripts in the Cotsen Collection*, teaching aids such as dictionaries were used, too, often in the form of spindle-mounted clay cylinders that could be rotated to search for the correct sign. Much of the day was devoted to copying, and the ummias would write the daily texts on the back of the tablet, which students would then attempt to copy to the front. The backs of some

Old Babylonian, ca. 1600 BCE, Mesopotamia





Sumerian, date unknown, Mesopotamia

Above: Many tablets in Sumerian were used to produce lists. This one lists workers belonging to the temple of a goddess in Sumer. **Right:** This is the longest-extant Old Assyrian legal text, and it records court testimony describing a dispute between two merchants in Kanesh, in central Anatolia, that was one of the trading settlements of Ashur. In the text, Suen-nada and Ennum-Ashur accuse each other of stealing the contents of a private archive that they each claim to own.

tablets display notes of teachers giving extra help to pupils who appeared to be falling behind.

Although discipline was strict, there is evidence of humor as well. Wilson reports that one tablet in the Cotsen collection, housed at Princeton University, shows the word “to fart” in a context that would have been almost certain to put a grin on even the most aggrieved student’s face. Some tablets in the Cotsen collection appear well worn and ready for erasure and reuse via a water box. Others show they had been erased and were ready for reuse. As long as the tablet was malleable, only a small amount of water was needed to delete the script by wiping it away. Most tablets, Wilson notes, were likely used many times.

Like schools in many educational systems today, eduba schooling was divided into primary and secondary stages. Gabriella Spada, who has concentrated her studies at the University of Pennsylvania on Sumerian model contracts, explains that secondary students were offered more autonomy and they did not have to rely on a master’s model tablet to copy.

However, she adds, “not all the scribes continued onto the advanced curriculum. Whoever intended to specialize in a particular administrative field, such as legal affairs, palace or temple administration, and so on, did not need to widen his knowledge of literary texts.”

Although some scholars believe a basic form of literacy may have been widespread in the general population of the era, there is no doubt that eduba education was limited to the few whose families could afford the tuition. It was also exclusive to boys. Nonetheless, while there is no evidence that girls attended

edubas, there were cloisters of women in Sippar and Ur that had female scribes, and temple priestesses, an important position in Sumer, were often literate. Enheduanna, who lived between 2285–2250 BCE, was the daughter of Sargon of Akkad and one of the most famous high priestesses in Sumer as well as a popular poet. Among royalty, however, few appear to have been literate.

By the mid-seventh century BCE and the time of the reign of Neo-Assyrian King Ashurbanipal, the use of cuneiform was drawing to a close. Aramean traders and invaders from north-west Syria were moving in, bringing their language and writing with them. Between the 11th and eighth centuries BCE, Aramean became the lingua franca of the region.

Aramean was very different from Sumerian. It used a 22-letter alphabet. This made it far simpler and far more versatile than the hundreds of complicated characters required to write Sumerian, Akkadian and other cuneiform languages. That made it easier to learn and easier to write. Cuneiform gradually fell out of use. The last known tablets were written in the late first century CE. The Aramean alphabet circulated not only throughout the Middle East but also to Greece, where the first signs for vowels were introduced. Texts—by reed, chisel, quill, pencil, pen or keyboard—changed forever. 🌐

Old Assyrian, ca. 2000–1800 BCE, Anatolia



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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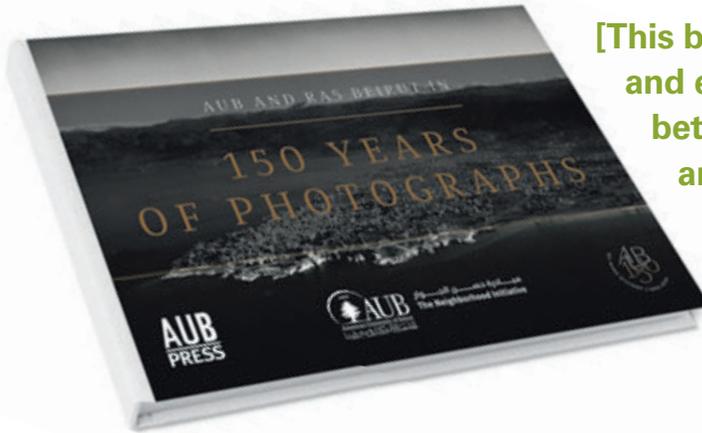
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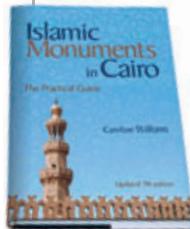


[This book] “evinces the rich and enduring relationship between the university and its surroundings ... and the bonds formed between people and place over 150 years.”

AUB and Ras Beirut in 150 Years of Photographs

Maria Bashshur Abunassar. 2018, AUB Press, 978-9-95358-6-359, \$50.

This coffee-table volume of photography focusing on the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the community of which it’s a part is one that readers familiar with the Lebanese capital will undoubtedly enjoy. Published as a companion to the eponymous photo exhibition marking AUB’s 150th anniversary in 2016, its 230 pages feature some 380 color and black-and-white photos, several previously published in *Aramco-World*. The book includes photographs of landmarks such as the university, Bliss and Hamra streets, ‘Ayn al-Mreisseh and the Saint George Hotel, as well pictures of the old tram line, Uncle Sam’s restaurant, Clemenceau and Sadat streets, Pigeon Rocks, Manara and the Corniche area. Historic maps and views from the sky show how the Ras Beirut area has grown and evolved from 1876 to the present. —WILLIAM TRACY



Islamic Monuments in Cairo: The Practical Guide

Caroline Williams. 2018, AUC Press, 9-789-77416-855-0, \$29.95 pb.

Cairo’s historic center contains “the most concentrated,

the most numerous, the most varied collection of monuments in the Islamic world,” Caroline Williams reminds readers in this updated, seventh edition of her classic guide. This comprehensive and compact edition is easily totable in a backpack or hip pocket. The guide is indispensable for exploring Cairo’s architectural and cultural history, from its founding era in the seventh century CE to the Ottoman period and beyond. Williams reports that since the book’s last edition was published in 2008, old residences “have been rescued from oblivion,” while the cleaning and restoration of many monuments, such as the 13th-century tomb of Shajarat al-Durr, with its glorious mosaics, have been made “beautiful and delightful” and “visible once more.” Sadly, other sites such

as the 14th-century Mosque of Altinbugha al-Maridani have suffered neglect or damage. Loaded with practical information and details, this title remains unmatched.

—TOM VERDE



Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature: Elites and Narratives

Diana T. Kudaibergenova. 2017, Lexington Books, 978-1-49852-892-0, \$95 hb.

In the early part of the 20th century, when Kazakhstan was transitioning from a Russian tsarist colonial outpost to a socialist republic in the Soviet Union, a movement of Kazakh intellectuals and political activists emerged. Known as the Alash, this group introduced the birth of both Kazakh literature and the Kazakh nation. The author, a Kazakh graduate of Cambridge University, examines the relationship of Kazakh modernity and nationalism, and the “cultural production of generations of pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet writers in Kazakhstan.” Literature became the main “channel of communica-

tion, space of cultural production and rich canvas for remembering” the past. As Kazakhstan undergoes a Kazakh literature revival nearly 30 years after its independence in 1991, the book is a timely and valuable way for readers to become more familiar with the dynamism of the Kazakh cultural landscape over the past 100 years.

—ALVA ROBINSON



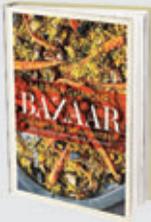
The Vanishing Stepwells of India

Victoria Lautman. 2017, Merrell Publishers, 978-1-85894-658-0, \$60 hb.

Some of the most interesting, and probably least known, monuments in India are stepwells: *baoli* or *vav*. Built by both Hindus and Muslims, and often endowed by women, the oldest date back some 14 centuries. These extraordinary examples of hydraulic architecture, found largely in the Northwest, provide not only access to water, some as many as 13 stories underground, but also an escape from the heat and a social gathering place with, almost invariably, a religious component.



Edible Journeys Across Space and Time



Bazaar: Vibrant Vegetarian Recipes

Sabrina Ghayour. 2019, Octopus Publishing Group, Ltd., 978-1-78472-5-754, \$34.99 hb.

Sabrina Ghayour's aim in this colorful Middle Eastern cookbook is "to deliver as much flavor as possible using few ingredients." While many of her recipes require a dozen or more ingredients, most are pantry items even the casual cook likely has in the cupboard, such as cinnamon, cumin, olive oil, flour or canned chickpeas. The complexities arise from each of Ghayour's combinations, which as the title suggests, are as wide-ranging and enticing as a bazaar. Whether mixing a salad of smoked eggplant, pepper and walnut, charred corn and baby tomatoes, or making a rice-and-vegetable *aash*, this book's creative variety should appeal to vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike.

—TOM VERDE



The Food Explorer: The True Adventures of the Globe-Trotting Botanist Who Transformed What America Eats

Daniel Stone. 2018, Dutton, 978-1-10199-059-9, \$17 pb.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries botanist David Fairchild was a "plant explorer" for the us Department of Agriculture. His mission: "to scour the planet for new foods and plants and bring them back to enliven his country." Americans who today enjoy avocados, mangos, dates, pistachios and papayas, consume foods made from soybeans or sleep on Egyptian cotton sheets, have Fairchild to thank. This book traces his journeys. In Egypt he was "as eager to see the place where farming was invented as a matador might find a pilgrimage to Spain," though cotton, a crop introduced in 1800, was of particular interest to him. In Baghdad he "amassed hundreds of dates" as well as new strains of wheat, barley, chickpea and maize. Indonesian mangosteens—cousins of mangos—were among his favorite fruits, but their thick skins and meager flesh were too much trouble for American consumers. This is an entertaining, informative culinary armchair read.

—TOM VERDE



Fruits from the Sands: The Silk Road Origins of the Foods We Eat

Robert N. Spengler III. 2019, University of California Press, 9-780-52030-3-638, \$34.95 hb.

Robert Spengler offers a rich history of commerce among the Arab-Persian empires and those of Central Asia and the Far East, underscoring their contributions to the last five centuries of global commerce. He unearths archeological data and other early records related to centuries-old voyages, many of which were never circulated or scrutinized in English or Romance languages. A delightful

raconteur and astute field archeobotanist, Spengler relates this history in a personalized manner, as if he is conversing with the reader. His command of both botany and linguistics gives readers a front-row seat to historic discoveries about culinary traditions that will dramatically alter the way they think about populations living thousands of miles apart.

—GARY PAUL NABHAN



Saffron in the Souks: Vibrant Recipes from the Heart of Lebanon

John Gregory-Smith. 2019, Kyle Books, 978-0-85783-577-2, \$29.99 hb.

The "sour tang" of Lebanese cooking, along with its "intricate use of herbs and spices," such as sumac, za'atar and Lebanese seven-spice—a local, ubiquitous blend of seasonings—infuse this lively cookbook. For travel writer and cook John Gregory-Smith, the colorful and exotic beauty of Tripoli's *suq*, as well as the kitchens of Lebanese friends, inspire this collection of recipes that highlights the dynamism and diversity of the country's cuisine. In Beirut, Smith discovers the Ottoman-linked history of *daoud basha*—meatballs swimming in a heady, glistening sauce of cinnamon, allspice and pomegranate molasses. In the Bekaa Valley, he learns how to make *sfiha*, bite-size meat pies of ground lamb, tomatoes and allspice. In Batroun, between Beirut and Tripoli, he is treated to a Lebanese friend's rendition of shrimp scampi, enhanced with chili and fresh mint. Gorgeous images of the food and the country add to the book's allure.

—TOM VERDE



The Seven Culinary Wonders of the World: A History of Honey, Salt, Chile, Pork, Cacao, and Tomato

Jenny Linford. 2018, Smithsonian Books, 9-781-58834-6-421, \$27.95 hb.

Humankind's relationship with the seven ingredients so diligently and informatively explored in this cookbook is "a long one, developed over thousands of years," to the extent that they "have acquired cultural and religious values." With these pedigrees in mind, food writer Jenny Linford reaches back into the histories of each ingredient, advising that none should be taken for granted. Images of honey-gathering adorn caves in Valencia, Spain, occupied in prehistoric times, as well as the walls of temples in Egypt where "we come across the first records of beekeeping or apiculture." Those same Egyptians relied on salt "medicinally to dry out and disinfect wounds." Rice had a long journey from India and China, reaching the Middle East around 1000 BCE, and was introduced to Europe by Arabs through southern Spain. It forms the foundation of Middle Eastern *mejadra* (rice and lentils), one of 62 recipes in this thoughtfully curated culinary history.

—TOM VERDE

Lautman's book is the first generally available description of these threatened monuments, which range from UNESCO World Heritage treasures to abandoned ones used as rubbish pits. Her accounts of some 80 wells are accompanied by photographs—many excellent—although the color reproduction leaves something to be desired. The work will appeal to anyone interested in Indian art and architecture, water management and Indian social history, especially rural. It also provides a great temptation to explore India far from the tourist routes—but one long for a map!

—CAROLINE STONE



War Songs

'Antarah ibn Shaddad. James E. Montgomery, tr., with Richard Sieburth. Peter Cole, fwd. 2018, New York UP, 978-1-47985-8-798, \$14 pb.

Najd-born 'Antarah ibn Shaddad, (525–608 CE) is considered one of the greatest pre-Islamic Arabian poets. His verses glorified battle and his love for Ablah, a noblewoman he could never marry because he was a slave and the son

of a slave. Four hundred years after his death, storytellers embellished 'Antarah's exploits and his love for Ablah in new epic poems inspired by the original verses. This book features translations of 'Antarah's poems and selections from the later epic verses. Presented in modern form, the translations are as clear and unexpected as 'Antarah's original verse. The volume's comprehensive introduction to the life, poetry and lore of 'Antarah, along with scholarly accounts of him and his and works, provide an insightful portrayal of an enduring literary legend.

—KAY HARDY CAMPBELL



EVENTS

Highlights from
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CURRENT / JANUARY

At the Still Point of the Turning World, There is Dance. Late artist and writer Helen Khal was at the center of a generation of artists in Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s. A prolific painter, cofounder of Gallery One and art critic for *The Daily Start* and *Monday Morning*, Khal left a mark on Beirut's art

landscape. The exhibition examines differing approaches of some of the best- and least-known Lebanese artists of the 20th century. Sursock Museum, **Beirut**, through January 19.

CURRENT / FEBRUARY

Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa. Set up as a journey along the Sahara's trade routes during a time when West African gold connected peoples and cultures, arts and beliefs across continents, this is the first major exhibition to reveal the shared history of West Africa, North Africa, the Middle East and Europe from the eighth to 16th centuries. Aga Khan Museum, **Toronto**, through February 23.

CURRENT / APRIL

Calligraphy: A New Addition to the Permanent Galleries demonstrates the versatility of Islamic calligraphy in secular objects, including an official seal from the court of 17th-century Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan of India. Other items originate from countries including Turkey, India and Pakistan. Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, **Bradford, UK**, through April 17.

The Cloth That Changed the World: India's Painted and Printed Cottons. The painted and printed cottons of India revolutionized art, fashion and science wherever

they went. Featuring pieces from the museum's world-renowned collection, this ROM original exhibition explores how India's artisans created, perfected and continually innovated multicolored fabrics. Royal Ontario Museum, **Ontario**, through April 19.

ONGOING

Clay: Modeling African Design. By its very nature, clay embodies the notion of transformation, shifting from a soft to hard state in the course of firing. Its prominent use in global art contexts makes it ideal for exploring not only African art forms, but also broader questions of design. This exhibition highlights artistic innovation and creativity in Africa from across the continent and over history. Harvard Art Museums, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**.

Assyria: Palace Art of Ancient Iraq. Assyrian kings in the ninth to seventh centuries BCE decorated their palaces with sculptures representing a high point of Mesopotamian art, illustrating vivid depictions of warfare, rituals, mythology, hunting and other aspects of Assyrian court life. The Getty Villa, **Pacific Palisades, California**.

A Century in Flux: Highlights from the Barjeel Art Foundation. features a selection of key modernist paintings, sculptures and mixed media artworks from the Barjeel



Tutankhamun: Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh commemorates the 100th anniversary of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, and it represents a final opportunity to see these glittering world heritage artifacts outside of Egypt. The exhibition explores the life of King Tutankhamun and the storied discovery that captivated the world through more than 150 authentic pieces from the tomb—three times the quantity that has traveled in previous exhibitions—more than 60 of which are traveling outside of Egypt for the first time. Saatchi Gallery, **London**, through May 3.

Among the artifacts on display is this wooden figure showing King Tutankhamun wearing the pharaoh's white crown.



Art Foundation collection. It covers a century of art in the Arab region and its diaspora, beginning from the late 19th century to the late 20th century. **Sharjah Art Museum, UAE.**

A Woman's Afterlife: *Gender Transformation in Ancient Egypt.* Ancient Egyptians believed that to make rebirth possible for a deceased woman, she briefly had to turn into a man. Guided by new research inspired in part by feminist scholarship, the exhibition tells this remarkable story of gender transformation in the ancient world through 27 objects from the museum's Egyptian collection that explore the differences between male and female access to the afterlife. It is part of a yearlong series of 10 exhibitions celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. **Brooklyn [New York] Museum of Art.**

Moorish Spain: *Its Legacy to Europe and the West* explores the "Golden Age" of Muslim rule in Spain and the Islamic legacy inherited by Europe and the West in terms of the cultural and scientific contributions that helped spark Europe's Renaissance. The exhibit features artifacts and information about Muslim rule in Spain, as well as its contributions to both the sciences and

the arts from the eighth to the 15th century. International Museum of Muslim Cultures, **Jackson, Mississippi.**

Arts of Islamic Cultures Gallery: *The new Arts of Islamic Cultures Gallery* is designed to expand how visitors see and understand the diverse arts of Islamic cultures. Its thematic installation, developed through an intensive eight-year process of engagement with Islamic, artistic and scholarly communities, is divided into distinct spaces that reflect the richness of these artistic traditions, such as Arabic calligraphy, or the unique visual traditions of Ottoman Turkey or Mughal India. Museum of Fine Arts, **Boston.**

COMING / JANUARY

Sahel: *Art and Empires on the Shores of the Sahara* is the first exhibition of its kind to trace the legacies of the mighty states of the Sahel—a vast swath of continental Africa south of the Sahara spanning modern-day Senegal, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The presentation brings into focus transformative developments, such as the rise and fall of political dynasties and the arrival of Islam, through some 150 objects. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, January 30 through May 10.

COMING / MARCH

Red Sea International Film Festival 2020. This inaugural event brings international communities together to experience the best in film and other cinematic events. Founded to develop and promote film in Saudi Arabia, the festival embraces films that push traditional narrative forms. **Jiddah, Saudi Arabia**, March 12 through March 21.

Tarek Yamani Trio. Born and raised in Beirut and now living in Harlem, New York, Tarek Yamani taught himself jazz at the age of 19 and has dedicated himself to exploring relationships between African American jazz and classical Arabic music. An educator, film scorer, and Thelonious Monk International Jazz Composers Competition winner, he brings his hypnotic fusion of American jazz and Arabic tarab to this event. Yamani makes his *ums* debut with his trio. Lydia Mendelssohn Theater, **Ann Arbor, Michigan**, March 13.

Mesopotamia: Civilization Begins. Mesopotamia was home to Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians who created cuneiform, the earliest-known script, formed the first cities and developed astronomy and mathematics, in addition to other artistic and literary accomplishments. The

exhibit spans from about 3200 BCE to 331 BCE. The Getty Villa, **Pacific Palisades, California**, March 18 through July 27.

COMING / APRIL

Taking Shape: *Abstraction from the Arab World.* From the 1950s through the 1980s, painters and sculptors throughout the Arab world explored the challenges and possibilities of abstraction in art. The exhibit examines the collection of the Barjeel Art Foundation in Sharjah, *UAE*, presenting the work of Middle Eastern and North African artists whose creative visions stretched beyond the boundaries of representation. Artists originate from Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and the *UAE*. Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, **Evanston, Illinois**, through July 26.

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