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AramcoWorld





6 Mancala, the Game of Seeds

Written by **Matthew Teller**

One of the world's oldest games, mancala needs only two players, some seeds—or beads—and shallow pits in the earth. Over more than a millennium and under different names, mancala spread out from East Africa, and now there are almost as many variations as there are cultures that enjoy it.

12 Going Pirogue, Feeding a Nation

Written by **Tristan Rutherford**

Photographed by **Samantha Reinders**

As long as a minibus and as thin as a canoe, curved like a banana and painted a rainbow of hues, the handbuilt wooden *piroque* remains the watercraft of choice among half a million people who support the artisanal fishing industry along the coast of Senegal in West Africa. Pirogues were originally designed narrow for easier paddling, and their long, curved keels help them glide into surf and swell, where every morning hundreds of crews cast nets with the hopes of a good day's catch.

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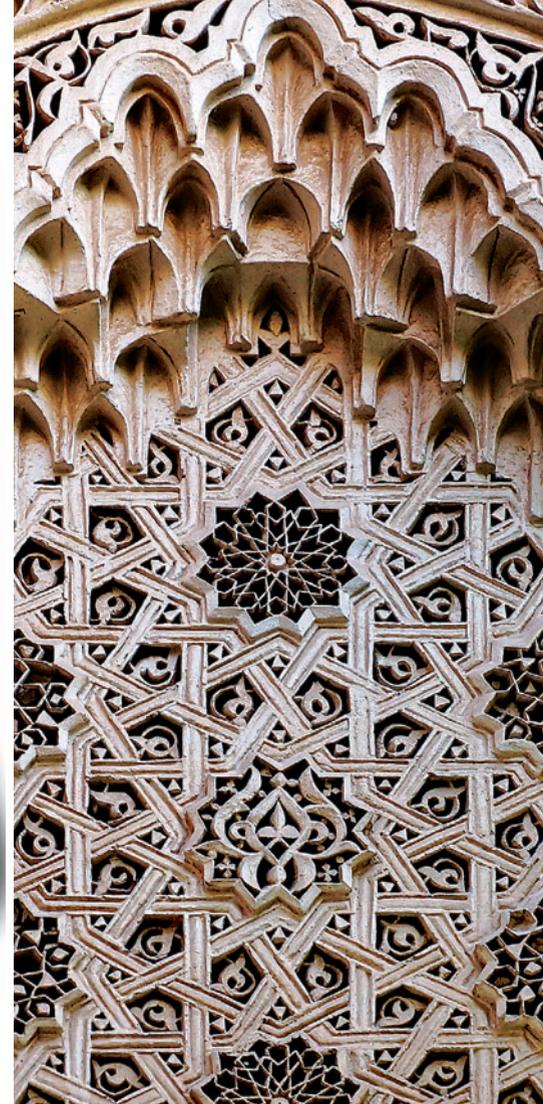
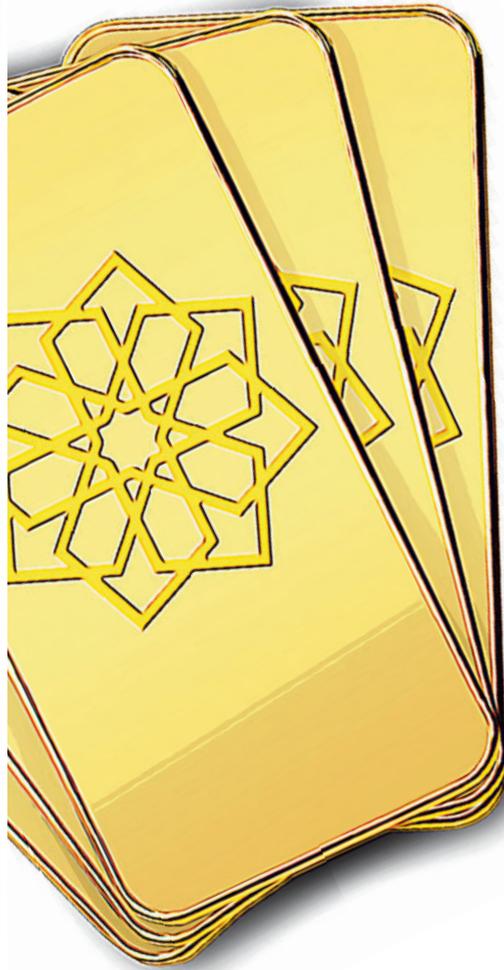
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We distribute *AramcoWorld* in print and online to increase cross-cultural understanding by broadening knowledge of the histories, cultures and geography of the Arab and Muslim worlds and their global connections.

FRONT COVER “The pirogue is a family friend for generations,” says Senegalese fishing federation president Gaoussou Gueye. “The boat nourishes and entertains the family.” Photo by Samantha Reinders.

BACK COVER Shown here at original size, the subject of this anonymous Indian painting, circa 1760, is identified as a Mughal prince holding a mango. Courtesy of Sir John Soane's Museum / Ardon Bar-Hama.



22 **Mango: The Emperor's New Fruit**

Written by **Alia Yunis**

We know from their memoirs that, centuries ago, Mughal emperors craved mangos, and their patronage of orchards in Goa led to today's global mango agribusiness—but the tastiest mangos of all? Those still come from Goa, say locals, and most would agree.

28 **What's So Resilient About Islamic Finance?**

Written by **Trevor Williams**
Illustrated by **Ryan Huddle**

Over the past two decades, investing, banking and mortgaging guided by Islamic principles have grown 10-fold worldwide. As a sector, Islamic finance experienced lower percentages of losses in the 2008 global financial crisis than most conventional institutions. Proponents point to lower risk profiles and a focus on tangible assets, for starters.

34 **Art of Islamic Patterns: A Moorish Star**

Written by **Richard Henry**

On a wall overlooking a garden in Marrakesh, Morocco, this 12-pointed star vibrates with strapwork and ornamentation, but its basic geometry can be drawn using only one-eighth of the pattern. That becomes a template that, flipped and inverted seven times, produces the rest of the star.

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FIRSTLOOK

Hair Washing at Home

Photograph by Emily Garthwaite

In 2021 a photography project took me 1,900 kilometers down the Tigris River through Turkey, Syria and Iraq. By the time we reached the city of Kut, in central Iraq, I had been camping along the riverbanks for nearly two months, mostly in the company of men, with the occasional night hosted by a local family. Here in Kut, at the home of a fisherman's family, I was able to have some precious time with other women. I was also able to join their weekly ritual of washing one another's hair. In the morning, four sisters woke me with tea, fried eggs and bread, and they turned on the faucet to fill a basin. We took turns washing, and then the sisters joined up in a line to comb and plait one another's hair. It was a gentle moment, the kind I like to share and that replenishes me on a journey. My own hair was being plaited as I took this photo.

—Emily Garthwaite



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FLAVORS

Pumpkin Coconut Soup (Kaddu Nariyal Shorba)

Recipe by Asma Khan

Photograph by Laura Edwards

Nothing had prepared me for the damp, cold winters of Cambridge. I wanted to make this soup not just because it was warming and comforting but because I also got a lot of free pumpkins from the market on my first Halloween in England.

I was surprised to see the number of pumpkins on sale. The shop owner gave me a free one to take home because he was amused that I did not know anything about Halloween! After that, I would buy a pumpkin from him whenever I saw him. I made a lot of pumpkin soup in the first fall after I moved to England. In Bengal the most-prized pumpkin is a variety with sweet, deep-orange flesh, and this soup does taste best when made with a sweeter variety of pumpkin. The combination of pumpkin and coconut works beautifully with the flavors of fennel seeds and dried red chiles.

(Serves 6)

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 tablespoon vegetable oil | 750 grams (1 pound 10 ounces) pumpkin or winter squash (preferably an orange-fleshed variety), peeled and chopped into chunks. |
| 3 dried red chiles, broken | |
| 2 heaped tablespoons fennel seeds | 1 teaspoon salt |
| 1 star anise | Scant 1 cup (200 milliliters) coconut milk (canned) |
| 2 tablespoons chopped white onion | Sugar, to taste |
| 4-centimeter piece of fresh ginger, grated | Coconut cream, to garnish |
| 6 large garlic cloves, crushed | |

Warm the oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. In quick succession add the broken dried chiles, fennel seeds and star anise, followed by the onion, ginger and garlic, then cook, stirring, for a few minutes. Stir in the pumpkin, and add enough warm water to cover, along with the salt. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat, cover, and simmer for 15–20 minutes until the pumpkin is tender.

Use a hand blender to blend the contents of the pot until smooth.

Put the pot back over low heat to warm through. Stir in the coconut milk, then taste for seasoning, adding sugar and more salt to suit your taste.

Serve in bowls, with some coconut cream swirled on top of the soup.

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Ammu: Indian Home-Cooking to Nourish Your Soul

Asma Khan.
Interlink Books, 2022.
interlinkbooks.com.



Asma Khan is chef and restaurateur of London's Darjeeling Express, which began as a supper club, then a pop-up, before settling in its permanent location to wide acclaim. Khan's food is homage to her royal Mughlai ancestry and the busy streets of Calcutta, where she grew up. An all-women team runs the kitchen at Darjeeling Express, which has been featured in *Time Out*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *The Guardian* and numerous others. In 2015 it was named one of the best restaurants in London by the *Evening Standard*, and in 2017 *Eater* named it one of its most impressive restaurant newcomers.



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GAME

OF

SEEDS

WRITTEN
BYMATTHEW
TELLER

A

dam Cheyo
glances across
the table at
his opponent.
A game has
temporarily

distracted them both from their duties as volunteers staffing Tanzania's booth this summer afternoon at the African Diaspora Festival in Milton Keynes, north of London. Lithe and clean-shaven, Cheyo reaches over the wooden game board, scoops up a handful of large, dried beans from one of the rounded pits that line up along on the board's surface and starts dropping them, one by one, into consecutive pits along the row nearest to him.

But when he drops the last bean into an empty pit, he leans back with a yelp of despair: His turn is over. He laughs and offers a fist-bump to his opponent.

Cheyo, 48, is a community engagement officer for Buckinghamshire Council. He smiles ruefully as his opponent begins a complex sequence of scooping and dropping

RIGHT Hungarian painter Hermann Reisz depicted men of two generations at an unspecified location in 1897 in "Playing a Game of Mancala." **OPPOSITE** At July's African Diaspora Festival in Milton Keynes, England, Adam Cheyo, at right, discusses the game with Mujahid Hamidi. Cheyo, 48, grew up in Tanzania, where the advanced version of the game is known as *bao la kiswahili* (*bao* of the Swahili people) and *bao la kujifunza* is literally "bao for beginners."





on his side of the board. The game isn't over, but Cheyo is sensing his own disadvantage.

"I feel really attached to this game, because I come from a community in Tanzania that always had it around. But I never played as a child. I started playing in my 20s. I am still a beginner!" he says.

This is a game without dice, without cards, without universally agreed rules. In its simplest forms, it needs only shallow pits in earth or wood, and tokens. It's not even just one game—it's a family of games. Cheyo and his buddy are playing bao, which just means "board" in Swahili. (Its formal name is *bao la kiswahili*, "the board game of the Swahili people.") It is a popular variety of the games that are collectively known as mancala, one of the oldest-known games that is still played and, according to Alex de Voogt, a researcher on mancala's history and psychology at New Jersey's Drew University, "perhaps the most widely played board game in the world."

The word *mancala* (often pronounced "MANK-a-la" or "man-KAA-la") comes from the tripartite Arabic root *n-q-l*, which means "movement" or "transfer." In this two-player game, opponents take turns moving tokens among pits or depressions, which are laid out in parallel rows. In whichever culture the game is played, the tokens are

**When I played a game of Bao, board of wood well decorated
A strong defense I did allow in the center saturated;**

**Now seeds were sown into a row which in few turns devastated
I said 'Shurba' when I played it, look at the Bao game I've won!**

**When I played this one *mtaji* [move to capture], I played it satisfactor'ly
Until the seeds picked up by me filled up the cup entirely
It swept the board then clear and free, no seeds in store were left to be
I said 'Shurba' accordingly, look at the Bao game I've won!**

—Swahili poet Muyaka bin Haji al-Ghassani (1776–1840)
lived in the port city of Mombasa, in what is now Kenya.

His poetry follows the rhyming verse form called *mashairi*,
and this poem was translated by games researcher Alex de Voogt.



While portable and usually wooden mancala boards have rows of scooped-out circles in which players place and move their tokens—seeds, pebbles, shells, beads or what have you—the game’s origins likely hark back to roots as an East African analog for agriculture. Here, girls play in the Acowa refugee camp in northeast Uganda, where the game is sometimes called *giuthi*, meaning “to distribute” or “to place.”

often called “seeds” regardless of what they actually are, and their movement from one pit to the next is often referred to as “sowing.” This hints at what may be the game’s origins: an adapted and ritualized mimicry of an action that reaches far back into human history—planting seeds in the ground.

The game comes in varieties that range from two parallel rows of six pits to four rows of seven, eight or more. Cheyo’s personal bao set, which he bought some years ago on a trip back to his birthplace of Kahama, in northwest Tanzania, includes literal seeds, smooth and rounded, from the msolo tree (*Guilandina bonduc*), known in English as gray nickernuts. But anything will do: beans, shells, glass marbles, small rocks, beads of wood or plastic, or whatever comes to hand. Some mancalas call the seeds “cows” and build strategies around trading livestock. Generally, the goal is to win more seeds than your opponent. In most versions players gather seeds won in a larger pit set aside from the rest, often known as a “house,” and is protected from the opponent; in other versions each player moves captured seeds off the game board.

The word *mancala* (often pronounced “MANK-a-la” or “man-KAA-la”) comes from the tripartite Arabic root *n-q-l*, which means “movement” or “transfer.”

Usually players take turns, but some mancalas include rounds of simultaneous play, which gives the advantage to those with minds and fingers nimble enough to outpace their opponents. Cheyo laughs as he points out this means that players who take too long to ponder the next move open themselves to ridicule from spectators. In this game, he asserts,

speed and instinct—or the foresight that comes from years of practice—are everything.

“Bao players play in clubs which encourage speed play,” adds de Voogt, who confirms that breaking “the consensus on reasonable thinking time per move” is frowned upon.

All this means that mancalas can be as simple as a counting game for kids or as complex as chess. Masters can plot outcomes many moves in advance, and they know how to lay traps for the unwary.

Akeem Abiodun Ashiyanbi, a researcher into African visual arts based at Nigeria’s University of Ibadan, says bao “requires deep thought and good strategy.” Wherever it’s played, he notes, it is important to regard mancala as a social activity, one in which



the comments and banter of spectators add color to the game.

Whereas chess, backgammon, checkers and other very old games that became popular in the West have received extensive study and popularization—even professionalization—there is scant research into mancala, no professional players, and it remains little known outside its mostly African and Asian cultures of origin. De Voogt notes an “important bias” in 20th-century anthropological literature that has to date overlooked mancala-type games in “nonhierarchical communities and societies” throughout the Global South.

“Bao players learn bao without the help of written literature,” he says. “There is only one manuscript in Swahili that deals with bao [and] it has never been published.”

Nor from antiquity have any wooden game boards or descriptions of rules survived, but archeologists have found rows of parallel pits

chiselled into stone surfaces at sites across Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. While it is tempting to identify these as mancala boards, de Voogt and other specialists remain skeptical. A game featuring two rows of five pits has been found at Roman sites in Turkey and elsewhere; there is a game from Egypt and



TOP In what is now Jordan, variations of mancala have been played for centuries. Near the fifth-century-CE Nabataean ruins of Petra, a game board with four rows of 14 pits was carved into the rock, and similar finds have been noted from Africa to the Arabian Peninsula and South Asia. **RIGHT** In Malaysia, where the game is called *congkak*, the country’s 10-sen coin features a decorated mancala board.

TOP: EXPUESTO / NICOLAS RANDALL / ALAMY; LOWER: VPC COINS COLLECTION / ALAMY; OPPOSITE: JAKE LYLELL / ALAMY

the Levant with four rows of pits, documented since the 13th century and called *tab*, that has been found at Petra in Jordan. Literature and art from ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome mention games, but none offer evidence of connections to mancala.

Did mancala develop later? Or was it just that mancala's simplicity—scooping pits in the dirt and playing with seeds or pebbles “without the presence of a state to warrant” the activity, as de Voogt puts it—has left no evidence for archeologists?

Wherever and whenever mancala emerged, it has often been associated with travel. “Mancala players took along their boards when they migrated or when they traded with distant neighbors,” says de Voogt. Some elaborate mancala boards are carved as ships, with bowed form and tapered ends, or decorated with fish motifs: The University of Pennsylvania and the Horniman Museum in London both have canoe-shaped boards from Sierra Leone in West Africa that look almost seaworthy.

That West African variation is known as *oware*, and it traveled west from the 16th to 19th century in the memories of people enslaved and sent to the Americas. It endures today through variations in Latin America and the southern United States under an almost identical name: *warri*, which is also the name of a city in southern Nigeria that was one of the kingdoms of the Niger Delta from the 14th century onward. Today the Caribbean islands of Barbados



and Antigua are known for hosting championship warri tournaments.

Bao spread through East Africa's trade routes, and it is played now from Somalia and Kenya as far south as Mozambique and Madagascar. It too has tournaments, held most often on the Tanzanian island of Zanzibar. Mancala was also carried east across the Indian Ocean by sailors, traders and travelers of all kinds, including enslaved people. There it was adapted and given local names while maintaining its fundamental characteristics. *Ohvalhu* has been played in the archipelago of the Maldives, off the southern coast of India, for 1,000 years or more. United Kingdom resident Geraldine Pinto, 55, born in Malaysia to parents of Portuguese and Filipino backgrounds, remembers *congkak* (CHONG-ka) from her childhood in Kuala Lumpur.

“It was very easy to play, because there were no numbers written down,” she says. “In Malaysia it's predominantly played by women, not men. They would be chewing betel leaf, gossiping and playing. As a child, you're fascinated, watching them. We would dig little holes in the ground and play like that.”

Pinto describes *congkak*'s gameplay and terminology: In Malay the pits are called *kampung* (villages), she says. Play proceeds clockwise around two rows of six or seven pits as each player tries to seize, or “eat,” the other's seeds.

“It's a very quick game. You need to be observant



Depending on the country of origin, game boards vary widely in the number of pits, seeds and designs: This game board **ABOVE** is from Indonesia. **OPPOSITE TOP** Geraldine Pinto, who grew up in Malaysia, plays gets her congkak board ready in a cafe in Banbury, England. In Lebanon, **CENTER**, mancala boards are often simple, with 14 pits, while in other parts of the world, such as in north-central Kenya, **LOWER**, boards can be longer.

and tactical,” she says. Then her mood turns reflective as she brings out her own congkak board, made on the Indonesian island of Bali, which she uses for playing with her British husband and their daughter.

“We attach memories to congkak. I remember my parents preparing for a wedding with all my aunts. In the garden everyone was cooking these huge pots of curry, and the women were taking time out to play congkak and gossiping about the bride and groom. This game goes so deep, culturally, into our heritage.”

Beauty consultant Temitope Ajiboye offers her own personal recollections of *ayo olopon*, the mancala variation played among Yoruba people around the city of Lagos in southern Nigeria. “When I was little, with my grandma, every evening after reading a story, we would all sit and play under a tree. There would be a lantern on the side, they would do some fried meat. It’s the center of the community. The game means you get to sit with elders, so even if they’re having their own conversation, you’re learning while you play.”

Ajiboye says she is determined to keep the traditions alive, even after 20 years away from Nigeria in Britain. “I own 10 sets of ayo. If I have a barbecue in my garden, ayo is coming out. This

“In Malaysia it’s predominantly played by women, not men. They would be chewing betel leaf, gossiping and playing. As a child you’re fascinated, watching them.”

—GERALDINE PINTO

is a piece of Africa I hold dearly. My kids know the game because it’s important. It’s part of our heritage.”

In another cross-continental echo, musician Maya Youssef recalls how her grandmother in Damascus played mancala “under the big tree in the yard, and [she] would try to teach us grandchildren how to play. I wasn’t brilliant at it, but I enjoyed counting and flicking the cool pebbles on hot summer days.”

In Milton Keynes, Cheyo went on to win his bao challenge at the festival. Satisfying, yes, he says, but “this game is bigger than a game.” He clears the board and gathers the seeds in a glass jar. “It gives me an identity and a cultural connection with strangers from all over the world. It’s for everybody.” ☺



Matthew Teller is a UK-based writer and journalist. His latest book, *Nine Quarters of Jerusalem: A New Biography of the Old City*, was published this year. Follow him on Twitter @matthewteller and at matthewteller.com.



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GOING PIROGUE



FEEDING A NATION

Written by **TRISTAN RUTHERFORD** Photographed by **SAMANTHA REINDERS**





PREVIOUS SPREAD Off Senegal's 530-kilometer Atlantic coast lie what for years have been some of the world's richest fishing waters, and essential to the West African nation's fishing industry are the long, narrow boats known as pirogues. The work of about a half-million boatbuilders, fishermen and fishmongers help nourish the nation's population of 17 million as well as people east in neighboring West African countries. Along this beach in the Ouakam district of Dakar, capital of Senegal, fishers launch and land, custom-painted pirogues by the dozens. **ABOVE** Pirogues line the beach also in Mbour, 80 kilometers south of Dakar, which has become one of the most important fish-handling centers in the region.

On the white sands of the Ouakam beaches, just beyond Senegal's famed white-and-red Mosque of Divinity and its two towering minarets, rows of narrow, canoe-like pirogues line up. The boats are present every morning on the beach and begin to come alive in the early morning hours of daybreak. Senegalese fishermen from across the Dakar region, as they have done for hundreds of years, ready their multicolored pirogues for launch into the Atlantic, where they will spend hours or days at a time, catching giant trevally and marlin as they traverse the West African shoreline.

For more than a decade, pirogue designer Mor Diouf has crafted a range of pirogues in the chantier, or construction site, of Soumbédioune's horseshoe bay. The chantier

is the main boatyard in the region and known for its pirogue-building. Loose and half-constructed wood is strewn across the yard as dozens of boatbuilders work on various boat projects. They take only short breaks between hammering and sanding to rest under nearby mango trees or pause for a quick tea or coffee.

Diouf is currently building a new, 6-meter pirogue with a 6-person capacity, which is considered a small to mid-sized vessel. When complete in about four days, the pirogue will sell for CAF 900,000, or US \$1,500. Fishing is serious business in Senegal, Diouf says amid the banging, whirring and electric sanding across the boatyard. So serious is it that even the country's name reflects fishing and boating culture: It comes from *Sunu*

gaal, which in the national Wolof language means "our pirogue." (French is Senegal's other national language, along with several regional languages.)

Along Senegal's 530 kilometers of coast, small-scale fishing, also known as artisanal fishing, provides up to 75 percent of the consumed animal protein for its 17 million residents. Many local dishes feature fish, such as thieboudienne, a favorite fish recipe served with rice, peppers and sweet potatoes. Senegal's national fish, the white grouper, or *thiof*, also appears in many dishes throughout the region. Just over a half a million fishermen, mongers and shipwrights comprise Senegal's fishing industry and provide meat for its citizens.

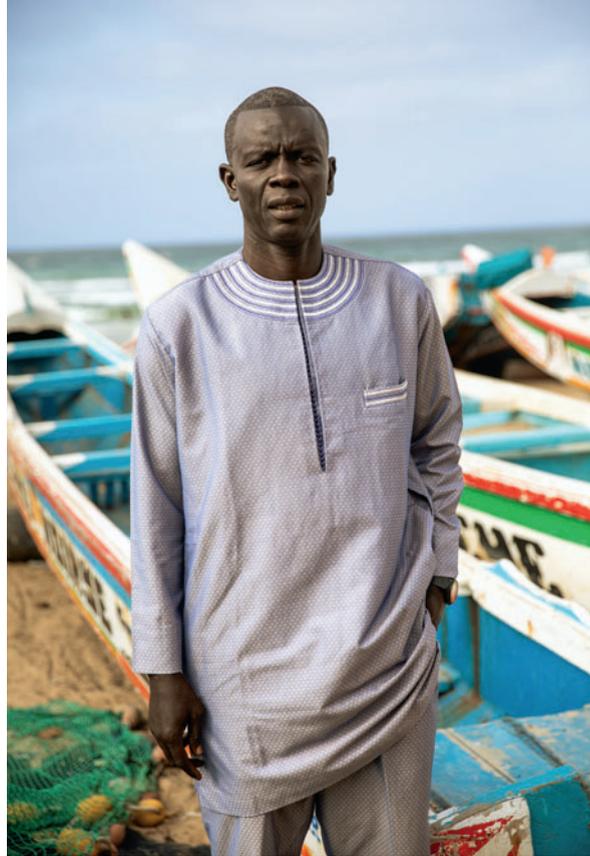
Once a pirogue is complete and sold, Diouf says, the boats are immediately launched in the water. There is no ceremony or celebration of the pirogue's completion, only the expectation the vessel will produce ample catch and return to shore with enough catch to feed the families of the fishermen, and sell the remaining supply at local markets.

Sometimes this business "has benefits, and sometimes people don't buy" the boats, says Diouf, describing the pirogue-building industry in Senegal. How quickly a pirogue sells depends on its size, how much weight it can withstand, how long it takes to build and how many fishermen can use it at one time.

Some 20,000 pirogues have been crafted at the chantier, just a 20-minute drive south from Ouakam, and while many new boats are always under construction, many older boats remain at the boatyard for repair, while others are being retired and prepared for disassembly.

Diouf began his career as a net fisherman using a paddle-powered pirogue made for a single person. He soon transitioned to boatbuilding, however, and today his pirogues are known for being faster and sturdier than others in the region. The recent completion of one of his 20-meter pirogues, designed to be at sea for a week at a time, took 15 days to build and a crew of 10 men to heave it into the water.

It took "two days work, two days rest," to complete



the large boat, says Diouf, who earned about \$10,000 from the sale. With so much energy and time poured into each pirogue build, the boatbuilders depend on the shade of the nearby trees and the brewing stations stocked with hot water, tea and Nescafe instant coffee for short breaks.

Diouf says the larger pirogues are built to sustain a mounted outboard engine—or two—and for long trips store provisions such as coconuts, groundnuts, oranges and rice for when the fishermen may stay out at sea for a week or more at a time. While the fishermen are at sea,

Descendant of generations of fishermen, Maguette Sow, 50, **ABOVE**, fishes from Yoff, Dakar's largest district with 90,000 residents. Although he expects his children will follow in his footsteps, the industry is increasingly challenged by international fishing trawlers. **LOWER** At the boatyard known locally just as chantier (construction site), pirogues are in continuous stages of construction, decoration and repair. Most pirogues can last a decade or more.





ABOVE Most pirogue crews work with weighted nets that catch small and midsize fish, and their catches comprise some 80 percent of what is for sale in local fish markets. Large fish, such as trevally and marlin, are also caught, but these require larger pirogues, more crew and heavier gear. **LOWER** Offloaded from the pirogue, fish are moved to coolers and bins for transport or just carried on a tray, **OPPOSITE TOP**, to a market such as this one in Mbour, **OPPOSITE LOWER**, where fish are cleaned, sorted, sometimes cooked on grills and sold alongside a variety of other foods and wares.

however, there is not much entertainment, Diouf says. There is no singing, storytelling or listening to music on one's smartphone, for example. It's all business.

It's "just catching fish," says Diouf, shifting between hammering nails and fitting protective rubber seals between the joins of samba wood and redwood.

Piles of the samba wood at the boatyard arrive frequently via shipping containers from Cote d'Ivoire, also located on the West African coastline, with five countries between it and Senegal. The yellow wood is light and flexible, famous for its use in crafting pirogues. Pirogue hulls, however, are made from the more durable West African redwood from Casamance, Senegal's tropical southern region. Redwood can withstand saltwater conditions for about a decade before needing to be replaced.

Earlier this year, as a well-meaning gesture from foreign fishing enterprises who fish in Senegalese waters, 38 fiberglass fishing canoes were gifted to Senegal by a French multinational company and Japan's International Cooperation Agency. These reinforced plastic canoes require no tree felling and offer cold-storage boxes built in the hull. While these fiberglass boats are thought to be unsinkable and longer-lasting, perhaps, they're not made in the local boat-building tradition, nor do they feature the colorful, whimsical artwork hand-painted across the sides of the wooden pirogues.

"We wouldn't get on a fiberglass boat," Diouf says







TOP A painting on a wall outside a home on Ngor Island in Dakar depicts the prominence of pirogues throughout the Dakar region, where pirogues are also used for general transportation. Originally all were paddled; however, today most pirogues used for Atlantic fishing are fitted with outboard motors. **ABOVE** Pirogue art ranges from designs and colors to sports teams or players, car brands as well as celebrities and political, cultural or religious figures. **OPPOSITE** On Mbor beach retired fishermen look over a photo from the 1960s that shows a crew carrying fish off a pirogue in baskets.



emphatically, almost offended by the thought. “Don’t even talk to me about it.”

Each boat built at the chantier is painted with blue waves and gold swirls, with rising red suns and green stars to echo the Senegalese flag. Boat names honor loved ones, such as “Mama Samba Diop,” “Mansour Sy” and “Abdou Aziz.” Smaller motifs at the bow add extra élan: a US flag, or the insignia of the popular soccer club in Barcelona, or a nod to international soccer icon Cristiano Ronaldo. The current pirogue art trend is for more color than ever, but as the boats are fishing far from shore, rarely seen after launch, it begs the question: Why bother painting them at all?

“People want to decorate them because everybody wants their own unique design,” says specialist pirogue painter Demba Gaye, explaining the regional uniqueness of the motifs. “If a boat comes from Yoff,” an important Dakar fishing suburb, “the designs will show it. If a boat is from Ngor, you can also tell.”

Retired fisher and pirogue owner Ousmane has witnessed Dakar’s fishing industry expand through the years, and he has intimately known the importance of seeing the pirogue boats supply fish for a nation.

“Our grandfathers and fathers were all fishers,” says Ousmane, a well-known and respected senior among the local pirogue fishing community. “After we finished school and ate with our family, our grandfathers would

talk about fishing and how it works.”

Beyond the fishing culture and its necessity for feeding a nation, fishing as an activity is also used as a method to teach children and young adults life lessons, Ousmane says. If a male student is failing at school, for example, someone takes him fishing.

“It’s better for our people to fish than doing a





ABOVE Fishing crews typically set out early in the morning, but the beaches remain active all day, with pirogues coming and going, unloading, and afterward cleaning, gutting and cooking fish, all amid the sounds of waves and vendors. **OPPOSITE** A boy and a cat pass each other near sunset along the hull of a pirogue under construction.

bad thing on land,” he says.

It’s also good exercise for the mind and body to catch large fish, he says, mentioning the largest fish he ever caught was a fighting marlin, which can weigh upwards of 226 kilograms. But one does not simply know how to catch large fish. It is a learned skill, Ousmane says.

“You have to be taught the technique to catch one,” he says.

Yet big fish like fighting marlins are becoming harder to fish from the sea. There is an overcrowding beginning to occur on the shoreline, with foreign boats and fishermen encroaching on Senegalese waters. They’re taking more fish than can be replenished

during a natural cycle.

“At night they come,” says Ousmane’s friend Assane, also a longtime fisherman. “If people just took a small amount, giving fish time to reproduce, it would be OK. But with big boats from China or Russia, they take all of them.”

Many of the local Senegalese fishermen are starting to

go out and come home on their pirogues empty-handed, Assane says, and not only are fish quantities decreasing along the coastline, but now Senegalese divers are coming in at night and spearfishing the larger fish while the pirogue fishermen are sleeping and off duty.

“They dive with a (waterproof) torch so strong that it’s like daylight underwater,” Ousmane says.

Some of the older retirees are noticing the possibility that making a living on pirogues in the future may eventually become an unreliable option.

“A lot of people are going to America, or Spain, or France because they don’t have income,” says Assane, who wonders if the pirogue culture will eventually sail away too.

In the suburb of Ngor, between Oukam and Yoff, pirogues are now being used in different ways to help sustain the profession. For a \$2 ride, which includes a life jacket, the boats act as tourist shuttles as they weave through the waves to Ngor Island across the bay. To ride in a pirogue is to understand why they are perfectly suited to West African waters. Their U-shaped hulls push the sea aside, allowing the boat to glide through rough waters. A raised stern tosses away spray and the pirogues’ lengthways, banana-like curve aids maneuverability. Pirogues

Senegal, or *Sunu gaal*, in the national Wolof language, means “our pirogue.”



are agile like dolphins rather than large and difficult to steer, like a whale. In other areas of Senegal, pirogues have adapted to become riverine passenger and fishing crafts, as well, made with flatter hulls and smaller sails. They also continue to evolve in size to be able to accept larger cargo.

But the pirogue community has not given up on its tradition, or future, and many in the boating community, whether fisherman or boatbuilder, are dialoguing about possible solutions to preserve pirogue fishing in Ouakam.

The African Confederation of Artisanal Fisheries Professional Organization president, Gaoussou Gueye, who presides over the African organization of artisanal fishers, a confederation of small-scale fisheries from 26 African states, concedes that overfishing by large, foreign fishing enterprises is “evidently a problem.” It is one they hope to resolve in the future since 80 percent of the catch in Senegal comes from artisanal fishers and landlocked West African countries, such as Mali and Burkina Faso, also rely on the fish from Senegal ports.

“Coastal communities and civil societies are asking for transparency as to which legal and illegal boats are fishing in Senegalese waters,” he says. “We propose taking initiatives to measure stocks and their durability to better regulate food security and social stability.”

Some fishermen believe it is a good idea to reserve small pelagic fish solely for artisanal fishing methods and help replenish the available fish faster. Tradition is also at stake, the president says.

“Sometimes the pirogue is like a baby. ... The boat nourishes and entertains the family. That toddler will inherit the culture before doing the same work as his parents,” he says. “The pirogue is a family friend for generations, part of a community which is very social.”

Gueye says the community is so social, in fact, if fishermen come back with no fish, they are entitled to take two or three fish from another fisherman to prepare a meal and have something to eat.

It seems many are determined to keep the pirogues, and all they represent to Senegal, in tact for generations to come. With millions depending on these pirogues to come back with fish to eat and sell each day, more must be done to preserve the fish supply and maintain the tradition of pirogue fishing.

“The base of our food is fish,” says Gueye. “This is why pirogues are extremely important in the lives of Senegalese.” 🌐

“The pirogue is a family friend for generations, part of a community which is very social.”

—GAOUSSOU GUEYE



Tristan Rutherford is a winner of six journalism awards and a regular contributor to *Boat International* and *The Times*. He recently traveled on assignment with his three young sons across Europe to Morocco on a Eurail pass. **Samantha Reinders** (samreinders.com; [@samreinders](https://twitter.com/samreinders)) is an award-winning photographer, book editor, multimedia producer and workshop leader based in Cape Town, South Africa. She holds a master's degree in visual communication from Ohio University, and her work has been published in *Time*, *Vogue*, *The New York Times* and more.



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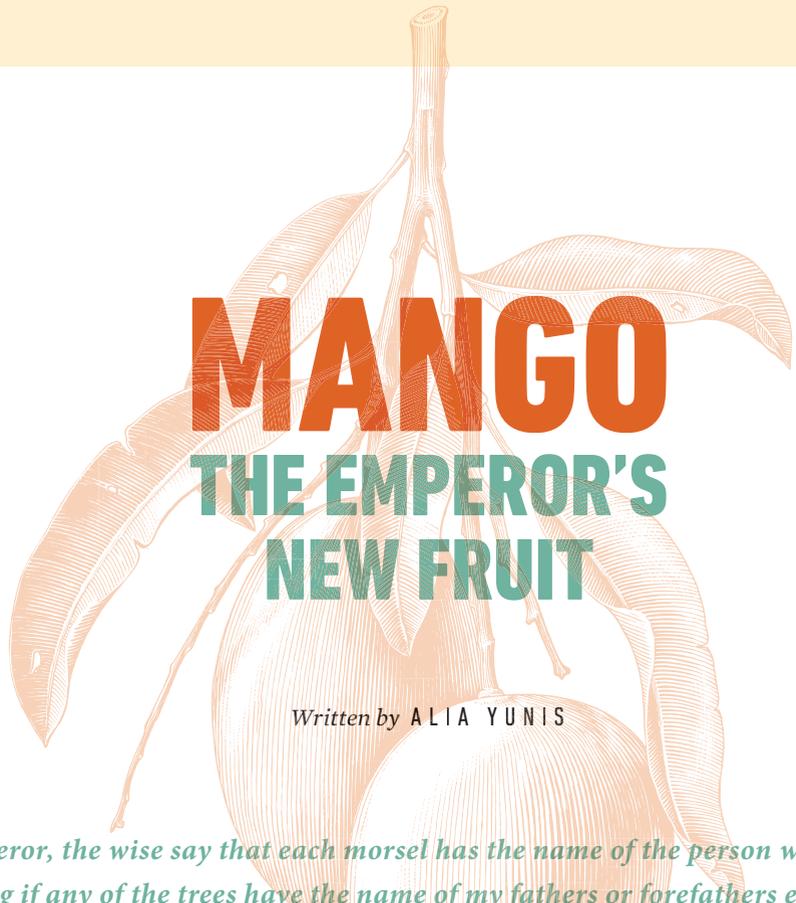
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MANGO

THE EMPEROR'S NEW FRUIT

Written by ALIA YUNIS

*Oh emperor, the wise say that each morsel has the name of the person who will eat it
I am seeing if any of the trees have the name of my fathers or forefathers etched on them.*

These words were reportedly recited in the mid-19th century by the poet Mirza Ghalib to the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar II, as the sovereign paused to gaze up at a mango tree laden with ripening fruit. The emperor's grateful response was to gift Ghalib a basket of mangos the very next day. Whether this is folklore or fact, it shows that the Mughal Empire ended much as it started: conquest wrapped in a love of poetry, painting—and mangos. As their own royal diaries reveal, this was a dynasty that for more than three centuries, from 1526 to 1858, loved mangos like they loved their own children.

It began with Babur. After years of back-and-forth campaigns in Afghanistan, Persia and what is now Uzbekistan, in 1526 Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, a descendant of Mongolian leader Genghis Khan and Central Asian

conquerer Amir Timur, gave up on his late father's dream of reclaiming Samarkand and set his eyes, reluctantly, on India. As charming and as cultured as he was determined, Babur and his followers first took control of Kabul and then occupied key points all the way to Delhi, where he dethroned Sultan Ibrahim Lodi and, in so doing, founded what became the Mughal Empire.

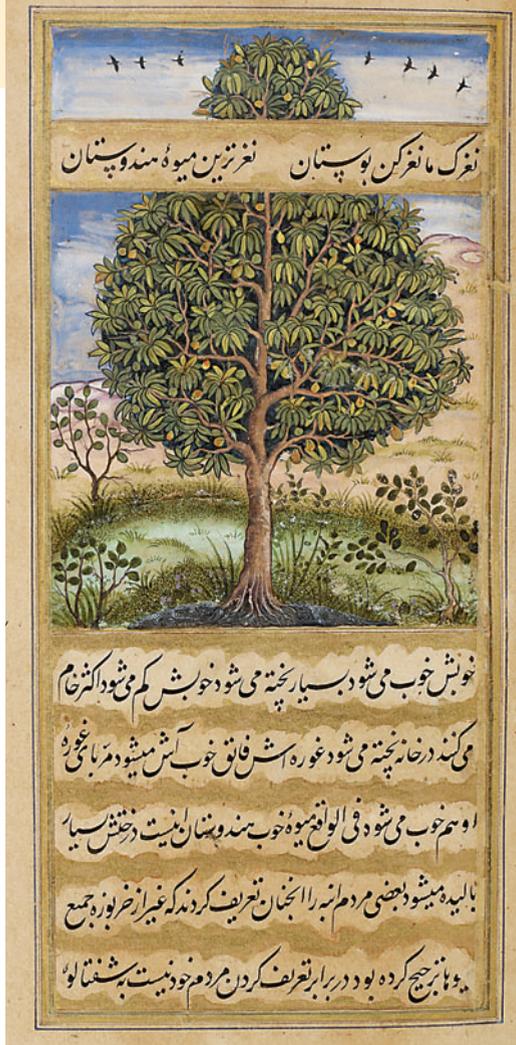
"We have no historical evidence of it, but as the legend goes, when Babur was called to defeat Ibrahim Lodi by an Afghan warlord, he was promised a crate of mangos if he completed this feat," says Ruchika Sharma, who teaches history at the University of Delhi and is a doctoral scholar of medieval Indian history at the Centre for Historical Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University. "It's very far-fetched that Babur was lured to the subcontinent for the opportunity to taste mangos. But mangos and Mughals have become inseparable, so when far-fetched stories like this come

up, no one really questions them. Some of it is legend, and some of it we have written records for."

Praise for the mango was one of few kind words Babur had for his new domain. In Central Asia the tradition of gifting fruits was a sign of wealth and status. The gifting fruit of choice, and the one Babur would miss most from the Mughal throne in Delhi, was the Central Asian melon. "Taking it altogether, the mango is the best fruit of Hindūstān," he wrote in his autobiographical *Baburnama*. "Some so praise it as to give it preference over all fruits except the musk-melon. Such praise outmatches it. It resembles the kārdī peach. It ripens in the rains. It is eaten in two ways: one is to squeeze it to a pulp, make a hole in it, and suck out the juice, the other, to peel and eat it like the kārdī peach," he wrote.

No place has played a bigger part in making the mango India's beloved national fruit more than the country's smallest state, Goa. Today still in Goa,

Painted around 1620, this Indian opaque watercolor with gold and ink on paper, **OPPOSITE**, shows Mughal Emperor Jahangir meeting with Persian ruler Shah Abbas with two attendants. Every element in the painting communicates Jahangir's power and opulence in the presence of his rival. Platters at the bottom of the scene are shown laden with fruits, including, at the left, apples, melon and grapes, all popular in Central Asia, and at the right, bananas, lemons, pineapple as well as Jahangir's own favorite, mangos.



Painted in 1590 by artist Sarjan, this illustrated folio from *Vak'at-i-Baburi*, or *The Memoirs of Babur*, depicts a mango tree laden with fruit. It was Babur's grandson Akbar who initiated widespread cultivation of mangos.

boys and girls looking for adventure can be seen roving in cliques, gathering fallen mangos or climbing the tall, leafy trees, shaking branches to loosen mangos before the owners of the trees catch them. If they are lucky, and they don't have to run away empty-handed, they eat them much as Babur described, poking holes in them or peeling them. Meanwhile, mango vendors sit on the sides of the streets with baskets of the fruits, cleanly slicing the mangos into wedges and sprinkling them with chili powder for waiting customers while calling out for new customers from among the passersby.

Mango trees are thus integral to both real and imagined landscapes. "If you look at the Mughal miniature paintings and illustrations, which are quite renowned, you will often see a mango or mango tree in the painting," says Sonia

Wigh, a postdoctoral fellow in history at the University of Edinburgh whose research focuses on early modern India. "It might not be the focus of the painting. But the mango was so much a part of life that it would be there somewhere."

It was Babur's descendants who took the mango tree, *Mangifera indica*, which botanists estimate developed in the wild about 4,000 years ago, to iconic status. Babur's son Humayun, who as Mughal-era diaries suggest spent much of his life on the run, developed a system whereby mangos could be delivered to him in secret wherever he was hiding: The Humayun Pasand mango was named for him (and may even have been named by him, though in time its name became Iman Pasand). It was also in this era that, when Humayun was defeated at the Battle of Chausa by Sher Shah Sur, that the victor reportedly celebrated by naming a variety of mango "Chausa," and today it is still grown, mostly

in Pakistan.

It was Humayun's son and successor, Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar (commonly known as Akbar the Great), who changed the course of mango history more than anyone else with a contribution that went back to the Moors. In 1510 the Portuguese fleet had landed in Goa under the leadership of Afonso de Albuquerque. They had sailed around Africa from western Iberia, which under Arab rule had developed agricultural practices still unknown to the rest of Europe.

"It is evident even from his name, Albuquerque, an Arabic-derived one, that Albuquerque's family was, at least culturally, influenced by the rule of the Moors in Iberia," says R. Benedito Ferrão, who studies transoceanic connections in his native Goa as Asian Centennial Faculty Fellow at the College of William and Mary and Fellow of the American

THE MANGO IN THE GOAN KITCHEN

Because of their short season, fresh mangos don't figure strongly into savory or sweet dishes in Goa. While they are served as a nectar in some areas or with lassi (yogurt) in others, and they are part of desserts, most notably mango sticky rice, salads and curries in other parts of Asia. In Goa they are most appreciated morning, noon and night just as fresh fruits, opened or peeled. But mangos remain present throughout the year in Goa in other forms. Sandy-colored dried-mango skins and seeds are added to curries to give them a tart sweetness. Most importantly, mangos become pickles. Rosy Sarah, a vendor at the Mapusa Friday Market in Goa, took over her mother's 60-year-old business. "I'm a teacher, but I try to keep this business going," she says from her stand at the market. "Basically, there are two kinds of pickles: brined pickles, made with the small mango, and cooked pickles, better known as chutney, which is when the mangos are chopped and stewed with spices," she explains. In other parts of India, acharas are more common, in which the mango is preserved with salt and spiced oil. Less common but cherished in Goa is marraba, which is a sweet mango jam preserved with jaggery, a form of cane sugar.

In the Goan city of Panjim, there is one local dish that does use cooked mango, but only a single, small, wild variety called *ghottam* in Konkani, the local language. Marie Suzette Martins, owner of the popular eatery Mum's Kitchen, keeps traditional foods alive. Simmered in a sweet and spicy curry, the tennis-ball size mangos are sucked on after the dish's sauce is finished off with rice or chapatis. "The dish reminds me of looking for the mangos as kids and bringing them home for our mothers to cook. That determined how many we would get to eat in the dish," she says. "There are a lot of memories around mango season."

Institute of Indian Studies. “Because the Portuguese were ruled by the Moors for some 700 years—rulers who had only been ousted a short period before the Iberians began to explore the sea routes to Africa and Asia—they brought fresh Moorish knowledge with them.”

It had been in the 12th century that horticulturist Abu Zakariya’s *Kitab al-filahah* (*Book of Agriculture*) had put into writing the science of plant grafting, the process by which two plants are joined to create a single new plant. When the Jesuit missionaries sent to Goa by the Portuguese tasted mangos, the Jesuits set about grafting the trees to create more of these fruits so new and delicious to them.

By the mid-16th century, Akbar became sufficiently intrigued by their successes to summon the Jesuits to his court in Agra to pass along their skills in mango-tree grafting. Akbar then commissioned the 100,000-tree Lakhī Bagh orchards, about 1,200 kilometers from Delhi, where grafting led to hundreds of mango varieties. While this historic orchard has fallen into ruin, its horticultural legacy can be tasted in the different mangos’ level of tartness, sweetness, texture and endurance. It was a victory for mango science and palette diversity that continues today, much as it does for other fruits and crops throughout the world, such as apples, olives and grapes.

By 1556, the year Akbar came to power, Portugal held control of the major ports in western India, including Goa. Although the Portuguese had either killed or forced Christian conversion upon most Muslims in Goa, they were not much interested in the



LEFT Mangos grow plentifully in Arpora, Goa, in western India along the Arabian Sea. The fleshy fruit variety belongs to the genus *Mangifera*, part of numerous species of tropical fruit trees. There are many types of mangos, each with unique flavors and sweetness levels, **MIDDLE**, and they come in a variety of colors, shapes and sizes. The mango’s skin is typically not eaten, but the sweet, pulpy inside can be sliced for immediate serving or used for juice, soups, purees, smoothies and more.

Muslim-majority interior. For their part, the Mughals were a largely land-based and land-focused empire, one that even viewed the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Makkah, as one to be taken by land. Thus while the Mughals spread the grafting of mangos across South Asia, Portuguese and Arab traders spread mango seeds to Yemen, Egypt, East Africa and the tropics of the Americas.

Today, there are more than 1,000 varieties of mango trees worldwide, and in Goa alone there are 106. Most begin bearing fruit when they are four years old, and they produce anywhere from 40 to 300 mangos a year for about 40 years.

During mango season, Goa’s markets and streets are overtaken with shades of yellow, green, orange or red, depending on the variety of the mango. Along roads, people can be seen looking up at trees speckled with orange and yellow, assessing whether the mangos are ready to pluck.

It is a brief and magical season that begins in late March and ends with the monsoon rains of early June. “In their obsession, Mughals kept records of who had gifted them mangos, the condition of those mangos, and notations about them,” says Wigh. She cites a ledger of Akbar’s son Jahangir, who marveled at a ruler who



Today, there are more than 1,000 varieties of mango trees worldwide, and in Goa alone there are 106.



TOP Puffy, crispy north Indian puris are served here with a mango-dip puree. **ABOVE LEFT** Fermented, spiced fruits and vegetables, including cabbage and mangos, are canned for later use in a variety of Indian recipes that include both sweet and savory dishes. Mango lassi, **ABOVE RIGHT**, originated in the Punjab and Multan areas of India around 1000 BCE when fruits were first pureed with spices. Lassi, which can be sweet or savory, is sometimes called the world's first smoothie: It is made of yogurt and fruit blended variously with water, spices, sugar and salt.

gifted him fresh mangos on October 4, 1617. “Even today that would be hard to imagine, so I understand,” she laughs. “If I got fresh mangos in October, I would be so excited.”

That may become more common through global trade as mango production continues to be industrialized to meet demand that is growing 3.3 percent a year, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The FAO also estimates that by 2030 global production will reach 84 million metric tons, half of which will come from India, with Thailand and Indonesia also ranking as leading South Asian exporters. Indians will also still eat more mangos than any other national population—28.4 kilograms per capita per year.

This means that mangos today remain much like they were in the Mughal era—a part of family heritages and culture. “We can’t be in India during the season,” says Noora Jabir, a student born in the Indian state of Kerala who grew up in Abu Dhabi, “so my grandparents have a freezer just for mangos, so that we can eat them when we get there. I dream

about that freezer.”

For the Mughals, says Wigh, mangos were also a form of flattering one’s father. When Prince Azam wanted to please his father, Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, who ruled from 1658 to 1707, “he sent him two baskets of mango varieties that had no names and gave his father the honor of naming them.” Aurangzeb wrote to his son and said, “Exalted son, the delicious mangos (sent by you) sweetened the palate of the old father. May the happiness and fortune of the young son be augmented.” Aurangzeb named these mangos Sudhara and Rasnavilas.

But such mango diplomacy also proved tricky for Aurangzeb. On one occasion when he was young and ambitious, Aurangzeb’s father, Shah Jahan (who built the Taj Mahal for Aurangzeb’s mother, Mumtaz Mahal), expressed his displeasure with Aurangzeb when he received from him a basket of mangos that proved poor. He even told Aurangzeb’s sister Jahanara that he was perplexed that his son could show such disrespect. Jahanara took it upon herself to quell Shah Jahan’s distress by writing to her brother, knowing an apology was in order. “Shah Jahan had even commanded that Aurangzeb send men to stand watch over the tree after it flowered, waiting for it to bear fruit,” says Wigh. For Aurangzeb’s part, however, he “blamed the courier service for not handling the mangos well.”

India’s most famous mango variety today is the Alphonso (also nicknamed Hapoo), and it originates in Goa. While it is often assumed to have been named for Portuguese seaman Afonso de Albuquerque, more likely it was named for Jesuit Nicolau Alfonso, the horticulturist who grafted it around 1550.

The Alphonso is now the most widely

“In their obsession, Mughals kept records of who had gifted them mangos, the condition of those mangos, and notations about them.”

—SONIA WIGH

“It’s quite normal for people to eat two or three mangos a day during the season.”

—VASCO ALVARES

grown mango in India. Goa and its neighboring state to the north, Maharashtra, produce the most. Cultivated for its exceptionally complex sweetness and non-fibrous pulp, the Alphonso is also abundantly cultivated in the state south of Goa, Karnataka. But despite the Alphonso’s renown, within Goa it is considered a pedestrian variety, and more niche varieties are upheld as the true crown jewels of mangos: Fernandin, Xavier, Monserrate, Hilario, Malgues and the bright yellow Mankurad. Of these, it is the latter that is of all the most prized, and it has dominated local markets since its development in the years since the Mughals began grafting.

“It’s quite normal for people to eat two or three mangos a day during the season,” says Vasco Alvares, owner and chef of Miski Bar in Panaji, which promotes Goan local fare. “My brother went for 10 a day as a kid, but then he

started to get boils. So there are limits.”

Wigh points out that in the traditions of the Ayurvedic medicine widely practiced in the region, the mango is considered as a food that heats the body, not one that cools it. This shows up also in Mughal-era medical records that speak of the heat the fruit ignites when consumed to excess.

The 19th-century poet Ghalib, in a story that goes around, wrote to a caretaker in Kolkata that mangos are so delicious that they require extraordinary self-control: “Not only am I a slave to my stomach, I am a weak

person as well. I desire that my table be adorned and that my soul be comforted. The wise ones know that both of these cravings can be satisfied by mangos.”

“Mangos were considered a source of pleasure,” says Wigh, “but in moderation.”

While there may be limits to the number of mangos a person can eat, there seems to be none to the stories and myths about them. Some may be overheated, but only some have been shared here, in keeping with sensible moderation. 🌍

The author extends her thanks to Goa College of Architecture Associate Professor Vishesh Kandolkar for his many valuable insights.



Alia Yunis, a writer and filmmaker based in Abu Dhabi, recently completed the documentary *The Golden Harvest*.



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From late March until the monsoon arrives in early June, markets throughout Goa are overtaken with piles of yellow, green, orange or red mangos, depending on the variety. While the Alphonso is Goa’s best-known variety, the most prized mango locally is the Mankurad.



What's So Resilient About Islamic Finance?



Written by
TREVOR WILLIAMS

Illustrated by
RYAN HUDDLE

Naoman Malik recalls that when he began looking to finance an Atlanta home 14 years ago, it was his fiancée, Reem Faruqi, who steered him away from the banks and credit unions that were then in the throes of the global financial crisis. As Muslims, Faruqi wanted her future husband and home to stand by the Qur'an's prohibition of *riba*, the term often translated from Arabic as “usury” but interpreted generally as interest.

This is one of the core tenets of Islamic finance, a framework rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, that over the past four decades has been mapped onto the global financial system. Its growth has been tenfold since the early 2000s, and although it is projected to reach \$3.5 trillion in assets by 2024, that constitutes a bit less than 2 percent of the total volume of global financial markets. The first commercial Islamic banks launched in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia in the mid-1970s, and today nearly 300 Islamic banks do business in more than 80 countries. In places like Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey and Pakistan, governments have laid proactive ground rules to serve not only Muslim-majority populations, but also to attract outside investment.

Even though Malik, now a professional financial consultant, grew up in a family that had avoided debt and interest

everywhere they could, he says that at first, he didn't see much difference in the contract terms offered by Guidance Residential, an early provider of Islamic mortgages, and those offered by conventional banks. Some of his Muslim friends were skeptical, too, he says.

“A lot of people said ‘you're crazy,’ and ‘you're going to pay more,’ that it's just a traditional, Western-financed mortgage in sheep's clothing,” Malik says.

Today, looking back from the couple's same home, which they have refinanced twice with the lender they ended up signing with, LARIBA American Finance House, Malik says he feels a sense of peace in staying as far away as possible from the red lines drawn out in the Qur'an.

And even at the time, it was clear to Malik that Islamic principles—eschewing interest, investing in tangible or productive assets, sharing both risk and upside through partnership and

showing concern for one's community—could have averted the financial contagion that infected US subprime mortgage market and mutated around the world. There would have been no derivatives based on paper alone, and there certainly would have been no subprime mortgages.

“Every time either there is a recession or the signs of a recession, I default back to the arguments I was forming in my head back then,” Malik says of how insidious the system had become. “There was a smoking gun. You knew exactly what the causes were. You could see the domino effect.”

Fifteen years later, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that is inflicting another generational shock to the world economy, more turbulence seems to be on the horizon. In the US and elsewhere, housing costs are soaring, inflation is breaching 9 percent, and rising interest rates are forcing a reckoning for the valuations of high-flying stocks. A correction, if not a recession, looms.

Industry experts say that these storm clouds could once again showcase the structural resilience of Islamic finance, which they argue is built to combat exploitation and limit speculation, to the long-term benefit of the consumer, the financial institution and the community.

“In Islamic finance, the party that has the ability to assume the higher risk should do that,” says Ghiyath Nakshbendi, who spent 30 years in business before becoming a professor of finance at American University’s Kogod School of Business, Washington, DC. “For example, you and me, as the poor borrowers, in conventional finance, we assume the higher risks of our loans than the bank. In Islamic finance, we say this is the opposite, because the bank can bear it. You and I cannot.”

A MUSLIM MORTGAGE

At the time Malik and Faruqi assumed their mortgage with LARIBA—the name is a compound of *la*, Arabic for “no,” and *riba*—the Islamic mortgage model was only a few years old, in contrast to broader investment frameworks that had been evolving for decades.

In the early 2000s, representatives of the greater Detroit area’s growing Muslim community approached University Bank, which



“People said ‘You’re crazy,’ and ‘You’re going to pay more’ ... [but] every time either there is a recession or the signs of a recession, I default back to the arguments I was forming in my head back then.”

—NAOMAN MALIK, FINANCIAL CONSULTANT

for more than a century has served customers from its base in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and has recently received federal recognition for service to its community. Could the bank, community members asked, offer options that aligned with Islamic faith? University Bank CEO Stephen Lange Ranzini felt compelled to respond. “It was a true unmet need of the community,” he says.

In 2002, University Bank opened a window focused on Islamic finance in one of its branches. Three years later, to meet rising demand, it stood up University Islamic Finance Corporation (UIF).

While Ranzini believed in the product, the business model was still largely unproven, says Aijaz Hussain, who worked for Guidance Residential before

joining UIF in 2011. The move touched off political backlash at a time when negative associations with practices based on Shar’ia, or Islamic guidance, were widespread in the US public, and skeptics abounded even inside the Muslim community, he says.

“It was very challenging at the beginning because Islamic finance was just



Teaching about Islamic finance helps students “imagine a world in which things could be different.”

—LEE ANN BAMBACH, EMORY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW



“We have seen lower loss rates and lower default rates ... like an order of magnitude lower.”

—STEPHEN LANGE RANZINI,
CEO, UNIVERSITY BANK

starting off in the US, and every place you went, there was a lot of pushback: ‘Isn’t it the same thing? Aren’t you guys just changing names, just calling interest profit?’” says Hussain, now an executive vice president for UIF in Chicago.

UIF stayed patient, and again later through the 2008 crisis, reinvesting income generated by residential loans into the business. It eventually began turning a profit on its Islamic portfolio, which proved resilient in the natural experiment offered by the mortgage meltdown. At a time of record foreclosures in the broader US, UIF saw very few defaults. Over time that trend has stayed true.

“We have seen lower loss rates and lower default rates on our Shari’a-compliant, faith-based portfolio than on our conventional portfolio, and it’s materially lower, like an order of magnitude lower,” Ranzini says. “If the world were run under the principles that we’re discussing here, there would not be as many or as severe financial crises. Period.”

“It became a matter of coming up with thresholds that will allow you to still invest and have a diversified portfolio.”

—MONEM SALAM,
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, SATURNA CAPITAL

GOING RIBA-FREE

That same idea has proven true at LARIBA, which had already been two decades into providing what it calls “riba-free” or “RF” loans when the 2008 crisis rolled around. The group had been founded in the 1980s by Muslims in Dallas who pooled money to build the city’s first Islamic center without the use of interest-based loans. Though new at the time in practice, LARIBA Chairman and CEO Yahia Abdul Rahman says its model could be seen as having a popular American cultural precedent.

“I consider the first riba-free banker in the US to be George Bailey, the character played by Jimmy Stewart in *It’s a Wonderful Life*,” says Abdul Rahman. (In the classic holiday movie, Bailey runs a local bank that, through community goodwill, staves off default and takeover by Mr. Potter, an exploitative lender and homebuilder.)

Abdul Rahman arrived in the US as a young chemical engineer from Egypt in the 1960s. He says he backed into the financial world through community activism, having helped start the Industrial Bank of Kuwait and then managing one of the first Islamic stock portfolios in the US for Citibank.

As he worked and learned, he came to believe that riba-free banking could do two important things: help families build wealth while hedging against risk and empower the broader Muslim community to achieve greater self-sufficiency as a minority.

However, until the early 2000s, riba-free mortgages were offered only infrequently, and they carried hefty down-payment requirements. That eased when LARIBA received approval for its mortgage-backed securities from Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, the US government institutions that buy loans from banks to provide liquidity and stability in the mortgage market. In 1998 LARIBA had bought Bank of Whittier (California) to be able to take deposits, restructuring the institution around Islamic principles, and Bank of Whittier now manages assets of about \$180 million with customers of diverse backgrounds and faiths.

“I don’t hold the keys to paradise,” Abdul Rahman says he



“It was very challenging at the beginning because Islamic finance was just starting off in the US, and every place you went, there was a lot of pushback: ‘Isn’t it the same thing? Aren’t you guys just changing names, just calling interest profit?’”

—AIJAZ HUSSAIN,
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT,
UNIVERSITY ISLAMIC FINANCE CORPORATION



tells his customers. He is careful to point out how Islam’s prohibition on usury overlaps with principles in both Judaism and Christianity as well.

LARIBA’s proprietary underwriting model, he explains, uses *istithna*, a contract type in which the customer immediately gets the property’s title but gradually buys out LARIBA’s right to the home’s rental income, known as usufruct.

To ensure LARIBA’s investment (“loan” in conventional terms) is funding an income-generating asset, LARIBA’s algorithm calculates the home’s potential per-square-foot rental rate against comparables in the neighborhood, basing its own rate of return off the result. It then determines a monthly payment schedule based on the borrower’s share in the property and the

agreed-upon term. LARIBA may lower its own payment requirement to compete with conventional banks, and it guards against bubbles by aligning its prices to those of commodities like gold and agricultural staples.

These equations have served to keep LARIBA—and other riba-free banks, as well as their customers—out of risky deals, Abdul Rahman says.

“During the peak of national delinquencies of 2008 to 2010, our delinquency rates were less than 1 percent, which was

Maneuvering Toward Resilience?

Even among experts, Islamic finance can be fraught with controversy. Do the mortgage contracts truly share risk and reward as required in *musharakah*, or partnership? Which *musharakah* terms promote this best? Does *tawaruq*, the practice in which metals and other commodities can back a loan, value form over substance? What guidelines are needed?

Proponents contend that the results are proving worth the efforts.

Reports have shown that at least by some measures, Islamic banks best their conventional counterparts in resiliency during times of volatility. One 2010 survey by the International Monetary Fund looked at the performance of 120 Islamic banks across jurisdictions like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait. The agency concluded that by minimizing leverage, the banks’ profits were insulated from the worst of the 2007-’09 crisis. But not all was rosy: Over the longer term, their

real estate holdings dragged on earnings as property values fell, and without the benefit of interest-bearing deposits, many struggled to meet obligations and grow loan portfolios.

But Islamic finance proponents look beyond this: While no system will prove infallible, a focus on tangible investments grounded in real assets, along with a resistance to speculation, sets up a system that self-selects for healthier financial practices.

“If the financing that exists in the world went to productive things only—buildings, equipment, plants, machinery, infrastructure, whatever—and you eliminate all the financial engineering, there would be less demand for capital, the cost of capital would be lower to true entrepreneurs and people building companies, and you would actually accelerate the growth rate of the global economy,” says Stephen Lange Ranzini, CEO of University Bank.

approximately one-tenth of the national average. This triggered the attention of Fannie Mae management and private mortgage insurance companies to visit us and ask: ‘How did you do it?’” Abdul Rahman says, adding that some customers called in amid the crisis to thank the bank for turning down their loans.

INVESTING WITH ISLAMIC FINANCE

Compared with consumer lending, in equities and securities, it is easier to see how Islamic finance shares risks and rewards, and how it more sharply defines its boundaries. Investment managers even have their own Islamic contract type: *mudarabah*, wherein one party contributes capital, the other labor.

Islamic investing has a long historical precedent, points out Monem Salam, an executive vice president for Saturna Capital Amana Mutual Funds Trust, the largest set of shari’a-compliant mutual funds in the US. Historians acknowledge that the principles of *musharakah*, or cost- and profit-sharing partnership, likely influenced the contract Christopher Columbus signed with Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella before he set sail west across the Atlantic in 1492. According to a 2007 article by Drake Bennett in the *Boston Globe*, the contract was drawn up by Islamic legal scholars whose traditions had structured the economy and administration of much of the Iberian Peninsula over its seven centuries of Islamic rule.

It would have been like funding a startup, Salam points out, noting that partnerships make sense for ventures in which the risk for both sides is high and the reward unknown.

Equity investing in stocks and mutual funds also fits naturally into the Islamic ethos of partnership, but it has taken a few decades for Islamic scholarship on the topic to catch up with modern markets, says Salam, who spent the seven years leading up to 2018 working as president for Saturna Capital’s operations in Malaysia, a country which is seen as a model for parallel regulation of Islamic and conventional finance.

There is not only the sharing of risk but also the matter of

what one invests in. The Qur’an and Hadith state clear prohibitions against investments in pork, alcohol, gambling or any other activity that is expressly forbidden, along with investments in companies that generate interest from their savings.

But at the same time, under Shari’a, what is not specifically prohibited is permitted. Thus gray areas abound. Islamic scholars have issued decades of interpretations that have, for the most part, widened the pool of available investments.

“It became a matter of coming up with thresholds that will allow you to still invest and have a diversified portfolio,” Salam says.

For instance, companies whose main business activity is not forbidden (like an airline) can generate up to 5 percent of their revenues from forbidden activities (such as serving alcohol on flights) and still can be seen as “investable” by Islamic standards. Amana allows companies it invests in to carry debt of up to 33 percent of their market capitalization.

Finding investment targets has grown easier with enhanced reporting requirements and online search capabilities, Salam says. This is partially responsible for the relatively rapid growth of Islamic investing as a sector since the 1980s, when Amana was helping to pioneer the space. A seminal moment arrived with what Salam and others call the “Dow Jones fatwa” of 1998, when Islamic scholars from around the world hammered out the foundational guidelines for shari’a-compliant investing in public equities to create the Dow Jones Islamic Index.

Amana’s measured approach, emboldened further by clearer Islamic scholarship, saw many investors—including more than a few non-Muslims—flock to Amana as a safe haven during the 2008 crisis, as its assets under management across its first three funds more than doubled during the period from \$1 billion to about \$2.6 billion. The Amana Participation Fund was launched in 2015, and now the trust has \$3.5 billion under management across four funds.

It’s hard to generalize that in times of crisis, Islamic funds do better than the overall market, but there is evidence, says one economist at a Jiddah-based bank in Saudi Arabia who for privacy asked not to be named.

“‘Outperformance’ is a relative term,” he says, but “any stock



“During the peak of national delinquencies of 2008 to 2010, our delinquency rates were less than 1 percent, which was approximately one-tenth of the national average. This triggered the attention of Fannie Mae management and private mortgage insurance companies to visit us and ask: ‘How did you do it?’”

—YAHIA ABDUL RAHMAN,
CHAIRMAN AND CEO, LARIBA

in a shari'a-compliant fund has to be from a morally upright, ethical industry and financially disciplined. This helps Islamic equity investments perform better during the economy's downturn," he explains. "Similarly, for lending institutions, financing to the real economy helps them stay away from exotic derivatives like instruments for hedging or trading. Therefore, these are more conservative."

Amana's funds have borne this out during recent periods of volatility, but it's only clear in hindsight, Salam says. "For a long time you can be wrong," he adds, noting that in the low interest rate environment of the 2010s Amana's Income Fund looked like it was leaving money on the table by not funding riskier firms. But during the crisis of 2007-'09, Amana's Growth Fund and Income Fund dropped just 6.9 percent and 5.4 percent, respectively, while the S&P 500 fell 20.32 percent.

Performance since COVID-19 began has been more mixed. The Amana Growth Fund jumped 74.7 percentage points in the two years ending in December 2021, outpacing the S&P 500's 52.4-percent increase. The Amana Income Fund grew more slowly at 39.4 percentage points. All have fallen since that peak at various rates, but Salam believes Amana's funds are positioned well as more uncertainty gathers on the horizon.

GLOBAL APPEAL

Overall, Islamic finance has become a model for what a more inclusive, responsible global financial system could look like, says American University professor Nakshbendi.

"Simply put, Islamic finance is for humanity," he says, noting that what he refers to outside Muslim circles as "alternative finance" could show considerable mass appeal, especially if Islamic banks from outside the US would become bolder in showcasing their practices using pilot projects in places like New York or Washington, DC.

Students in the Kogod School of Business, where Nakshbendi introduced the first graduate certificate in Islamic finance in the US, admire the way the practice overlaps with their "adopted mantras" of corporate social responsibility and compassionate capitalism, and the rising resonance of environmental, social and governance (ESG) concerns, as well as firmer stances on social issues like race relations and climate change. He also points out that



"Islamic finance has become a model for what a more inclusive, responsible global financial system could look like."

—GHIYATH NAKSHBENDI,
PROFESSOR OF FINANCE, KOGOD SCHOOL
OF BUSINESS, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Islam's prohibition against usury resonates particularly strongly with students in the US facing daunting debt burdens that cumulatively total about \$1.7 trillion, a figure that exceeds the nation's outstanding credit card debt.

Lee Ann Bambach, an adjunct professor teaching Islamic finance and researching religious dispute resolution at the Emory University School of Law in Malik and Faruqi's home city of Atlanta, has similarly seen how teaching Islamic finance helps her students "imagine a world where things could be different."

She believes Islamic finance will see more uptake when its principles are evaluated more frequently outside of their original religious context. With her students, she illustrates her point by drawing an analogy with Jewish food requirements: Oreo cookies, she says, are labeled kosher, but that's not why most consumers buy them. "I think

that's the future of Islamic finance, at least in the United States," Bambach says.

Ranzini of University Bank makes a similar point, but with a chicken shawarma. The halal, or Islamic-compliant, and conventional versions may look and taste the same, but how the meat was slaughtered is of vital importance to the devout diner. The same concerns and conclusions are increasingly applied in other sectors, from organic foods to clothing, packaging, energy and more.

"How you manufacture your product actually matters. You wouldn't want to incorporate unethical features into a product, so once people start to understand that, then it becomes more clear," says Ranzini. 🌐



J. Trevor Williams is a global business journalist based in Atlanta where he serves as publisher of the online international news site, *Global Atlanta* (globalatlanta.com). Follow him on Twitter @jtrevorwilliams.



Ryan Huddle is a Boston-based graphic designer and artist whose work appears regularly in the *Boston Globe* and other leading publications.



Related articles at aramcoworld.com

Microlending finance: May/June 1999

Cairo stock exchange: Jan/Feb 1996

Islamic banking: May/June 1987



A MOORISH STAR

5

WRITTEN BY
RICHARD HENRY

ART COURTESY OF
ART OF ISLAMIC PATTERN

For our next journey into the art of Islamic patterns, we visit Marrakesh, Morocco, where we find a stunning carved stucco design on a wall in the Qasr al-Bahiyah. The design is framed within a niche topped by muqarnas, the characteristic stalactite-like forms that often articulate the transition from a wall to a dome, a vault or, as in this beautiful example, the upper span of an interior niche. Although woven strapwork and vegetal motifs embellish the star pattern, in this installment in this series we focus only on the underlying geometric scheme: a classic arrangement of 12-pointed stars with equilateral triangles between them.

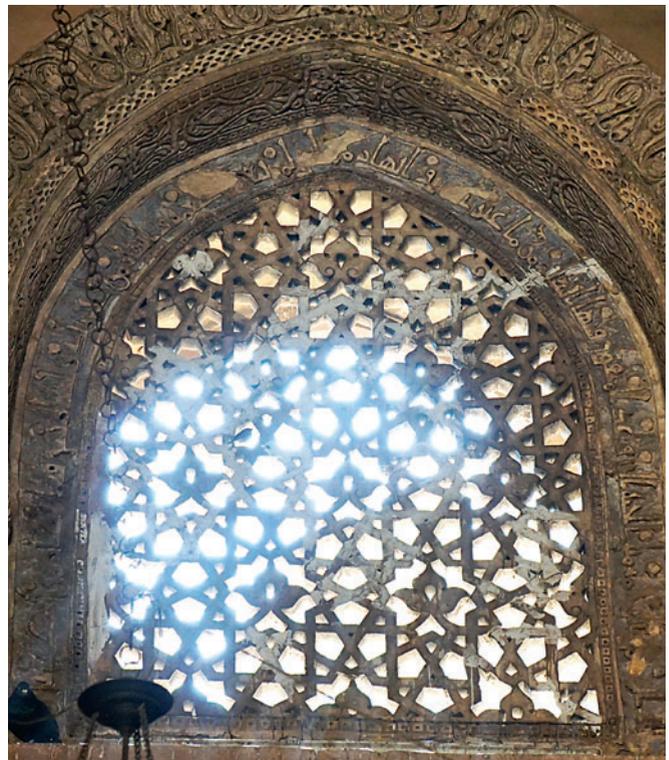
The design overlooks one of the famous *riyad* gardens, which form their own interconnected, labyrinthine plan together with the rooms and courtyards. The palace was commissioned in 1859 by Si Musa, grand vizier to Sultan Muhammad IV of the 'Alawi

dynasty, from which today's King Mohammed IV of Morocco descends. The palace is famous for its many decorations, which feature not only carved stucco, but also painted cedar ceilings, *zillij* tile mosaics and marble floors. Completed in 1900, its construction involved materials and artisans from throughout Morocco over four decades, and it is now one of the most well-known architectural attractions in Marrakesh.

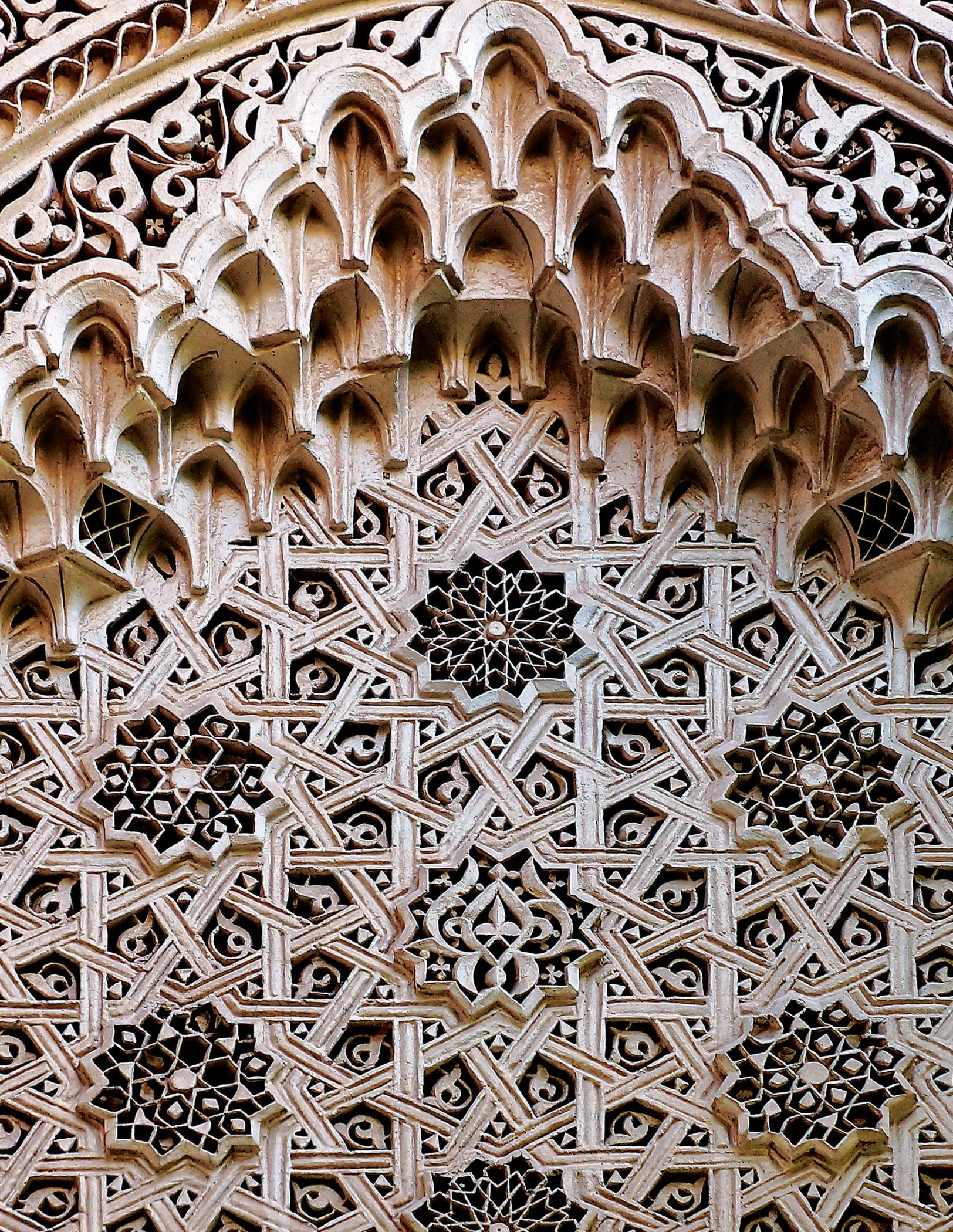
The star pattern employs the same harmonic ratio and repeating module using a ratio of 1 to the square root of 3 ($1:\sqrt{3}$) that was used to produce the pattern in the third installment of this series. This time, however, the 12-fold radial design is of a different character, one for which variations can be found throughout the Islamic world: There are multiple examples in Morocco and southern Spain, where it appears in ceramic, plaster, and even embossed leather. In Anatolia it can be found as a cut-tile mosaic from the Seljuk period, in the 13th century. In Egypt it features in a range of media, most notably in the pierced stone screens produced in the ninth century for one of the world's oldest surviving mosques, that of Ibn Tulun in Cairo.

Our approach to recreating the design is simpler. Rather than constructing the whole design, here we work with a rectangular module that comprises only one-eighth of the design. Then, by using tracing paper seven times, we flip and invert the design, burnishing and retracing as we go. This completes the full, 12-pointed star tessellation. Modular pattern repetition is indeed a common traditional approach, as shown by evidence in patterns from Iraq and Persia west to North Africa. It has the virtue of great accuracy, as we focus on modular details that we can then repeat to create an expanded design sized to fit our own desired space, whether it is on paper or on a wall overlooking a garden.

BELOW This pierced stone screen at the mosque of Ibn Tulun, Cairo, produced in the ninth century CE, sets a biomorphic, leaf design at the center of each 12-pointed star.



RICHARD HENRY (2)



WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Compass: Choose one of high quality that will precisely hold a radius and for which you can keep a sharp point on the pencil lead.

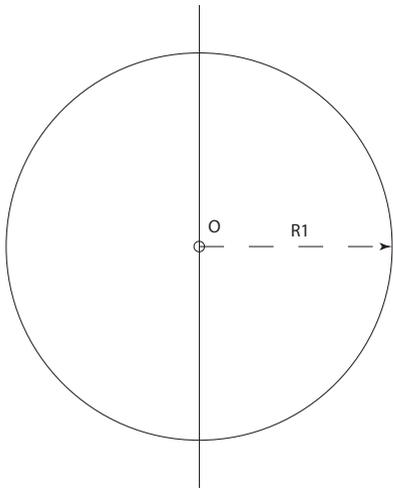
Straightedge: A metal one works best, 30 to 50 centimeters in length.

Paper: Use smoothly finished drawing paper, at least A3 or 11 by 14 inches. For this pattern, you may wish to cut it into a square.

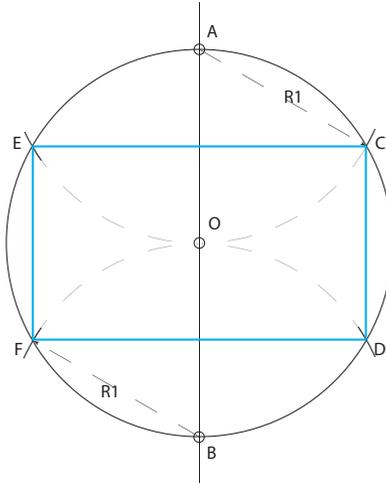
Eraser: A professional drafting eraser works best. Mistakes are part of learning to make patterns.

Pencils: Use a hard lead, such as 2H, for lighter guidelines and a soft lead, such as 2B and 3B, for heavier finishing lines. Add colors to fill as desired.

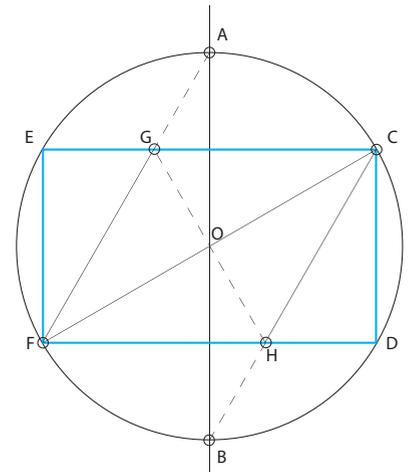
Tracing paper: A4 or 8½ by 11 inches works well.



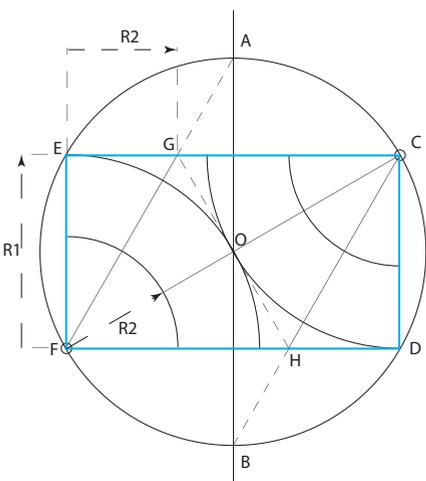
- 1 Starting from a vertical line, extend radius R1 to draw a circle to fill the page.



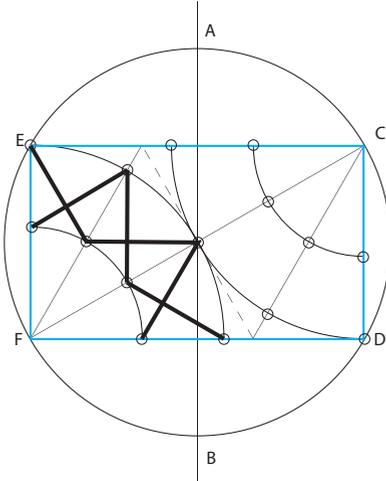
- 2 From points A and B, use R1 to mark arcs to establish points E, C, D, F. Then highlight the harmonic rectangle ECDF in a different color. This is the frame of our fundamental $1:\sqrt{3}$ repeating module.



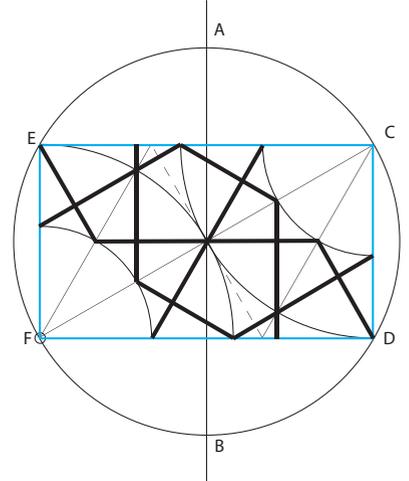
- 3 With a light solid line, indicate the three diagonal segments FG, FC and HC. With a broken line, indicate segment GH.



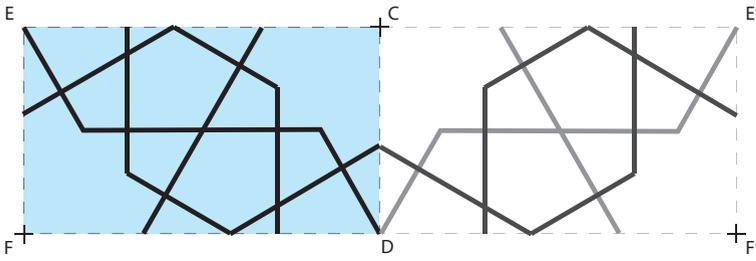
- 4 Anchored first at F and then at C, create from each a quarter arc (90 degrees) with radius R1 (EF). Then again from F and then C, create a second, smaller quarter arc with radius R2 (EG).



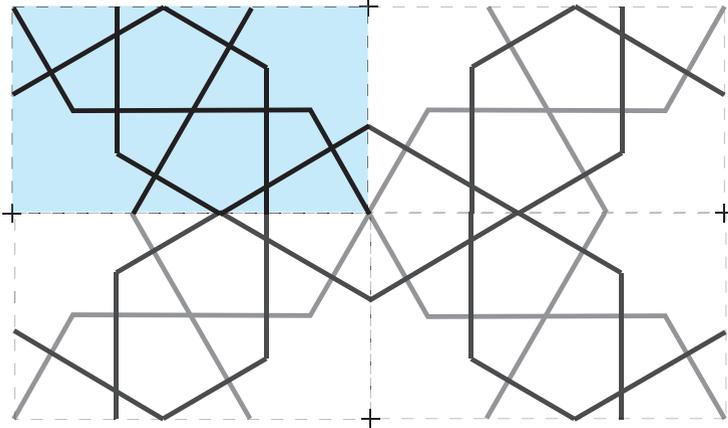
- 5 With a softer pencil, the final motif can now be marked in bold. Highlight the points where the radial lines from drawing 3 intersect with arcs from drawing 4. Connect these in a zig-zag manner, and the design starts to emerge: one quarter of the central 12-pointed star.



- 6 Continue the same process, and extend the bold lines to the frame of the rectangle to complete the fundamental repeating module.



- 7 Place tracing paper on top of final drawing from 6. Lightly mark the quadrilateral frame ECDF. In addition, lightly mark corners C and F with small crosses: These will serve as registration marks that will help you align the design for expansion and tessellation. Use a straightedge to trace the design with a soft pencil. Then on a fresh sheet of paper, flip the tracing paper over across the vertical chord CD. Now retrace the design, also with a soft pencil: This will create, on the paper, an adjacent reflection of the original design. You will now have the design in soft pencil on both sides of the paper, left-handed and right-handed versions.



- 8 Repeat the process through the horizontal axis. You now have the four repeated units including the original module. Notice how these alternating reflections can be repeated indefinitely to extend the design over an infinite space: This is tessellation.



- 9 Repeat the process to create a reflection of the four-piece drawing in the previous step. Your final drawing will show the expanded design built up now out of eight of the basic modules. (Note that the original module is highlighted at top left). The pattern starts to become clearly recognizable as our historical design from Marrakesh. Add color, tone and further embellishments to bring out the beauty of the design.



Richard Henry is an artist and teacher who focuses on the contemplative aspects of pattern. He has a background in philosophy and cognitive psychology.



Watch our video tutorial on this pattern at aramcworld.com

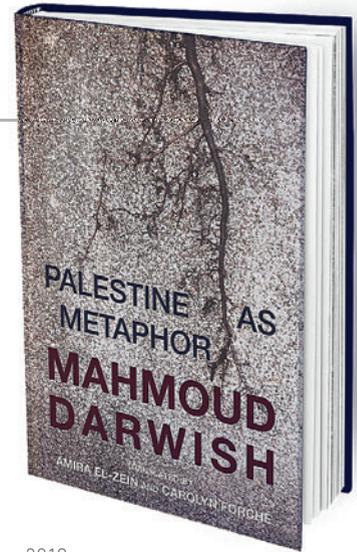


REVIEWS

Without endorsing the views of authors, the editors encourage reading as a path to greater understanding.

"I am convinced that exile is profoundly anchored in me, to the point that I cannot write without it. And I will carry it wherever I go, and I will bring it back to my first home."

—from *Palestine as Metaphor*

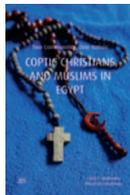


Palestine as Metaphor

Mahmoud Darwish. Amira El-Zein and Carolyn Forché, trs. Olive Branch Press, 2019.

This collection of five interviews with the late Mahmood Darwish (1941–2008) opens a door into the heart and soul of Palestine’s most beloved poet. Translated for the first time into English, the interviews date to 1993–1996 and reveal how intimately Darwish’s life is intertwined with that of Palestine. “When he tells his own story,” explains Forché, the compilation’s translator and a poet herself, “he inescapably tells the story of Palestine; destiny has ordained that his personal history would be read as collective, and his people recognize themselves in his voice.” Exile emerges as a dominant theme for Darwish, who explains how it is anchored deeply within him and indispensable to his writing. “I have constructed my own homeland,” notes Darwish. “I have even established my state in my language.” The heart of the book rests in the conceptualization of Palestine as a metaphor—recreated, revived and immortalized through poetry as a declaration of identity.

—PINEY KESTING

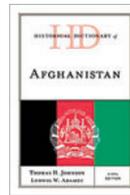


Coptic Christians and Muslims in Egypt: Two Communities, One Nation

Fikry F. Andrawes and Alison Orr-Andrawes. AUC Press, 2019.

This book examines Egypt’s cultural landscape from when its people became Coptic speaking and Christian, in the first century CE, through their subjugation by external powers beginning in the seventh century CE, when they became predominantly Arabic speaking and Muslim. The shifting balance between the two groups, with periods of persecution, alternating with relative tolerance, is described, through the time of European colonization in 1798 and up to the present. The authors, one Egyptian and the other having extensive experience in the country, originally published this work in Arabic. This English version reflects upon the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 and after. A clear and very readable account, it includes translations of several Coptic and Arabic sources, otherwise not easily available.

—CAROLINE STONE



Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan

Thomas H. Johnson & Ludwig W. Adamec. Rowman and Littlefield, 2021.

In this latest edition, Johnson, a professor of Afghanistan and Central Asian studies, and the late Ludwig Adamec, a scholar of Middle East and North African studies, chronicle the religious, military, political, judicial, historical, economic and cultural highlights of the book’s namesake country. Historical dictionaries, like this one, relay encyclopedia-level information with the ease of browsing a dictionary. The most-interesting section is within the appendix, which includes numerous lists, like one on Pashtun tribes and their clans. While the book has no photos or illustrations, the charts and information tables are clear and easy to reference. For any student or researcher, this makes for a solid reference source for anything Afghanistan related.

—MARINA ALI



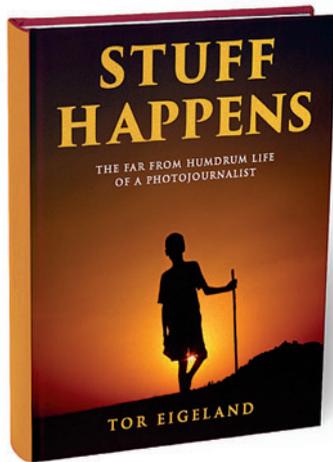
I Was Born There, I Was Born Here

Mourid Barghouti. Bloomsbury, 2011

In the summer of 1998, renowned Palestinian poet and author Mourid Barghouti (1944–2021) traveled to Ramallah with his son, Tamim, to obtain the 21-year-old’s Palestinian identity card. As he watched his son discover Palestine for the first time, Barghouti lamented no longer knowing the physical and emotional geography of his own homeland after being exiled for three decades, since the Occupation started in the 1960s: “I am now walking in Jerusalem as a father. Now my son walks beside me. I come burdened with my past. He starts from the white page of the future.” Barghouti’s journey traveling that summer in a shared cab from Ramallah to Jericho and avoiding Israeli checkpoints and blocked roads exposed the arduous daily life of Palestinians who confront life under Occupation with courage and dignity. Translated into English in 2011, this compelling, intimate story sadly rings as true today as it did nearly 25 years ago.

—PINEY KESTING

AUTHOR'S CORNER



A Life Full of Good Stuff: A Conversation With Photojournalist Tor Eigeland

by ALIA YUNIS

Photojournalist Tor Eigeland set sail from his hometown of Oslo in 1947 at age 16, and he never looked back until he had completed his last photography assignment, in Tangier for *AramcoWorld* in 2016. Transitioning from sailor to photographer in his early 20s, during those travels, he learned one truth: Stuff happens. This is also the title of his book, in which each of the 51 chapters follows one of his hundreds of adventures and assignments—capturing people at the height of their power or fame, including Fidel Castro and King Hussein of Jordan, to those dying of AIDS in Africa. Some were moments that changed the course of history, like when the USSR's Nikita Khrushchev and Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser inaugurated the building of the Nile's Aswan Dam in 1970. But this is in not a reprint, retrospective or rehash of his work. Rather it is an introspection of what it meant to be there, to be a journalist and a human being in these places. Eigeland's compassion for those he met as well as the humor with which he looks back at his days on the road are what make the book so special. Well, and that it presents an incredible archive of photos. Eigeland also delights in sharing random encounters with the likes of Olympic gold medalist Johnny Weissmuller and novelist Norman Mailer while doing his work, adding a quirky twist to this compelling memoir.



Tor Eigeland

If you could revisit any of the subjects or locations from your book, which would you choose?

I knew I could only write about the highlights, the ones of now historical interest, ones which others have enjoyed hearing when I get to storytelling. I wrote the first pages about 10 years ago—the background of how I got bitten by the travel bug. It was COVID that rocketed me into fast-forward. Lockdown wasn't pleasant, but it gave me time to concentrate on finishing my book. It definitely doesn't include everything I've done—what was fascinating to me might not be to a reader.

If you could revisit any of the subjects or locations from your book, which would you choose?

Without a doubt I would return to the Marshes of Iraq, where I went for a story for a Time Life book in 1967 and observed the lives of the Marsh Arab and their 5,000-year-old civilization. Their ancient world still remains brilliantly alive in my memory and, fortunately, through my photos. From the moment my little boat floated into the tranquil marshes, there was water everywhere, small lakes and canals with reed dwellings on little reed

islands, thousands of birds and water buffalo. The outside world ceased to exist. It was magical. I also really liked the people, many of whom had never had any contact with outsiders. That was all prior to their sad destruction and the draining of the marshes in the 1990s. Revisiting would obviously be tinged with much sadness, as so much has changed. Nonetheless, I would like to see with my own eyes whether the current efforts at restoration are making any real progress.

Of the more than 50 stories you've covered for *AramcoWorld*, what stands out most?

My favorite assignment was titled "Scenic Arabia: A Personal View" and was published in 1975. I wrote and photographed every single article in that issue, so it became quite a personal achievement. This "special edition" included organizing planes, cars and people, and I had a lot of ground to cover in a short time.

If you were to make a bigger book, what other stories from your career would you include?

Before handing over my manuscript to the publisher, there comes a difficult

moment when you think, "What else?" I actually spent about six months in Indonesia and about the same amount of time in South Africa and Australia. Apart from a small mention of South Africa, none of that is included. The truth is that these trips, and many others, have faded in my memory. I'm short of photos for these locations, and I wanted to limit the size of the book.

You have a love of languages and speak four fluently. Is there an expression you learned along the way in any language that sticks with you?

Inevitably, the expression or word that instantly springs to mind is *inshallah*, used as an expression of hope, as in, "We will meet again tomorrow, inshallah." I think the word is also vaguely related to the title of my book, *Stuff Happens*. There is an element of fate, a shrug, an acceptance of whatever will be, the *c'est la vie* in French.

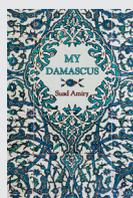
Keep reading more of this article online at aramcoworld.com.

Stuff Happens: The Far From Humdrum Life of a Photojournalist

Tor Eigeland.
Brown Dog Books, 2022.

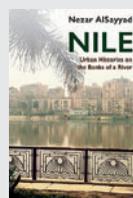


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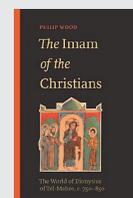
My Damascus

Suad Amiry.
Olive Branch Press, 2021.



Nile: Urban Histories on the Banks of a River

Nezar AlSayyad.
Edinburgh UP, 2019.



The Imam of the Christians: The World of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, c. 750-850

Philip Wood.
Princeton University Press, 2021.



EVENTS

Highlights from
aramcoworld.com

Please verify a venue's
schedule before visiting.

CURRENT / OCTOBER

Ujal Hagverdiyev: Conversation in Presence features 250 works of art and graphics that transmute the late Azerbaijani artist's idea of "presence in space," illustrating all aspects of his oeuvre and enabling visitors to engage in a silent dialog with the painter, who died in 2004. The exhibition touches on his inner domain while reflecting his personality and work. Yarat Contemporary Art Space, **Baku**, through October 16.

Think Big! Gail Rothschild Paints Portraits of Late Antique Egyptian Textiles features Egyptian tapestries from the museum's collection that become the source of inspiration for New York artist Gail Rothschild's new series. By juxtaposing her work with original textiles from the fourth century CE to ninth century CE, a fascinating dynamic emerges between artifacts of a past culture and contemporary artistic production. Bode-Museum, **Berlin**, through October 31.

fictive landscape of *The Little Prince* (1943). Watercolors, drawings and manuscript drafts by Saint-Exupéry explore the visionary artistry and timeless wisdom of this classic tale, a story that inspires its readers to encounter new realms of experience with a leap of the imagination. The Morgan Library & Museum, **New York**, October 14 through January 15.

ONGOING

Ancient Egypt: From Discovery to Display provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to walk in the shoes of an archeologist. Peel back the curtain and get a behind-the-scenes view of the journey artifacts take on their way to museum display, from excavation to conservation, to storage and research, through more than 200 fascinating objects that become a part of the reenvisioned Ancient Egypt and Nubia Galleries. Penn Museum, **Philadelphia**.

The Ancient Mediterranean presents a cultural-historical narrative of the cultures of the Mediterranean told through the more than 1,000 archeological objects from Glyptoteket's collection, throwing light on the exchange of goods and knowledge, religious beliefs and ideologies that took place with the Mediterranean as a set of highways for more than 6,000 years. Glyptoteket, **Copenhagen**.

Readers are welcome to submit event information for possible inclusion to proposals@aramcoamericas.com, subject line "Events."

CURRENT / APRIL

ThisPlay revolves around the concepts of childhood and play, exploring the liberating aspect of play, its defiant capacity to suspend and reconstruct reality, and the way it transcends the humdrum of daily life to create unique systems and structures of meaning. This exhibition approaches art both as a marker and breaker of play, oscillating between reality and fantasy. Pi Artworks, **Istanbul**, through April 9.

COMING / OCTOBER

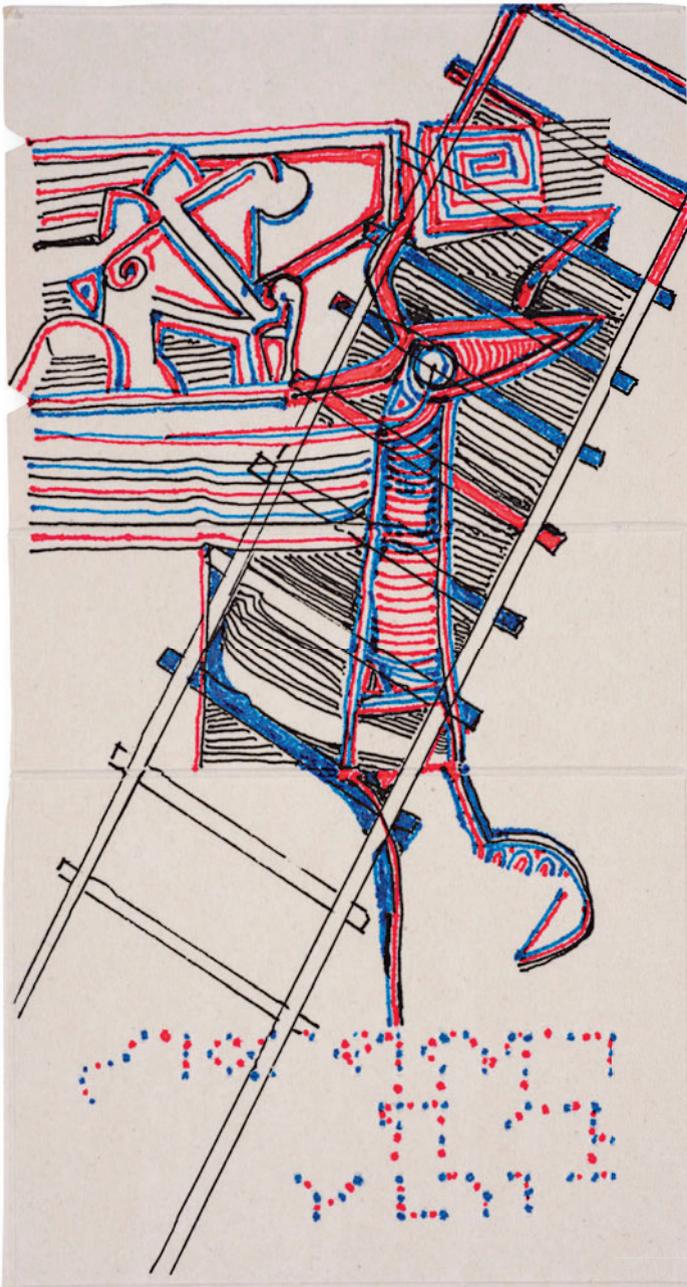
Hieroglyphs: Unlocking Ancient Egypt charts the race to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs. From initial efforts by medieval Arab travelers and Renaissance scholars to more focused progress by French and English scholars, and the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799 and its eventual decoding in 1822, this immersive exhibition unlocks one of the world's oldest civilizations. The British Museum, **London**, October 13 through February 19.

The Little Prince: Taking Flight shows the beloved story of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's unforgettable

Ibrahim El-Salahi: Pain Relief Drawings

presents nearly 300 drawings from one of the most-significant artists in African and Arab modernism. A hundred of those works drafted on the back of medicine packets, pill bottle labels, envelopes and scraps of paper over the last two years reflect El-Salahi's intricate pen-and-ink artistry and serve as a form of respite for the UK-based artist born in Sudan, who, at 91 years old, finds diversion from his chronic pain through his daily drawing practice. Drawing Center, **New York**, October 7 through January 15.

Ibrahim El-Salahi, 2016–2018. Pen and ink on medicine packets and envelope (18.1 x 9.8 centimeters).



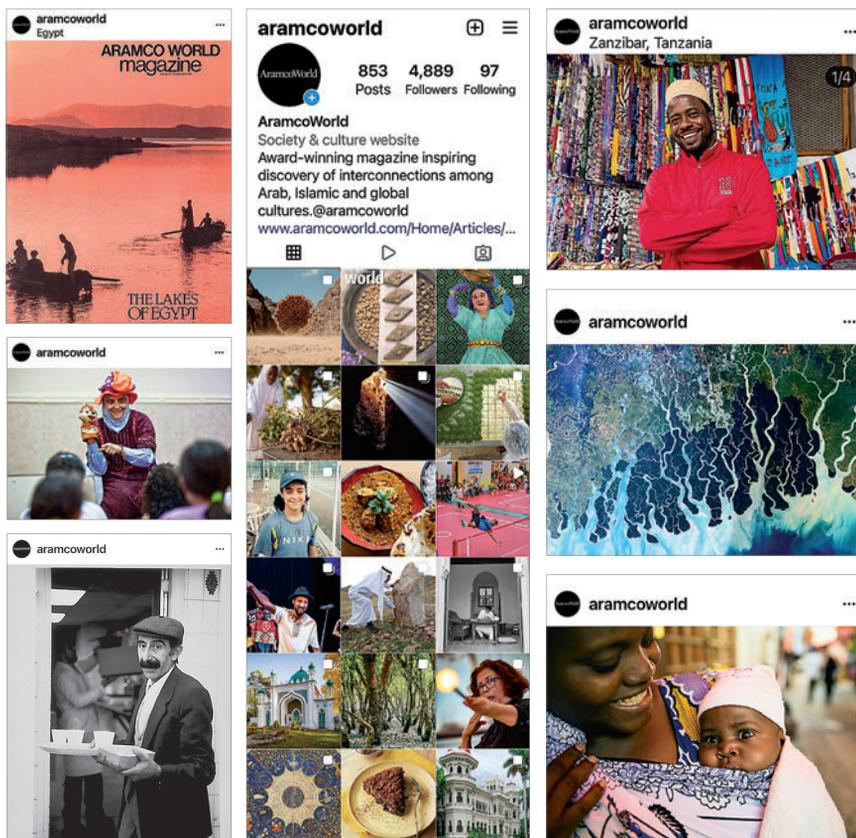
IBRAHIM EL-SALAH AND VIGO GALLERY, LONDON



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