MARCH APRIL 2022

AramcoWorld

6 **Ons Jabeur's Court of No Fear**

Written by **Brian E. Clark**

Her hands have known tennis rackets since age 3, and now, 24 years later, Ons Jabeur of Tunisia is the first Arab ranked in the world's top 10. Each new title is also a break point in her longer game to inspire a new generation of young women.

10 **Was Enheduanna the World's First Author?**

Written by **Lee Lawrence**

Four thousand years ago she was a princess and high priestess in the Sumerian city of Ur in modern-day Iraq. She was also a poet, and when scribes wrote her verses in cuneiform on clay tablets, they also did something unusual: They named her as author. Now Enheduanna is more famous than ever.

16 **The Marsh Guide and the English Explorer**

Written by **Leon McCarron** *and* **Mohammed Shiaa**
Photographed by **Emily Garthwaite**

Amara bin Thuqub was a teenager in 1952 when he guided British explorer Wilfred Thesiger through the marshes of southern Iraq. Now 91, he is full of memories.

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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 Amara bin Thuqub remembers working alongside Wilfred Thesiger, who provided years of medical care to villagers in the Iraqi marshes and often photographed Bin Thuqub and others. Portrait and photo illustration by Emily Garthwaite.

BACK COVER Encircled first by the Serranía mountains and then by battlements such as this weathered wall, Ronda was the seat of kingdoms and the site of the most ambitious waterwork in al-Andalus—a mineshaft to water. Photo by Richard Doughty.

6: CLIVE BRUNSKILL / GETTY IMAGES; 10: JOHNNY HANSON; 16: LEON MCCARRON; 34: AREEJ AZEM (DETAIL)

24 **Key to a Kingdom: Ronda's Secret Water Mine**

Written by Ana M. Carreño Leyva
Photographed by Richard Doughty

Sometime in the 12th century, at the center of a frequently contested region in what is now southwestern Spain, atop sheer cliffs that fall to the river below, hydraulic engineers working for the Almohad rulers of the *taifa* of Ronda began directing men wielding picks to carve, stroke by stroke, a secret staircase down through the rock to the river: It was a water mine, for use in case of siege, and it worked until May 13, 1485, when it was breached by the army of the Marquis of Cádiz. Cut off from water, the town surrendered. The victory bolstered the Spanish campaign against the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, and in 1492, Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula was over. Now historians are taking a closer look—and finding more questions.

34 **Art of Islamic Patterns: Mamluk Rosette**

Written by Adam Williamson
Art courtesy of Art of Islamic Pattern

In part two of this series, we construct a medallion that combines a geometric rosette with an eight-point biomorphic, or arabesque, design. With tracing paper, get ready to learn a 700-year-old patternmaking hack.

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FIRSTLOOK

Dhanji's Garden

Photograph by Zishaan A. Latif

As a photographer, it always amazes me how sometimes my most casual photographs become moments of lasting reflection and universal attachment.

It was the winter of my grandfather Dhanji's 89th birthday, and we gathered at Mani Villa. We spent the afternoon sunbathing, eating and listening to stories of Dhanji's impassioned life in the sprawling garden of this beautiful half an acre of property: Mani Villa, home of our beloved grandparents, was a British row house in Jhansi, in north-central India, that was named after my late grandmother, Mani. After Mani passed in 2002, Dhanji lived there alone with their German shepherds, Gallant and Nikki, before he passed in 2012.

Here you see my late older sister, Seher, taking in the winter sun as my grandfather was immortalized in one of his "Dhanji quirks"—when his index finger went up, everyone listened! He regaled us with his wisdom in between bites of my mother's gajar ka halwa, an Indian carrot pudding she made every winter for his birthday.

It's one of the last moments we all spent together at Mani Villa. The property was sold in 2018. It was one of the toughest experiences for us to see our beloved family holiday home go, and it was a deeply emotional goodbye.

I keep this photograph of Dhanji and Seher close to me at my desk. I surround myself with the energies of these two spirits who have helped shape me into the person I am today. They are my guiding lights.

—Zishaan A. Latif

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FLAVORS

Eggplants are a heavenly ingredient, a mainstay of the healthy Mediterranean diet and a staple of Middle Eastern cuisine.

Roasted Eggplants With Tahini and Pomegranate Molasses Dressing

Recipe by Yasmine Elgharably and Sheweker Elgharably

Photograph by Yehia El-Alaily

For a light dish in which you can really taste the essence of eggplants, we simply roast them in olive oil and combine them with arugula, a tahini dressing and one of our favorite ingredients: sweet-sharp pomegranate molasses. It's a recipe that impresses in any setting.

(Serves 4)

2 large eggplants

Large bunch of arugula (about 2 cups), torn and destemmed

2 tablespoons olive oil

Salt and pepper

For the Tahini Dressing

4 tablespoons tahini paste

2 garlic cloves, minced

Juice of 1 large lime

½ teaspoon ground coriander

¼ teaspoon ground cumin

Salt and pepper

For the Garnish

Handful pomegranate seeds

2 tablespoons pomegranate molasses

2 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted (optional)

Preheat the oven to 180 degrees Celsius (350 degrees Fahrenheit). Line an oven tray with baking parchment.

Slice the eggplants into thin rounds, brush them lightly on both sides with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and lay them carefully next to each other in one layer on the oven tray. Place in the middle of the oven for 30 minutes until fully cooked, turning halfway through.

While the eggplant slices roast, put all the ingredients for the dressing along with about 4¼ cups of lukewarm water into a medium bowl and mix to combine. If the dressing is too thick for your liking, you can mix in a little more water.

When the eggplants cool, arrange them next to each other on a plate, drizzle with the tahini mix and then lay the arugula leaves on top. Season with salt and pepper, drizzle olive oil and pomegranate molasses. You can garnish with a handful of fresh pomegranate seeds and toasted pine nuts.

Yasmine Elgharably is a self-taught home cook with a business background and a passion for Middle Eastern food. She is a cofounder of cairocooking.com, a recipe-sharing platform helping cooks across the Middle East. She is also based in Cairo. **Sheweker Elgharably** is a certified holistic health coach and culinary nutrition expert based in Cairo, Egypt. She completed the Integrative Nutrition Program and the Culinary Nutritional Program at the US-based Academy of Culinary Nutrition. Originally an established interior designer, after seeing how small food and lifestyle changes have a huge impact on health, she wanted to help people strive to live healthier and happier lives. Shewekar is also the founder of #HealthyRocks.

Reprinted with permission from

Bilhana: Wholefood Recipes From Egypt, Lebanon, and Morocco

Yasmine Elgharably and Sheweker Elgharably. AUC Press, 2021. aucpress.com

ONS JABEUR'S *COURT OF* NO FEAR

WRITTEN BY BRIAN E. CLARK

While Samira Jabeur practiced drills at the Tennis Club of Monastir in Tunisia, her then-3-year-old daughter, Ons, would toddle around nearby courts, watching, playing and picking up rogue balls as they settled along the green clay. She recalls herself as a kid who "loved anything to do with a ball." Long before Ons Jabeur became the first Arab—male or female—to be ranked among the top 10 professional tennis players in the world, she was just an ordinary girl with a racket.

"I owe a lot of my success to my mother," says Jabeur, 27, currently ranked No. 11 in the world by the Women's Tennis Association. "She always wanted to play, and that was what got me started."

Though Tunisia is just across the Mediterranean and east from France and Spain, countries known for tennis champions as well as prestigious tournaments, tennis in 1990s Tunisia, when Jabeur was a girl, wasn't popular. What few courts existed were mostly in touristic cities such as Tunis, Hammamet and Jabeur's hometown of Sousse. To play tennis required effort, means and dedication, and even today the game remains a niche sport compared to soccer, volleyball and even the newly popular handball.

By age 12 Jabeur was making a 150-kilometer trek north from Sousse to Tunis, the nation's capital, where she trained with top coaches at the country's leading athletic training center, Lycée Sportif El'Menzah. She also trained in France, which has consistently produced some of the world's highest-ranking tennis professionals.

"I always dreamed I could be one of the best players in the world," says Jabeur, whose first name means "removal of fear" and "to provide a comforting presence for another" in Arabic.

By 16 Jabeur had won numerous tournaments, and in 2010 she finished second in the Junior Grand Slam singles final at the French Open in Paris. She returned to the Roland Garros Stadium the following year and became the first Arab to win a Junior Grand Slam singles title since Egypt's Ismail El Shafei won the Wimbledon boys' crown in 1964.

But it was last year in June, after defeating Daria Kasatkina of Russia at the Birmingham Classic in Birmingham, England, that Jabeur made history as the first Arab woman to win a major Women's Tennis Association title.

"That victory in Birmingham felt so good because it was a long time coming," says Jabeur, who puts in five or more hours on the court every day when not competing. "I know some people expected me to achieve a WTA title earlier, but injuries held me back."

Her coach, fellow Tunisian and former pro Issam Jallali, succinctly assessed Jabeur and her long-awaited WTA title.

"She is very gifted and she works hard," says Jallali, 41.

Jabeur's Russian Tunisian husband, Karim Kamoun, a former fencer, also coaches her off the court, serving as her personal trainer.

"It's nice to have him around," explains Jabeur, who says the couple hopes to start a family once she retires. That may not be far away, she says, as most tennis pros compete until they reach about 33.

"Honestly, I don't know how long I'll be able to play at this level, because it all depends on how your body deals with injuries and how your mind handles motivations," she says. "But if I'm playing well at 34, I'll be staying on the tour."

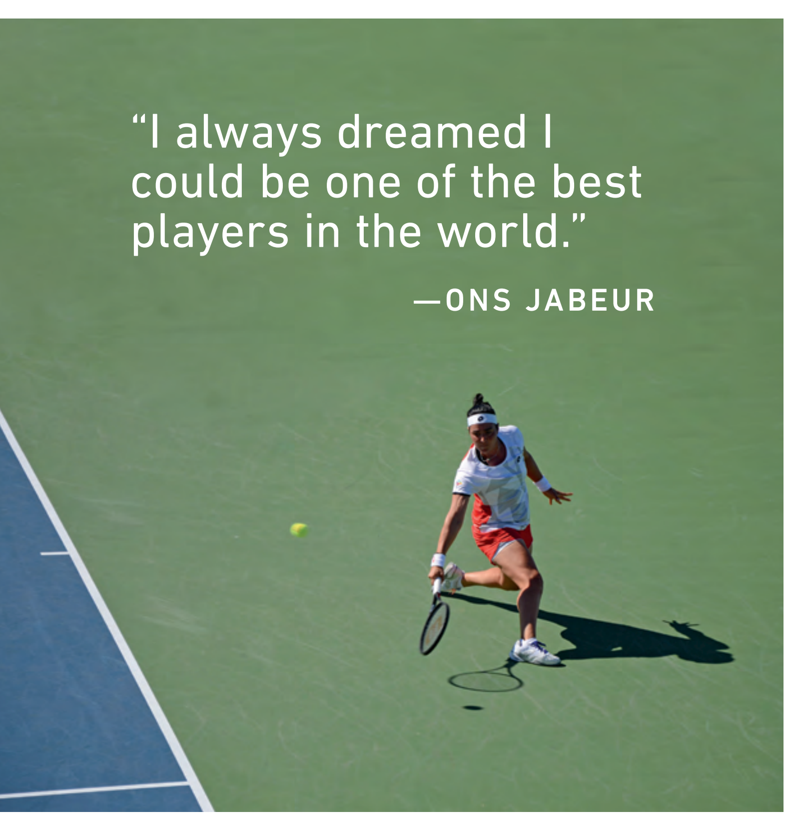
Countries comprising the Middle East and North Africa account for more than 420 million people, yet they have only produced five top-100 tennis players, including Jabeur, in the sport's history. The only other Arab woman to reach a similar level was also a Tunisian: Selima Sfar, who ranked 75th in the early 2000s. To date, Jabeur's highest ranking has been No. 7, and as of the publishing of this article, she stands at No. 11.

"I tell young women, and boys too, that if they train and work hard to be a success, they may achieve their goals," she says. "And not in just tennis, but in any other sport or activity where you want to prove yourself."

Even though Jabeur has competed and trained all over the world, she has always been most comfortable in Tunisia, where she calls herself and her achievements a "100 percent Tunisian

Ons Jabeur learned tennis in Sousse, Tunisia, and this photo, **ABOVE RIGHT**, shows her on the court at age 11. **ABOVE FAR RIGHT** She appears with her mother, Samira Jabeur. **RIGHT** Jabeur plays a forehand in the quarter-final match against Aryna Sabalenka on July 6 at the Wimbledon championships. **OPPOSITE** Jabeur celebrates match point against Anett Kontaveit on October 14 during their quarterfinal match of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden in California.

ABOVE: COURTESY ONS JABEUR (2) LOWER: AELTC / FLORIAN EISELE - POOL / GETTY IMAGES; OPPOSITE: CLIVE BRUNSKILL / GETTY IMAGES



product." She wants to use her celebrity to encourage young athletes to excel at life, whatever path they take.

"I especially hope Tunisian and Arab girls can be inspired by my story and my success. I am also getting inspired by them," she says. "I hope I can have a positive influence for more and more generations. That would be the best thing I can do."

While ascending in popularity over the past few years, Jabeur has become a fan favorite too for what she describes as her "crazy" drop shots and slices that can leave opponents baffled and off balance. Her fans have been known to enthusiastically wave red-and-white Tunisian flags before and after her matches and to sing chants that are usually reserved for Arab and Africa Cup soccer matches. Supporters have come together through multiple fan pages on Facebook, and Jabeur's own professional page on Facebook has nearly 1 million followers.

Longtime fan and Tunisia native Hayfa Chine has been following Jabeur's success for the last eight years. A tennis player herself, Chine has enjoyed watching Jabeur's rise and has traveled to Montreal, New York and Chicago to watch Jabeur compete.

"I am very proud of her," says Chine, who now resides in Ottawa, Canada. "She's a real inspiration to me and others."

Chine says she loves watching Jabeur's footwork on the court.

"I really appreciate the way she moves, the way she plays and especially her drop shots. She is very smart, and she has amazing energy. Sometimes her shots are magical," Chine says.

Chine, who has posed with Jabeur while holding a Tunisian flag at last year's Chicago Fall Tennis Classic, says each time she's conversed with her favorite athlete, she finds Jabeur engaging and humble.

"She also has a wonderful personality, and while she is quite focused in her matches, she's friendly and kind off the court," Chine says.

In 2021 Jabeur was playing some of the best tennis of her career against top pros, including Spain's Paula Badosa and Garbiñe Muguruza—both ranked in the Top 10—and US fan favorite Venus Williams, whom Jabeur defeated last summer at Wimbledon.

"I am learning every day and working hard every day, too. I want to stay positive and be more successful in all that I do," she says.

With Jallali by her side, Jabeur has racked up 11 titles on the International Tennis Federation (ITF) circuit, a steppingstone to the WTA, and, as well as being the first Arab to reach the top 10, has garnered other firsts for the Arab world—including first Arab to reach a Grand Slam quarterfinal at the 2020 Australian Open and first Arab to break into the top 50 in the history of WTA rankings.

After winning Birmingham again last year, Jabeur received praise from childhood idols Andy Roddick and Kim Clijsters. She also heard from US tennis icon Billie Jean King, who won 39 Grand Slam titles, including six Wimbledon singles crowns. In an October interview with Dubai-based *The National*, King said she wouldn't be surprised if Jabeur becomes No. 1. "I think she's got the ability to go much higher," King said.

ABOVE Jabeur returns a shot in the early rounds of the Chicago Fall Tennis Classic in October, where she was defeated in the finals. **LOWER** Jabeur fans show national pride on August 13 during the Women's Singles third-round match between Jabeur and Bianca Andreescu at the National Bank Open presented by Rogers at IGA Stadium in Montreal. Fan enthusiasm on Jabeur's court often reaches levels of volume comparable to major soccer games.

Jabeur shakes the hand of Venus Williams after defeating her on day three of Wimbledon last June. Williams's sister and former No. 1-ranked Serena Williams expressed her support for Jabeur's success on and off the court, where Jabeur is an increasingly popular role model worldwide. **LOWER** Jabeur poses with the Maud Watson Trophy after her June 20 victory against Daria Kasatkina in the womens singles final of the Viking Classic Birmingham. Currently Jabeur is ranked No. 11, and she has stood as high as No. 7: She's aiming for No. 1.

Serena Williams, formerly ranked No. 1 and sister of Venus Williams, commended Jabeur at a Wimbledon press event for "breaking down barriers" and "inspiring so many people, including me. She gives 100 percent every time."

Over the next few years, as Jabeur continues to compete, she hopes to continue increasing her professional ranking in pursuit of her dream of reaching No. 1. But once retired, she plans a quiet life in Tunisia, where she can work with youth, mentor young women and open a tennis academy in-country where she can nurture a culture of tennis excellence in North Africa and train future tennis champions—so she's not the only one.

"I especially hope Tunisian and Arab girls can be inspired by my story and my success."

—ONS JABEUR

"That would be a good life," she muses. "That is my ultimate goal." ⊕

Brian E. Clark is a Wisconsin-based writer, photographer and columnist for the *Milwaukee Sentinal Journal*. He also contributes regularly to other publications, including *The Los Angeles Times*.

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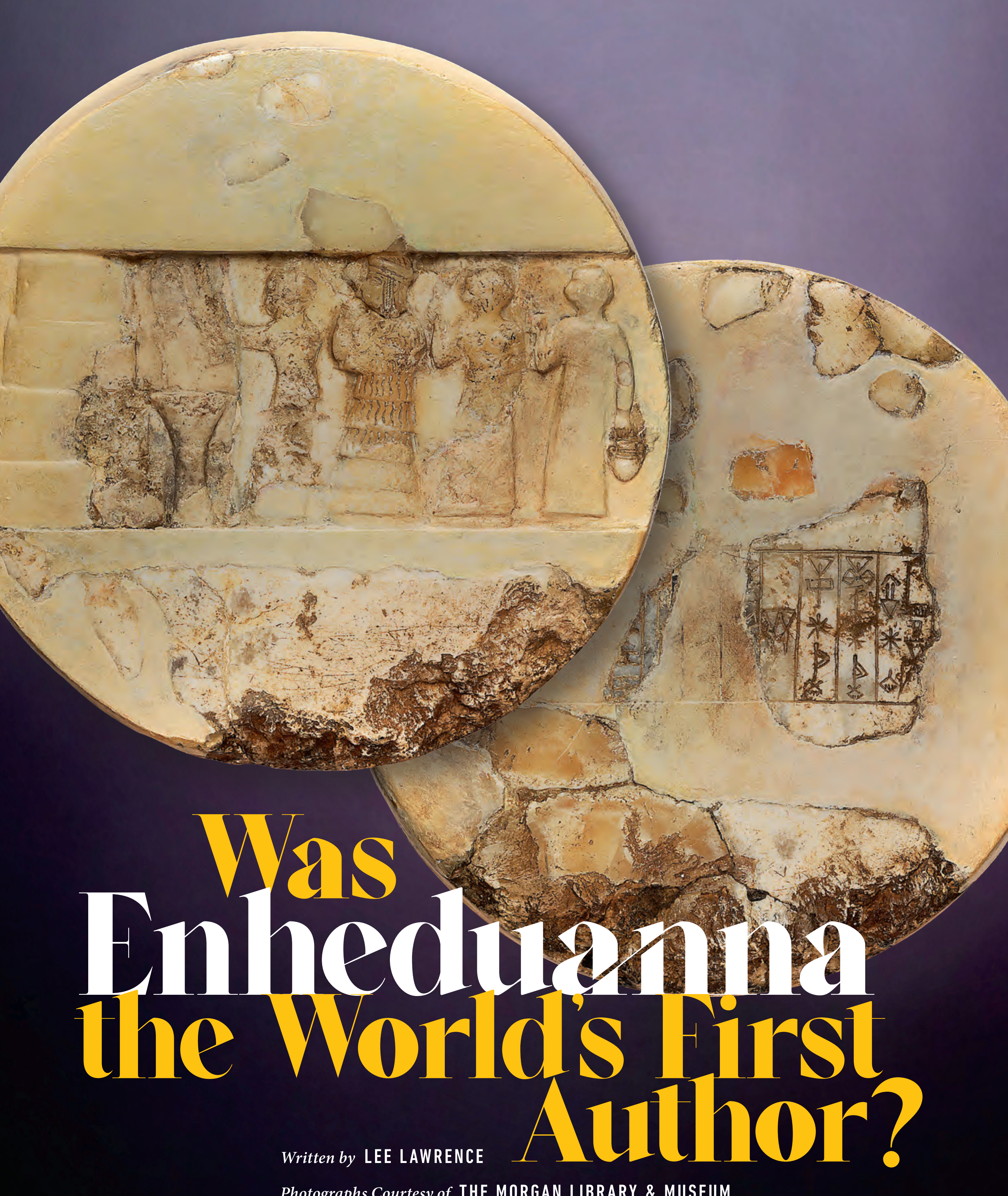


Was Enheduanna the World's First Author?

Written by LEE LAWRENCE

Photographs Courtesy of THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

I am Enheduanna, I am the high priestess. I carried the basket of offerings. I sang the hymns of joy.

—FROM "THE EXALTATION OF INANNA," CA. 2300–1800 BCE

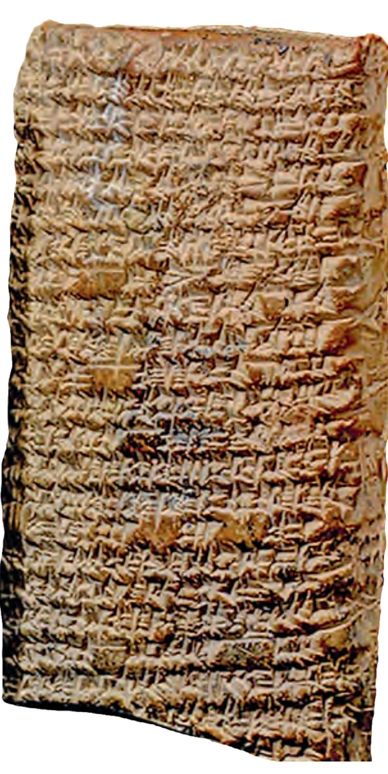
The thought of a woman who lived more than 4,000 years ago in what is now Iraq being a topic of contemporary conversation thrills Gina Konstantopoulos, an assistant professor of Assyrian history at University of California Los Angeles. "She is not just 'not forgotten,'" she says, "She has gained greater significance."

Mespotamia had many remarkable women, including some who wielded power, Konstantopoulos, 36, points out as she puts together a class assignment based on a clay tablet filled with rows of cuneiform characters. But she can name only one woman who has been repeatedly "chosen to be remembered and not overwritten": Enheduanna.

Daughter of King Sargon of Akkad, Enheduanna was the high priestess in the Sumerian city of Ur, in the southern reaches of her father's empire. Some 500 years after her death, her name appears as author of poems considered "central texts that are widely circulated." And in recent years, Enheduanna has captured the attention of scholars and popular readers alike, expanding what Konstantopoulos calls her "many lives" and illuminating the importance of women in the world's earliest civilization. "How quickly she acquired other lives, so to speak, and how notable they are," Konstantopoulos says, fascinates her.

The first commemoration of Enheduanna had taken place around her own lifetime, in about 2300 BCE, in the city of Ur, when a sculptor chiseled into a thick disk of alabaster the relief of a woman presiding over a ritual offering. Depicted slightly larger than the other figures, she wears a tiered gown and a headdress with a rolled brim. On the back of the disk an inscription identifies her as *en hedu-anna* (high priestess-ornament of heaven) in Sumerian. As priestess, Enheduanna served Nanna, the city's principal god and father of Inanna, the goddess of love and war.

Inscribed in cuneiform script that tells "The Exaltation of Inanna," a lengthy hymn dedicated to the Sumerian goddess of love and war, these three clay tablets date to around 1750 BCE, and they were excavated from Tell Senkereh in what is now southern Iraq. The closing lines of the hymn attribute the composition to Enheduanna, who lived some 500 years before before these tablets were inscribed. **OPPOSITE** This 25-centimeter alabaster disk, dating from the Akkadian period around 2300 BCE, shows what appears to be a temple ritual. Its principal figure is the woman second from left, who is identified on the reverse in Sumerian cuneiform characters that name her *en hedu-anna*, high priestess-ornament of heaven, wife of the god Nanna and daughter of the Akkadian King Sargon. The artifact was found by English archeologist Sir Leonard Wooley in the mid-1920s.



YALE BABYLONIAN COLLECTION / KLAUS WAGENSONNER; OPPOSITE: PENN MUSEUM / BRITISH MUSEUM

An alabaster statuette, its actual size not much larger than an adult index finger, shows a seated female figure with a tablet on her lap. Dating to some 4,000 years ago, it is thought to represent a high priestess. If a portrayal of Enheduanna were ever discovered, it might well look like this statuette.

In the same hymn, Enheduanna also describes how a rebellious lord expelled her from her temple: "Like a swallow he made me fly from the window … / He stripped me of the crown appropriate for the high priesthood." Then, having received no help from Nanna: "As for me, my Nanna takes no heed of me. // … may your heart take pity on me!"

"The Exaltation," as it is often called, was the first text related to Enheduanna to be published in translation, first in 1958 in a German journal and, 10 years later, in English. Its English translators, Assyriologists William W. Hallo and J. J. A. van Dijk, wrote that they had identified "a corpus of poetry of the very first rank which not only reveals the author's name, but delineates that author for us in truly autobiographical fashion." They argue that this set of poetry includes the "*Temple Hymns*" as well as "The Hymn to Inanna," whose narrator is Enheduanna, and "Inanna and Ebih," in which the goddess reduces a mountain—Mount Ebih—to charred rubble for refusing to bow. This last one contains no mention of Enheduanna, but the translators deemed it was written in the same style as the others, with Inanna regarded as supreme over other gods. Mesopotamia, they announced, had produced history's first named author.

Scholars, however, are not in full agreement. Some, like Sidney Babcock, head of the department of ancient seals and tablets at The Morgan Library & Museum, in New York, point to the "signatures" in the text and the imprimatur of the Old Babylonian scribes as sufficient evidence of authorship. Others, like Eleanor Robson, who has written extensively about cuneiform culture, argue that stylistically the Sumerian is too late for Enheduanna herself and that the scribes could have had more than a copyist's hand in it, perhaps inserting Enheduanna's name to build cultural identity and pride around a respected figure from the past.

This debate notwithstand-

Some 500 years later, during the period known as Old Babylonian, scribes remembered Enheduanna as they copied and disseminated tablets with Sumerian poems that name her as the narrator and, in some cases, as author. A compilation inscribed on clay tablets known today as the *Temple Hymns*, for example, attributes the high priestess as its composer. According to a translation by the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, the closing lines read, "The compiler of the tablets was En-hedu-ana. / My king, something has been created that no one has created before."

Another set of lines, from another hymn attributed to Enheduanna, "The Exaltation of Inanna," sheds light on some of the duties of the high priestess as intercessor, mediator and eulogist. "Let me, Enheduanna, recite a prayer to her / Let me give free vent to my tears like sweet drink for the holy Inanna!"

A woman who lived more than 4,000 years ago in today's Iraq "is not just 'not forgotten.' … She has gained greater significance."

Gina Konstantopolous, Assyriologist, UCLA

ing, interest in Enheduanna is now flourishing in both academic and popular spheres. Take for example Sophus Helle, 28, a postdoctoral fellow at Freie Universität Berlin and Oxford University working on a book about her. At the mention of Enheduanna, he lights up. Whether the verses date to 2300 BCE or 1800 BCE, he says, "these poems stand out."

In his translation we see Enheduanna's inner turmoil, "I went to the light, but the light burned me; / I went to the shadow, but it was shrouded in storms. … But still my case stays open, and an evil verdict coils around me—is it mine?" This hymn also exudes much fierceness, as shown in the lines, "Let them know that you grind skulls to dust. / Let them know that you eat corpses like a lion." And in the "Hymn to Inanna," Helle singles out some bowl-me-over imagery: "Their shouts weigh on wasteland and meadow. / Her cry is a storm: skins crawl throughout the lands."

> "I believe she was not the first one. We have to think there were hundreds of women before her participating in oral literature."
>
> Haider Almamori, archeologist, University of Babylon

Helle says his translations are "intentionally very free" to better convey both the original's meaning and its poetic sensibility. He hopes his analysis also helps readers appreciate, for example, Sumerian puns, as well as the complexity, ambiguity and subtlety of an ancient language scholars are still unraveling.

In Enheduanna's modern homeland, archeologist Haider Almamori, 50, is equally keen on helping fellow Iraqis appreciate Sumerian literature and "the great woman," as he refers to Enheduanna. For some 18 years, he worked at Iraq's State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, excavating sites, heading archeological digs and eventually directing the institution. For the last five years he has been teaching upper-level classes at the University of Babylon in central Iraq. "Most people talk about Inanna and Ishtar"—the latter is the former's name in the language of Babylon—"but not Enheduanna, almost no one," he says, shaking his head. While his students read Sumerian, he adds, they have been exposed almost exclusively to tablets about "grains, seeds, barley, leather." For two years he has been working on introducing a course on literature, and in it he hopes to talk about more than just Enheduanna.

"I believe she was not the first one," he says. "We have to think there were hundreds of women before her participating in oral literature."

Even for Enheduanna, a high priestess and the daughter of a king, archeological evidence remains scarce. "The alabaster disk and a few seals are really it," says Babcock, 71, who is cocurating The Morgan Library & Museum exhibit *She Who Wrote: Enheduanna and Women of Mesopotamia,* scheduled to open in October. The exhibit will display the disk and cylinder seals—including some attesting that Enheduanna had a scribe and a hairdresser—along with other artifacts such as statues, tablets, ornaments and reliefs that relate to the roles of priestesses and other prominent women. In all, Babcock negotiated loans of some 90 objects from museums and collections in North America, Europe and Israel.

In the fall of 2019, he introduced the objects to young scholars through a class at Columbia University. By the end of the semester, he had invited doctoral candidate Erhan Tamur, 33, to cocurate the exhibit, and he had asked other students to adapt their term papers into essays to publish in its catalog.

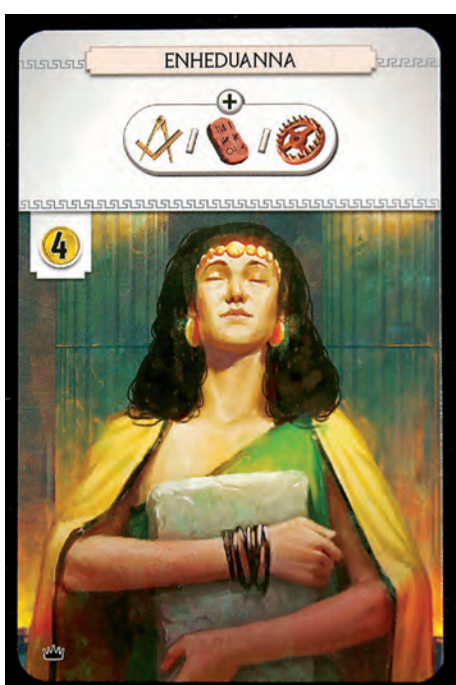
One of the students, Majdolene Dajani, 25, compares depictions of Inanna on cylinder seals to descriptions of the goddess—winged and having a "terrible glance"—found in "The Exaltation." Dajani finds that "text and image remind you of each other," though she is quick to add there is no way to know whether a particular artist was inspired by the Enheduanna-related texts.

Still, she finds enough rapport between the media to lay the groundwork for future research, according to Babcock, who has long thought Enheduanna's writings might have been a reason portrayals of deities became much more numerous after King Sargon came to power.

Meanwhile, fellow student Kutay Şen, 30, detects another remarkable link between art and writing,

This fragment of an Akkadian seal impression from around 2300 BCE, discovered between 1927 and 1928, and measuring no more than 4 centimeters in height, shows two water buffalo and, between them, an inscription naming Enheduanna and her scribe.

YALE BABYLONIAN COLLECTION / KLAUS WAGENSONNER; OPPOSITE: STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN / VORDERASIATISCHES MUSEUM / OLAF M. TESSMER (2)



Because of her known positions as a princess, a high priestess and a poet—and perhaps the world's earliest-known author to be attributed by name—Enheduanna inspires creative works across a variety of media, including, at **LEFT**, *'Enheduanna – A Manifesto of Falling' / Live Brain-Computer Cinema Performance* featuring actress Anastasia Katsinavaki at CCA: Centre for Contemporary Arts Glasgow, in July 2015, and a character card in the strategy game 7 Wonders, **RIGHT**.

this time in the statue of a seated female. He draws attention to the tablet resting on her lap: It is scored with parallel lines, which was a standard way of organizing cuneiform characters, but here, he points out, there are no characters. The tablet is blank.

His research leads him to believe that the statue was made 200 to 300 years after Enheduanna and that it represents a high priestess offering a deity "the idea—and the intention—of writing," he says. It attests, he adds, "to writing being of significance, and worth dedicating to a god, and its association with women."

Scholars are not the only ones engaging with early writing. Konstantopoulos points to contemporary poets who have picked up on Enheduanna's lament that Nanna did not come to her aid when she was exiled from the temple, citing Iraqi poet Amal Al-Jubouri's 1999 "Enheduanna and Goethe." Al-Jubouri's lines "while you drag me to your 'West-East Divan' / … O East, what have you done to me? / I loved you but you brought me shame," Konstantopolous says, reverberate with "the idea of being abandoned that Enheduanna feels in her own text."

In Australia, Meagan Blyth, 27, devoted a year and a half to reinterpreting "The Exaltation" as a historical novella for her 2019 honors undergraduate thesis at Canberra University. She calls attention to the poem's vivid descriptions, ranges of emotions and archetypal figures, all of which she feels enhance its sense of immediacy and relevance. "This wasn't just some person who existed 4,000 years ago whose life is so vastly different from mine that I couldn't possibly fathom anything about her," says Blyth. Enheduanna "wrote about herself, how she got kicked out of power, and it was really bad, and she didn't like it, but then she came back. And that," she says, "happens in history all the time."

> Enheduanna "wrote about herself, how she got kicked out of power, and it was really bad … but then she came back."
>
> Meagan Blyth, Canberra University

For Polina Zioga, director of the Interactive Filmmaking Lab at the University of Stirling in Scotland, it was the violent images and urban references in the verses that attracted her. Zioga first read "The Exaltation" in Greek in 2013, and its rage-filled imagery resonated, she says, "because most of us do go through crises, do go through acute emotional states."

But the poem is not, she adds, "a self-pitying text," nor is it merely vengeful; rather, "it's the need for justice to prevail." The text shifts, she says, from a personal to a societal perspective. At the time, the 2008 financial crisis that rocked the globe, and that hit Greece especially hard, still simmered in her memory. It was this "sense of responsibility—toward the city in ancient times and toward democracy in present times—that is very relevant."

In producing *Enheduanna: A Manifesto of Falling,* which premiered in 2015, Zioga intercut verses from "The Exaltation" with words by Maya Angelou, Virginia Woolf, Theodore Adorno, Pavlina Pamboudi, Marguerite Yourcenar and other writers. The 50-minute mixed-media event broke technological ground in theater: As video projections filled a screen, the show's solo performer and audience members all wore electroencephalographic headsets that intermittently picked up brain activity and colored the stage in real time

In an impression made from an Akkadian cylinder seal some 4,500 years old, two bearded men perform music for the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, who was known in Sumeria as Inanna. She sits enthroned upon a lion, the animal associated with her power. The imagery illustrates how hymns might have been performed. In Enheduanna's "The Exaltation of Inanna," the poet describes herself as having given birth to a song for the goddess, adding, "That which I recited to you at midnight, May the singer repeat to you at noon."

MUSÉE DU LOUVRE / RMN-GRAND PALAIS / RAPHAËL CHIPAULT / ART RESOURCE; OPPOSITE, LEFT: CATHERINE M. WEIR / POLINA ZIOGA; RIGHT: JOHNNY HANSON

accordingly to the results. Scenes that evoked relaxed but awake alpha waves tinged the stage with greens; more cognitive gamma waves produced reds; meditative but also emotionally stressed theta waves brought on blues. It was the premiere of a live, brain-computer interface performance, and in it the world's first author seemed right at home. "The Exaltation," says Zioga, "is one of these works that is safe to describe as universal and timeless, and therefore contemporary."

"'The Exaltation' is one of these works that is safe to describe as universal and timeless, and therefore contemporary."

Polina Zioga, director, University of Stirling

Others, too, are showing that one doesn't need to read cuneiform to appreciate and interpret the verse of Enheduanna. After Jungian analyst Betty De Shong Meador published interpretive translations and analyses in 2001 and 2008, word of the high priestess spread further. In 2016, for example, teenage readers of Kate Schatz's *Rad Women Worldwide* met Enheduanna as the oldest among the "bold, brave women who lived awesome, exciting, revolutionary, historic, and world-changing lives." Two years later, in *What Would Boudicca Do? Everyday Problems Solved by History's Most Remarkable Women,* E. Foley described the high priestess as a role model for letting one's creativity flow. And online, feminist blogs invoke her, and gamers might meet her in the 7 Wonders board game and in Civilization 6—the list goes on.

None of this surprises Konstantopoulos. "We're very fond of firsts," she says. "So, when we have this named female figure who is—either actually or constructed to be—the first named author, that's a very compelling image." But beyond that, she wants everyone to know that as remarkable as Enheduanna is, "the contributions of women in Mesopotamia, and the contributions of women in ancient history, as a whole, is also, in its own right, extraordinary."

Lee Lawrence (leeadairlawrence.com) writes frequently on cultural issues as well as Islamic and Asian art.

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Translations

Unless otherwise specified, translations of texts attributed to Enheduanna are by William W. Hallo and J. J. A. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna*, 1968.

THE Marsh Guide AND THE ENGLISH EXPLORER

Written by LEON MCCARRON *and* MOHAMMED SHIAA | *Photographed by* EMILY GARTHWAITE

On the afternoon that was to change his life, in the spring of 1952, Amara bin Thuqub recalls sitting cross-legged by the fire outside the reed house he shared with his family in the village of Rufaiya. His friend Sabaiti sat with him, and they sipped thick, rust-colored tea sweetened by plump, glutinous dates. Both in their late teens, they shared news overheard from the older men, and in their actions and words, they tried to mimic their role models. One day, they themselves would be heads of households, and they discussed who seemed to lead bravely and wisely, and who didn't. Every day usually followed the same routine, so when the village's *mukhtar*, or mayor, arrived by their fire, it came as a surprise. He told the pair Falih bin Majid, the son of the shaykh, had requested their help. They were to prepare a boat for an important visitor, no time to waste. Both young men sensed an opportunity to impress.

The boat was a thin, canoe-like *tarada*, 9 meters long with a sweeping, tapered stem at the front and pronged with decorative nails along the ribs. The boys laid a carpet suitable for a guest on the flat bottom. They then stowed a woolen bag, a locked iron box and a shotgun in the stern. Bin Thuqub remembers the guest appearing, his traditional gray dishdasha (robe) of southern Iraq and matching jacket hanging loosely from his broad, straight shoulders; his freshly shaven chin propping up his handsome face that showed his 40 years in fissures and creases as deep as those of the mountains and dunes in which he had spent much of his life. His name is Wilfred Thesiger, Bin Thuqub recalls being told, and he is from England. Bin Thuqub and Sabaiti were to help him with whatever he needed until his curiosity was satisfied.

"My first impression was that he spoke Arabic just like us," Bin Thuqub recalls. "He was eating like us. There were no impressions he was like a stranger."

Bin Thuqub imagined his assignment might last a day, perhaps two, but over the next seven years, the pair traveled frequently together, exploring the vast Mesopotamian marshes, during which time an unlikely and complex friendship was forged, one that was then severed as abruptly as it began.

WILFRED THESIGER / PITT RIVERS MUSEUM COLLECTION (2)

In the spring of 1932, a young couple from Rufaiya went north from the central marshes to visit the town of Amara. Naga Muhsen was nearly due in her pregnancy, and when she went into labor in the town center, a local family rushed her into their home, where she gave birth on the kitchen floor. The kindness of these strangers, and the novelty of the location, prompted the couple's choice of name for their first child: Amara.

They brought their son home to Rufaiya, where they lived with 150 other families, the majority of whom worked as farmers on land owned by Bin Majid. The extent of the Mesopotamian marshes, which gather in the vast floodplain around the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, was then around 20,000 square kilometers (today, the maximum extent is estimated at less than half that.) According to Mahdi al-Saadi, a journalist from Iraq's southern governorate of Maysan, where the eastern marshes are located, "the first half of the 20th century was the golden age for the marshes in terms of the natural flow of its environmental cycle." Blissfully absent, he says, were the issues of pollution, drought and climate change that now plague the wetlands.

By the age of 12, Bin Thuqub had four brothers and four sisters. The family owned a small number of buffalo, which grazed on grass cut and collected by the women. Their home was made in the traditional way of the marshes, with intricately bound reeds gathered from the beds that surrounded them, arched into an opening at one end that looked out on a similar but more rudimentary shelter for the animals.

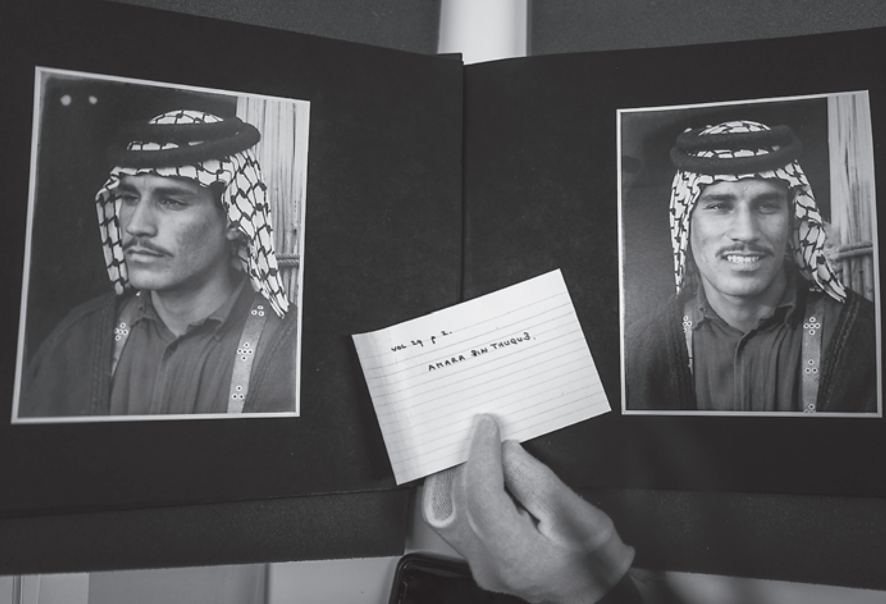
In 1954 when the photo **ABOVE** was made by English explorer Wilfred Thesiger, **LEFT**, Amara bin Thuqub was amid his third of seven seasons working as Thesiger's main guide in the marshes, where transportation was by a canoe-like *tarada*. Now 91 and living in Baghdad, Bin Thuqub can still pole a tarada, **OPPOSITE**. He recalls how Thesiger would "arrive in the marshes from Basra in a suit and tie and then change into his dishdasha. ... He spoke Arabic just like us." Thesiger, who died in 2003, wrote that "although considerably younger than the others Amara had the strongest character."

"An extraordinary architectural achievement with the simplest of materials," wrote Thesiger of the barrel-vaulted, reed *mudhifs* that have provided shelter to people of the marshes for thousands of years. Though the extent of the marshes is much less today, mudhifs remain in use.

The ecosystem of the marshes might have been thriving, but for families like Bin Thuqub's, life was far from easy. "People were indirectly enslaved by the feudal shaykhs," says Iraqi historian and author Jabir al-Juaibrawi. The shaykhs leased the marshland from the nascent government of Iraq, which had gained independence from a British mandate in 1932 but, throughout the following two and a half decades, had found itself caught between lingering colonial influence and internal unrest. Though wars and sectarian conflicts have diminished the marshlands drastically since the 1950s, there remain areas where residents continue to live much as people have for more than 3,000 years, including Bin Thuqub and his generation: in *mudhif*s, the barrel-vaulted homes constructed of bundled reeds harvested from the marshes themselves. "An extraordinary architectural achievement with the simplest of materials," wrote Thesiger. With little opportunity or inclination to leave, young men like Bin Thuqub dedicated themselves to crops and animals, and the years passed with the cyclical harvest seasons.

By the time Thesiger reached the Iraqi marshes, he had already spent two decades traveling among communities of whom little was known in the West. Born in Addis Ababa, in what was then Abyssinia, now Ethiopia, he was educated at Eton and Oxford. He returned to Abyssinia at age 23, to lead an expedition in the Danakil Desert, one of the hottest places in the world. He fought with British forces in Sudan and Syria. He twice crossed the Rub' al-Khali (Empty Quarter) of the Arabian Peninsula led by Bedouin guides, journeys he wrote about in his 1959 book, *Arabian Sands,* which remains a classic of adventure literature. "Like many English travellers I find it difficult to live for long periods with my own kind," he wrote in a collection of his work called *Desert, Marsh and Mountain*. He liked to box in England and shoot big game in Africa and, as he got older, so too did his atavism increase. Ahmed Saleh, a researcher from Maysan and a tourism pioneer in the marshes, believes Thesiger saw "the atrocities modernity committed in his homeland," England, and sought out places unspoiled, to his mind, by greed and reckless development.

Thesiger's friend and biographer Alexander Maitland wrote that Thesiger "took an aggressive pride in being the 'last' in a long line of overland explorers and travellers, a refugee from the Victorians' Golden Age." Thesiger, he wrote, envied the freedom to roam in remote places seemingly untouched by industrial culture, as exemplified in the 19th century by Charles Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta* and, a generation later, by the exploits of T. E. Lawrence. By the 1950s the marshes of southern Iraq were some of the few places



Two contact strips from 1953, made from Thesiger's uncut strips of negatives, **ABOVE LEFT**, show carefully composed portraits of Bin Thuqub as well as Thesiger's interest in his tarada. Over decades of travel in remote reaches, Thesiger made a total of more than 38,000 photos, not only in Iraq but also in his native Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) and in the Arabian Peninsula. People—usually men—were among his favorite subjects. **ABOVE RIGHT** This pair of portraits of Bin Thuqub dates from 1958, the year of Bin Thuqub's last trip with Thesiger. After the Iraqi revolution later that year, the two never saw each other again. **TOP RIGHT** Thesiger's photo archive is held in Oxford, UK, at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

in which the waning British Empire still had influence yet in which Thesiger's nationality would not count against him.

In Iraq, as elsewhere before, Thesiger sought local companions as guides, often young men or boys, as they tended to be freer to travel for weeks or months than their elders. This is how he came to meet Bin Thuqub and Sabaiti, as well as two others, Hasan and Yasin. In his 1964 book, *The Marsh Arabs,* Thesiger declares that "Of my four regular companions, Amara and Sabaiti were my favourites, and, away from their fellow tribesmen and the familiar setting of the Marshes, the three of us were drawn still closer together on these expeditions." He tells of the crew's adventures together, touring village to village by boat, hunting wild boar and slowly peeling back the layers of life in the marshes.

With time, Thesiger became more involved in the affairs of Bin Thuqub and his family. As Bin Thuqub describes it, "He took care of me like a son. He was more than a friend and brother."

Thesiger visited the marshes each year, usually from late winter until summer, between 1951 and 1958, with only one exception in 1957, sometimes staying as long as seven months. While the book is regarded as another classic of travel literature and—in the best sense of the term—amateur anthropology, it is, like Thesiger himself, a paradox: It can be read as both the indulgences of a wealthy orientalist whose value system was largely outdated even then, and as an astute, sympathetic documentation of a remote and uniquely adapted community. In it, he betrays his own desperate longing to belong. Saleh calls Thesiger "the good colonial," for his focus on celebrating the marshes and its oft-marginalized people, giving voice to men like Bin Thuqub.

Bin Thuqub is now 91. His family and friends mostly call him Abu Hamid to honor his age and first son, but he still likes the name Amara, because it reminds him of the adventures

“The bond between us was like father and son. He was more than a friend and brother.”

—Amara bin Thuqub

With the corners of his *shumagh*, or headscarf, catching the wind, Bin Thuqub poles Thesiger's tarada in 1953. Fed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the marshes of southern Iraq are still the largest wetland ecosystem in the Middle East. **LOWER** Thesiger noted that this photo was made while attending a wedding in the marshes that same year. Thesiger's main activity in the villages, however, was providing medical care.

of his youth. He lives with his wife, Khashiyeh Shamekh Nikhash, daughter Amal, and granddaughter Rusul in a small, two-story house behind a high wall in al-Shu'ala, a modest district at the northeast edge of Baghdad, where urban sprawl melds with wheat fields beyond. It's a noisy and busy neighborhood, with wrinkled streets filled with three-wheeled yellow tuk-tuk taxis and small-goods trucks belching exhaust. Tattered political posters adorn rough cement walls.

Bin Thuqub sees little of this disorder, and cares less. He sits mostly in his *majlis*, or guestroom, 8 by 5 meters, with peach walls. One poster, one clock and one framed picture of himself are the only decorations. A multicolored floral carpet covers the whole floor. Along the sides lie a second layer of rugs, adding to the kaleidoscope, with cushions placed not too far apart. It's not hard to imagine its similarity to the earthy interior of a traditional mudhif. Mostly these days, Bin Thuqub says, “we don't move a lot from here. We just go for weddings, and funerals. We go to see our relatives.” When they do, they are likely to hear of his adventures as a young man.

He is still tall and slim, and he speaks with a raconteur's finesse still reminiscent of the young man Thesiger described as “slightly built and remarkably handsome,” and “deft and self-possessed, a natural aristocrat.”

He wears a dishdasha and jacket, and a black-and-white *shumagh* (headscarf) frames the furrowed impression of devotion on his forehead. The chance encounter with Thesiger afforded him an opportunity to travel, he says, and to become respected throughout the central marshes. “They were the best days of my life,” he maintains. “I consider them beautiful.”

Bin Thuqub has a keen memory for detail and numbers. He can tell you the cost of everything throughout his life, from the 40 dinars in annual rent Sabaiti's father paid Shaykh bin Majid to lease a space for a village shop to the price of every house he has ever lived in since leaving the marshes (400 dinars to buy his first house in al-Shu'ala in 1977; 28,000 dinars when he sold it in 1992.)

Thesiger entrusted Bin Thuqub to manage his accounts, and it was through this bond of trust, Bin Thuqub explains, that real friendship developed. “He had an iron case full of money,” says Bin Thuqub. “And he gave me the keys. When he checked the accounts and found not a single dinar was missing, he told me, ‘you are honest and trustworthy.’” For Bin Thuqub, this was the greatest compliment. Thesiger had validated Bin Thuqub's own belief in himself as a natural leader. “I didn't change around him or anyone else. I was the same, and Thesiger considered me as a precious friend. He was a good influence.”

A recurring theme in *The Marsh Arabs* is Thesiger's self-taught, peripatetic doctoring. He almost seems to revel in the grisly details of sores and boils and amputations, and even the removal of an eyeball. His specialty became male circumcision, an important and obligatory ritual in the religious traditions of the marshes.

Prior to his arrival, the procedure was carried out by wandering surgeons who would often operate with a piece of string, a rusty razor and no antiseptics. Thesiger, with his sterilized scalpel, anesthetic and penicillin, soon became the favored option. Maitland, who noted that before arriving in Iraq, Thesiger had never performed a circumcision, deduced from Thesiger's diaries that he likely carried out well over 6,000 procedures in the marshes.

Bin Thuqub became Thesiger's medical assistant. "I liked the work of doctoring. I helped Thesiger to give injections, and I learned to help," he says. Often the pair would spend entire days working under the sun, moving from circumcisions to injuries, infirmities and all manner of ailments as families congregated around them in village after village. In his reminiscences, Bin Thuqub doesn't dwell on blood or drama, but instead the enjoyment of the skill. "I liked learning," he says. "It was so useful. Even when the work was hard, it was rewarding." Today, he still administers injections to family members when needed.

By 1956 Bin Thuqub had arranged to marry Baheyah, the sister of his friend Sabaiti. Thesiger, Bin Thuqub says, "was like a father at this time" and even helped pay the bride price of 60 dinars.

The engagement was followed by a quick wedding, and Bin Thuqub began excitedly to prepare for family life. But in the early summer of 1957, his father died, and a heartbroken Bin Thuqub took his body to the cemetery in the city of Najaf. Two weeks later Baheyah also died, minutes after giving birth to their first child. For the second time in a month, Bin Thuqub made the journey to Najaf. "It was a miserable time in my life," he says, and he still blinks away tears in the recounting.

TOP In 1956 Thesiger had paid Bin Thuqub's "bride price" to marry. In early 1958, Bin Thuqub dressed well for this tarada journey, and this time he sat with Thesiger: Tragedy had struck when Bin Thuqub's wife died after bearing their first child; his father had died too just weeks earlier. "I at once sensed a difference in Amara," Thesiger wrote. "He was more mature and strangely reserved." Bin Thuqub remarried later that year. **ABOVE** The largest mudhif in the region belonged to Shaykh Falih bin Majid, whose son Mohammed had been the one to assign Bin Thuqub as a guide to the newly arrived Englishman.

WILFRED THESIGER / PITT RIVERS MUSEUM COLLECTION (4)

In 1958 Thesiger left in early summer as usual, telling Bin Thuqub that he'd be back the following spring. It was the last time they ever saw one another. That July Bin Thuqub joined a crowd of tribesmen in Bin Majid's long, thatched mudhif to listen to the news on a small radio. Iraq's King Faisal II had been executed, they heard, along with Prime Minister Nuri al-Said. The revolution was driven, in no small part, by a desire to expel the influence of the British who had propped up the Baghdad-based monarchy. From that moment, says Bin Thuqub, "I suspected that I might never be able to see Thesiger again." But still, he adds, "I didn't think it would be forever."

A few months after this, police arrived at the mudhif asking to identify anyone with connections to the Englishman. They were sent away, but the following year, Bin Thuqub made a rare trip to the town of his birth, and there an informer identified him. "They took me to jail for 15 days and asked about [Thesiger] every day. I told them nothing." Eventually a judge threw out the case, and he was released. He smiles thinly when he thinks of it. "It was a strange time," he concludes, but for the next two decades, he avoided leaving the marshes except when absolutely necessary.

Later in 1958, after the revolution, Bin Thuqub remarried, to Nikhash, whom he had met during a visit to her village with Thesiger in their medical capacity. "I was bringing them food and water," remembers Nikhash. "When Amara set his eyes on me, I knew he wanted me. I was so young then, but I wanted him too." She thinks she was probably about 16, and within a year of marriage, she gave birth to a daughter. Three more girls

Khashiyeh Shamekh Nikhash and Bin Thuqub married in late 1958, the last year Bin Thuqub worked with Thesiger. She remembers, "when Amara set his eyes on me, I knew he wanted me." The couple now lives with their daughter Amal and granddaughter Rusulin in a modest, two-story house in Shu'ala, a district at the northeast edge of Baghdad. Bin Thuqub's son Hadi, **LOWER**, lives nearby. Here he looks at his father's now-worthless deed to the land Bin Thuqub once farmed and grazed buffalo in Rufaiya, the village in the marshes where Bin Thuqub had grown up.

and two boys followed.

The revolution swept out not only British influence but also that of the shaykhs who had controlled the rich farmlands in the marshes. For the first time in his life, Bin Thuqub was a landowner, "alone and working hard," but "it felt good to own it." He and Nikhash settled into a new rhythm of life in Rufaiya, but it was still a demanding existence. Profits were low and the toll on the body high. Bin Thuqub's siblings, like many thousands of other Marsh Arabs, drifted to the cities in hopes of making a better life. In 1973 the British writer Gavin Young, who had first visited the marshes with Thesiger, returned to Rufaiya to find Bin Thuqub. For a few days, they traveled together as they had done 16 years earlier, but it was to be a last free-roaming adventure for them both.

In April 1977 Bin Thuqub moved to al-Shu'ala. He sold all his water buffalo as well as the rifle Thesiger had given him, and the proceeds therefrom afforded him enough to buy a small house. Since that time, he has never returned to his land in Rufaiya, though he still keeps the faded deed for 7 dunams, or 7,000 square meters. Today the paper is worthless, as the legal system prohibits ownership of unused land, but its value is not countable in dinars: It is his last tangible connection to the only place he ever really belonged.

In al-Shu'ala Bin Thuqub worked for 11 years as a storekeeper in a hospital, then five as a private guard outside a debt store. At the hospital, he says, "They asked me not to wear my traditional clothes, but I refused, and I left. They eventually brought me back and said I could wear what I wanted." For the rest of his working life, he insisted on wearing his clothing from the marshes. Nikhash worked, too, serving tea at a road transportation office. In 1988, they sold their house and followed Bin Thuqub's brother to al-Hasla, close to the town of Abu Ghraib. There Bin Thuqub worked the potato harvest, with some carpentry on the side. They made decent money and bought a bigger house. In 2006, however, the sectarian fighting in the area became too dangerous to tolerate, and the couple returned to al-Shu'ala.

Yet the violence of war was at times inescapable. During the Iran-Iraq War, one of his sons was imprisoned for trying to escape military service. He died in jail at age 17. Bin Thuqub's youngest son, Hadi, became a soldier and, in 2016 in Falluja,

Watched by men sitting in a small mudhif, Bin Thuqub appears to pause as Thesiger makes this photo at the edge of a village that shows a broad waterway as well as the simple efficiency of the tarada. Spending time out on the water, Bin Thuqub recalls, "We considered it as having fun, and having a good time with friends. We considered the marshes as having great value and legacy. We knew that."

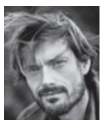
was shot in the head by an ISIS sniper. A friend rushed him to an operating room. Before the surgery, Bin Thuqub had to sign a waiver absolving the state of fault if Hadi died. But he recovered fully and today lives a 10-minute walk from his parents, and he often brings his five children to visit them. "I prayed every day," Bin Thuqub recalls. "Thank God he is okay. The doctors didn't believe he could make it."

"We have 11 grandchildren. Thanks be to God," says Nikhash. She is 80 now, and she wears a velour *abaya* with small blue printed flowers. Her skin is loose and gathered in folds, her wrists almost as thin as pencils. She laughs easily. They've adapted to city life, she says. But no, it is not the same.

"I regret leaving," says Bin Thuqub. It is the only regret he ever expresses. "We don't know where our food comes from now," Nikhash adds, and it's expensive. "In the marshes we had milk from the buffalo, eggs from the chickens and fish to catch. … Everything was there." Despite the hardships, Bin Thuqub says, "our life there was precious." But the land they left is no longer what remains. In the 1980s and 1990s, the marshes were devastated by war and drained of their waters by Saddam Hussein. Today a combination of weak governance, geopolitical tensions and climate change all risk rendering the marshes even more uninhabitable in the future.

Thesiger's writing is one kind of the recent past's essential records. But the living, oral memories of Bin Thuqub and Nikhash are no less valuable, if much less celebrated. Basra-based novelist and heritage expert Nawal Juayid points to elements of endangered heritage of which they and others from that era in the marshes are custodians. "The first is the intangible verbal heritage, and that includes the literary dialect that Marsh Arabs used to be known for," she says, noting the poetry and stories of the shaykhs, elders and farmers that enshrined a way of life and passed from one generation to the next. "All of that began to disappear gradually since the days of Amara and Thesiger," says Juayid. Then there are "the many forms of tangible visual heritage," like traditional architecture and clothing. "These elements comprise the ideals of a homeland," she concludes. "Once they're lost, the homeland is lost too, regardless of the amounts of water pumped into the marshes."

Bin Thuqub and Thesiger had a complex, unequal friendship, one that marked both their lives. Thesiger's memories and knowledge live on in print, given voice by his capacity to write and publish. Amara's memories and knowledge live on, for now, in a suburb of Baghdad where grandchildren hear his stories, including those of his adventures in a 9-meter tarada with an Englishman. "I think of them often," he says of those years. "And I thank God every day for the memories." 🌐



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Wilfred Thesiger: May / Jun 2005

WILFRED THESIGER / PITT RIVERS MUSEUM COLLECTION; OPPOSITE LOWER: LEON MCCARRON

Key to a Kingdom: Ronda's Secret Water Mine

Written by

ANA M. CARREÑO LEYVA

Photographed by

RICHARD DOUGHTY

"One of the most invincible … a fortress that melts with the clouds, belted by freshwater rivers and springs."

—Abu al-Fida, early 14th c. CE

Approaching the region of the Serranía de Ronda, just inland from the Mediterranean's Costa del Sol, one passes through mountains and rugged surroundings that have challenged settlers, merchants, travelers and invaders for thousands of years. Over the last ridges, a broad valley opens, circled around by hills and hazy massifs.

Near its center, set like a jewel in this natural crown, a small tableland rises some 200 sheer meters above the fields: Ronda, spectacularly cleft by its famous Tajo, a narrow, nearly vertical gorge cut over five million years ago by the river Guadalevín, a name that comes from the Arabic *wadi al-laban* (valley of milk), after the prosperity its waters brought to the grazing lands below.

The city appears precarious, perched along the rocky crests of the ravine and surrounding cliffs. Picturesque today, for centuries this setting made Ronda one of the most strategic natural strongholds in a frequently contested, borderland area.

From the southwest, Ronda's limestone ramparts are split by the Tajo, or gorge, spanned since 1793 by the picturesque "New Bridge." The water mine, tunneled in the 12th century down through 60 meters of rock from the plateau to the river's edge, lies around a bend beyond the bridge.

Commanding the center of a natural amphitheater of fields, orchards and forests, Ronda is one of Spain's oldest continuously inhabited settlements. By the 11th century, it was the capital of the regional district called Takurunna, and it was one of the Iberian Peninsula's *taifas* or independent kingdoms. In the 14th century, it allied with the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, and in 1485 it fell to the Catholic monarchs.

While its spectacle gives the town "a legendary character that still persists," says Virgilio Martínez Enamorado, professor of medieval history at the Universidad de Málaga and a specialist in al-Andalus, or Muslim Spain, this is a region that has been settled since even before Neolithic times. Iberians, Phoenicians Celts, Romans, Visigoths, Arabs and Berbers have all predominated at different times, each making here a center stage thanks to Ronda's defensive qualities.

"Its urban history goes back to antiquity, to Neolithic times, in nearby Acinipo, where Romans settled later, as recorded by Pliny and Ptolemy," says Martínez Enamorado. By the 11th century CE, the Banu Ifran, a Berber tribe, made Ronda capital of the district they called Takurunna. That name, he explains, embodied the cultural layers that characterized the region: It compounded the Berber article *ta-* with an Arabicized pronunciation of the Latin word for crown, *corōna*. Also in the 11th century CE, Ronda became capital of a *taifa*, or independent kingdom; by the 14th century, Ronda had joined the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada and became its westernmost realm.

Around that time, Kurdish historian and geographer Abu al-Fida wrote about the town in his *Tarikh al-mukhtasar fi akhbar al-bashar* (*Concise History of Humanity*): "As for the district of Ronda, it is one of the most invincible *ma'qal* [shelters] in al-Andalus. It is a fortress that melts with the clouds, belted by freshwater rivers."

A century before him, in the mid-1220s CE, Yaqut al-Hamawi, born in Constantinople, wrote *Kitab mu'am al-buldan* (*Dictionary of Countries*), which drew upon earlier works by Ptolemy and Mohammed al-Idrisi. He noted that "Takurunna in al-Andalus is located in a very mountainous area and has countless inaccessible wells and castles."

Around this same time, Takurunna native son al-Himyari called his home region "a very old city, with a great number of vestiges"—and his words closely echoed ones written in the earliest-known Arab-based account of al-Andalus, the 10th-century *Crónica del moro Rasis (Chronicle of the Moor al-Razi)*.

For the town today, this history is much overshadowed by the marketable pleasures of Ronda's rugged beauty and small-town appeal. Spanned by stone bridges, the drama of the Tajo and the surrounding cliffs make Ronda one of southern Spain's leading tourist destinations. It has been this way since the 18th and 19th centuries, says Ronda Municipal Delegate for Culture Alicia López Dominguez. It was in this era that it became a

Iberians, Phoenicians, Celts, Romans, Visigoths, Arabs and Berbers have all predominated at different times in Ronda.

favorite on the itineraries of so-called "Romantic travelers," generally writers and artists from Europe and the Americas seeking inspiration from both natural beauty and the exoticism of remnants of Hispano-Muslim culture.

While today most visitors come for the "astonishing landscape and exceptional gastronomy," she says, they often find also "a surprising history with a monument unique not only in Ronda but nationally, *la mina de agua*," the water mine carved in the 12th century CE from the Tajo's edge down through 60 meters of rock to a spring-fed well and the river.

Historic Arabic sources refer repeatedly, if briefly, to Ronda's strategic defensive role, but about the water mine, Martínez Enamorado says, "there are no concrete references. It's a place that hardly appears in the Arab chronicles," and only briefly in later Christian ones, too. Systematic archeology, by a team from the Universidad de Sevilla, began only recently.

"Hardly anything has been studied so far," he says. As a result, "a halo of legends" has long since filled the gaps, most notoriously the story that the water mine had been a hiding place for treasure stashed away by Ronda's King Abd al-Malik, who ruled from 1333 and 1339.

While no treasure of gold or gems has ever been found, the mine's real treasure was always the water. Under attack, the only way for the inhabitants of the tableland town to get water for drinking or cooking was through the mine. "This was very hard work," says Martínez Enamorado, because the water had to be carried up the mine's stone stairs in one goatskin sack after another. This made the mine itself a kind of treasure, one that worked the other way around too: In 1485 the water mine was the decisive prize for the army of Rodrigo Ponce de León, Marquis of Cádiz, who led the army of the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella into Takurunna in early spring of that year.

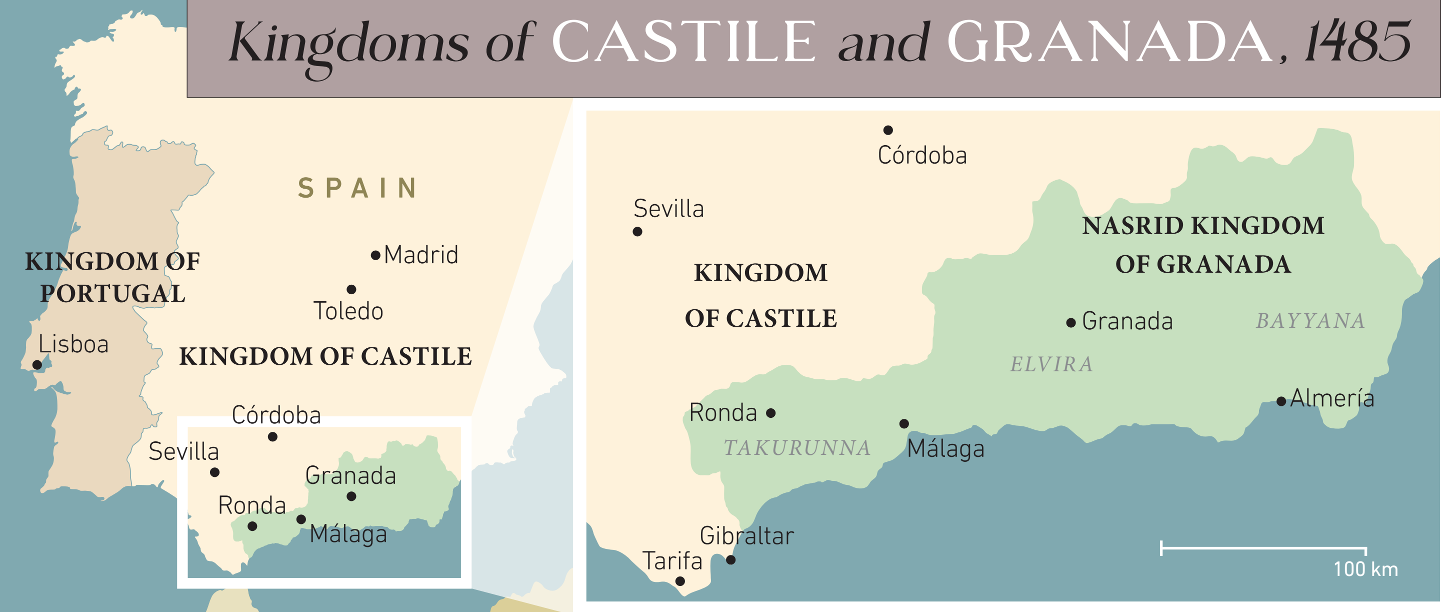
Many doubted his forces could take over Ronda, so well was it garrisoned by its own army as well as its topography, walls and towers.

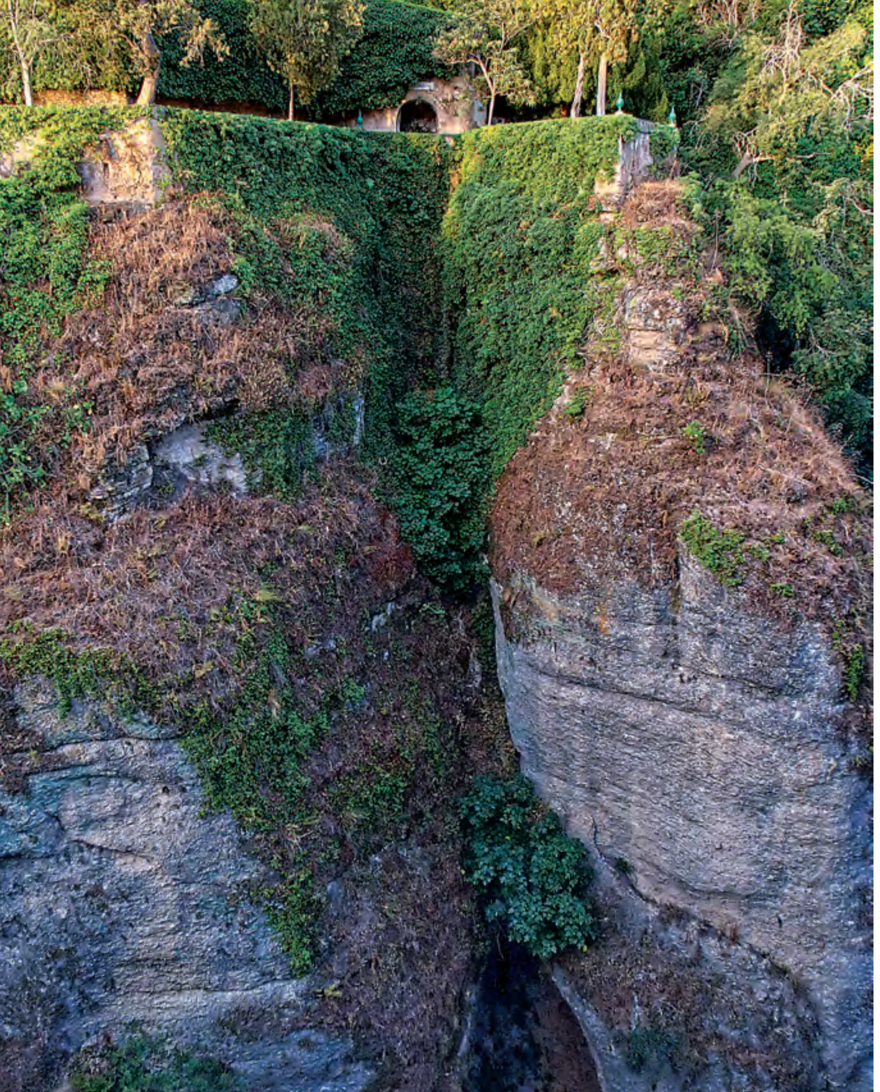
According to Castilian royal secretary and chronicler Andrés Bernáldez, the Christian forces deployed 20,000 infantry, 1,500 cavalry and 1,100 artillery carts that used gunpowder to fire *cuartadao*, the forerunner of the mortar. They surrounded Ronda, laid siege in late April, and on May 22 took possession of the city.

A small plaza commemorates Ronda's early tourists—the writers, poets and painters known as "Romantic Travelers." Arriving from throughout Europe and abroad from the late 18th century on, they came in search of inspiration from natural beauty and the remnants of Hispano-Muslim culture. Today Ronda is one of Spain's most-popular tourist destinations.

Shortly after the conquest, Bernáldez wrote:

> The Moors had a secret mine in Ronda … from where they went down to collect the water they needed, from three wells they had built at the bottom, by the water's edge. … Of this the Marquis of Cádiz was informed, and he himself with his soldiers fought there, and ordered the construction of a gate in the wall of the large ravine where he discovered the staircase, put people inside to guard that water, inside the vault of the mine. And in this way the Marquis-Duke of





LEFT Viewed from across the Tajo, the vaulted entrance to the water mine, open to the public since the 1990s, is now clearly visible. What stood to conceal it when Ronda's Almohad rulers constructed it as a military secret in the 12th century is just one of the questions that endure today. **CENTER** There are 231 steps that lie between the well and the entrance, up which slaves carried water in goatskins whenever the mine was put to use. The passageway snakes through rough, damp, lime-encrusted walls, once illuminated only by strategically designed windows and, **RIGHT**, skylighting from this high gallery.

> Cádiz took the water; for this the Moors were much afflicted … and they could not hold on.

Also describing the scene in contemporary Spanish accounts was Diego de Valera, a soldier, diplomat and historian who was 73 years old when Ronda fell. He noted that "the Moors" defended the city bravely, "causing many injured and some deaths," but that

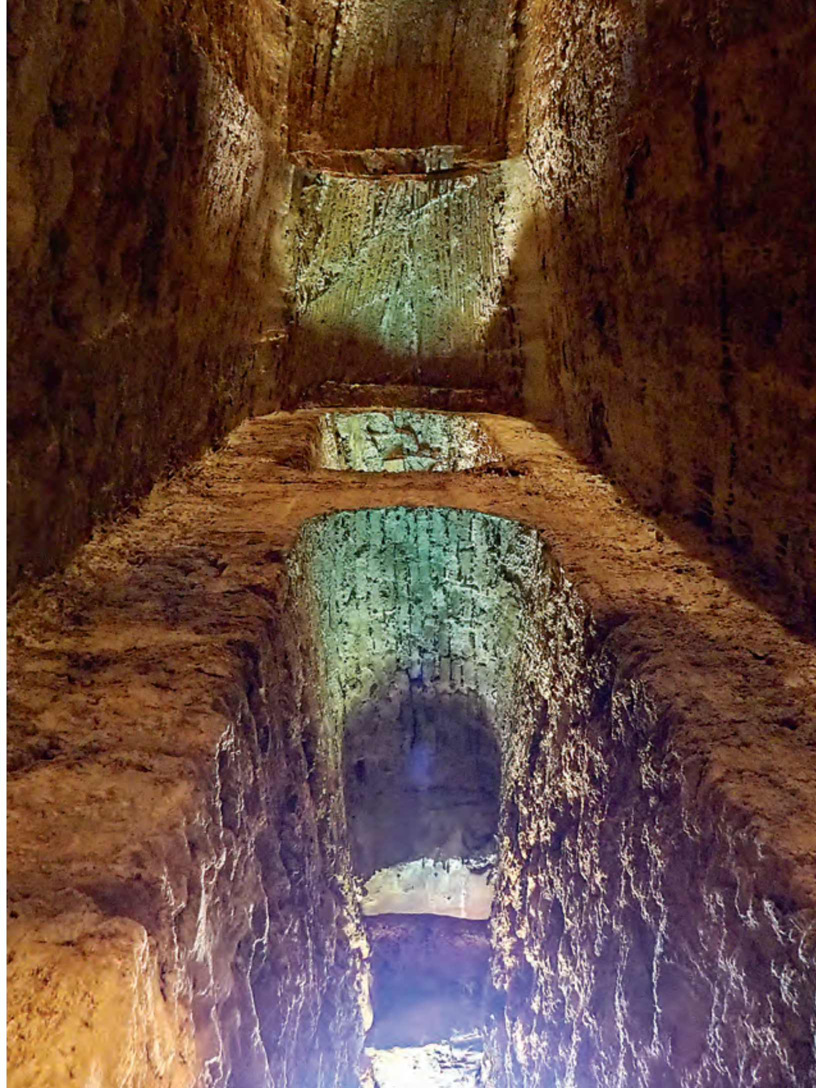
> a tower on the river from which the Moors took water was cut off … and having no other source of water, excepting the cistern which lasted no more than five or six days, the Marquis in person took part in the taking of this mine and he worked very hard there, to the extent that he got in water many times up to his waist, and some of his servants were either killed or wounded.

The fall of Ronda, and with it Takurunna, shook confidence throughout the Nasrid Kingdom, already deeply divided by internal rivalries. Fears of its eventual fall, and fears of Muslim expulsions that might result, began to circulate more widely.

The Catholic campaign of conquests continued for seven more years. In 1492 the Nasrid capital, Granada, surrendered. Nearly eight centuries of Muslim power in the Iberian Peninsula ended and, that same year, reports of new lands across the Atlantic gave Ferdinand and Isabella hope for the discovery of even more riches.

It is uncertain whether before their siege the Christian forces knew of the water mine's existence. It is a steep passageway, much of it like a tunnel, that today counts 231 stone stairsteps and three main chambers carved into the rock along natural fractures in the Tajo. In addition to being "completely engineered, under favorable geologic conditions," explains Martínez Enamorado, it was nothing like an ordinary well. It was a prodigious hydraulic work designed to produce water in volumes high enough to sustain the inhabitants of the city—and one that could also be a military stronghold to protect its liquid treasure.

This, Martínez Enamorado says, made the water mine a *qawraja*, as it was called in Arabic, a fortification designed to guard a resource. Now referred to as a *coracha* in Spanish, the name may have come into Arabic through Persian and Latin. There are hundreds of Arab-built qawrajas, small and large, scattered in ruins all over southern Spain, he points out. Many also guard wells, but of them all, the water mine is the most elaborate and



"one to be used only in serious situations." With its access to the river, he adds, it could also be used as an escape passage, but primarily it was strongly armored and defended from the inside by soldiers stationed behind tall, narrow archers' windows placed at different levels as well as a few wider windows directly above the entrance, from which hot oil or water could be poured.

Today the mine's upper entrance is a simple, cave-like stone portal at the edge of a formal garden on a property named Casa del Rey Moro (The House of the Moorish King) even though it dates from the 19th century and neither Moor nor king ever lived there. The garden dates from 1911–1912, when the house was bought by Trinidad von Scholz-Hermensdorff, Duchess of Parcent. At that time the entrance to the mine was much obscured by brushwood and heaps of material from former constructions, although earlier Romantic travelers had taken notice: Francis Carter, a British traveler who wrote about the region in 1772, praised the water mine's "several large and spacious saloons, which occupy the bowels of the rock," and he lamented that "the whole will very soon be destroyed for want of care in its preservation."

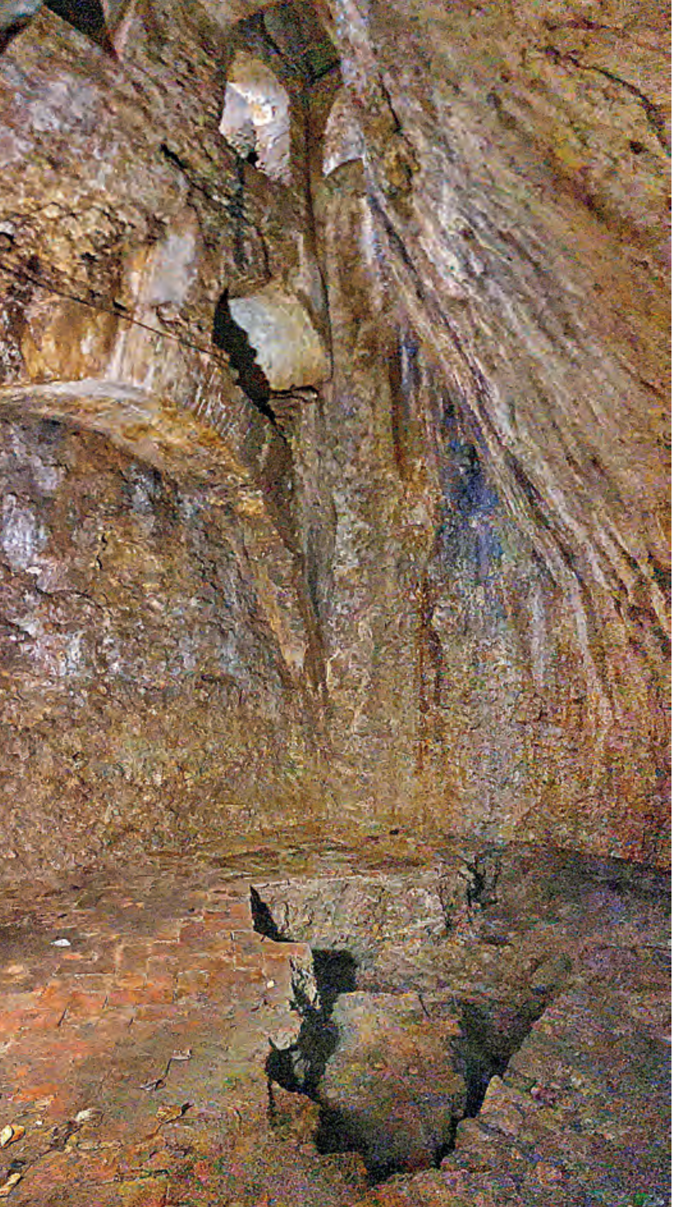
It has been open to the public only since the 1990s. The natural lighting from the windows has been supplemented with discreet electric bulbs, and tourists—unlike the slaves, servants and soldiers who bore water in goatskins—can steady their footing on each irregular step thanks to modern metal handrails.

With its organically winding, labyrinthine structure, the descending passageway looks phantasmagorical, a surreal staircase where light is filtered as slowly as the water that seeps down the walls and drips from the ceilings in this engineered, vertical cave. It has several bench-like resting niches along the way, some covered by arches and vaults, others pierced by windows, and recesses in the walls whose purposes, Martínez Enamorado says, remain uncertain—only one of the several enduring mysteries of the water mine. (See sidebar, p. 31.)

The water mine is a *qawraja*, a fortification built to protect a resource—often a well. Of hundreds across al-Andalus, it is the most elaborate one known.

Post-Reconquista Spanish accounts say the mine was constructed and manned by captive Christians who, in addition to hewing rock and carrying goatskins, would have also turned by hand the crankshaft of the *noria*, or waterwheel, at the heart of the mine, about three-fourths of the way down to the river.

At some 10 meters from floor to ceiling, the noria's chamber is the tallest of the mine's three excavated "saloons," as Carter referred



LEFT The waterwheel occupied this chamber, its axle mounted into the wall and its rotation driven, according to Spanish accounts, by captive Christians, since no draft animal could negotiate the stairway. The well from which the wheel drew water dropped through the floor some 15 meters to river level. **RIGHT** Exiting the mine at the river's edge, defenders held a strong advantage. However, on May 13, 1485, Spanish forces prevailed with gunpowder, espionage and a superior number of soldiers: Days later, the town surrendered.

to them. The noria would have been attached to an axle mounted in the wall, Martínez Enamorado explains. It would have used a belt or ropes that dropped through the floor to the level of the spring close to the river level. Buckets attached to it would raise the water to a cistern from which skins could be filled, clamped or tied and then hauled up the stairs. Human traction was the only way to draw, load and carry the water, Martínez Enamorado says, since no draft animal could negotiate the stairway. The space shows a floor of brick, arranged in a herringbone pattern, that began to be uncovered in 2019 during the first of the four phases of excavations planned by the Universidad de Sevilla, each focused on a different part of the mine.

Almost at the same level, along the outside wall, a room with several vaults and a lower ceiling was made with windows wide enough to invite speculation that this may have been an armory for weapons, ammunition, or perhaps even at times a small prison.

Down another a few more meters is one of the most surprising places in the mine, popularly known as "The Hall of Secrets." Actually a small, square room, its ceiling is a finely constructed *qubba*, or a hemispheric dome; in one wall is an archer's slit of a window. Considering the traditional use of this type of domed constructions that resolve the corners of a square plan, the room suggests that the mine may have had other, as-yet-unknown uses, says Martínez Enamorado. "The qubba sacralizes the space, or at the very least, it implies that it was a multifunctional space," he says. The Spanish accounts say it was here

The fall of Ronda in 1485, and with it Takurunna, shook confidence throughout the Nasrid Kingdom, which lasted only seven more years.

MYSTERIES *of the* MINE

Written by **VIRGILIO MARTÍNEZ ENAMORADO**

Although the water mine is one of the most singular *qawraja*s (*corachas* in Spanish) in al-Andalus, it has almost as many uncertainties as it has steps. Starting at the top, where visitors today begin their descent from the tranquil gardens designed 400 years after the water mine was last used, the first mystery is what stood at the top. What was the construction that topped the mine on the edge of the gorge? Into what did those who carried the water deposit that which with so much effort they carried? No trace remains of any fortress at the top of the gorge that would have been served by the purpose of the mine's existence—the water supply.

The descent begins along stairs through passageways carved roughly and encrusted with karstic deposits, some with low ceilings and others that reach up 5 to 10 meters in which small windows allow light to enter. The effort of cutting the passage was only part of the job: Assuring adequate light was an almost independent feat, as the shaft wound its way down through the rocks, taking advantage of natural crevices and formations as much as possible. But the builders of this fabulous hydraulic device are the second great mystery. Other than their dynastic affiliation—Ifrane Berbers—and their rough time period—the 11th century—we know no more.

At three intervals along the descent appear three different rooms that each raise more questions. Most curious is the so-called "Hall of Secrets," crowned by its hemispheric *qubba*, or dome on pendentives; then the rectilinear, columned room called "the armory," although we do not know for certain its real functions; and the 10-meter-high room in which the noria, or waterwheel, was installed: Each one raises historical and archeological questions. Even at the bottom of the gorge, at the edge of the river, the slightly ostentatious portal of a door seems to be hardly something suited to a military secret.

The Hall of Secrets appears much more finely constructed than any other part of the mine. Was it a place for the military commander in times of war, or the administrator when the mine may have served as a prison? Or was it as legend says, a place for the ladies of the court, a sort of private hammam, or bath? Does its amazing acoustic characteristic, which allows the faintest whisper to be heard on the other side of the room, serve a purpose, or is it a coincidence?

Next to the arsenal room along one wall, a few dozen black crosses, most of them just a few centimeters tall, are roughly drawn using what appears to have been charcoal. Here legend says these were scratched by captive Christian water carriers. Although we know from post-reconquista accounts that Christians were released when the Catholic forces took Ronda, these marks have not yet been scientifically dated. Could such informal marks have endured more than five centuries? At present there is no better explanation than that of legend.

Finally, in the room in which the waterwheel was installed, there are many archeological questions, because the waterwheel is no longer there, having been removed and the well covered over with bricks at an unknown time. We hope to learn more from investigations by archeologists from the Universidad de Sevilla, who have completed their first phase.

It is all more than enough to lead us to believe that the water mine was more than a hydrological complex or an exclusively military construction, but rather one that served other, as-yet-unknown purposes, too.

With such a scarcity of evidence and data, it is left to conjectures and legends to respond to the riddles that today continue to surround one of the most important and least known constructions from the era of al-Andalus.

TOP Situated as a buffer between the mine's outer wall and the chamber of the waterwheel, this vaulted room may have served as an armory. Its windows open directly above the mine's exit to the river. **ABOVE** The hemispheric *qubba*, or dome ceiling, of the square room known today as the "Hall of Secrets" is an acoustic marvel of a whispering gallery, yet the purpose of its elegant architecture in a military installation remains a mystery.

ABOVE Spanish settlement of Ronda built up the side of the Tajo opposite the Berber-Arab town, where land was more plentiful in an era where defensive concerns were fewer. Still, the last attack on Ronda came from the armies of Napoleon in 1810. **RIGHT** Built in the 13th century, Ronda's recently excavated Arab bath complex is the best preserved of its type in Spain.

The Water Mine's BERBER FOUNDATIONS

Written by **ROBERT W. LEBLING**

Most of the Muslim soldiers who crossed from North Africa into the Iberian Peninsula beginning in 711 CE were ethnic Berbers, called *al-barbar* in Arabic chronicles and today self-identified as Amazigh. The terrain of southern Iberia would have reminded many of them of rugged regions of today's Morocco and Algeria. Ronda, and its water mine, are part of a seldom-told story of Berber conquest and rule.

With the weakening of Roman control, in the sixth century CE, Visigoths from France captured Ronda and its surrounding region. When the Arab-Berber army defeated them to take Ronda in 713 CE, the Syrian general Musa bin Nusayr renamed it Hisn al-Ronda (The Castle of Ronda), and later it became capital of the district called Takurunna.

Among the Berbers who came to Iberia, some of the most powerful came from the Zenata tribe, which allied with the Córdoba-based Umayyad Caliphate that also controlled Takurunna.

When the caliphate fell in 1031, Ronda became an independent *taifa* or city-state ruled by the Banu Ifran, a Zenata family. Thirty-four years later, in 1065, Ronda was absorbed into another, more-powerful Islamic taifa, the Kingdom of Seville. It and other taifas of al-Andalus soon grew worried about the power of the Christian Kingdom of Castile, which by 1085 had taken Madrid and stunned Arab-Berber forces with defeat at Toledo. The taifas appealed to other Berbers for help: the Almoravids of Morocco. Their request backfired as Almoravid troops flooded into al-Andalus and challenged not only the Castilians but also the Muslim taifas. By 1091, the Almoravids controlled most of them.

In Morocco, the rival Almohads took advantage of popular discontent with Almoravid rule and rose up to supplant them—first in Morocco and then in Iberia.

The Almohad siege of Ronda in 1148 gave them the city but greatly damaged its defenses. They set about strengthening them and also building palaces, mosques and the water mine.

Within a century, over much of al-Andalus Almohad control had fallen to the Christian armies with the exception of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, which absorbed the taifa of Takurunna, and Ronda, as its westernmost territory.

In 1329, as Granada grew worried about Castile, again al-Andalus looked to Morocco for help. And again, it got more than it wanted when Berber Marinids, like the Almoravids and Almohads before them, invaded Iberia. Abu al-Malik, son of the Marinid sultan of Fez, took the crown of the taifa of Ronda.

He oversaw construction that produced some of the city's classic Moorish structures, including the Arab Baths, and Ronda thrived as a cultural and commercial hub. After Abu al-Malik was slain in 1339 in a Castilian ambush, Ronda became a dependency of Nasrid Granada, by then the last Arab kingdom in al-Andalus.

Although for centuries Muslim and Christian rulers had at times also joined forces against each other's rivals—and then sometimes turned against their own allies—all such opportunistic flexibility ended in 1469 with the unification of the two most powerful Christian kingdoms through the marriage of Queen Isabella I of Castile and King Ferdinand II of Aragon, who together became known as "the Catholic Monarchs." Their military campaign against the Nasrid Kingdom began soon thereafter, and amid dozens of actions until their victory in Granada in 1492, the siege of Ronda in 1485, and the decisive capture of its water mine, marked a turning point along the road of history.

LEFT A further hint of the artistry, culture and wealth that flourished in Ronda during its Nasrid era appears on the ornate arch that formerly vaulted the *mihrab*, or prayer niche, in the city's central mosque. Of that mosque, only this arch survives, incorporated into the back of the nave of the church of Santa María la Mayor, constructed between the 15th and 18th century. **RIGHT** Protecting the city from the south and dating to the 13th century, the twin towers of the Puerta de Almocabar takes its name from the Arabic word for the cemetery, *al-maqabir*, which lay nearby. **LOWER** Amid the narrow streets of the historic Arab town, a simple horseshoe arch marks the doorway to the single minaret that still stands in Ronda.

that in 1485 the Marquis of Cádiz posted his soldiers.

The room owes its popular name to the singularity of its acoustics, which allow a whisper from side to be heard across the room but not in the middle. Of course, this has helped amplify also the whispers of legend, such as stories of the room being a spa for Moorish ladies of the court, despite it not looking at all comfortable for this. Yet this also suggests why, down at the river's edge, in the open air, the entrance to the mine appears not camouflaged but rather flaunted with a wide, rectangular door bordered with a stone frieze whose decoration seems out of place for military purposes. Today a metal deck offers visitors a view of the grottos of the river and the tapered stone of the Tajo that rises like buttresses, as if designed to keep the town from tumbling off the edge.

The growth of the city that followed the Catholic conquest took place mainly on the side of the Tajo opposite the old Arab city that today preserves its character amid steep, winding streets and scattered reminders of its centuries as capital of Takurunna. There is a single, modest, square, stone minaret and the best-preserved Arab bathhouse in all of Spain. A tall horseshoe arch, covered in elaborate Arabic calligraphy, carved in bas relief during the city's Nasrid era, lies tucked within the church of Santa María la Mayor: The arch originally framed the *mihrab*, or prayer niche, of the mosque Arabs built over a Roman temple. And on every side of Ronda, walls and turret-towers remind us that the citadel town was a ruler's key to a rich and rugged region.

To those Berber and Arab people who first crossed the Serranía from the drier lands of the Mediterranean's African shore "with the light sound of water, plotting the desert's memories," as wrote Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, there would be no key to Ronda, no treasure of their Takurunna, greater than the water for which they would hew the rock in secret to ensure its blessings. ⊕

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MAMLUK ROSETTE

WRITTEN BY
ADAM WILLIAMSON

ART COURTESY OF
ART OF ISLAMIC PATTERN

Interlacing amplifies a sense of movement in this marble relief carved in the 14th century CE at the entrance of the mosque-masdrasa of Sultan Hassan in Cairo. On paper, **OPPOSITE**, the effect is achieved using both line and variations of tone at the points of intersection.

In this second exploration into classic Islamic patterns, we turn to one of the stunning marble rosettes that flank the magnificent entrance portal to the mosque-madrasa of Sultan Hassan in Cairo, Egypt, built in the 14th century CE.

These marble-carved medallions seamlessly weave curvilinear geometry into a vesica, or quatrefoil, arabesque composition. The pattern repeats using radial symmetry to produce an interlaced, eight-fold rosette. This is traditionally interpreted to symbolize the four elements of matter—earth, air, fire and water—together with their four properties of dry, wet, hot and cold. These interpretations date to the fourth century BCE, the time of Aristotle, whose writings remained influential among many Muslim thinkers around the time the pattern was carved.

The vegetive motifs, drawn freehand, have their origins in the teardrop motifs called *Rumi* (Roman) and *tepelik* (pointed tip, or hilltop) motifs established in Anatolia. The distinctively Mamluk characteristics here can be seen in the symmetrical, spiral embellishments that coil inside the abstract leaves of the Rumi motif.

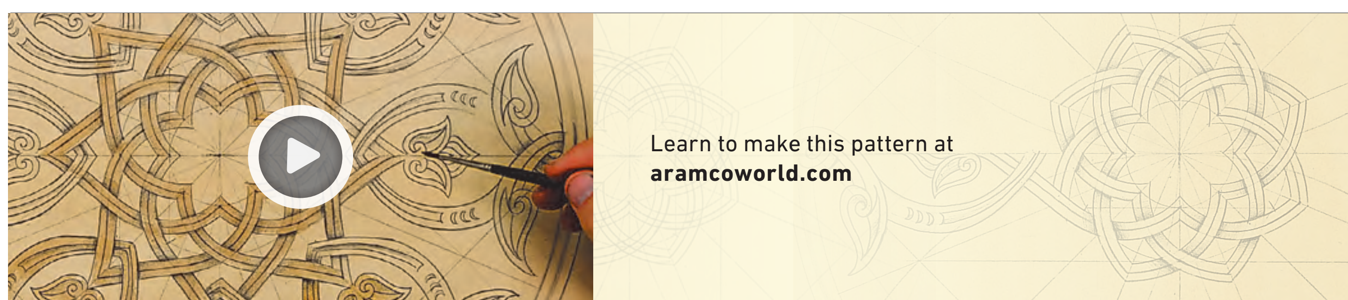
The mosque-madrasa complex was built between 1356 and 1363, during the Bahri Mamluk period, and it is ranked among the masterpieces of Mamluk architecture. Most Mamluks originated in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and while not free subjects of the Ottoman Empire, they were often educated, and their architecture was sophisticated and cosmopolitan, having within it influences from Byzantium, al-Andalus, North Africa, Central Asia and Persia.

Although this design is underpinned by geometric elements, it is classified as an Arabesque, or biomorphic, design. Both terms refer to patterns that are visual crystallizations of movement, abstract depictions of the vital, dynamic life force of nature that is expressed visually by every culture around our globe, generally using the shapes and materials most intuitive to them. These shapes describe the cycles and patterns inherent in nature, from the microscopic to the macroscopic: protons and neutrons as they spin around atoms; sound as it vibrates through the air; leaves as they uncurl from a fern; the whorls of fingerprints, the growth rings of trees and the currents of oceans.

These flowing, curvilinear patterns thus reflect, alongside geometry and calligraphy, one of the three distinct disciplines of classical Islam's decorative canon. Within that, there exists a wide variety of regional styles of arabesque, and all follow the same archetypal principles.

In classical Islamic art, symmetry exemplifies perfection and unity, and is thus a reflection of divine qualities: The act of drawing can be undertaken as a meditation upon this harmony in the orders of nature.

ADAM WILLIAMSON; OPPOSITE, MAIN: SANAA KOCHAR


Learn to make this pattern at
aramcoworld.com

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Compass: Choose a high-quality one 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 to a square.

Eraser: Professional drafting erasers work best. Mistakes are part of learning to make patterns.

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

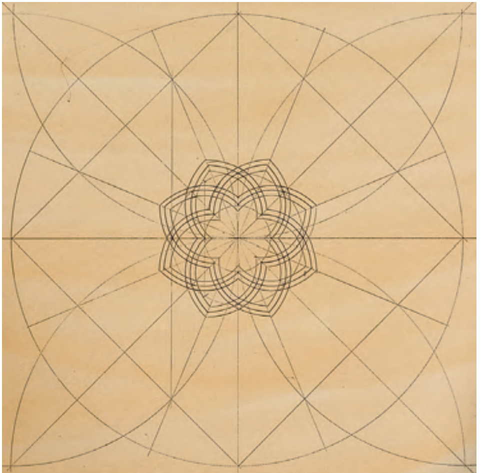
Tracing paper: A4 or 8½ inches by 11 inches size works well.

In this pattern, stages 1 to 4 are geometric, drawn using a compass and a straightedge. Stages 5 to 9 are biomorphic, drawn freehand, and the repetition of the motifs is rendered using a soft pencil and transferred by tracing paper.

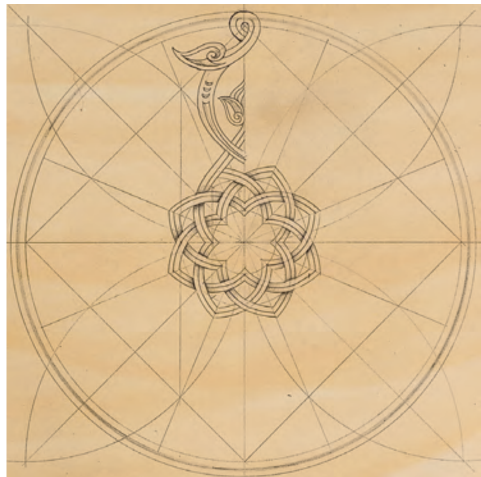
- Across the midpoints of the page, draw a horizontal line. Measure its midpoint and, using the compass, inscribe a circle to fill the page.
- Retaining the same radius, place the compass where the circle intersects the horizontal line on the right (green). Draw a semicircle. Do the same on the left side.
- Place the compass on each of the four points where the semicircles meet the circle. (The top two are marked in white.) Use the intersecting points of the top and bottom arcs to find the points that define the vertical axis. Note these are above and below your paper, so make sure you allow space. Draw the vertical axis across the circle.
- From the top and bottom intersections of the circle with the vertical axis, draw semicircles (red).
- Draw the diagonal lines by aligning the straightedge with the tips of the petals (blue) and cross the center point.

- Draw a square from the intersections of the circle with the vertical and horizontal axes.
- Draw a set of 8 radial lines from the center point to the edge of the circle by aligning the ruler with each intersection of the square and the semicircular petals (white).
- From the farther intersections of the left petals with the square, draw 1 vertical guideline (red).
- Place the compass point in the center of the diagram and set its radius to meet the vertical guideline. Draw the proportioning circle for the central rosette.
- Without changing the radius, switch the compass to the left side of the circle, where it meets the vertical line. Make small marks where the compass crosses the upper and lower circumference of the proportioning circle.
- Use these points to draw a second, shorter vertical line (turquoise). Use where it meets the horizontal axis to draw, from the center point, a second, smaller proportioning circle.
- Place the compass point on each of the 8 points marked in blue. Set the radius to draw a set of 16 curves whose arcs connect the blue points with the 8 radial lines.

- Expand the compass proportionally to the drawing and repeat the curves from the previous stage at a larger radius to create a channel or ribbon.
- Reduce the compass by the same value and repeat the curves once more to increase the width of the channel/ribbon.



- Using an eraser to remove the lines that flow over one another, reveal the weave of the central rosette.
- Shade where the ribbon passes “under” to emphasize the interlacing.
- Draw the freehand biomorphic element into one of the sections (1/16 of the circle) using a 2B pencil. (Hint: you may want to practice first using tracing paper.)



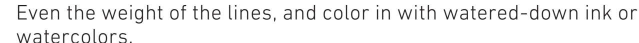
5

- Place tracing paper over the biomorphic element. Tape it in place using drafting tape. Trace the drawing using a 3B (very soft) pencil.
- Using the straightedge, trace the vertical line onto the tracing paper. Then fold along this line, keeping the pencil lines on the outside.
- Trace the bilateral symmetry of the biomorphic section on the other side of the fold.
- Unfold the tracing paper and turn it over so that the pencil lines face the original drawing. Aligning it with the main drawing in the each of the sections around the medallion, and keeping it taped in place or held very steady, transfer the pencil lines from the tracing paper onto the main drawing by burnishing (rubbing) the tracing paper with a smooth stone or a spoon.
- Repeat this process for the four corner motifs. (Not shown in these examples.)

6

- Using a 2B (soft) pencil, redraw the faint lines that have been transferred directly on the page. Start from the side opposite your drawing hand to to reduce smudging.

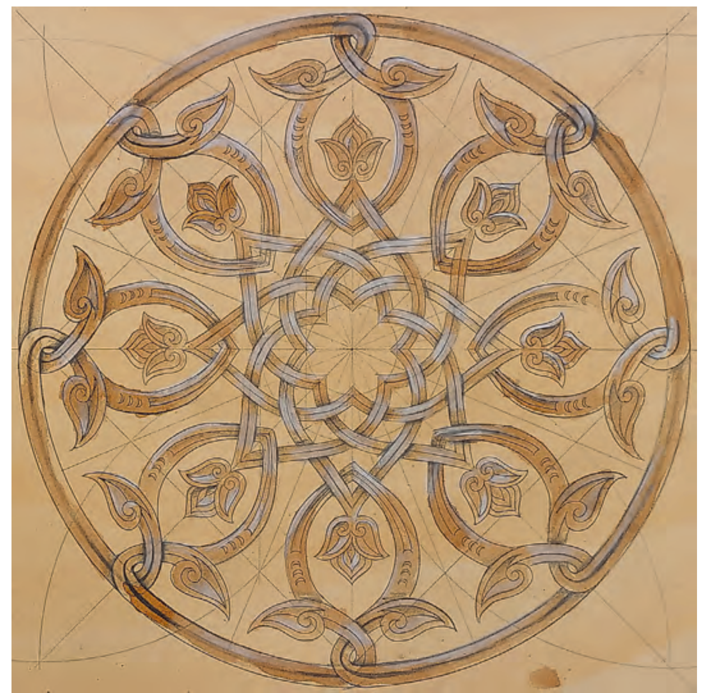
7



- Even the weight of the lines, and color in with watered-down ink or watercolors.

8

- Highlight with a stick of white chalk or pastel.
- Erase the radial lines, axes and all guidelines.
- Add background color if you wish.



Adam Williamson specializes in biomorphic pattern (*islimi*, or arabesque), and he is also a stone and wood carver and artist. With Richard Henry he directs London-based Art of Islamic Pattern (artofislamicpattern.com), which has offered short courses, workshops and exhibitions at locations renowned for pattern-based artistic heritages in the UK and more than half a dozen other countries.

REVIEWS

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

> "The Egypt of one's dreams is often just that, a dream rather than the real Egypt of history. That, however, to a large extent is what Egyptomania is all about."
>
> —from *Egyptomania*, by Ronald H. Fritze

Egyptomania: A History of Fascination, Obsession and Fantasy

Ronald H. Fritze. Reaktion Books, 2021.

In this compendium of all things magical and mystical associated by fact or imagination with pharaonic Egypt, Fritze, a professor of history and religion, tracks the Western fascination with the Egypt of myth and legend from its beginnings with the Old Testament Hebrews and Classical Greeks through medieval alchemists and Enlightenment-era occultists to the opening of King Tut's tomb in 1922 and on to the 1981 film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and on and on. Though the perspective is primarily Western, Fritze also discusses Islam's "conflicted and contradictory attitude" toward pharaonic civilization. He examines the reality of pharaonic Egypt and the mythical visions it has inspired for millennia, from exhumed mummies taken as medicine to Freemasonry and the obelisk of the Washington Monument, leaving no avenue or alleyway of Egyptomania unexplored. He counterpoises factual Egyptian history with the "babel of baloney" about the mystical powers of pyramids, the fables of Atlantis and the hypotheses of extraterrestrial engineers while surveying the fascination also across fiction and cinema, from Shakespeare to Agatha Christie.

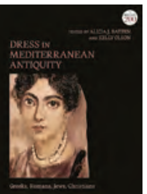
—KYLE PAKKA

A House in the Land of Shinar

Bernadette Miller.
Archway Publishing, 2020.

Scholars and archeologists have theorized that Judaism may have originated some 5,000 years ago from the relationship between Bedouin Arabs and citizens of the city of Sumer, in what is now southern Iraq. Bernadette Miller, a historical novelist, dramatizes this in her fictional account of this encounter. The novel follows numerous characters and centers on Tiras, a Bedouin tribesman who becomes disillusioned by his bull-god Martu after having to sacrifice his daughter. Tiras leaves his family and tribe to embark on a solitary, spiritual journey that leads him to Sumer, where he gets taught Sumerian traditions by a scholar and physician. In the five months he lives in Sumer, Tiras fashions a new set of beliefs as his life becomes entangled in an affair with a Sumerian woman who becomes pregnant with his child. The novel then follows his children as they try to make sense of the world around them and establish what becomes a new religion.

—HANNAH STERENBERG



Dress in Mediterranean Antiquity

Alicia J. Batten and Kelly Olson, eds.
T&T Clark, 2021.

We all dress up on occasion: formal dinners, weddings, a night out. How, when and why people did so around the Mediterranean from 1200 BCE to 500 CE is the focus of this collection of essays that rummage through the closets of history in search of the materials, styles and purposes of dress. Modern-looking Fayyum mummy-case portraits from Egypt's Roman period, or roughly the first to third century CE, reveal what the deceased looked like and demonstrate these Egyptians "wished to be commemorated for eternity … in their ideal state," which included their finest gowns, tunics and jewelry. Formal court robes, "richly embellished with woven designs and ornamented appliqué decorations" of gold and jewels—garments symbolizing royal endorsement—were adapted from a Persian innovation dating to the Achaemenid Era in the sixth century BCE. This text will appeal to anyone with an interest in fashion history and the material cultures of antiquity.

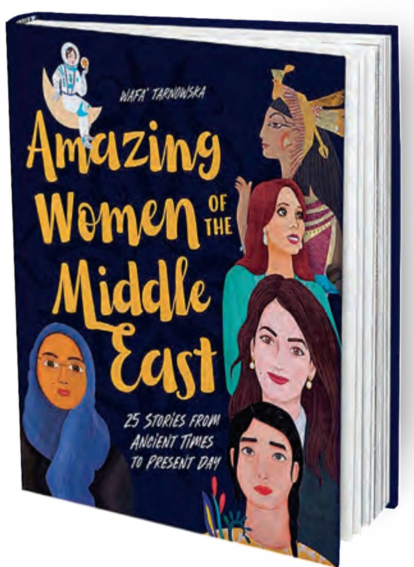
—TOM VERDE

Street Art Africa

Cale Waddacor.
Thames & Hudson, 2020.

South African artist, musician and photographer Cale Waddacor has compiled more than 200 artistic works—a decade worth of Waddacor photographing street art—from across the continent to produce his second book, which expands upon his first, *Graffiti of South Africa*. This extensive visual survey features artwork from hastily created revolutionary graffiti art to meticulously planned, commissioned murals. The book's highlights include explanations on the history and context for each piece, which connect readers to the meaning behind the art. Waddacor organized the book by each of the major continental regions, and he included standout pieces from each. Personally, the abstract graffiti and portraits from Western Africa made me nostalgic for the street art I have often seen on my own trips back home to Southern Asia. Much more than a coffee-table book, this is a captivating look into Africa's street art scenes.

—MARINA ALI



Tackling Tough Subjects Through Children's Literature: A Conversation With Wafa' Tarnowska

by MARINA ALI

A self-described "world Bedouin," Wafa' Tarnowska's extensive travels sowed the seeds for her new children's book, *Amazing Women of the Middle East*. She's lived in in her native Lebanon, Australia, India, Cyprus, Dubai and Canada, and she currently splits her time between Poland and the UK. Ironically, her optimism belies a life of hardship and perseverance. At age 19 Tarnowska packed for Melbourne University under nonstop gunfire during the Lebanese Civil War after classes at her local university were suspended. While studying in Australia, she translated the news into Arabic for Radio 3 Ethnic Australia and later became a host on a children's Arabic storytelling program. After 4 years with no breaks, Tarnowska earned her bachelor's degree in political science with a minor in psychology. Later, she obtained a master's degree from the American University of Beirut. For Tarnowska, languages are her life. While translating and teaching to pay the bills, her true love is storytelling.

Wafa' Tarnowska

Amazing Women of the Middle East: 25 Stories From Ancient Times to Present Day

Wafa' Tarnowska. Crocodile Books, 2020.

How did you get into writing for children?
My kids studied Greek myths when they began school in Cyprus. They roleplayed as Greek deities, like Aphrodite and Apollo. Once, they asked me, "Mummy, are there any gods and goddesses in Lebanon?" Of course, there are gods and goddesses from my country! Then they asked, "Why don't we know anything about them? Why are we only studying the Greeks?"

How did you respond?
I started researching about Phoenician myths and legends. I couldn't believe there were no children's books on Phoenician legends. So, I said, "I'm writing it!" This led to my first book, *Dances with the Gods*. It came out in 1991 and was instantly sold out. I realized that people want to see stories about themselves, and this inspired me to write *The Seven Wise Princesses* and *The Arabian Nights*.

How do you pick subjects?
I write for Western audiences, and Middle Eastern children who don't know their country of origin but would like to learn more. Maybe they were born there and, like me, left their country of origin. I don't think the mainstream media addresses this population very much, so I'm interested in it.

How did you choose each of the women for *Amazing Women of the Middle East*?
I wasn't going to write about a woman I didn't admire. Each person had to be amazing in their own way, but different. Princesses and queens get girls to open my book, but not everyone can be royalty. So, I included a smorgasbord of professions and ages. There are Jewish, Muslim and Christian women.

Why was it important to show women of different backgrounds?
I grew up in such a multicultural society, so I wanted *Amazing Women of the Middle East* to reflect this. I included women who were not well-known or popular. Mainstream Western society doesn't know there are remarkable Middle Eastern women who aren't helpless or downtrodden. After all, one of the women in my book, Sheherazade, saved her life by telling stories.

What are you working on now?
In April I'm releasing a book called *Nour's Secret Library*. It's based on a true story from the Syrian Civil War, where children collected books to make a secret library, while their town was under attack. I don't mention politics, but I think children should know a little bit about reality in a sensitive way. *Nour's Secret Library* reflects my experience.

Which experiences does it reflect?
Because I lived in the basement like the kids in my story; I know what it's like to almost be killed by bombs. I read [Aleksandr] Solzhenitsyn during the Lebanese Civil War, and it made me grateful. I was happy to be alive and with my family. [Solzhenitsyn's characters] were exiled and starving in the Siberian gulags. I always looked at the bright side of things. I'm never a victim, no matter what life throws at me.

Find these and other reviews at aramcoworld.com

The Boy and the Boy King

George H. Lewis and A. D. Lubow. Ilust. George H. Lewis. AUC Press, 2020.

The Accursed Tower: The Fall of Acre and the End of the Crusades

Roger Crowley. Basic Books, 2019.

The Caliph's Splendor: Islam and the West in the Golden Age of Baghdad

Benson Bobrick. Simon & Schuster, 2021.

EVENTS

Highlights from aramcoworld.com

Please verify a venue's schedule before visiting.

CURRENT / MARCH

Between the Sky and the Earth: Contemporary Art From the UAE, marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the UAE by bringing together 12 artists reflecting the diverse contemporary art ecosystem in the UAE today. With roots in the Gulf, the Levant, Southeast Asia and the US, the artists, all of whom now call UAE home, present new narratives about the Emirates through an intergenerational dialog exploring social, cultural and natural landscapes. Middle East Institute, **Washington, DC**, through March 31.

CURRENT / JULY

Baseera Khan: I Am an Archive, using their own body as an archive, employs a variety of multimedia collage techniques (sculptures, installations, collages, drawings, photographs and textiles) to visualize the lived experiences of people at the intersections of Muslim and American identities, both today and throughout history. The exhibition debuts 11 artworks, in conversation with key works made since 2017 that explore Khan's body as a site of accumulation of experiences, histories and traumas. **Brooklyn** Museum, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center For Feminist Art, **New York**, through July 10.

Falcons: The Art of the Hunt offers a glimpse into the fascinating world of falcons. Swift, fierce and loyal, falcons have been celebrated for millennia. Ancient Egyptians associated them with Horus, the god of the heavens. By the early eighth century CE, Syrians trained them to become skillful hunters at royal courts, an artform that soon spread across the rest of the Islamic world to the Byzantine empire in the west and to the east as far as China. Freer Gallery of Art, **Washington, DC**, through July 17.

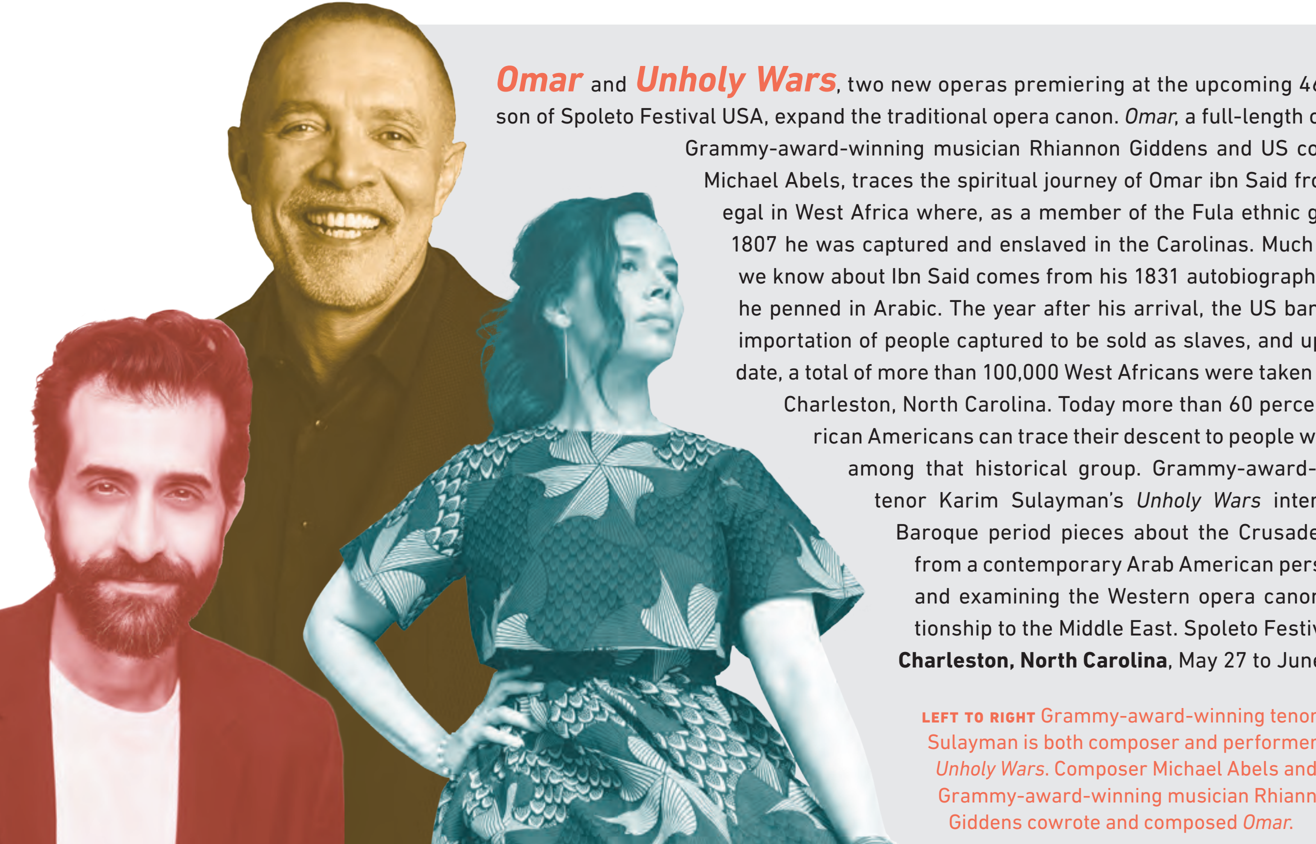
CURRENT / SEPTEMBER

Assyria: Palace Art of Ancient Iraq, through the museum's masterworks on special loan from the British Museum, reveals how Assyrian kings in the ninth to seventh centuries BCE decorated their palaces with masterful relief sculptures that represent a high point of Mesopotamian art, both for their artistic quality and sophistication, as well as for their vivid depictions of warfare, rituals, mythology, hunting and other aspects of Assyrian court life. Getty Villa Museum, **Los Angeles**, through September 5.

COMING / OCTOBER

Amarna traces the rise and fall of Amarna, the magnificent city built by pharaonic Egypt's royal couple Akhenaten and Queen Nefertitti as a new place of residence, which although housing palaces for the royal family, residential areas, workshops and burial grounds, quickly faded away after the couple's deaths. The exhibit spotlights the visual style of the period while also highlighting the religious secular life of the time. Glyptoteket, **Copenhagen**, October 6 through February 26.

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

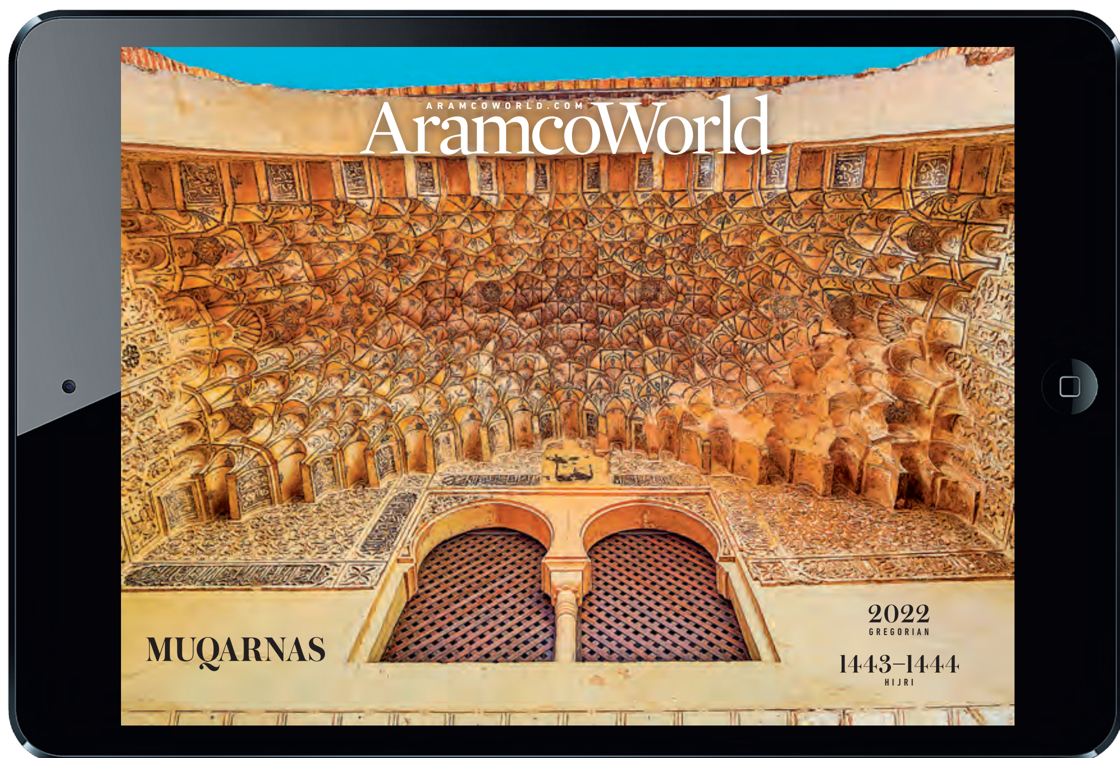


Omar and ***Unholy Wars***, two new operas premiering at the upcoming 46th season of Spoleto Festival USA, expand the traditional opera canon. *Omar*, a full-length opera by Grammy-award-winning musician Rhiannon Giddens and US composer Michael Abels, traces the spiritual journey of Omar ibn Said from Senegal in West Africa where, as a member of the Fula ethnic group, in 1807 he was captured and enslaved in the Carolinas. Much of what we know about Ibn Said comes from his 1831 autobiography, which he penned in Arabic. The year after his arrival, the US banned the importation of people captured to be sold as slaves, and up to that date, a total of more than 100,000 West Africans were taken through Charleston, North Carolina. Today more than 60 percent of African Americans can trace their descent to people who were among that historical group. Grammy-award-winning tenor Karim Sulayman's *Unholy Wars* interweaves Baroque period pieces about the Crusades, sung from a contemporary Arab American perspective and examining the Western opera canon's relationship to the Middle East. Spoleto Festival USA, **Charleston, North Carolina**, May 27 to June 12.

LEFT TO RIGHT Grammy-award-winning tenor Karim Sulayman is both composer and performer of *Unholy Wars*. Composer Michael Abels and Grammy-award-winning musician Rhiannon Giddens cowrote and composed *Omar*.

SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA (3)

2022 CALENDAR



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