All Things Arabia

Arts and Archaeology of the Islamic World

Edited by

Margaret Graves (*Indiana University*)
Marcus Milwright (*University of Victoria*)
Mariam Rosser-Owen (*Victoria and Albert Museum*)

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Arabian Identity and Material Culture

Edited by

Ileana Baird
Hülya Yağcıoğlu

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Illustrations

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INTRODUCTION

Complex Legacies: Materiality, Memory, and Myth in the Arabian Peninsula

Ileana Baird

This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.

ALEXANDER POPE, *The Rape of the Lock* (1712–1714/15)

All around the world national and communal identities are increasingly being defined through new readings of their history, and that history is frequently anchored in things.

NEIL MACGREGOR, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (2010)

In a suggestive passage, Wilfred Thesiger, or, as his Arab friends affectionately called him, Mubarak bin London, described his encounter with the people of the Empty Quarter in the following terms:

"The northern Arabs had no traditions of civilization behind them. To arrange three stones as a fireplace on which to set a pot was the only architecture that many of them required. They lived in black tents in the desert, or in bare rooms devoid of furnishings in villages and towns. They had no taste nor inclination for refinements. Most of them demanded only the bare necessities of life, enough food and drink to keep them alive, clothes to cover their nakedness, some form of shelter from the sun and wind, weapons, a few pots, rugs, water-skins, and their saddlery. It was a life which produced much that was noble, nothing that was gracious."[1]

This blunt description of the material life of the Arabian Peninsula about 1946–1947, the time when Thesiger crossed the Empty Quarter in the company of his Bedouin guides, shows the place as devoid of any "architecture," "furnishings," or "refinements"—material references seen here, in a similar way to Ibn Khaldûn's much earlier's account in *The Muqaddimah*, as signs of "civilization."[2] The detailed list of objects that fill the life of the desert Arabs—pots, rugs, water-skin, saddlery, weapons, tents—depicts a lifestyle of extreme simplicity, where food, drink, garments, and shelter are all that is needed for physical survival in the harsh desert environment. Albeit reductionist, this description is not inaccurate: Thesiger experienced the desert firsthand and he recorded his impressions not only in writing but also visually, in the over 38,000 photographs currently held at the Pitt River Museum in Oxford. However, this depiction is strangely at odds with other accounts of Arabia as a place of breathtaking beauty and magic. Here is a recollection of the same place by Richard F. Burton, nineteenth-century traveler to

1 Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands* (London: Longmans, 1959; Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 1994), 88. Citations refer to the Motivate Publishing edition.

2 Ibn Khaldûn, *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History*, ed. N.J. Dawood, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 118–19. Interestingly, Ibn Khaldûn's account of the desert Bedouins' material life is very similar to Thesiger's: "the inhabitants of the desert adopt the natural manner of making a living, namely, agriculture and animal husbandry. They restrict themselves to the necessary in food, clothing, and mode of dwelling, and to the other necessary conditions and customs. They do not possess conveniences and luxuries. They use tents of hair and wool, or houses of wood, or of clay and stone, which are not furnished (elaborately). The purpose is to have shade and shelter, and nothing beyond that" (92).

the Arabian Peninsula and remarkable translator of *The Arabian Nights*:

"[T]he Jinn bore me at once to the land of my predilection, Arabia, a region so familiar to my mind that even at first sight, it seemed a reminiscence of some bygone metempsychic life in the distant Past. Again I stood under the diaphanous skies, in air glorious as ether, whose every breath raises men's spirits like sparkling wine. Once more I saw the evening star hanging like a solitaire from the pure front of the western firmament; and the after-glow transfiguring and transforming, as by magic, the homely and rugged features of the scene into a fairy-land lit with a light which never shines on other soils or seas. Then would appear the woolen tents, low and black, of the true Badawin, mere dots in the boundless waste of lion-tawny clays and gazelle-brown gravels, and the camp-fire dotting like a glow-worm in the village center. Presently, sweetened by distance, would be heard … the measured chant of the spearmen gravely stalking behind their charge, the camels … and—most musical of music—the palm-trees answered the whispers of the nigh-breeze with the softest tones of falling water."[3]

Through a subtle process of "transfiguring and transforming," the viewer's perspective changes from the "homely and rugged" details of everyday life to a "fairy-land scene" of domestic harmony. Tents, clays, gravels, camels, and palm trees are suddenly ensouled through the magical alchemy of light, scent, and sound. No longer just "bare necessities of life," the things that fill this nostalgic landscape gain agency and a story-like quality through emotion and synesthesia, conjuring in the reader's mind Arabia of the soul.

When reading about Arabia, such sharply contrasting descriptions are the norm. The same objects that prove in some accounts the lack of "civilization" and "traditions" of a people whose energies are focused mainly on survival are rendered in other accounts as breathing an unmatched beauty and a profound spirituality. Travelers like Lodovico Varthema in the sixteenth century, Joseph Pitts and Carsten Niebuhr in the eighteenth century, Ali Bey, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, Richard Burton, Georg Wallin, Carlo Guarmani, Charles M. Doughty, William Gifford Palgrave, and Lady Anne Blunt in the nineteenth century, Wilfred Thesiger, Harold Ingrams, Bertram Thomas, and Harry St. John Philby in the twentieth century, and Marcel Kurpershoek in the twenty-first century[4] provided detailed depictions of the desert environment, the Bedouin life, or Arabia's holy places through tropes of pilgrimage,

3 Richard F. Burton, preface to *The Arabian Nights. Tales from A Thousand and One Nights*, trans. and notes by Richard F. Burton (New York: Modern Library, 2004), xxv–xxvi.

4 *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema in Egypt, Syria, Arabia Deserta and Arabia Felix, in Persia, India, and Ethiopia, A.D. 1503 to 1508,* ed. John Winter Jones and George Percy Badger (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Joseph Pitts, *A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mahometans* (Exon: Printed by S. Farley, 1704); *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East, Performed by M. Niebuhr*, trans. Robert Heron, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Printed for R. Morrison and Son, 1792); *Travels of Ali Bey in Morocco, Tripoli, Cyprus, Egypt, Arabia, Syria, and Turkey between the Years 1803 and 1807, Written by Himself*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Orme and Brown, 1816); John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land* (London: J. Murray, 1822) and *Travels in Arabia, Comprehending an Account of Those Territories in Hadjaz Which the Mohammedans Regard as Sacred* (London: H. Colburn, 1829); Richard Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855–1856); Georg August Wallin, *Travels in Arabia (1845 and 1848)* (Cambridge: Oleander Press, 1979); Carlo Guarmani, *Northern Nejd: Journey from Jerusalem to Anaiza in Kasim* (London: Argonaut Press, 1866); Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1888); W.G. Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia* (London: MacMillan, 1865); Lady Anne Blunt, *A Pilgrimage to Nejd, the Cradle of the Arab Race* (London: J. Murray, 1881); Harold Ingrams, *Arabia and the Isles* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998); Bertram Thomas, *Arabia Felix: Across the Empty Quarter of Arabia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932); H. St. J.B. Philby, *A Pilgrim in Arabia* (London: Golden Cockerel Press, 1943); Marcel Kurpershoek, *Arabia of the Bedouins*, trans. Paul Vincent (London: Saqi Books, 2001).

hardship, and discovery. On the other hand, Muslim travelers to the Arabian Peninsula, from Naser-e Khosraw, Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta, and Evliya Çelebi to Nawab Sikandar Begum, Mirzâ Mohammed Hosayn Farâhâni, and Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad,[5] focused mainly on pilgrims' travels to Mecca, the spiritual and religious endpoint of the *Hajj*. Although obviously reflecting the sensibility of their authors, these narratives provide unique insights into the material culture of the place, ranging from accounts of the desolate bareness of the environment to Orientalized evocations of a magical and alluring locale. Within this wide variety of impressions, and within the changing waves of history, Arabia's distinctiveness is still to be asserted.

This collection is an attempt to do so by focusing on the things most often associated with the Arabian Peninsula for their perceived value of stable cultural signifiers. Here, incense burners, pearls, dates, protective medallions, *al-Sadu* weavings, head coverings, jewelry, the saker falcon, and the Gulf oil are set side by side with ancient books, magic lamps, flying carpets, an elusive desert, and myriad other things connoting wealth, magic, and exoticism to assemble through their individual narratives the complex history of a land at the crossroads of civilizations. To suggest this blend of the material and the imaginary, reality and fiction, geography and symbolism that is the distinctive characteristic of the place, we have chosen a title that echoes a line from one of Alexander Pope's famous poems[6] that metonymically describes Arabia through one of its most representative things: its legendary perfumes. Thus, *All Things Arabia* assembles stories about the place told by the things that have represented it, historically and imaginatively, to local populations and outsiders alike.

1 Arabia: Real and Imaginary Geographies

This collection aims at suggesting new and more nuanced ways of understanding the cultural identity of the Arabian Peninsula by examining some of its most representative things. Employing the innovative lenses of thing theory[7] and material culture studies, it brings together essays focused on the role of things—from cultural objects to commodities to historical and ethnographic artifacts—in creating an "Arabian" identity throughout the ages. This focus on things allows us to highlight the multifarious interactions—commercial, cultural, and not only—between Arabia and the rest of the world, and think about local identities outside simplifying binaries, as part of a global, nonhierarchical network of relations. This collection is also an attempt to increase the visibility of a culture that has made important contributions to the global cultural heritage. The Arabian Peninsula has a fascinating history that is in process of unveiling in its archeological sites, many of which are today part of UNESCO World Heritage. It also boasts a rich material culture that includes metalwork, earthenware, wood-carved objects, garments and ornaments, ritual objects, nonrepresentational art, and calligraphy—a unique form of traditional Islamic art associated with the Holy Qur'ān—, and it is home to a

5 *Naser-e Khosraw's Book of Travels*, ed. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: SUNY Press, 1985); *The Travels of Ibn Jubair,* ed. William Wright (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1852); *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325–1354: Volume II*, ed. H.A.R. Gibb (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); Evliya Çelebi, *Narrative of Travels in Europe, Asia, and Africa, in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Ritter Joseph von Hammer (London: Printed for the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1834); *A Princess's Pilgrimage: Nawab Sikandar Begum's* A Pilgrimage to Mecca, ed. Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); *A Shi'ite Pilgrimage to Mecca, 1885–1886: The Safarnâmeh of Mirzâ Mohammad Hosayn Farâhâni*, ed. and trans. Hafez F. Farmayan and Elton L. Daniel (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad, *Lost in the Crowd* (Pueblo, CO: Passegiatta Press, 1985).

6 Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, ed. Cynthia Wall (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998).

7 The term was coined in 2001 by Bill Brown in "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 1–22.

Bedouin culture in which traditional crafts, such as *al-Sadu* weaving, pottery, and leatherwork, are skillfully employed.

The essays collected here attempt to shed light on the different meanings that the Arabian things gain in different geographical, historical, and cultural contexts, in a survey which spans from the pre-Islamic era to the present day. In doing so, we had to acknowledge that, historically, representations of Arabia have been multifaceted and at times quite at odds with the real place. At one end stand representations that describe Arabia with a certain degree of accuracy: they come both from Western travelers or traders who came in direct contact with the people of Peninsula and from the local populations who developed their own sets of identity markers and symbolic representations. At the other end are representations that emphasize Arabia's riches, magic, sensuality, and exoticism, a fabulous Arabia that has had a lasting impact on the Western imaginary and has been internalized by the local populations today. The Arabian identity that we convey here is a subtle amalgamation of the two: it comprises a fabulous Arabia that has haunted the European imagination for the past three hundred years and a real Arabia that has had its unique history, culture, and traditions. Significantly, after the oil boom, the newly-formed states of the Arabian Peninsula have started a process of nation branding which accounts for both these representations: they have begun assembling their past in museums and heritage sites while at the same time promoting themselves as alluring tourist destinations in a language many times redolent of the Orientalized narratives of the West. As some of our contributors point out, such *topoi* include exciting desert safaris, exotic destinations, luxurious hotels, opulent retreats, and spellbinding natural settings, all of which bear testimony to a commercially-driven, self-Orientalizing process.

We have aimed at capturing the tension between these polar opposite representations, as well as highlighting the shared history of the peoples of the Peninsula, by using "Arabian" rather than "Arab" or "Arabic" in the title of this collection. The reference to an "Arabian" identity underlines, first, the geographical confines of our project to the Arabian Peninsula and the material culture produced by the *Khalīji*, the local population of the area. Second, it also accounts for the intersection between fact and fiction, reality and magic that combine in identifying the place in literary, visual, and cinematic productions. As some of the contributors to this volume argue, the stereotypes about Arabia's wealth, allure, and exoticism started to emerge during the eighteenth century due to a growing interest in the Orient and orientalia. This interest was significantly influenced at the time by the translation of a book that, as Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum state, "has changed the world on a scale unrivalled by any other literary text."[8] First translated in French by Antoine Galland as *One Thousand and One Nights* (1704–1717), this book was rendered in English as *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* (1706–1721), although very few of the tales included in it originated from or were located in the Arabian Peninsula. The book was a composite collection of tales with roots in Persia, Syria, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, India, and even China; however, its English readers were not aware of the complicated history of the manuscript, which started a pervasive process of misattributions and false identifications. From that point on, much of the literature of the time used "Arabia" as an umbrella term that described not one particular location, but many.[9]

8 Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, introduction to The Arabian Nights *in Historical Context: Between East and West,* ed. Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.

9 In *Fabulous Orients: Fictions of the East in England, 1662–1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Ros Ballaster makes a similar argument about the geographical inclusivity of the "Orient": "When we speak of the Oriental tale we need to recognize both the force and specificity of those imaginative geographies that emerged as a means of representing Oriental regions and the pressure of generic determinants in narrative *not always specific to the culture represented* [emphasis added]" (31).

The reasons for this misleading identification of "Arabia" with a locus of wealth and allure are, of course, not only cultural but also historical: they go back to the Arab conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries that led to the spread of the Arabic language and Islam in geographical areas that extended far beyond the Arabian Peninsula. In other words, the language and the religion of these diverse populations were stronger identifiers than their geographical location at the time the Orientalist literature emerged: in this sense, an "Arab" was a believer in Islam or a speaker of Arabic. As a result, the references to "Arabs" that abound in the Enlightenment literature designated not only the Arabs of the Peninsula but also Persians, Syrians, Ottomans, Egyptians, and a whole host of Muslim populations from northern Africa and the Far East.[10] Through extension, "Arabia" itself expands both geographically and imaginatively to encompass attributes of plenty, wealth, supernatural, opulence, eroticism, adventure, despotism, exoticism, and desire. This "creative cartography," as one of our contributors describes it,[11] was subsequently fueled by an extremely productive thread of Orientalist literature and theatrical or operatic productions that inflated and consolidated the extraordinariness of the place, by the exoticizing Orientalist paintings of the nineteenth century and beyond, and, in the twentieth century, by the movie industry and popular culture productions, which capitalized on the Orientalist store of images in representing the place.

The consequences of this Orientalizing process have been extensively addressed by Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Franz Fanon in now-classic works of postcolonial thought.[12] Started in the latter part of the eighteenth century and described by Said as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient," the Orientalist discourse "produced" the Orient—"politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively"[13]—as the West's polar opposite. While acknowledging that the Orient is "an integral part of the European *material* civilization and culture" [emphasis in original], Said points to the fluid "truth" of the Orientalist depictors of the space (i.e., despotism, splendor, cruelty, sensuality, exoticism, or mystery), which are based "not on the material itself," but on imaginative projections that purposefully Orientalize the place.[14] Furthering this analysis, and echoing Fanon's argument about the *negative* difference encoded in any racial distinctions, Bhabha calls attention to "the alterity and ambivalence of the Orientalist discourse," which vacillates between the recognition and disavowal of "racial and cultural otherness," using it as a mode of identity shaping and colonial control.[15]

The picture these critics paint, however, involves binary oppositions—i.e., civilized vs. barbaric, powerful vs. defeated, rational vs. sensual, sameness vs. foreignness, *us* vs. *the others*—that do not work well when describing the relationship of the Arabian Peninsula with European

10 An older misattribution, this time due to limited knowledge of the area, can be traced back to Herodotus and Pliny the Elder, who used "Arabia" to designate parts of Eastern Egypt, Sinai, and the Negev. To complicate things even more, the Ottoman Empire ruled over much of the Arab world since the conquest of the Mamluk Sultanate in 1517, hence the common conflation of the Ottomans with the Arabs. Its dissolution in the early twentieth century was followed by the signing of the Alexandria Protocol of 1944 and the formation of the Arab League, which encompasses today twenty-two Arab states. The Arabian Peninsula, which is the focus of our study, includes seven states: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

11 See Holly Edward's chapter, "Creative Cartography: From the Arabian Desert to the Garden of Allah," which concludes the second section of this book.

12 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question. Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 66–84; and Frantz Fanon, "Racism and Culture," in *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (London: Pelican, 1970), 31–44.

13 Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

14 Ibid., 2 and 67, respectively.

15 Bhabha, "The Other Question," 71 and 68, respectively.

metropolitan centers. It is not only that Arabia was never a fully-fledged European colony upon which racial, cultural, or historical discriminations could be easily built[16] but also that it was never in a passive or subaltern position in relation to the European powers in the same way that other colonized territories were: as Allen James Fromherz suggestively put it, "the Gulf was almost always between, but never completely under, particular empires or single civilizations."[17] More recent projects engaging with the various forms that Orientalism took over time and the neo-Orientalist movements that emerged in the past decades have addressed the place of Arabia within these cultural productions in more nuanced ways. In *Fabulous Orients*, for instance, Ros Ballaster calls attention to the intersection between materiality and fantasy in constructing the identity of the place: "the English encounter with the East was largely mediated through the consumption of material goods such as silks, indigo, muslin, spices, or jewels, together with the more 'moral' traffic of narratives about the East, both imaginary and ethnographic."[18] Approaching this phenomenon from a different perspective, Srinivas Aravamudan discusses how Orientalism has led to a process of self-Orientalization by the cultures represented by this strain of literature[19] and cautions that eighteenth-century "desiring fictions" of Orientalist type "are not colonial propaganda or imperial blueprints, even if they can be refashioned as such after the fact."[20] John M. MacKenzie points to the Victorian fascination with Oriental arts and crafts and their current sale in London galleries to wealthy Middle Eastern buyers as a similar search, more than a century later, for "an older, gentler, and [more] appealing world."[21] Kristian Davies reminds us that Orientalism is paralleled in the Eastern imaginary by Occidentalism and that both are but natural impulses toward seeing the local populations "for all the richness of their lineage and the pride of their past,"[22] while Christine Peltre describes the "Orient" not as a specific geographical place, but as "the mythic site of all possibilities."[23] Finally, Valerie Kennedy connects the interest in Orientalism both to the British

16 Indeed, the representations of the local populations do not contain the tropes of subjectification, impurity, or derision of the colonial stereotype, as defined by Bhabha. Moreover, their dealings with the Ottomans and the British cannot be described as an occupant-occupied relationship in the same way the Arab populations of North Africa, for instance, engaged with the French colonizers (see Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 66).

17 Allen James Fromherz, "Introduction: World History in the Gulf as a Gulf in World History," in *The Gulf in World History: Arabia at the Global Crossroads*, ed. Allen James Fromherz (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 18–19.

18 Ballaster, *Fabulous Orients*, 18.

19 Srinivas Aravamudan, *Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 205.

20 Srinivas Aravamudan, "Introduction: Enlightenment Orientalism," in *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 9.

21 John F. MacKenzie, "Orientalism in Arts and Crafts Revisited: The Modern and the Anti-Modern: The Lessons from the Orient," in *Orientalism Revisited: Art, Land and Voyage*, ed. Ian Richard Netton (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 123. Other notable reactions to Said's work include Inge E. Boer, ed., *After "Orientalism": Critical Entanglements, Productive Looks* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003); François Pouillion and Jean-Claude Vatin, eds., *After Orientalism: Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and Eastern Re-Appropriations* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); and Engin Isin, ed., *Citizenship after Orientalism: Transforming Political Theory* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

22 Kristian Davies, *Orientalists. Western Artists in Arabia, the Sahara, Persia, and India* (New York: Laynfaroh, 2005). Davies also addresses the perception of a "collective East, a collective 'Orient'" by Western painters, which included very diverse areas, such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Persia, and India, and credits it to their "uniformity of appeal" (13).

23 Christine Peltre, *Orientalism in Art*, trans. John Goodman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998), 275. Peltre's

imperial project, which made Oriental commodities available for consumption to the British subjects, and to the nineteenth-century attraction for popular entertainment like "panoramas and dioramas, shows of exotic peoples, exhibitions of alien cultures, museums and entertainment venues."[24] Rather than looking at the *other* spaces of the Near East as the "great complementary opposite"[25] of the West, such accounts suggest more nuanced ways of understanding the cultural identity of Arabia not in relation to an *other* knowledge, but through the things and cultural products that stand for the place, both real and imaginary, and their associated meanings.

2 Material Culture of the Arabian Peninsula

The field of material culture studies can provide productive insights into how the things produced, transited, exchanged, gifted, or that constitute the landscape upon which the human subjects live have contributed to the creation of a distinctive Arabian identity over time. As J.D. Prown explains, delving into the material culture of a place means "to discover the beliefs—the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a given time" by paying attention to how "human-made objects reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of the individuals who commissioned, fabricated, purchased, or used them and, by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which these individuals belonged."[26] This is a methodology that focuses on objects as bearers of different meanings in different geographical, historical, and cultural contexts, meanings that need to be unfolded through an active process of contextualization and interpretation.[27] The strength of this approach comes from its cross- and inter-disciplinary nature: it invites a variety of perspectives—sociological, anthropological, geographical, archeological, historical, museal, and art-related—which illuminate various aspects of the subject-object relation.[28] Karl Marx's definition of commodities as "social things" and his groundbreaking discussion of commodity fetishism, Raymond Williams' understanding of "cultural materialism" as a means to recover the zeitgeist of a particular historical moment, Marcel Mauss's pioneering studies on gift exchange in primitive societies, and Georg Lukacs' notion of a "reified world" in which commodities stamp their

argument is rooted in Lisa Nochlin's notion of an "imaginary Orient" put forth in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 33–59. Such views contrast quite sharply with analyses by scholars like Zainab Bitar, for instance, who explains that the British Orientalist art of the nineteenth century developed in the thrall of Realism and often involved the use of the photographic camera to record ethnographic detail. Cf. "Orientalist Art in the Collection of the Sharjah Art Museum," in *The Light of the Orient: From the Orientalist Art Collection of H.H. Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohamed Al Qasimi*, ed. Ismael Al-Rifaie (Sharjah: AlQasimi Publications and Sharjah Museum Department, n.d.), 9–27. The relationship between art and photography in nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings is also discussed in MaryAnne Stevens, ed., *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse. European Painters in North Africa and the Near East* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1984), 21–22.

24 Valerie Kennedy, "Orientalism in the Victorian Era," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, August 2017, doi: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.226.

25 Said, *Orientalism*, 58.

26 Jules David Prown, *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 60.

27 For a brief survey of the field, see Ileana Baird, "Peregrine Things: Rethinking the Global in Eighteenth-Century Studies," in *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context: From Consumerism to Celebrity Culture*, ed. Ileana Baird and Christina Ionescu (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 3–8.

28 For a useful study of the impact of material culture studies on various fields of knowledge, see Arthur Asa Berger, *Reading Matter: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Material Culture* (Abington: Routledge, 2017).

imprints on an individual's consciousness—are only some of the contributions that paved the road to the "Material-Cultural Turn" of the second half of the twentieth century.[29] Important studies by James Deetz, M.G. Quimby, Thomas J. Schlereth, Ian Hodder, Daniel Miller, Nicholas Thomas, Christopher Tilley, Arjun Appadurai, Igor Kopytoff, Tim Dant and others followed, fundamentally shaping the field.[30] As suggested by their work, objects can trigger memories and emotions, forge mutual experiences, recall the mindset of individuals or communities long gone, evoke social relations and ceremonial rites, reflect relationships of power, production, or exchange, have their own cultural biographies, shed light on collective practices, and produce symbolic meanings. Applied to virtually every aspect of human life, material culture approaches have expanded to include, beyond things themselves, landscape, architecture, social memory, and art.[31]

In relation to the Arabian Peninsula, an area strategically placed at the intersection of the trade routes linking the shores of the Indian Ocean and the Horn of Africa to Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Mediterranean world, this approach is particularly productive as the local populations engaged historically in an intense process of commercial and cultural exchange that led to mutually enriching transfers of both commodities and knowledge.[32] Unfortunately, although the field of material culture studies has boomed in the past decades, the material culture of the Arabian Peninsula has been largely underrepresented. Overall, current scholarship has engaged only sporadically with the things of Arabia, focusing, instead, on the European interactions and material exchanges

29 Karl Marx, *Capital. Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: Modern Library, 1906), 83; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990; first published 1954); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958); Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1967), 100.

30 James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977); Ian M.G. Quimby, ed., *Material Culture and the Study of American Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978); Thomas J. Schlereth, *Artifacts and the American Past* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1980); Ian Hodder, *Symbols in Action: Ethnoarchaeological Studies of Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), and his edited collection, *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford: Berg, 1997); Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Tim Dant, *Materiality and Society* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2005). Notable studies published in the past decade include Ian Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture* Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, eds., *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2016); and Catherine Richardson, Tara Hamling, and David Gaimster, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2017).

31 See Barbara Bender and Margot Winer, eds., *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile, and Place* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Victor Buchli, ed., *The Material Culture Reader* (New York: Berg, 2002); Joëlle Bahloul, *The Architecture of Memory: A Jewish-Muslim Household in Colonial Algeria 1937–1962* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Anthony Forge, ed., *Primitive Art & Society* (London: Wenner-Gren Foundation and Oxford University Press, 1973), among others.

32 See Michael Edwardes, *East-West Passage: The Travel of Ideas, Arts and Inventions between Asia and the Western World* (London: Cassell, 1971). As Edwardes points out, these exchanges involved material goods such as textiles and furnishings, rugs, stained glass, mirrors, powder, toiletries, jewelry, metalware, ceramics, perfumes, spices, sweetmeats, sugarcane, and luxury goods, as well as military technology and medical and scientific knowledge.

with the Islamic East, especially the Ottoman Empire.[33] Moreover, while modern publications on the Arabian Peninsula include various studies on ritual offerings,[34] ancient dwellings,[35] pearls,[36] jewelry,[37] amulets,[38] Bedouin weaving,[39] coffee,[40] incense,[41] and oil,[42] they only rarely discuss these

33 An example is Yaacov Lev's edited collection, *Towns and Material Culture in the Medieval Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), which focuses on the interplay between urban society and material culture in the Ottoman Middle East and includes three cases related to the material culture of the region: the production and spread of paper, textiles, and medicinal substances. See also Finbarr Barry Flood's monograph, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and the Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), which looks at how coins, dress, monuments, paintings, and sculptures helped forge complex transcultural identities in South Asia.

34 In *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2011), for instance, Neil MacGregor describes an Arabian bronze hand found in a temple from pre-Islamic Yemen (AD 622); this object was an offering to the god Ta'lab Riyam in exchange for the owner's well-being (287–92). For more examples, see Robert G. Hoyland's important study, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2002).

35 Lealan Anderson Nunn Swanson, "Historical Considerations in Yemeni Vernacular Architecture: Houses from the Sulayhid Dynasty (439/1047) to the Modern Period" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1997); Nancy Um, "Spatial Negotiations in a Commercial City: The Red Sea Port of Mocha, Yemen, during the First Half of the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the Society of the Architectural Historians* 62, no. 2 (2003): 178–93, and *The Merchant Houses of Mocha: Trade and Architecture in an Indian Ocean Port* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

36 Robert A. Carter, "The History and Prehistory of Pearling in the Persian Gulf," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48, no. 2 (2005): 139–209, and *Sea of Pearls: Seven Thousand Years of the Industry that Shaped the Gulf* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2012); Victoria Penziner Hightower, "Pearls and the Southern Persian/Arabian Gulf: A Lesson in Sustainability," *Environmental History* 18 (2013): 44–59, "Pearling and Political Power in the Trucial States, 1850–1930: Debts, Taxes, and Politics," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 3, no. 2 (2013): 215–31, and "Purposeful Ambiguity: The Pearl Trade and Heritage Construction in the United Arab Emirates," in *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula: Debates, Discourses and Practices*, ed. Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico (London and New York: Ashgate, 2014), 71–84.

37 Heather Collier Ross, *Bedouin Jewellery in Saudi Arabia* (London: Stacy International, 1978); Marie-Claire Bakker, "The Arab Woman Adorned: The Social Role of Jewellery," *The Linacre Journal* 1 (1997): 47–69; Michael Spink, ed., *Islamic Jewellery* (London: Spink, 1996) and, more recently, Michael Spink and Jack Ogden, eds., *The Art of Adornment: Jewellery of the Islamic Lands*, 2 vols. (London: The Nour Foundation in association with Azimuth Editions, 2013).

38 Venetia Porter, Liana Saif, and Emilie Savage-Smith, "Medieval Islamic Amulets, Talismans, and Magic," in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 1: 547–604.

39 See Joy Totah Hilden, *Bedouin Weaving of Saudi Arabia and Its Neighbours* (London: Arabian Publications, 2010), and Patricia Joyce Redding, "Al Sadu Collection: Preserving Bedouin Weaving," in *Museums and the Material World: Collecting the Arabian Peninsula*, ed. Pamela Erskine-Loftus (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc., 2014), 333–61.

40 Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Middle East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985).

41 Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade* (London: Longman, 1981) is still the reference book on this commodity. More recent studies on frankincense worth mentioning here are Juliet Highet, *Frankincense: Oman's Gift to the World* (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2006); Françoise Aubaile-Sallenave, "Bodies, Odors, Perfumes in Arab-Muslim Societies," in *The Smell Culture Reader*, ed. Jim Drobnick (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 391–426; and the excellent chapter by Shimshon Ben-Yehoshua, Carole Borowitz, and Lumír Ondřej Hanuš, "Frankincense, Myrrh, and Balm of Gilead: Ancient Spices of Southern Arabia and Judea," in *Horticultural Reviews, Volume 39*, ed. Jules Janick (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 1–76.

42 See Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); David G. Heard, "Development of Oil in the Gulf: The U.A.E. in Focus," in *Oil and Regional Developments in the Gulf*, ed. Rosemary Hollis (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, Middle East Programme in association with Division of Research and Studies, Crown Prince Court of Abu Dhabi, 1998), 34–68, and *From Pearls to Oil: How the Oil*

objects in relation to their role in constructing a distinctively "Arabian" regional identity. More often, they provide details about the material life of the area within the larger context of the developments in trade, manufacturing, architecture, crafts, and ritual life.

Another category of publications addresses aspects of the life in the Arabian Peninsula that contain references to materiality without making this the main focus of their analysis. For example, H.R.P. Dickson's study, *The Arab of the Desert*, is a comprehensive account of the Bedouin life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia that includes references to local food, tents, furnishings, jewelry, medicines, boat building, pearl diving, Arabian horses, camels, and other domestic and wild animals of the area.[43] Similarly, Jibrail S. Jabbur's account, *The Bedouins and the Desert: Aspects of Nomadic Life in the Arab East*,[44] is suggestively organized around four pillars of Bedouin life: the desert (with attentive depictions of its trees, plants, animals, birds, reptiles, and insects), the camel, the tent, and the Arab Bedouin himself, calling thus attention to the central role of the material in the daily life of the Bedouin tribes.

A third category of scholarship includes studies that address more specifically the material culture of the Arabian Peninsula, focusing on its distinctive contribution to the global heritage. Barbara Finster, for instance, discusses the material culture of the area during antiquity, when Arabia played an essential role in the trade in incense, myrrh, and spices, developed a flourishing handicraft industry, and boasted several architectural landmarks.[45] Similarly, in *An Arabian Collection: Artifacts from the Eastern Province*, Grace Burkholder lists an impressive array of everyday, ornamental, and ritual objects collected from the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, which is described as a true "archeological wonderland,"[46] to highlight the cultural richness of the area. Nancy Um's *Shipped but Not Sold: Material Culture and the Social Protocols of Trade during Yemen's Age of Coffee* is an important monograph that looks at the networks of commercial exchange developed during the eighteenth century between the Arabian Peninsula and the rest of the world. Traded objects included spices and aromatics, coffee grown in the mountains of Yemen, Arabian horses, food, medicine, furniture, pens, paper, and wax candles—all items that contributed to the emergence of a distinctive Arabian identity during the time. *Western Arabia in the Leiden Collections: Traces of a Colourful Past* describes a collection of Arabian objects preserved in the Volkenkunde Museum which includes historical artifacts, objects of everyday use, garments, and pilgrim souvenirs, as well as a collection of manuscripts, photographs, and books related to

Industry Came to the United Arab Emirates (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2011); Terence Clark, *Underground to Overseas: The Story of Petroleum Development Oman* (London: Stacey International, 2007), and "Oman: A Century of Oil Exploration and Development," *Asian Affairs* 39, no. 3 (2008): 388–99.

43 H.R.P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert. A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Sau'di Arabia* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949).

44 Jibrail S. Jabbur, *The Bedouins and the Desert: Aspects of Nomadic Life in the Arab East*, trans. Lawrence I. Conrad and ed. Suhayl J. Jabur and Lawrence I. Conrad (New York: SUNY Press, 1995).

45 Barbara Finster, "The Material Culture of Pre- and Early Islamic Arabia," in Flood and Necipoğlu, *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, 1: 87–114.

46 Grace Burkholder, *An Arabian Collection: Artifacts from the Eastern Province* (Boulder: GB Publications, 1984), 9. The objects mentioned include jugs, bowls, cups, animal figurines, mace heads, copper or bronze mirrors, beads, miniature spouted vessels, incense burners, seals, bracelets, earrings, bone spindles and whorls, storage jars, kitchenware, small glass bottles, seal rings, ear cleaners, mother-of-pearl applicators (used in the past as wands for perfume and to apply *khol*, a popular black eye makeup), lamps, cookpots, and pearling and net weights. See, also, Margaret S. Graves, *Arts of Allusion: Object, Ornament and Architecture in Medieval Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), which contains references to stone incense burners and metalwork in and around the Arabian Peninsula.

the Gulf area, hosted at Leiden University.[47] Such studies deepen our understanding of the Arabian Peninsula by calling attention to the importance of its things not only as circulating commodities or exemplars of intellectual history but also as stable signifiers of a place with unique characteristics and social engagements.

Finally, a comparatively better represented category of studies is dedicated to the culture of the museum in the Arabian Peninsula. In the past decade, several studies have focused on the extraordinary post-1970 museum boom, which aimed at creating social cohesion and a sense of national identity in the newly-formed Gulf states.[48] The opening of the first national museums in Yemen (1971), Oman (1974), Qatar (1975), Kuwait (1983), and Saudi Arabia (1999) is indicative of the growing interest in recovering the past by displaying it in museal exhibits—be they private collections made public, or mega-museums like Mathaf: The Arab Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar, or Louvre Abu Dhabi and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi in the U.A.E., to name just a few. In such sites, as Pamela Erskine-Loftus aptly explains, "[t]raditional objects become exemplars for past times that should be venerated and lifeways that should be maintained, as well as symbolism within a constructed collective history and identity, and a bastion against certain aspects of globalization."[49] While proudly displaying unique art objects and artifacts, such cultural ventures consistently highlight commonalities among the states in the Gulf Cooperation Council that include "an economic history focused on pearling and trading … and a cultural background shaped by Islam, Bedouin culture, and transregional tribal identities."[50] This scholarship focuses on the role of the museum in representing the regional culture of the Gulf states, as well as on the tensions between newly-adopted museum practices and local forms of heritage performance and preservation. Importantly, they all emphasize the crucial role of materiality in the formation of national identities, a scholarly focus that has gained increasing traction in academia in recent years.[51]

Also engaging with the material culture of the Gulf area, past and current exhibitions in the region and beyond show a symptomatic interest in both recuperating the past through collections of local arts, crafts, or historical artifacts and glamorizing it through lavish displays of Orientalist artwork. Originally developed in 2010 by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage and the Louvre Museum, the *Roads of Arabia* touring exhibition has already visited fifteen cities throughout the world, revealing through the objects displayed the

47 Luitgard Mols and Arnoud Vrolijk, *Western Arabia in the Leiden Collections: Traces of a Colourful Past* (Leiden: Leiden Publications, 2016).

48 Noteworthy titles include Sonja Mejcher-Atassi and John Pedro Schwartz, eds., *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012); Pamela Erskine-Loftus, ed., *Reimagining Museums: Practice in the Arabian Peninsula* (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc., 2013); Karen Exell, ed., *Modernity and the Museum in the Arabian Peninsula* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016); Pamela Erskine-Loftus, ed., *Museums and the Material World* cited above; Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico, eds., *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula* cited above; Pamela Erskine-Loftus, Victoria Penziner Hightower, and Mariam Ibrahim Al-Mulla, eds., *Representing the Nation: Heritage, Museums, National Narratives, and Identity in the Arab Gulf States* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016); and Karen Exell and Sarina Wakefield, eds., *Museums in Arabia: Transnational Practices and Regional Processes* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016).

49 Pamela Erskine-Loftus, "Introduction: Ultra-Modern Traditional Collecting," in Erskine-Loftus, *Museums and the Material World*, 41.

50 Karen Exell, "Introduction: Questions of Globalization, Modernity and the Museum in the Arabian Peninsula," in Exell, *Modernity and the Museum in the Arabian Peninsula*, 6.

51 See, for instance, a recently published collection, Geneviève Zubrzycki, ed., *National Matters: Materiality, Culture, and Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), which focuses on three key areas through which materiality informs the idea of nationalism: the relationship between objects and national institutions, the role of commonplace objects in shaping a national ethos, and the importance of everyday practices in enacting and embodying the nation.

diversity of the cultures and civilizations who met within its confines. In 2017, the *Lest We Forget* exhibition in Abu Dhabi gathered a wide array of tangible and intangible forms of adornment, from garments, jewelry, and weapons to henna, *kohl*, and fragrance. Simultaneously, Orientalist art is increasingly seen as a financial investment vehicle for new generations of buyers and local governments in the Gulf area, being showcased in the Orientalist Museum in Doha and in the Sharjah Art Museum, or, more recently, in the Majilis and Monda Galleries in Dubai.[52] Exhibitions of Orientalist paintings have proliferated both in the Arabian Peninsula and internationally, being constant points of attraction for visitors.[53] Another major cultural event, *Les mille et une nuits* exhibition, opened in 2012 at the Institute du Monde Arabe in Paris to tell the tales of the *Arabian Nights* in three hundred and fifty sundry pieces collected from sixty-two museums in sixteen countries. The exhibits included artifacts, rare manuscripts, and modern productions and highlighted the significant impact of Orientalism on art, song, dance, literature, and film.

Another methodological focus of our collection involves employing the innovative lenses of thing theory in approaching literary texts, visual arts, and cinematic productions of and about "Arabia." By proposing a return to things as primary focus of cultural inquiry, thing theory allows for productive discussions about things' agency, consumer culture, fashion fads, scientific curiosity, collecting practices, and things' role in preserving the past or in signaling cultural difference, to name just a few.[54] Predicated on Heidegger's distinction between objects and things,[55] thing theory accounts for things' historical and phenomenological context, for their fluid meanings and relations

52 Al Fahidi Festival–*The New Orientalists*, The Majilis Gallery, Dubai, February 6 to September 1, 2019, http://www.themajlisgallery.com/2016/01/al-fahidi-festival-new-orientalists/; *The Orientalist Exhibition*, Monda Gallery, Dubai, January 17 to February 27, 2019, https://www.mondagallery.com/collections/orientalist-collection.

53 For a comprehensive survey of exhibitions of Orientalist paintings in the Middle East, see Mercedes Volait, "Middle Eastern Collections of Orientalist Painting at the Turn of the 21st Century: Paradoxical Reversal or Persistent Misunderstanding?" in Pouillon and Vatin, *After Orientalism*, 251–71. Outside the Middle East area, important Orientalist exhibitions include *Eastern Encounters: Orientalist Painters of the Nineteenth Century*, opened in July 1978 at the Fine Art Society (the first major Orientalist painting exhibition) in London; *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870–1930,* an exhibition launched in 2000 at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown; *The Lure of the East*, an exhibition opened at the Tate Gallery in London in 2008; the Orientalist Painting Collection at the Petra Museum, in Turkey; and *Marvels and Mirages of Orientalism*, an exhibition opened in 2015 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

54 To illustrate these various perspectives, see, for instance, John Plotz, "Can the Sofa Speak? A Look at Thing Theory," *Criticism* 47, no. 1 (2005): 109–18; Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016); Jennifer Grayer Moore, *Fashion Fads through American History: Fitting Clothes into Context* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2016); Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Mark Blackwell, ed., *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007); and Ileana Baird and Christina Ionescu, eds., *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context* cited above. Important studies on collecting practices include Roger Cardinal and John Elsner, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994); Susan M. Pearce, ed., *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Silvia Spitta, *Misplaced Objects: Migrating Collections and Recollections in Europe and the Americas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009); and, more recently, Kevin M. Moist and David Banash, eds., *Contemporary Collecting: Objects, Practices, and the Fate of Things* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2013).

55 Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Collins, 1971), 161–84.

with the human subject, for their materiality as well as absence, proposing, thus, a new and more expansive understanding of the human-object interaction:

"You could imagine things as what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects—their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems. Temporalized as the before and after of the object, thingness amounts to a latency (the not yet formed and the not yet formable), and to an excess (what remains physically and metaphysically irreducible to objects). But this temporality obscures the all-at-onceness, the simultaneity, of the object/thing dialectic and the fact that, all at once, *the thing seems to name the object just as it is even as it names some thing else.*"[56]

Understanding the thing as an object-with-a-difference refines, thus, one's approach to materiality to include the things' ritual, symbolic, and other construed meanings, as well as their power to shape both the space they inhabit and the human subjects themselves. In his 2003 monograph, *The Sense of Things*, Brown depicts things as "the congealed facts and fantasies of a culture, the surface phenomena that disclose the logic or illogic of industrial society."[57] His attempt to discover the idea *of* things, as well as the ideas *in* things, involves a new logic of seeing, one that sheds light on an object's interiority and considers the way things are reflected by the image culture of their time.[58]

Given the cultural prominence of the Arabian things in the West's life and imaginary, especially from the eighteenth century onward, when trade with the Middle East underwent a radical growth and the interest in connoisseurship and the culture of collecting started to emerge, this focus on things allows for an exploration of the narratives, myths, and stereotypes associated with the area. Surprisingly, however, in-depth analyses applying this approach to the things of Arabia are quite scarce; among those, a notable contribution is Marina Warner's monograph, *Stranger Magic*, which explores the "thing-world" of the *Arabian Nights* through insightful close readings of its most representative tales.[59] As the author argues, the poisoned books, household goods, furnishings, talismans, speaking body parts, relics, automata, and mechanical devices of the *Arabian Nights* are magically ensouled, fueling the Occident's imagination with unlimited narrative possibilities while also speaking of a busy trade in exotic objects that familiarized their consumers with remote areas of the world:

"Like Zobeide and Sinbad and Marouf and so many other merchants and travelling traders, active and enchanted things also travel in the bustling trade and traffic of the Mediterranean, the North African coast and the Middle East. This mercantile society, with its many tales of buried treasure and sudden windfalls, and its population of sailors, beggars, shopkeepers, craftsmen, tradesmen and every kind of shopper, endows goods with independent presence and vitality, while their enchanted state recognizably derives from a world of unique treasures on the one hand and a thriving market in series and copies on the other."[60]

56 Brown, "Thing Theory," 5.

57 Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4. For more on thing theory, see also by the same author "Object Relations in an Expanded Field," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 17, no. 5 (2006): 88–106, and "Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (2006): 175–207.

58 Brown, *A Sense of Things*, 1–3.

59 Marina Warner, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the* Arabian Nights (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011). See also Sophy Kohler, "Stories 'Lodged in Goods': Reading the Thing-Culture of the *Thousand and One Nights*" (Master's thesis, University of Cape Town, 2017).

60 Warner, *Stranger Magic*, 200–01.

These "material cultures of connections,"[61] as Gerritsen and Riello felicitously have called them, draw attention to the networks of exchange, both real and fictional, that render a thing different when transposed outside its place of origin, or when displayed in museums at a considerable distance in time from its moment of production. Indeed, "[a]s is often the case in cosmopolitan places, other people's things appear in unlikely places, their original meaning or function long forgotten."[62] The many "Arabian" things that fill the Oriental tales of the Enlightenment, for instance, are literally misplaced, being often imports from remote geographical areas that only transited the Arabian Peninsula: such things, however, allow for fascinating insights into processes of transculturation and appropriation with expansive cultural ramifications. These processes highlight, for instance, what Emma Newport calls a thing's "fictility"—the value of a thing as fiction, or the process whereby a society comes to terms with the meaning of an object by reckoning its capacity to sustain fictions about its own origin, travels, forgeries, and innocent or willful misreadings of what it stands for.[63] Such transpositions of place, time, and function, such misplacements and misattributions, such fanciful tales of belonging, or, on the contrary, such opportunities to preserve and recover a past that would otherwise be forever lost, are particularly relevant in relation to the things of Arabia, whose multiple layers of meaning, individual histories, cultural and commercial imports, and fictional lives are still waiting to be unveiled.

3 The Things of Arabia: New Perspectives

As seen from this brief literature survey, there is a scarcity of works that focus on the role played by materiality in the formation of an Arabian identity, despite the historical omnipresence of the Arabian things in the daily life of the West through a myriad of commercial and literary channels, and despite the fundamental role played by everyday, traded, gifted, symbolic, or ritual things in the life of local populations. It is our intention to fill in this gap by collecting here new scholarship that elaborates on these networks of exchange from a broader and more inclusive perspective, one that compiles both Western and Middle Eastern views on the material culture of the Arabian Peninsula.

In assembling this collection, we had to be inevitably selective in our choice of both representative things and organizing events. In our view, the two main events that created paradigm shifts in thinking about Arabia are the translation of the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* in France (1704–1717) and England (1706–1721) in the eighteenth century, and the oil boom in the Gulf area in the third decade of the twentieth century. Each of these events radically changed the way the identity of the place was perceived both in the Western and in the local imaginary, giving rise to enduring representations of "Arabia" that were subsequently internalized and used as identity markers by the peoples of the Peninsula. These two phenomena also illustrate the organic, necessary interdependence of economic and cultural events in processes of identity formation and regional and national branding. While historical events occur within and are determined by economic contexts, they do not tell the full story of people's perception of themselves and of their place in the global imaginary. Place, language, religion, ethnicity, customs, aesthetics, history, and the narratives people construct about themselves or that are imposed upon them play essential roles in forming a group's identity. Although these representations often involve

61 See Gerritsen and Riello, *The Global Lives of Things*.

62 Fromherz, "Introduction," 4.

63 Emma Newport, "The Fictility of Porcelain: Making and Shaping Meaning in Lady Dorothea Banks's 'Diary Book,'" *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 31, no. 1 (Fall 2018): 127. The author expands here on Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace's discussion of porcelain's metaphoric potential in "Women, China, and Consumer Culture in Eighteenth-Century England," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 2 (1995): 153–67.

binary oppositions that place *us* versus *the others*, these differences should be proudly embraced rather than seen as hierarchical divides. From this perspective, the things that organize the material and spiritual life of a particular people allow for a new and less biased story to be told, a story that highlights a group's distinctiveness, its participation in processes of material and cultural exchange, and its unique place in the global family of nations.

We start this collection, therefore, with a section on Arabia of the old that focuses on things that have been considered as hallmarks of the area, being intensely traded throughout its history: frankincense, pearls, and dates. In "Frankincense and Its Arabian Burner," William Gerard Zimmerle considers frankincense and myrrh as the principal reference points for Arabia in the Mediterranean world during the Hellenistic, Byzantine, and Islamic periods. The author links the botanical and chemical study of frankincense gum resins and oils to the philological study of aromatic lexicography in Islamic, Mesopotamian, and Classical sources. By analyzing the material culture that was left behind, such as incense burners or alabastra and its residues, Zimmerle demonstrates that incense relays of the "Spice Trade" and maps the spread of frankincense as an Arabian luxury commodity from the southern Arabian Peninsula to the Mediterranean area. By considering scents as a crucial but little analyzed part of material culture, the author delves into old and current practices associated with the use of incense in the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. As he compellingly argues, when Westerners envision Arabia, the thought of frankincense comes immediately to their mind due to the entangled memories of this scent, which are deeply grounded in Classical mythology and Christian religious practices.

In "The Tyranny of the Pearl: Desire, Oppression, and Nostalgia in the Lower Gulf," Victoria Penziner Hightower examines the history of the pearl, an object that looms large in the construction of identity in the region. Employing the Kantian notions of thing-in-itself and thing-as-used, and the heritage studies notion of thing-as-remembered, the author provides an account of the pearl's history that highlights its reality, trade value, and symbolic meaning in the memory of the local populations. Using the British India Office Records to substantiate its past and popular and academic sources to assess its present, Hightower addresses the constructions and reconstructions of the significance of the pearl in the daily life of the people of the lower Gulf area. As the author argues, pearling has enabled the Trucial States to assert their identity on the global stage by constructing a national narrative within which the pearl was both a way to access the global economic market and a tyrannical symbol of destitution before the oil boom. Thus, the pearl is intimately bound with processes of identity formation: as the author suggestively states, it entered the commercial and heritage lexicon as "an iconic symbol of a past of struggle and a future of boundless prosperity."

Eran Segal's chapter, "Palm Dates, Power, and Politics in Pre-Oil Kuwait," examines another thing essential to the construction of an Arabian identity: the date palm. Commonly identified as a symbol of national heritage in all Gulf countries, the palm tree was in pre-oil times not only a source of food and building material but also a way of building social relations and economic wealth. This chapter argues that one of the keys to understanding the power of Kuwait's ruling Sabah family in the twentieth century lies in its economic strength, which depended greatly on this staple commodity. From the 1830s onwards, the Sabah family gradually purchased or took control of extensive date plantations in southern Iraq, being able to build up an economic power base. The dates were both a source of wealth and a political tool in the region, playing an important role in the Sabah family's interactions with the British and in the process of state formation in Kuwait. By delving into the complex social, cultural, and economic significance of dates in the Arabian Peninsula, in general, and in the history of Kuwait, in particular, this chapter illustrates the essential role played by

"material powers"[64] in processes of capital accumulation and nation-building.

The second section of our collection, *Imagining Arabia: Exotic, Fabulous, and Misplaced Things*, focuses on the process of "Orientalizing" Arabia, which started during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and produced lasting, albeit to a large extent inaccurate, representations of opulence, magic, and exoticism up to the present day. Here, our contributors focus on things inadvertently associated with the Arabian Peninsula due to its intense commercial contacts with the West, a process that led to the proliferation of visual and narrative depictions of a loosely defined "Arabia" during the eighteenth century and beyond. While many of the commodities traded only transited this area, and much of the art and literature depicting "Arabia" was not confined to the Arabian Peninsula *per se*, things like exotic fruit and spices, lavish garments and jewelry, refined beverages and food, exotic harems and bazaars, or, in the fictional realm, flying carpets, magic lamps, magnificent palaces, and powerful *jinns*—increasingly became signifiers of "Arabia" as a place of wonder, luxury, and adventure. The first chapter in this section, "Circulating Things, Circulating Stereotypes: Representations of Arabia in Eighteenth-Century Imagination," looks at the process of rendering "Arabia" through the things that stand for this place as symptomatic of the eighteenth century's redefinition of *the other* spaces in ways that often give rise to stereotypes or, to use Edward Said's words, "imaginative geographies"[65] that coalesce into prejudiced attitudes toward *the other*. Here, the author challenges some of these interpretations by exploring the mechanism of stereotyping in relation to the Arab world outside a colonial lens, and outside a political rendering of the stereotype. As Baird explains, Arabia's things—from spices and perfumes to coffee, dates, garments, and pearls—circulated outside their place of origin on commercial routes that enriched the Western world and, at the same time, disseminated narratives, myths, and stereotypes whose traces can still be found in our culture today. By looking at these accounts as a form of knowledge based on a distant origin of truth which was altered, embellished, or refined in the process of its circulation, the author argues that such stereotypes enrich, rather than distort, our knowledge of Arabia, and thus participate in an ongoing process of identity formation whose tropes have been internalized by the oil-rich countries of the Gulf in productive ways.

In "'Who Will Change New Lamps for Old Ones?': Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp in British and American Children's Entertainment," Jennie MacDonald focuses on the transporting spectacle of productions such as John O'Keeffe's 1788 play, the 1826 Drury Lane opera, and later pantomime, toy theater, and cinematic versions of the Arabian tale. Reliant on material elements such as the magic ring and lamp, and scenic and costume properties evocative of Arabian exoticism, early nineteenth-century productions celebrate concepts of curiosity, wonder, and childhood innocence while offering an imaginative representation of "Arabia" to a Romantic audience. Employing Dongshin Chang's notion of *interculturalization*,[66] the author discusses the blurring effect of British Orientalism, which combined British renderings of a fantastical East with elements of Chinese, Arabic, Ottoman, and North African cultures, as well as twentieth-century renditions of the tale in American cinematography which, in turn, perpetuated an "Arabian" look derived from Orientalist props and imagery. Thus, the author explores how Aladdin's lamp has become over time a shorthand for wish-fulfillment, imbuing "Arabia" with lasting qualities of wonder and exoticism and solidifying Romantic stereotypes of the place.

64 Patrick Joyce and Tony Bennett, "Material Powers: Introduction," in *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*, ed. Patrick Joyce and Tony Bennet (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 1–22.

65 Said, *Orientalism*, 49.

66 Dongshin Chang, *Representing China on the Historical London Stage: From Orientalism to Intercultural Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 1.

By expanding this argument to various manifestations of Orientalism in visual culture and beyond, in "Creative Cartography: From the Arabian Desert to the Garden of Allah," Holly Edwards explores the power of things to fashion a personal, communal, or national self through several cover stories. The author starts by examining two of Jean-Léon Gérôme's best-known paintings, *Arabs Crossing the Desert* and *The Snake Charmer*, which have come to epitomize an "imaginary Orient,"[67] corroborating Said's thesis of colonial power with visual evidence. Then, she delves into the history of Robert Hichens' novel, *The Garden of Allah,* which became a hugely successful Broadway play and then a film of the same title, where "real Arabs," elaborate stage props, and evocative consumer products became vehicles for romance, fueling a booming entertainment industry. A final iteration of Orientalism that she explores is the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, a secretive cohort within the larger order of Freemasonry who fabricated for themselves an Arabized identity through extravagant parades and pilgrimages intended to expand Shrine membership. In telling these cover stories, the author uses the notion of "creative cartography" to describe the process of "mapping, picturing, and narrativizing the world around and through self/other, here/there, and now/then" and argues that making, owning, or viewing arts or artifacts are modes of place-making and identity fashioning with cascading global ramifications. From this perspective, the Arab participation in modern museum culture is seen as a way to revisit and reclaim diverse individual and collective identities embedded in the things representing "the Orient" and the vaguely-defined "Arabian desert."

From the things of the imagination, the third section of the book moves on to things that functioned historically as "emblems" of Arabia for locals and travelers alike: the falcon, the *keffiyeh*, and *al-Sadu* weaving. Yannis Hadjinicolaou's chapter, "Kinetic Symbol: Falconry as Image Vehicle in the United Arab Emirates," demonstrates how the iconic afterlife of Arab falconry was crafted in the *longue durée* through specific visual strategies. This afterlife is narrated by the author in a nonlinear way, from Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen to Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan, by employing Aby Warburg's concept of "image vehicle,"[68] a concept which traces lines of continuity among various historical periods through the migration of images. The author argues that falconry images are "image vehicles" *par excellence* and uses a broad iconographic tradition to show how ruler and falcon are often associated to suggest sovereign power. Describing the falcon as a national symbol of the U.A.E., he connects this symbol to Sheikh Zayed, the founding father of the Emirates, and to the local Bedouin culture within which it was employed as a means for survival in the desert. By exploring Western art and photographic evidence, as well as work by contemporary artists from the area, Hadjinicolaou argues that the falcon has been elevated to an iconic symbol by the Emiratis, being handed down from one generation to another as a form of heritage that has helped craft for themselves a distinctive identity within the Arabian Gulf countries.

In "*Al-Sadu* Weaving: Significance and Circulation in the Arabian Gulf," Rana Al-Ogayyel and Ceyda Oskay explore the traditional practice of nomadic weaving that is still carried out by Arab women in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., Bahrain, Qatar, and other Gulf countries. As the authors argue, the symbols used in *al-Sadu* have a wide variety of functions—from tribal identity markers and means of inter-tribal communication to forms of social participation and artistic self-expression. As such, they indicate that women were very much part of the public sphere in the Arabian Peninsula in the past, which challenges existing perceptions about Arab women's limited participation in the social life. Moreover, given

67 Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," 33.

68 Aby Warburg, *Werke in einem Band* [Works in a volume], ed. Martin Treml, Sigrid Weigel and Perdita Ladwig (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 636–37.

that the nomadic tribes of the Gulf did not keep written records, the textiles became a means of record keeping through their symbols, which reflect social customs and local traditions. In the form of the Bedouin tent, or *bayt*, *al-Sadu* also embodies the idea of a soft and portable home that can adapt in relation to different landscapes and social contexts. Thus, the authors trace the history of *al-Sadu* weaving, the meaning of its symbols, the trade it facilitated, and the social and cultural significance of this practice for current designers in the Middle East and beyond.

One of the most powerful symbols of Arabness, the *keffiyeh* bears, nevertheless, mixed connotations of Arab pride and political controversy. In "Head Coverings, Arab Identity, and New Materialism," Joseph Donica examines the symbolic significance of the *keffiyeh*, a traditional head covering primarily for men that used to protect them from sun and wind in the Arabian desert. Although in the Gulf area the *keffiyeh* is an object that ties men back to their Bedouin past, this object has often been politicized, as seen in recent controversies over non-Arabs wearing the *keffiyeh* as a show of solidarity with the Palestinian fight or for simply being fashionable. By using Ian Hodder's notion of human-object entanglement and new materialist views that reassert the agency of things, the author debates whether wearing another culture's object is an unfitting act of appropriation or an acceptable expression of cultural appreciation. As Donica suggests, by disentangling the *keffiyeh* from the controversies that surround it, we may reposition it as a social unifier, a cultural symbol, and a fashion staple for the Arab people.

In the last section of our collection, *Post-Oil Arabia: Things, Memory, and Local Identity*, the contributors focus on the transformative impact of the Gulf oil on the newly-formed nation-states of the Arabian Peninsula. In their view, things that evoke the past, or "memory-objects," are active participants in processes of recovery and preservation of a people's history and cultural identity. This tension between past and present, heritage and commodification, is addressed in the chapter "Written in Silver: Protective Texts from Inner Oman," where James Redman discusses the significance of inscribed medallions known as *kirsh kitab*, powerful objects that lost their past protective value, being currently hawked in shops and tourist markets as souvenirs and collectibles. Crafted to either be worn around a woman's neck or placed at home near a bed, these objects used to guard their owners against the ravages of a specific *jinniya*, Umm Al Subyan, through the divine language of the Qur'ān inscribed on them. In this chapter, the author looks at these amulets in the broader context of the Omani silver trade and discusses what and how they communicate as texts written by unlettered men for unlettered women. The author regards the imprecisions of the texts imprinted on *kirsh kitab* as mnemonic faults due to the limitations of pre-1970s Omani education and to their both textual and recitational nature, and he likens them with errors commonly found in the manuscript culture. In this analysis, the texts on the *kirsh kitab* become a vehicle for grasping the time, place, and society in which they were created, while the circumvoluted history of the amulets illustrates changes in traditions that have relegated them from protective symbols to personal adornments, transportable wealth, family mementos, or tourist souvenirs.

In "Cradle to Grave: A Life Story in Jewelry," Marie-Claire Bakker and Kara McKeown explore the significant role played by ornaments among the people of the Arabian Gulf, as revealed by the numerous carnelian beads, gold and silver jewelry, and splendid Hellenistic and Sasanian craftsmanship found in archaeological sites throughout the Peninsula. Using oral history case studies, ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the early 1990s in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, and more recent research done in the U.A.E., Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman, the authors argue that jewelry articulates every major event in an Arab woman's life, from birth to marriage to motherhood to death. While tastes have evolved with each generation, the social role of jewelry has remained relatively stable, expressing social status and a complex matrix of

reciprocal exchange relationships that make an Arab woman's jewelry an intrinsic part of her identity. As the authors point out, the display and exchange of jewelry among the *Khalīji* women reinforce a sense of personal and national identity, solidify community ties, and ensure generational continuity.

Finally, in the chapter "'Cine-Things: The Revival of the Emirati Past in Nojoom Alghanem's Cinemascape," Chrysavgi Papagianni explores the important role that material culture plays in defining contemporary Emirati identity as reflected by the work of the most acclaimed Emirati female director, Nojoom Alghanem. By employing the notion of "cine-things," the author examines several objects that help shape a local identity—from landscape to vessels to medicines to rugs—and counterpoises them to the transformative thing of oil. In the author's view, Alghanem's film, *Hamama*, presents things as carriers of memory meant to counteract the annihilating forces of globalization symbolized by oil, an all-encompassing presence defining, to a large extent, the newly-formed Gulf states and their citizens. As Papagianni maintains, positioning these objects at the center of narration allows for building new relationships between humans and things which resist current stereotypes associated with the Emirati identity and offer an alternative understanding of the country and its people.

Hülya Yağcıoğlu's afterword aptly concludes this collection by dwelling on the role of the museum in forging a regional and national identity for the Gulf countries. For the new generations of *Khalīji*, born into cultures of overconsumption brought by post-oil wealth and rampant globalization, museums represent a way of preserving their past while also asserting their collective and local identity. The heritage revivalism manifest in many of the new nations of the Arabian Peninsula, which boast the most extraordinary museum-building boom in history, becomes, thus, not only a way of forging connections with their pre-oil past but also a form of symbolic and material investment that inscribes their distinctive place on the world's cultural and touristic map.

As evidenced by this brief outline, this collection is both interdisciplinary and cross-historical, involving the combined experience of scholars from diverse fields of study (anthropology, history, ethnography, museology, literary and film studies, and art history) and covering diverse historical periods. It is an endeavor that aims at starting a much-needed dialogue among the diverse cultures of the Arabian Peninsula, as well as repositioning them within the significant output of literature, art, film, and scholarship about "Arabia" produced by the West. We hope that the collective knowledge of the fifteen scholars who have contributed to this volume and the diversity of the perspectives presented here will help fill in existing gaps in scholarship, dispel persistent stereotypes about the area, and stimulate new thinking about a culture whose distinctive patterns of trade and cosmopolitanism have pollinated the world with lasting myths, knowledge, and, last but not least, things of beauty.

Note on Transliteration

This book follows the transliteration guidelines established by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. In Chapter 10, original Arabic was kept for text comparison.

PART 1

Arabia of the Old: The Things of the Trade

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CHAPTER 1

Frankincense and Its Arabian Burner

William Gerard Zimmerle

1 Introduction

Arabia Felix, or Happy Arabia,[1] has been memorialized throughout the ages on account of its smell. Some of the best-known aromatics associated with Arabia are the twin gum resins cut from the barks of the trees growing in the southernmost regions of the Arabian Peninsula that belong to the genera *Boswellia* and *Commiphore* of the *Burseracaea* family, otherwise known as frankincense and myrrh. From the Hellenistic period onward, these resins and their lucrative westward trade became the principal reference point for Arabia in the Mediterranean world. Indeed, this was so much the case that it is almost impossible for scholars to approach the question of Arabian trade prior to the Hellenistic period without presuming that this trade involved principally the gum resin frankincense, the most famous fragrant substance throughout history. In this chapter, I summarize the history of the frankincense trade through the lens of its principal container—the cuboid incense burner—used from the late Third Millennium B.C. until the present day in the Arabian Peninsula as the primary means to burn frankincense and other kinds of aromatics.

The cuboid containers mentioned here are square-shaped incense burners that have been recovered from archaeological excavations from every quadrant of the Middle East (figs. 1.1 and 1.2). They are testimony to a vast trade in Arabian aromatics that extended beyond the Peninsula to the Mediterranean world, on the one hand, and to East Asia, on the other.[2] As one important type of incense-related paraphernalia from Arabia, the cuboid-shaped censer is a historical and cultural object that becomes the focal point in exploring how the material culture evolves and lasts in cultural perpetuity throughout the ages. Pursuing this question requires an overview of the history of the Arabian trade in aromatics in general, and of frankincense in particular. I will begin by canvassing the proveniences of the cuboid incense burner, looking through space and time for its appearances in history, and then provide a historical overview of the aromatics trade in the Near East and a brief account of the production of incense burners today. Although incense burners have been found in archaeological excavations ranging geographically from the Levant to Mesopotamia, my focus here is only on items found along the trade routes running from the Arabian Peninsula to the Mediterranean markets, on the one hand, and to Mesopotamian city-states, on the other. As I will argue here, odors are a less analyzed but crucial part of the material culture of the Arabian Peninsula.

I will, therefore, begin with the question: How can historians and archaeologists detect patterns of olfaction use in history that are about burning combustible materials? Then, after reviewing both the material culture of cuboid incense burners in particular archaeological contexts and the historical evidence for the aromatics trade, I will pose anew the broader question taken from Igor Kopytoff's seminal article on the biography of things and

1 Jan Retsö, "When Did Yemen Become Arabia Felix?" *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 33 (2003): 229.

2 Michael O'Dwyer Shea, "The Small Cuboid Incense Burners of the Ancient Near East," *Levant* 15, no. 1 (1983): 92.

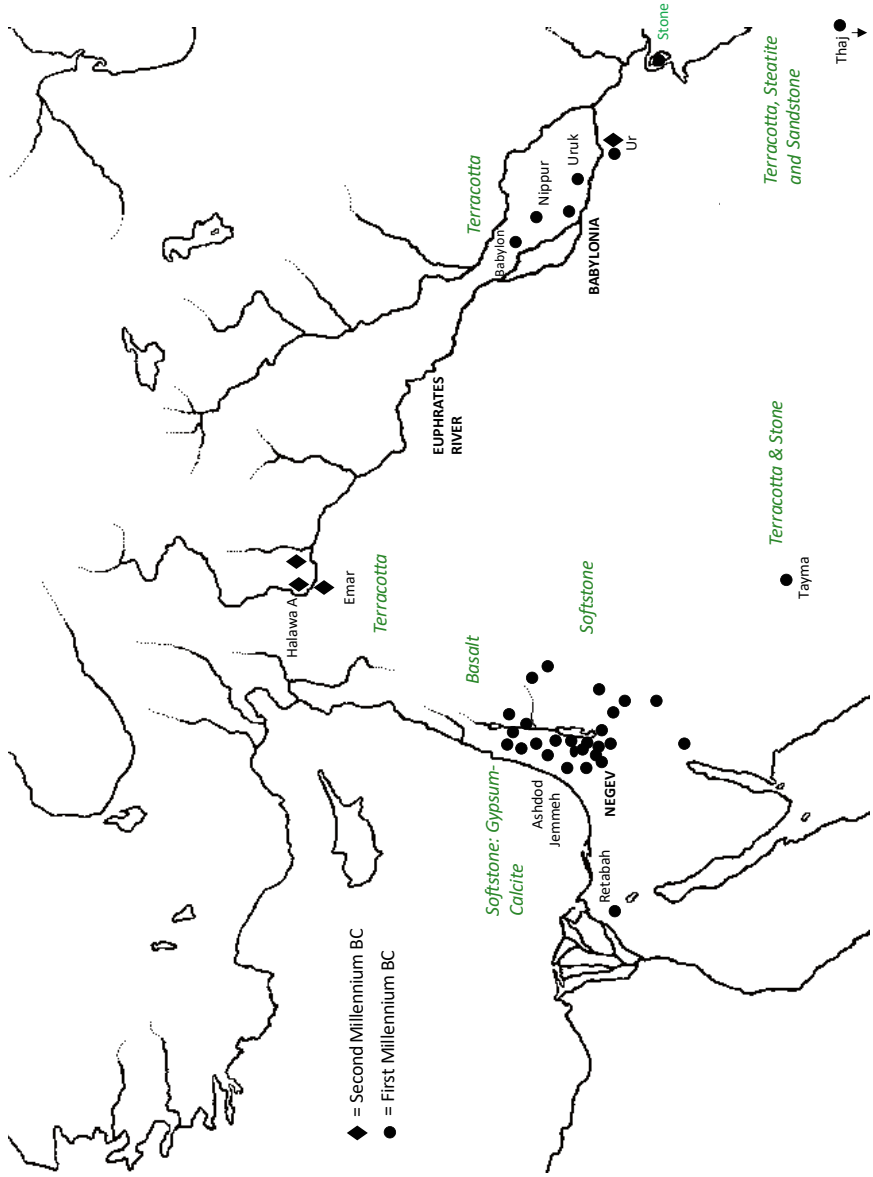

FIGURE 1.1 Map of archeological sites excavated in the Near East where cuboid incense burners have been found.

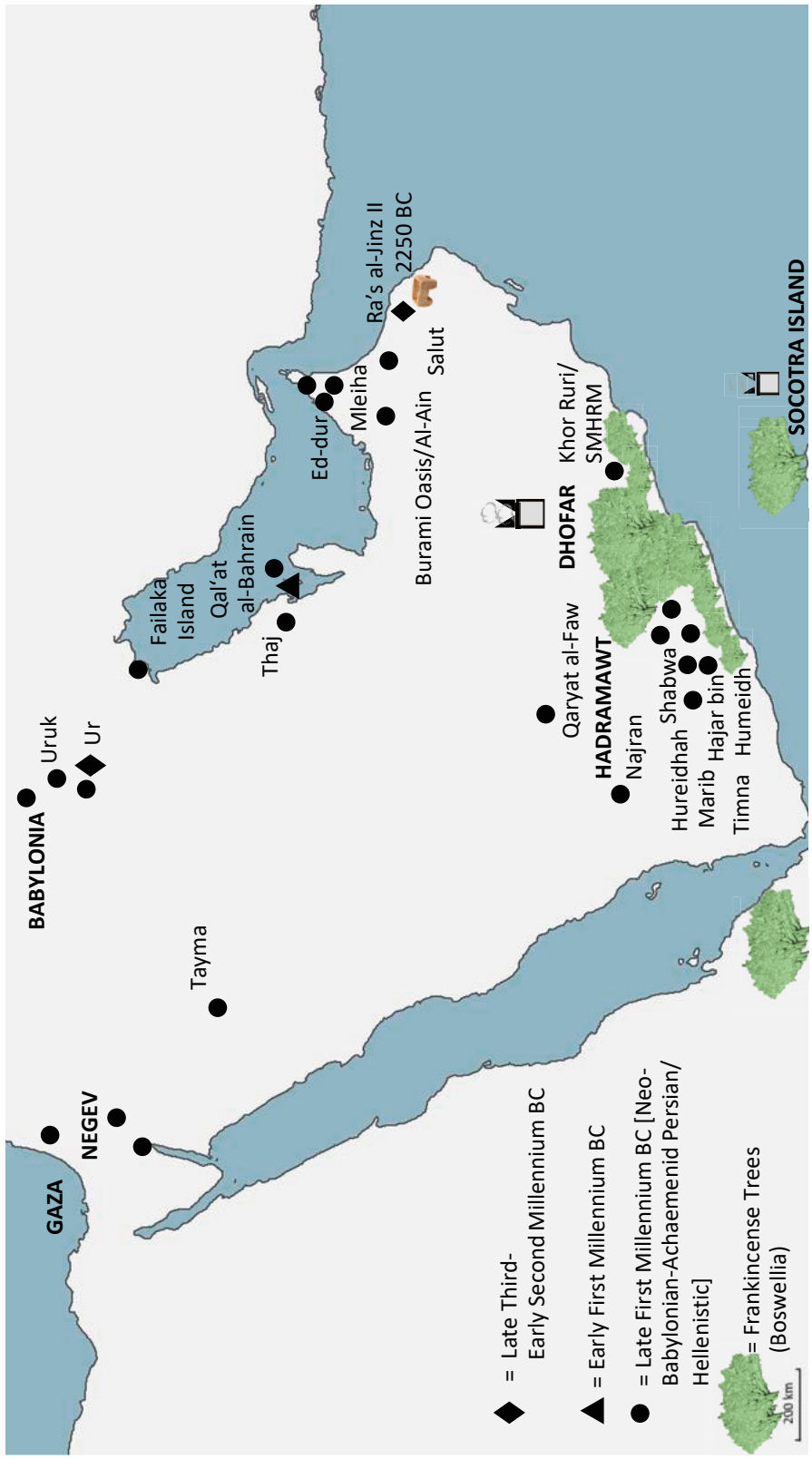

FIGURE 1.2 Map of archeological sites excavated in the Arabian Peninsula where cuboid incense burners have been found.

their cultural legacy: "Where does the thing come from and who made it?"[3]

2 Ra's al Jinz and Its Environment

The history of the four-legged cuboid incense burner, sometimes identified as the frankincense burner, begins in the Arabian Peninsula. Excavations conducted at the coastal fishing town of Ra's al Jinz in the Sultanate of Oman uncovered artifacts that at first were unrecognized by the Western archeologists excavating the site (fig. 1.3).[4] Using their senses of sight and touch, the Omani workmen perceived the attributes of these objects based upon their size, stone quality, and representative signatures of burnt remains, identifying them as incense burners similar to the modern-day Arabian-style burners that they knew. Archeologists Serge Cleuziou and Maurizio Tosi wrote about the attributes of these objects in their summary report on the excavations, noting three key points. First, when ascribing a domestic function to the object, they suggested that, "the sandstone burner was by no means a precious or exceptional object, but an item of standard household equipment: the burning of aromatics was an everyday activity performed with locally manufactured objects in common use."[5] Second, describing the artifacts as incense burners due to the interior residue, they reported that "[t]he burnt material formed a 3 mm thick crust, roughly oval in shape, with edges fading to a light brown coloration. At closer examination, the rest of the containing space revealed remnants of previous firings and tiny pockets of the same greasy deposit, suggesting that the surface had been scraped before the last burning. The object was then classified as an 'incense burner,' listed with number DA 12728 in the inventory of the Department of Antiquities of the Sultanate of Oman."[6] Third, after interrogating their attributions, they re-emphasized the value of these objects in terms of their function, which helped understand their original purpose in the Arabian culture: "The close similarity in size and shape of these Bronze Age burners with those traditionally used for aromatics throughout Arabia until today strongly suggests that they too were in similar widespread use for daily household and ritual activities."[7] While the excavators were first unable to determine the type of objects that they had found, their Omani workers in the field recognized DA 12728 as "the earliest *mabkhara*," or incense burner, in archeological history, used to burn *lbn*, the milky-white crystalized substance known as frankincense.[8]

3 Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 66.

4 Serge Cleuziou and Maurizio Tosi, "Ra's al-Jinz and the Prehistoric Coastal Cultures of the Ja'alan," *Journal of Oman Studies* 11 (2000): 54. As Cleuziou and Tosi describe it, "the Early Bronze Age settlement at RJ-2 was a seasonal settlement of a fishing community occupied from fall to the spring, when fishing was not limited by the monsoon. This can be inferred from the microstratigraphic study of the deposits inside the houses and from general considerations. Due to heavy southern monsoon winds, offshore fishing is impossible in summer at Ra's al-Jinz … the fishing season ranging from October to March" (41).

5 Ibid., 54. The authors also wrote: "Fragments of two identical vessels had already been recovered from RJ-2 in previous seasons, but they had not yet been identified as burners, due to their fragmentary condition. The first one, of the same shape (DA 10850), was found in the fill of pit su.2500, disconnected by erosion from the main sequence, while the second one is just a leg and part of a side (DA 11971) but comes from a safer context: su.3154 in Room IV of Building VI."

6 Ibid., 53–54.

7 Ibid., 54.

8 Ibid. For further discussion of the Semitic etymology of the root *lbn,* "white," from the Phoenician language, as well as a brief discussion of *lbnt*, "frankincense," see *Hebrew in Its West Semitic Setting: A Comparative Survey of Non-Masoretic Hebrew Dialects and Traditions. Part 1:*

By the late third millennium B.C., when the first incense burners started to be manufactured in Magan[9] (modern-day Oman and the United Arab Emirates), organized trade with Mesopotamia had intensified. By 2300 B.C., Ra's al-Jinz stood at the crossroads of an international system of complex exchanges between the Arabian Peninsula and the empires of Mesopotamia.[10] The site was rich in Harappan pottery sherds, which bears testimony to the long distance trade between Mesopotamia, the lands of ancient Magan, and the Indus Valley to the east.[11] The incense burners that Cleuziou and Tosi found at Ra's al Jinz were the first rectangular stone forms with four legs in archaeological history.[12] The intact form DA 12728 is not only the oldest known cuboid incense burner in Arabia but also a fully intact exemplar from a well-defined and clear archaeological context (fig. 1.4). It was discovered in a deposit beneath and sealed by a layer of bricks and clay from the fallen walls surrounding it. Its position suggests that this burner was left behind in a corner of the room, with tools to be used during the next season. Two fragments of identical four-legged containers were also found at Ra's al-Jinz in the previous seasons: the first one, DA 10850, in the fill of a pit, and the second one, the leg and side of another incense burner, in Room IV (DA 11971) (fig. 1.5). The incense burners were plain and displayed no signs of decorative incisions or carvings.

FIGURE 1.3 Cuboid incense burner DA12728, Ra's al-Jinz, Sultanate of Oman.

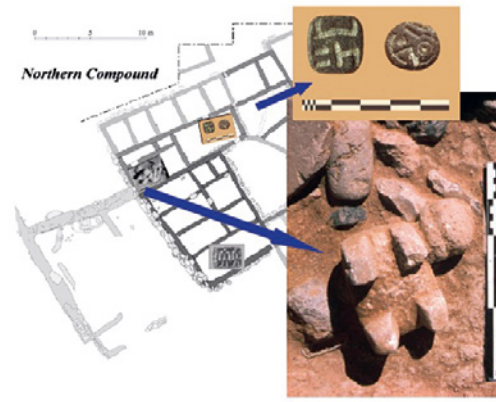

FIGURE 1.4 Cuboid incense burner DA12728, Ra's al-Jinz, found *in situ* from Building XI, Room 9, with Harappan seal impressions from Building VII, Room 8.

FIGURE 1.5
Cuboid incense burner fragment DA10850, Ra's al-Jinz.

A Comparative Lexicon, Section Bb—Root System, Comparative Material and Discussion. Section C, D, and E, Numerals under 100—Pronouns—Particles, ed. Aimo Murtonen (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 244. See also an example of a large cuboid incense burner found at Lachish inscribed with the word, *lbnt*, i.e., "frankincense" in the Aramaic language in William F. Albright, "The Lachish Cosmetic Burner and Esther 2: 12," in *A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers*, ed. Howard N. Bream, Ralph D. Heim, and Carey A. Moore (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 27.

9 This is the ancient name for the South-Eastern region of the Arabian Peninsula in Bronze Age cuneiform texts.

10 Cleuziou and Tosi, "Ra's al-Jinz and the Prehistoric Coastal Cultures of the Ja'alan," 23–24.

11 Ibid., 23–24. Over ninety-eight sites within a four-kilometer radius of RJ-2 have been identified ever since, revealing a network of maritime settlements within South Asia's reach.

12 Ibid., 53–54.

When the rectangular burner DA 12728 was recovered from the northern domestic compound at RJ-2, it was dug out of the ground upside down. Once the excavators rotated the container, they found a black greasy residue deposit in its center. The residue described by Cleuziou and Tosi was tested and identified as being burnt *Boswellia sacra*, presumably from Dhofar, the region where frankincense is cut from the bark of the trees growing there.[13]

3 Third-First Millennium B.C.: "Aromatics of All Kinds" under the Axial Age of Empires

Prior to the discovery of incense burners at Ra's al Jinz II, Assyriologists and Western archaeologists did not define these small devices as anything but four-legged troughs or boxes.[14] By 1903, the German Oriental Society had identified at least one of the incense burners from Babylon with residue as an "altar " (Bab 28490).[15] The German archaeologist Liselotte Ziegler finalized the identification when she published her line drawings of the objects in question by their Sumerian designation, NÍG.NA, a nomenclature for fire-burners often listed in witchcraft literature that identified them as "fire-boxes," or *raucherkästchen* in the German language.[16] Since then, over two hundred incense burners fashioned from clay in cuboid form have been identified, studied, and plotted. They are indicative of a widespread trade in aromatics that extended from the great cities of Ur, Nippur, and Babylon in southern Mesopotamia (the end of the Neo-Babylonian period and the beginning of the Achaemenid Persian period) to the settlements at the northern bends of the Euphrates River (modern-day Syria) (the Middle Bronze Age).

To be specific, these cuboid incense burners have been discovered during archaeological excavations of sites in southern and central Mesopotamia (fig. 1.6). Tall al-Muqayyar (Ur), Warka (Uruk), and Nuffar (Nippur) yielded the most burners, with as many as fifty from Uruk, thirty-seven from Nippur, and thirty-one from Tall al-Muqayyar. Sir Leonard Woolley identified them as clay incense burners in his 1962 report on the Ur excavations.[17] Discovered from strata dated a century earlier in excavations from Syria, the earliest cuboid incense burners are from Tall Halawa, Mound A, and Tall Meskene Emar, settlements on the Euphrates River in modern-day Syria; one stone incense burner from the Larsa period was also excavated

13 Personal communication with Dr. Maurizio Tosi in Salalah on June 28, 2014.

14 Leon Legrain, *Terra-Cottas from Nippur* (Philadelphia: Publication for the University Museum by University of Pennsylvania Press, 1930), 19; pl. 65. For a background on the aromatics trade in Mesopotamia, see Charles Franklin Myer, "The Use of Aromatics in Ancient Mesopotamia" (PhD. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1975), and A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Seafaring Merchants of Ur," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 74 (1954): 6–17. Thirty years prior to the Ra's al Jinz discoveries, the renowned Assyriologist and historian of Mesopotamia A. Leo Oppenheim defined the complex overland and maritime trade involving the Lower and Upper Euphrates River system as the main trade conduit from Arabia-India into the northern Levant. Oppenheim never connected any incense burners with the trade in aromatics, nor did he cite any evidence from Mesopotamia about the trade and exchange of frankincense from Arabia, but other Assyriologists before him, such as Leon Legrain and Leonard Woolley, briefly mentioned clay incense burners and recognized that they were instrumental for the burning of aromatics in Babylonia.

15 I read this in the margins of the Babylon reports at the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin.

16 Liselotte Ziegler, "Tonkästchen aus Uruk, Babylon und Assur" [Clay box from Uruk, Babylon, and Assur], *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1947): 224–40.

17 Leonard Woolley, *Ur Excavations IX. The Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods* (London: Publications of the Joint Expeditions of the British Museum and of the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, to Mesopotamia. Published for the Trustees of the Two Museums, 1962), 103.

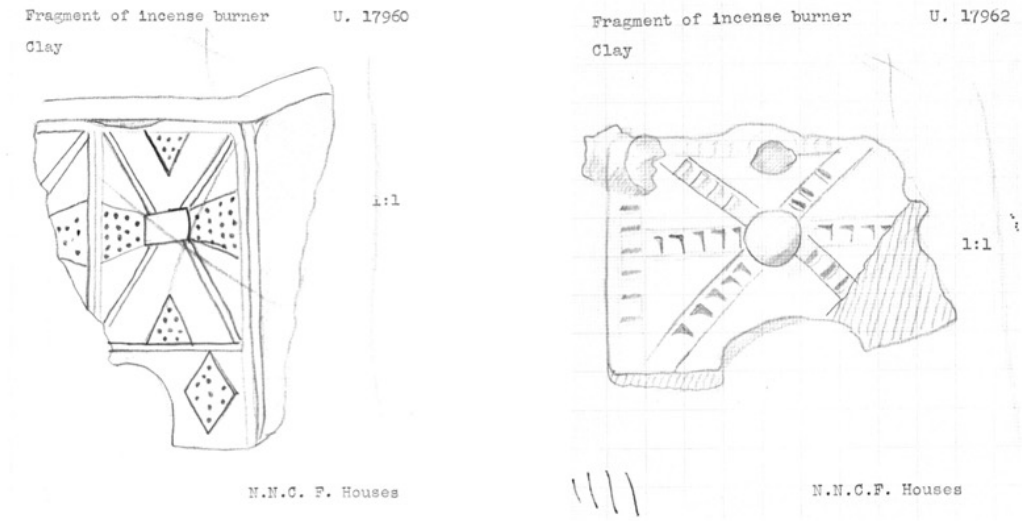

FIGURE 1.6 Cuboid incense burners from Sir Leonard Woolley's excavations at Ur, Iraq.

by Woolley at Ur (fig. 1.7).[18] Most of the thirty clay cuboid incense burners were found in domestic structures in the residential building Q, Level II, at Halawa; they date from the beginning of the Second Millennium, or the Middle Bronze Age I (ca. 1900–1700 B.C.). Seven incense burners were found inside private houses at the site, eight were excavated from the alleys facing these private houses, and five were found in the streets. The context for these fields was domestic, pointing to a culture for burning aromatics inside the home that extended geographically beyond what had been indicated in previous scholarship as Arabia's sphere of influence. The distribution pattern of these forms found at some of the conduit sites along the Upper Euphrates River suggests that the double mode of transportation—overland *and* maritime—created a rapid, safe, and efficient way to move commodities bidirectionally, especially before the advent of the domestication of the dromedary by the seafaring traders of Ur.[19]

Along these lines, other scholars have recognized and argued for the great awakening of the South Arabian trade that flourished later, in the First Millennium, during the time the dromedary was domesticated for long distance caravan trade.[20] The increase in Arabian trading was undoubtedly the result of three important global transformations in the ancient Near Eastern economy prior to Islam. First, during the Babylonian king Nabonidus' reign in Tayma, the northern oasis of the Nabateans in the Arabian Peninsula

18 See A. Pruß, "Räucherkästchen" [Incense burner], in *Ausgrabungen in Halawa—3: Die Bronzezeitliche Keramik von Tell Halawa A* [Excavations in Halawa—3: The Bronze Age pottery of Tell Halawa A], ed. Winfried Orthmann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994), 3:84, and J.-C. Margueron, "Le Coffrets" [Boxes], in *Mission Archéologique de Meskéné-Emar: Dix ans des travaux: 1972–1982* [Archaeological mission of Meskéné-Emar: Ten years of work: 1972–1982], ed. Dominique Beyer (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1982), 95–97.

19 Oppenheim, "Essay on Overland Trade," 253.

20 See Ryan Byrne, "Early Assyrian Contacts with Arabs and the Impact on Levantine Vassal Tribute," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 331 (2003): 11–23, and John S. Holladay, "Hezekiah's Tribute, Long-Distance Trade, and the Wealth of Nations c. 1000–600 B.C.: A New Perspective," in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*, ed. Seymour Gitin, J. Edward Wright, and J.P. Dessel (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 312–15.

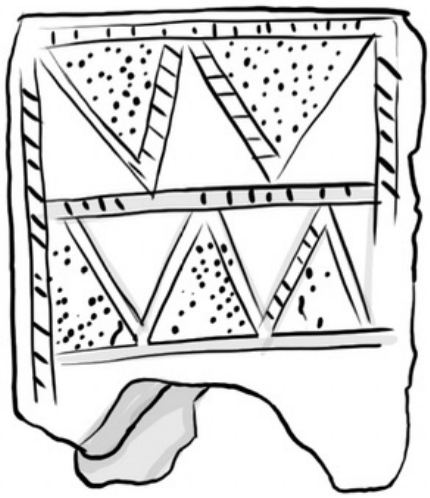

FIGURE 1.7 Incense burner from Ur-Larsa Period (UM U.6812).

(ca. 556 B.C.), the trade in aromatics intensified because of the Neo-Babylonian empire interacting with southern Arabia through the northern Arabian traders and Aramaic-speaking tribes. It is likely that Nabonidus single-handedly rerouted the flow of commodity exchanges from northern Arabia (Tayma) to Babylonia by the sixth century B.C. by penetrating into the desert, thus increasing the output of frankincense cultivation exponentially and passing it into the hands of traders and traffickers.[21] Second, as the short-lived Babylonian empire eventually waned in power, the successive Mesopotamian empire would give way to the Kingdom of Persis in the south-western region of the Iranian Plateau in the First Millennium B.C. The Persians would reunite the lands by building and maintaining royal roads that strengthened the network of trade in commodities across a vast terrain from as far as Susa to North Africa. To their credit, by seizing control of the spice trade in the sixth century, the Persians established new royal roads and taxations across their empire, effectively creating a "globalized" network system that reached the Mediterranean coast and the Aegean world.

In contrast to the first two events, the third deep historical transformation of the local economy was the successive rise of at least four major kingdoms inside the southern Arabian Peninsula that profited from the state-sponsored trade of frankincense and myrrh, the "petroleum" of the ancient world. These major kingdoms ruled successively in and around the oasis area of Hadramawt (Yemen), in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, and organized the transport of incense in the Iron Age, creating the historical memory of *Arabia Felix*. The kingdoms are classified by the written languages of their literate societies: Minaic, Qatabanic, Hadramitic, and Sabaic. Saba' (Sheba) was the most famous, wealthiest, and largest of the four, with its capital in Maryab (Marib). The kingdoms earned considerable profits by taxing, servicing, and protecting the camel caravans that led away from Arabia. They all developed marginally in the early or middle First Millennium B.C., before they advanced to city-state status in the middle to late First Millennium B.C.

These kingdoms were located on overland trade routes that led from the frankincense producing areas of Southern Arabia to the markets of the Near East and the Mediterranean. For example, the caravan route ran from the port of Qana, which was situated near the incense producing regions, to Shabwa, the capital of Hadramawt. Then, it continued around the edge of the desert into the cities of Timna and Marib, the capitals of Qataban and Saba', into Ma'in, the kingdom of spice merchants, and finally into Tayma, in northern Arabia. From here, it continued onto the southern cities of the Levant. Therefore, the spread of southern Arabian culture intensified in the mid-eighth century, during the Mukarrib period, which marked the zenith of the South Arabian (Sabaean) power.[22] As a

21 Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon (556–539 B.C.)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 174.

22 Albert Jamme has defined *mukarrib* from the Arabic root *karab*a, meaning to "weave a rope," or to "strengthen connections." For details, see "Quelques problèmes

result, Hadramawt, the region where frankincense groves grew, developed into a major trading center by the middle of the First Millennium B.C., after the Mukarrib period. By the third century B.C., a colony migrated from Shabwa to the Smhrm (Sumhuram) lagoon at Khor Rori, in Dhofar.[23] From there, they exported frankincense under the protection and control of the Roman Empire.

Very little is known about the development of these kingdoms prior to the First Millennium B.C.; however, it is assumed that they developed over more centuries than we probably realize. Whatever the case may be, the wealth that the frankincense trade generated during the high period of royal rule helped to fund large-scale architectural building projects that required huge teams of quarry workers, stonemasons, and sculptors. Hence, the Marib architecture was the most spectacular of its time in Arabia for the mid-First Millennium: it included the Awwam temple (locally known as the Mahram Bilqis, or the Temple of the Queen of Sheba), the Bar'an temple, and the great dam of Marib, built in 550 B.C., a water management system for Saba' so impressive that it was mentioned in the Qur'ān (*Sūra* 34:15–19). When the great dam burst in the seventh century A.D., it flooded Hadramawt, causing an environmental disaster and bringing a climactic end to the history of pre-Islamic South Arabia.

4 Pack Animals: Arabian Dromedary

Against this historical backdrop, the economic gain in revenue from the trade in aromatics increased in the First Millennium, under the protection of the Neo-Assyrians, intensified later under the Achaemenid Persians, and climaxed during the Roman rule, when new roads were created in response to the increased demand for exotic commodities, including new flavors and pleasant scents. However, navigating the elaborate system of relays and roads across arid environments required vehicles capable of sustaining these long and arduous journeys. Although donkeys were valued as pack animals capable of carrying heavy loads across mountainous terrains, camels gradually took their place as beasts of burden toward the end of the Second Millennium B.C., making long distance overland trade in desert areas possible. Although it is hard to determine when and where the dromedary was first domesticated along the coast of the Arabian Gulf, archaeologists have suggested that it happened toward the end of the late Third Millennium B.C. because of the camel bone collections found at Umm an-Nar, Hili 8, and Ra's Ghanda in the Arabian Peninsula.[24] North of the Arabian Peninsula, the case for domestication is more difficult to make since the many archaeological sites have evidenced only low numbers of dromedary faunal bones, making the evidence for the domestication of camels in the Levant circumstantial. Establishing domestication requires substantial faunal remains to determine a reduction in average size. The zooarchaeological data available today shows a distribution of camel bones at Late Bronze Age II levels at Izbet Sartah and Tell Jemmeh, in the southern Levant, and at sites along the northern incense relays to Gaza, ca. twelfth and eleventh centuries A.D.[25] Although it is unclear from such remains whether the camels were wild or domestic, the latest evidence for dromedary domestication suggests that the evolution of domestication was gradual, taking place over a few hundreds of years in the ancient Near East. By culling the assemblages of faunal remains

sud-Arabes" [Some South-Arab problems], *Biblica et Orientalia* 12 (1955): 219–20. The *mukarribs* were localized in Saba' and their function was largely secular in nature. They ruled, waged war, and built public works and irrigation systems for frankincense cultivation.

23 Juris Zarins, "The Latest on the Archaeology of Southern Oman," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 4 (2009): 665.

24 Brian Cotterell and Johan Kamminga, *Mechanics of Pre-Industrial Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 194.

25 Paula Wapnish, "Camel Caravans and Camel Pastoralists at Tell Jemmeh," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 13 (1981): 101–21.

FIGURE 1.8 Incense burner from Shahbwa, Yemen (BM 125682; 1937, 0507.1).

at various sites, Caroline Grigson summarized the bulk of this evidence as follows: "Presumably in the earliest stages of domestication camels were exploited for their meat, milk and other products; their use for riding and in transportation of heavy goods and the subsequent realization of the possibilities for long-distance trade would have been a gradual development lasting many hundreds of years."[26]

Even though the domesticated dromedary and the aromatics trade were entangled by the middle of the First Millennium B.C., as evidenced by a late third century B.C. incense burner from Shabwa (Yemen) held at the British Museum (fig. 1.8), small cuboid incense burners seem to have been locally made and rarely transported beyond short relays.[27] Although they were easily stackable because of their size and square shape, traders would have not profited from the sale of incense burners themselves, as the weight of the containers, whether made by stone or clay, would have outweighed the benefit of the transaction. Indeed, it was the aromatics themselves that were the more precious commodities for trade.

Frankincense was undoubtedly the keystone commodity of South Arabian trade during the Iron Age, with up to 1,700 tons reaching the Mediterranean Sea during the Classical period under the Roman maritime rule.[28] By the early First Millennium A.D., the price of frankincense is recorded in the annals of Roman history. Historian Pliny the Elder, for instance, calculates the cost of sending frankincense on the back of dromedary across the Arabian desert in his *Naturalis Historia*, an extensive thirty-seven volume encyclopedia and a primary source for understanding flora growing from various landscapes and cultures throughout the Roman world. Here, Pliny lists useful information on the types of substances traded on the Roman market coming from the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant, and India. No doubt, one should be

26 Caroline Grigson, "Camels, Copper and Donkeys in the Early Iron Age of the Southern Levant: Timna Revisited," *Journal of the Council for the British Research in the Levant* 44, no. 1 (2012): 97.

27 William G. Zimmerle, "Aromatics of All Kinds: Cuboid Incense Burners in the Ancient Middle East from the Late Third to the Late First Millennia B.C." (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2014), 7. For scientific testing of the limestone incense burners, see Seung Ho Bang, Oded Borowski, Kook Young Yoon, and Yuval Goren, "Local Production and Domestic Ritual Use of Small Rectangular Incense Altars: A Petrographic Analysis and Examination of Craftsmanship of the Tell Halif Incense Altars," in *Gods, Objects, and Ritual Practices*, ed. Sandra Blakely (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2017), 171. See also Sterenn Le Maguer, "Typology of Incense Burners from the Islamic Period," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 41 (2011): 173. Le Maguer came to the same conclusion that the clay incense burners of the Islamic period were locally made as Zimmerle concluded for the pre-Islamic forms.

28 Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 35.

suspicious of Pliny's rhetorical ethos and knowledge of the outside world beyond the Roman Empire, but it is remarkable how accurate he is regarding frankincense. For instance, he rightly suggests that: (1) myrrh grew separately from frankincense; (2) there were two harvests yearly and separately for frankincense and myrrh; and (3) that the frankincense district began after an eight-day journey from Shabwa (Sabota).[29] Additionally, as Pliny indicates, if traders followed the relays from southern Arabia to Gaza, they would have passed through a system of caravanserai and tolls along the way. In 137 A.D., he reports that the customs regulations of Palmyra specified 25 Denarii tax for every camel load of aromatics, and that these aromatics were transported in bags or sacks[30] while the oils were transported in alabaster jars or bottles.[31] Indeed, the rise of an extensively "globalized" perfume trade from the Second Millennium into the First Millennium required such containers to transport hard gum resins and liquid-based commodities across the landscape. Crystalline hardened gum resins required lighter and cheaper packaging to be carried onto the backs of camels, so leather bags were manufactured because they were lighter and more durable than stone bottles.

Most of the Neo-Assyrian kings recognized the value of the dromedary for carrying the heavy sacks of aromatics, or, as the annals frequently list them, "aromatics of all kinds" (Akkadian, *riqqū kālama*; Sumerian, *ŠIM.MEŠ* and *ŠIM.ḪI.A*).[32] The Arabian camel or dromedary is first mentioned in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions in the sixth regnal year of Tukulti-Ninurta (890–884 B.C.), as well as in the inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.). At least two other examples from the late Neo-Assyrian annals provide some of the best textual evidence about carrying aromatics out of Arabia. The Neo-Assyrian rulers Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.) and Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.) listed in their annals the tribute taken from Arabian queens and Aramaic kings, respectively. In the case of Tiglath-Pileser, this tribute included 5,000 pouches of all kinds of aromatics. In the case of Esarhaddon, the tribute is described in the following terms: "I added sixty-five camels (and) ten donkeys to the previous tribute and imposed [it] on him. Hazael died and I placed Iata', his son, on his throne. I added ten minas of gold, one thousand choice stones, fifty camels, [and] *one hundred bags of aromatics* [emphasis added] to the tribute of his father and imposed [it] on him. Later, Uabu, to exercise kingship, incited all of the Arabs to rebel against Iata."[33]

By the time of the early Roman Empire, the traffic in aromatics grew from raiding caravans to trading enterprises which led, in turn, to a very stable economy that flooded the region with commodities of all kinds. Some of the many types of ar-

29 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History. Volume IV: Books 12–16*. Translated and edited by H. Rackhman. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938).

30 William D. Glanzman, "Arts, Crafts, and Industries," in *Queen of Sheba. Treasures from Ancient Yemen,* ed. St. John Simpson (London: British Museum, 2002), 111. For depictions of leather bags in Neo-Assyria, see Max Mallowan and Lerri Glynne Davies, *Ivories in Assyrian Style: Commentary, Catalogue, and Plates. Ivories from Nimrud* (1949–1963) (London: The British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1970), pl. XXIII.

31 A complete study of the distribution patterns for alabaster jars and bottles of South Arabia-type has yet to be completed. For some examples of "bee-hived" jars, see Carl S. Phillips and St. John Simpson, "Ancient South Arabian Softstone Vessels from the British Museum," in *Softstone: Approaches to the Study of Chlorite and Calcite Vessels in the Middle East and Central Asia from Prehistory to the Present*, ed. D. Kennet and St J. Simpson (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2018), 167–79. For examples of *sqat* jars, see Ann Searight, Julian Reade, and Irving Finkel, *Assyrian Stone Vessels and Related Material in the British Museum* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2008), 78.

32 *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Volume 14, R,* ed. Erica Reiner and Martha T. Roth (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1999), 370.

33 Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria* (*680–669 B.C.*) (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2011), 19, 30, 38, and 49.

omatics traded are reflected on the incense burners from Southern Arabia themselves. Many Southern Arabian incense burners from Hellenistic-Roman times found in Yemen (third century B.C. to third century A.D.) are inscribed with scent-notes; the high, middle, and low chords of scents are identified by their Semitic names for botanical aromatics, such as *qsṭ*, *ldn*, *drw*, and *kmkm*. In the inscriptions on the artifact provided, *qsṭ*, or *Saussurea costus*, grew in the Indus Valley and the Himalayas, while *ldn*, *kmkm*, and *drw* of the *Pistacia genera* were all highly suited to the wetter climate of the Mediterranean (fig. 1.9). Other aromatic names depicting fragrances, including *rndm* (nard) and *lbny* (frankincense or storax), were inscribed on some samples of cuboid incense burners.[34] As many as fifty known examples of inscribed burners are part of museum collections.[35] The suffix of *lbny* could indeed be the Old South Arabian singular adjectival *nisbah* for "whiteness," and the full word might have been employed descriptively to identify either frankincense or storax.[36] Both these aromatics are shaded white and were often confused in antiquity, as they are today. A three-legged round incense burner found at Khor Rori in Dhofar, the land of frankincense, was found to contain residue from the *Pinaceae* (pine) family, or *Pistacia genera*, which the scientists suggested to have originated from the Mediterranean area.[37] The circular, legged limestone incense burner is from the first or second century A.D. Stone cuboid and circular clay incense burners from Tayma (fig. 1.10), a site lying along the northern relays of the aromatic trade, were also tested and found to contain residue from *Boswellia sacra* (frankincense). These incense burners were excavated from first or second century A.D. Nabataean Roman houses at the site of Tayma in the northern Arabian Peninsula.[38]

Besides the material culture of small cuboid incense burners, Classical mythmaking also described the travels and travails of finding and extracting Arabian gum resins, such as frankincense and myrrh. In the twentieth century, William F. Albright defined the relationship between myrrh and its altar in the First Millennium B.C. as divinized.[39] This relationship was further exemplified

34 Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic, Sabaean Dialect* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 93. Biella lists the following four aromatic notes on incense burner C683 as an example: *rnd* (nard), *ḏḫb* (golden incense), *n'm* (sweet), *qsṭ* (costus).

35 Mohammed Maraqten, "A New Small Incised Cuboid Incense Burner from Yemen," in *"My Life Is Like the Summer Rose," Maurizio Tosi e l'Archeologia come modo di vivere: Papers in Honour of Maurizio Tosi for His 70th Birthday*, ed. C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky and B. Genito (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2014), 488.

36 Walter W. Muller, "Notes on the Use of Frankincense in South Arabia," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 6 (1976): 124–27. Muller has always argued for storax (Arabic *lubnā*) on the basis of Semitic etymology but given the general confusion in identifying these aromatics visually, there is no reason to definitely concur with Muller. See also Kjeld Nielson, *Incense in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 18. On the contrary to Muller, Nielson writes, "*lbny* is undoubtedly Arabic *lubān* or frankincense. The final *yod* seems to be a *nisbe* construction indicating an adjective of relation."

37 Erika Ribechini and Maria Perla Colombini, "Chemical Investigation of the Resinous Material from Sumhuram," in *A Port in Arabia Between Rome and the Indian Ocean 3rd C. BC to 5th C. AD. Khor Rori Report 2* (*Arabia Antica 5*), ed. Alessandra Avanzini (Rome: L'erma di Bretschneider, 2008), 687–89. The main peaks were identified as didehydroabietic acid, dehydroabietic acid, and 7-oxo-dehydroabietic acid; the diterpenoid acid with abietane skeletons are the featured markers for the *Pinaceae* family. Incense Burner S487 (cat. 20).

38 Barbara Huber, Arnulf Hausleiter, Michèle Dinies, Jan Christopher, Ina Säumel, and Thi Lam Huong Pham, "Tayma, Saudi-Arabien Interdisziplinäre Untersuchungen von Räuchergefäßen zur Rekonstruktion antiker Gerüche" [Tayma, Saudi Arabia interdisciplinary studies of smoking vessels for the reconstruction of ancient smells], *e-Forschungsberichte*, no. 2 (2018): 120, 123–24.

39 William Foxwell Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1968), 147.

FIGURE 1.9 South Arabian incense burner inscribed with four scent notes in Old South Arabian as *ldn*, *km km*, *drm* and *qsṭ* (UM Philadelphia 50-47-31).

FIGURE 1.10 Fragment of an incense burner leg, Tayma Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, K.S.A.

through exchanges between the Mediterranean world and the Arabian Peninsula, and was best expressed in the fifth century B.C. Greek hymn to Myrrha (or Smyrna), the Cyprian princess whose mother compared her to the goddess Aphrodite.[40] In the myth, the offended goddess caused Myrrha to fall in love with her own father because of jealousy, which resulted in an incestuous relationship between the two. When her father pursued her into the Arabian Peninsula, Aphrodite turned Myrrha into a myrrh tree. Her tears formed from scraping back the bark of the aromatic gum resin tree that produces myrrh. In a way, such a mythopoeia tries to explain why the etymological root of *mrr* in Semitic languages is "bitterness," which characterizes the taste of myrrh-drops. Additionally, the historian Herodotus recounts the process of smoking the trees in Arabia by using a chemical agent—storax—as a means to chase away the flying serpents from the frankincense groves.[41] Those myths point to a lesser known fact about cultural contact in the late First Millennium B.C.: the overland relays and roads of the Arabian Peninsula were bidirectional, just like the maritime routes of Arabia-Mesopotamia discussed previously, and were safeguarding some of the traditional knowledge of Arabia for financial gain through the telling of its myths to ward off trespassers and travelers from afar.

5 Islam and Christendom

After the decline of the Southern Arabian kingdoms, the trade in frankincense continued and prospered under Christendom. In a sense, outside Arabia, the place for burning incense moved from within the home to inside the church. Thus, incense is originally mentioned in the Nativity narratives of the New Testament.[42] As Jesus was offered myrrh and wine on the cross in the Gospel of Mark,[43] burnt incense became synonymous with martyrdom and the prayers of the Christian saints were lifted to the heavens by the smoke of the frankincense in daily piety practices.[44] Inside Arabia, frankincense was still burned inside the homes as it was imperative to fumigate them with *lubān* and sage, according to *Aḥādīth*.[45] Also, in order to enter inside the mosque, petitioners in prayer were required to present themselves to God clean and of good scent.[46] Furthermore, both Christians and Muslims burned frankincense to ward off evil irritants through a complex interplay of smell, prayers, and magical incantations.[47]

40 Marcel Detienne, *The Gardens of Adonis. Spices in Greek Mythology,* trans. Janet Lloyd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 3–4.

41 Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A.D. Godley (London: William Heinemann; New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), 2:135; *A Greek-English Lexicon*, comp. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, 8th ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1897), s.v. "στύραξ"; Irina Vainovski-Mihai, "A Pre-History of Orientalism: Herodotus' and Strabo's Image of Arabia," in *A Festschrift for Nadia Anghelescou*, ed. Andrei A. Avram, Anca Focşeneanu, and George Grigore (Bucharest: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2011), 534.

42 Matt 2:11 (New Revised Standard Version).

43 Mark 15:23 (NRSV).

44 Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 13. Harvey quotes Psalm 141:2: "Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee, / And the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice!"

45 Mohammed Farooqi, *Ahadith Mein Mazkoor Nabatat, Adwiya Aur Ghizain* [Maguiru in Ahdith, Adaviya and Gizhin] (Lahore: Ilm-o-Irfan Publishers, 1998), 151–52.

46 Françoise Aubaile-Sallenave, "Bodies, Odors, Perfumes in Arab-Muslim Societies," in *The Smell Culture Reader*, ed. Jim Drobnick (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 392.

47 Bertram Thomas chronicled one example of this in Dhofar, Oman. See Bertram Thomas, "Anthropological Observations in South Arabia," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 62 (1932): 83–103. Thomas wrote: "These mountain tribes are much afraid of the Evil Eye, not only for themselves, but equally for their flocks and herds. The ceasing of lactation is invariably ascribed to *Ain Balis*. The cure is frankincense. I witnessed the ceremony on occasion and made a cinema film of it, though it is usually performed at sunrise or at sunset. The incense burner was

From birth to death, from the home to the grave, frankincense played a pivotal role in one's life, either by providing pleasure and sweetness or by helping avoid painful irritants and malodors.

The trade in frankincense did not seem to dissipate in the aftermath of Christianity becoming the official religion of the Holy Roman Empire, as Patricia Crone argued in her book, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam.*[48] As a substantive point, Crone argued that frankincense was no longer the luxury of living that it once was in Pre-Islamic times.[49] While acknowledging that the cause for this phenomenon can only partially be explained by Christianity's effects on the living, the evidence for frankincense being still in use at the time is substantial.[50] Rather, the trade expanded in the opposite direction, where researchers found remnants of frankincense residue as far as the palace temple of Nanjing Chang Gan (ca. 960–1120 A.D.), a settlement lying just northwest of modern-day Shanghai in China.[51] The organic materials found there were dated 1101 A.D., and two types of resins, wood-aloe and gum resin, were detected by gas chromatography-mass spectroscopy. Analysis also detected the presence of *Boswellia*, or frankincense.[52] As in the Roman Empire, the trade in frankincense increased in the years following the rise and fall of the Han Empire (206 B.C.–220 A.D.) as the demand for exotic flavors increased, ultimately reaching the Far East by the tenth century A.D.

6 Modern-Day Arabia: Scents and Notes on the Production of Cuboid Incense Burners

Frankincense has been continuously used in the Arabian Peninsula for at least five thousand years. As a malleable gum resin, it can be chewed to sweeten foul breath, distilled and drunk as an antihistamine for respiratory problems, and burnt inside a *kanūn* (a large incense burner)[53] for celebration. When burned in the morning or in the early evening, the flaming scent and smoke of the gum resin would offer a hedge of protection against evil; however, when burned in midday, it could conjure the "eye of *Shayṭān*."[54] The endurance of such practices over time indicates the sustainability of cultivated frankincense as a natural resource and medicinal agent with perceived cleansing power in the community, able to drive away foul spirits from the home and remove impurities from the body.

To burn frankincense, incense burners in clay forms are used: such burners are still crafted nowadays in the households of Dhofar, the Wilayat Governate in Oman, and throughout Yemen, including

brought and wood introduced and lighted. The practitioner, the cow-owner, broke a fragment of frankincense about the size of a walnut into three pieces. Then spitting upon it three times he introduced it into the burner. While two other witnesses held the afflicted animal by head and leg respectively, he waved about its head the burning frankincense, chanting a set sacrificial chant" (88).

48 Sterenn Le Maguer, "The Incense Trade During the Islamic Period," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 45 (2015): 176.

49 Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2004), 27.

50 Le Maguer, "The Incense Trade During the Islamic Period," 176.

51 Lei Zhouet, Dawa Shen, Junquan He, Yuhui Wei, Quinglin Ma, and Zhide Hu, "Multispectroscopic Studies for the Identification of Archaeological Frankincense Excavated in the Underground Palace of Bao'en Temple, Nanjing: Near Infrared, Midinfrared, and Raman Spectroscopies," *Journal of Raman Spectrometry* 43, no. 10 (2012): 1504–509.

52 It seems that the type of frankincense found was of the species usually grown in Ethiopia (East Africa).

53 The etymology of this word indicates an Arabic root meaning "to cover."

54 The "eye of Shayṭān," or evil eye, is the belief that, under the influence of Shaytan (Satan), the glance of envious individuals may bring harm to others, intentionally or unintentionally. Islam emphasizes that the Holy Qur'ān has healing and protective powers, and recommends following the Islamic traditions to gain protection and cure.

FIGURE 1.11 Cuboid incense burner with four legs and four horns from Dhofar.

FIGURE 1.12 Craft training center in Salalah, Sultanate of Oman, where adults and children train to make incense burners.

the island of Socotra.[55] These objects are worth studying as they provide useful information about the practice of making and using incense burners as heritage in the "land of frankincense" today, and show similarity in style to the shapes and designs of incense burners crafted in antiquity mentioned above. Incense burners from Dhofar, the land where frankincense trees grow, are generally cuboid, and called *al-majmārah* from the Arabic root *gmr*, or fire-coal. In the past century, these recipients included clay boats and, more recently, high heeled shoes, but the principal form used in the past was the cuboid shape. The forms have undoubtedly evolved from those found at Ra's al Jinz, but they have retained four legs with additional four horns at each corner of the cubes (fig. 1.11).[56] In recent years, cheaper manufacturing techniques and newer designs have begun to undermine this traditional craft, yet, simultaneously, the growing support for making incense burners has proportionally raised the number of potters in Dhofar.[57]

The vertically-shaped incense burner with four horns is a design embedded into the Dhofari potters' mind from at least the early age of four or five (fig. 1.12). Interestingly, the potters have no knowledge of its earliest existence or of earlier histories of the *al-majmārah* at Ra's al Jinz and, when asked about their craft, they responded that they were taught it in the home. Children are taught that the square form with horns is the oldest and the only legitimate form for burning incense.[58] Moreover, when interviewed, potters itemized the

55 Yemen is an interesting case as here most of the incense burners are made of stone, except for the clay forms made on Socotra Island.

56 Claire Hardy-Guilbert and Sterenn Le Maguer, "Chihr de l'encens (Yémen)" [Incense from Shihr (Yemen)], *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 21, no. 1 (2010): 21. Hardy-Guilbert and Le Maguer provide a preliminary typology based on the frankincense burners found at the site of al-Shihr in the Medieval Islamic period, which has a long chronological sequence (780–1996 AD). Some typological features can be discerned over time because of the site's stratigraphy and the number of incense burner forms found there. They include the lengthening or shortening of handles or the absence of fitted clay handles for holding these devices.

57 Since 2011, the Dhofar Ethnoarchaeology Preservation Project that I lead, sponsored by the Diwan of the Royal Court-Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre, has studied the processes of incense burner manufacturing and use in the Sultanate.

58 William G. Zimmerle, *Crafting Cuboid Incense Burners in the Land of Frankincense, Sultanate of Oman*, trans. Jenan Awad Mahmood (Washington, DC: Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center, 2017), 23–27.

FIGURE 1.13 The "roof" of an incense burner as an architectural model from Dhofar.

process. The construction of the incense burner was demonstrated in conversation, and its form divided into multiple parts: the base, body, horns, handle, and face. Potters often spoke of the parts of the incense burner as they would talk about a person, or an extension of themselves. Furthermore, they defined each field of space by using specific terminology. For example, they referred to the basin of the incense burner as *al-sateḥ.* or the roof in Arabic, which designates the space between the crenellated horns, reinforcing the notion of the incense burner as an architectural model, with the designs culled from the mudbrick architectural environment (fig. 1.13).

Multiple steps were involved in the fabrication of the cuboid shape.[59] The form was made sequentially, from top to bottom. The potter manufactured the top half first by stretching the clay and molding it into a square basin, after which he molded and pinched the clay to form a base. The two pieces were eventually molded into one box-like form. Once the potter finished molding the two-part form into a unified square form, she began to create a set of architectural features for it, which helped to define its shape and function (fig. 1.14). First, she cut four windows for each form by using a knife: with it, she incised a set of vertical draft lines to mark off where she should cut (fig. 1.15). Once this step was completed, she proceeded to make a series of careful and steady incisions. Then, she removed the excess clay from the cuts and, interestingly, she reused it to make horns, and then pinched, twisted, and molded the clay pieces into four small horned projections that she attached to the cuboid. Using water to moisten

59 Ibid., 19.

FIGURE 1.14 A potter designing an incense burner in Dhofar.

FIGURE 1.15 A potter cutting architectural features onto her Dhofari incense burner.

FIGURE 1.16 A Dhofari woman wearing an *al-kanūn* during a heritage festival, Sultanate of Oman.

the clay, she reapplied the clay to each point of the incense burner. These observational sessions made it clear that potters do have a choice in the forming techniques that they use, but they may have wider latitude today than in the past in terms of what they make and how they make it. When I asked one of the female potters why she made horns for the incense burner, she explained that "it is not a *majmar* (incense burner) without the horns!"[60] It is interesting to note that, on wedding days, the potters will often wear large horned incense burners of forty by fifty centimeters, full of burning frankincense. The device, known as *al-kanūn*, is a horned crown full of burning frankincense worn by Dhofari women during holidays, parades, and festivals (fig. 1.16). It can be identified by its horned cuboid shape and burning frankincense wafting in the air.

Additionally, not only do potters make incense burners but also use local frankincense, placing it inside the incense burners of their houses. The women of Dhofar would recite prayers in the morning and in the evening before an incense burner. One such Dhofari prayer in Arabic and Jibbali (one of the modern languages of southern Arabia) is: "Frankincense (*Ya lubān*)! Frankincense (*Ya lubān*)! You, the one who is going to the

60 Ibid., 21.

heavens, keep away from us the enemy and protect us from the hatred of the friend and enemy."[61] This prayer implies that the cuboid burner and its frankincense are not only used ritualistically inside the home, to invite pleasant smells, but also, depending on the context and timing of the day, to ward off evil, cure stenches, and remedy maladies.[62] This ritualistic role of frankincense is confirmed by the historian Herodotus, who wrote that, "whenever a Babylonian has had intercourse with his wife, they both sit before a burnt offering of incense (Greek, *thymímēma*), and at dawn they wash themselves; they will touch no vessel before this is done. This is the custom also in Arabia."[63] By the time Herodotus was writing his annals, perfumed incense was in high demand as the primary means to purify the body privately in the home. The practice could be witnessed both in Magan and Mesopotamia, where cuboid incense burners have been excavated. In this sense, as in the case of Dhofar today, everyday fumigation in the ancient world was indeed ritualistic: it could produce pleasure, protect the household from painful irritants, and remove malodors from the environment.

7 Conclusion

Textual evidence from both Classical and Ancient Near Eastern sources at the height of the famed Arabian incense trade suggests that specific aromatics were tied to particular geographic regions. Frankincense is one of the scents most commonly associated with the southern Arabian Peninsula. When Westerners envision Arabia or think of it today, the thought of frankincense scent often comes to their mind for two obvious reasons: frankincense and myrrh have entangled themselves in their historical memory because of the influence of the Classical mythology and Christianity on Western civilization. Throughout the ages, Classical myths coupled with Christian narratives reminded readers and listeners of the twin fragrances of frankincense and myrrh through sensory experiences: either by seeing or hearing nativity narratives, or by smelling these scents during liturgical masses or services, when they were wafted over participants as cleansing agents of prayer. From those entangled memories grounded in religious practices, frankincense-myrrh have become the most obvious twin aromatics associated with the Arabian Peninsula, although within the markets of aromatic commodities they are only two of the many scents that have been cultivated and traded throughout history. The other types of scents are more difficult to determine due to their similar appearance in color and consistency with frankincense-myrrh, even though they were in wide circulation during the Hellenistic period, as evidenced by inscriptions of their names onto the sides of the cuboid incense burners found in archaeological excavations in Yemen.

How, then, do historians and archaeologists understand the movement of intangible culture such as the scent of frankincense? For one, the material correlates that are left behind can be used to reconstruct patterns of trade: we know where and when traders moved because the demand for aromatics increased the necessity to manufacture containers to cense ritual places, which explains the widespread distribution of one type of incense burner from the Arabian Peninsula. On another level of interpretation, when tested in the laboratory, the objects associated with these scents can also be used to identify the types of aromatics in circulation for long distance trade: in this case, the Arabian cuboid-shaped incense burner bears strong testimony to a flourishing trade in frankincense throughout the Arabian Peninsula, and so the cuboid

61 Ibid., 31.

62 In *Scent from the Garden of Paradise: Musk and the Medieval Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), Anya King notes that "the frankincense and myrrh of Arabia had their uses in medicine, but they are not mentioned at all in the literature on luxury perfumery nor celebrated in poetry, indicating that they were thoroughly without any prestige value, though they were surely used by the common folk" (83).

63 Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1:198.

incense burner and frankincense are entangled in historical memory.[64] This is not to suggest that other aromatics had not been burned inside the cuboid-shaped incense burner; however, it is evident that cultural and spatial contexts demanded incense to be burned in antiquity as it does today in Dhofar. On a third and final level, ethnographic fieldwork can help us define how an Arabian frankincense burner has evolved over time by comparing its contemporary form to excavated exemplars from archaeologically stratified sites.

As the principal containers for burning aromatics associated historically with the Arabian trade in scents, the incense burners found in excavation sites, alongside historical sources regarding the economy of incense trade in pre-Islamic Arabia, can help us answer the question: "Where does the censer come from and who made it?" In this case, the origin of the cuboid incense burner, just like some forms of *Boswellia sacra*, can be confidently traced back to the Arabian Peninsula where the scent of frankincense is found.

64 The Arabian Scents Project led by the author at New York University-Abu Dhabi has tested multiple incense burners from the middle to late First Millennium by using liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry. In multiple cases, the chemical features of frankincense (Boswellic acids-triterpenoid) were identified in late Mesopotamian incense burners from the Achaemenid Persian period. Therefore, it was determined that frankincense was in circulation in southern Mesopotamia during the Achaemenid Persian Empire (c. 550–330 B.C.) (publication forthcoming). This should not be taken to imply that only frankincense was burned within the cuboid incense burners or that cuboid-shaped burners are the only type of incense paraphernalia. Rather, it tells us that frankincense was indeed in circulation as one of the main aromatics of "all kinds of aromatics" in the sixth-fifth century B.C. This scientific evidence is another line of data available to analyze besides the textual sources reviewed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

The Tyranny of the Pearl: Desire, Oppression, and Nostalgia in the Lower Gulf

Victoria Penziner Hightower

Objects exist within a dialogue between the thing-in-itself and the thing-as-used.[1] Within heritage studies, there is also the idea of the thing-as-remembered. In the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.), the pearl is an object that enables a productive discussion of these meanings and connections.[2] The pearl brings feeling, thought, lived experience, and memory together[3] and, as such, it helps to put the past and present into dialogue within the U.A.E. today. A pearl's value also lies in its ability to be traded away. Therefore, a pearl epitomizes Daniel Miller's description of material culture, which acknowledges that objects can be peripheral to human needs, yet still influence behavior and identity formation.[4] The relationship between the thing-in-itself, -as-used, and -as-remembered helps to expose how this tiny, beautiful luxury object could paradoxically imply an element of tyranny for those who toiled to extract them and how that oppression could be rehabilitated through the process of memory creation.

Although Immanuel Kant applied his notion of thinghood to cognition, it is possible to extend it to other areas of knowledge as well to help historians and scholars make sense of the contradictions inherent in the ways that people have used, valued, and remembered pearls.[5] The pearl's narrative of suffering stands in stark contrast to the traditional idea of the pearl as a luxury good. This latter narrative considers the item's wealth, beauty, or fineness. This dual nature of the pearl within the discourse of the history of the lower Gulf emirates suggests that this object has undergone a rhetorical rehabilitation. In order to understand how and why this happened, it is important to understand the different ways the pearl functioned as a material object in this area.

1 The Pearl as Itself

Kant's idea of the thing-in-itself grows from observed phenomena. For Kant, these phenomena are perceived through human senses. Therefore, objects gain primary meaning through the way that humans observe and perceive them. For the

1 Ralph Blumenau, "Kant and the Thing in Itself," *Philosophy Now* 31 (2001): 18–21.

2 Robert Saint George, "Material Culture in Folklife Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies,* ed. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 123–49.

3 Sherry Turkle, "Introduction: The Things That Matter," in *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, ed. Sherry Turkle (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 9.

4 Challenging Marxist materialism, according to which objects shape reality, and more functionalist understandings of material culture, according to which culture shapes materials, Miller argues for a dialectical relationship of meaning making between things and people. He argues that "stuff" has cultural and social meanings that vary over time and space and that these meanings are constantly negotiated. If, then, as Miller suggests, "stuff" has social and cultural meanings, it stands to reason that these meanings do not necessarily need to be constructed as wholly positive or negative; instead, they can have a complex, changing, and evolving nature over time, which incorporates both the notions of luxury and tyranny. See Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 51.

5 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 149.

pearl, this raises some important contradictions. The mollusks that produce pearls are easy to catch, being immobile on the sea floor, but the animal's body is covered by a hard shell and looks only slightly different from other nearby objects, making it challenging to distinguish and painful to pry away from the coral and rocks on the bottom of the ocean. Furthermore, there is no external indication on the animal that it is carrying a pearl. The difficulties of acquiring this object are nevertheless balanced by its beauty and ease of manufacturing. Pearls are beautiful objects. They come in a variety of colors and their luster is transfixing. They are relatively easy to manufacture into jewelry and do not require faceting or polishing; rather, they can be simply glued to a setting or drilled and strung into jewelry. This object is prized but also unforgivingly fragile—capable of being crushed or having its much-valued luster rubbed off by something as innocuous as contact with human body oils. Its fragility contributes to its luxury status.

Historically, pearls were sought after and traded throughout the world with accounts of them entering the European market regularly dating from the Roman period.[6] Robert Carter has chronicled extensively the historical evidence for pearls in the Gulf area stretching to the second millennium B.C. and provided a series of maps that illustrate the location of the beds in the Gulf over time.[7] Leaning on R.A. Donkin's chronicle of pearl fishing, Carter charts the historical evidence for pearling through the fourth/third century to the first century B.C., finding references to their trade and use in late Roman and Byzantine texts, as well as in early Islamic, Talmudic, and Nestorian writings.[8] During the Islamic period, the trade in pearls increased and references to this occupation became more substantive after the tenth century C.E.[9] Ibn Battuta journeyed through the Gulf and observed diving first hand, as did the geographer Al-Idrisi.[10] Europeans such as the Portuguese Duarte Barbosa and Pedro Teixeira and the Italian Gasparo Balbi made reference to the pearling centers in Julfar, Bahrain, Hormuz, and Qatif.[11] Writing in the fifteenth century, Gonzalez de Clavijo suggested that most of Spain's pearls originated in Hormuz.[12] During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the establishment of more direct and regular trade through the East India Companies and due to a stronger European presence in the Gulf area, the European documentary evidence of pearling increased. Citing J.A. Saldanha, who compiled a precis of British references, Carter indicates that pearls were first recorded in 1675 by an East India Company captain who noted the richness of pearl fishing in the region and mentioned that the Dutch had sent three missions to Bahrain to investigate whether they should be trading in pearls as well.[13] After some political instability in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Gulf pearl fisheries became a substantial source of income for many along the Persian and Arab coasts of the Gulf. However, by 1877, the British officials noted that there was no way to estimate the number of pearls changing hands or being extracted from the Gulf, nor could they do more than record a small fraction of these transactions.[14] Pearls were simply too easy to conceal.

6 R.A. Donkin, *Beyond Price: Pearls and Pearl-Fishing: Origins to the Age of Discoveries* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1998); Robert Carter, *Sea of Pearls: Seven Thousand Years of the Industry that Shaped the Gulf* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2012), 3–29.

7 Robert Carter, "The History and Prehistory of Pearling in the Persian Gulf," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48, no. 2 (2005): 14; Carter, *Sea of Pearls*, 64, 108, 114, and 116.

8 Carter, *Sea of Pearls,* 144.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 145.

11 Ibid., 146.

12 Ibid., 123, 135.

13 Ibid., 149–50.

14 E.L. Durand, "Appendix A: Notes on the Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf," in *Records of the Persian Gulf Pearl Fisheries 1857–1962, Volume 1: 1857–1914*, ed. Anita L.P. Burdett (Gerrard's Cross: Archive Editions, 1995), 74.

A pearl is formed when an irritant enters the body of a mollusk. In the Arabian Gulf, the most common species in which this happens are *Pinctada radiata, Pinctada margaritafera*, and *Pteria avicular.* Of these three species, *Pinctada radiata* is the most common in terms of the animal's distribution and its regular production of pearls. Mollusks are soft-bodied creatures, so even something as innocuous as a piece of sand can have devastating effects on them because of the sand's sharp edges. The animal secretes *nacre*, the same substance from which mother-of-pearl is created, to coat the irritant and smooth out its edges.

Because the primary purpose of making the pearl for the animal is to smooth out the rough edges of the irritant, pearls occur in a variety of shapes and sizes. The most sought after are spherical, white, and highly lustrous, but they can come in colors ranging from white to off-white, yellow, blue, green, and, rarely, almost purple-black. They can be large or very small. Pearls from the Arabian Gulf were most often quite small, that is why they were designated *seed pearls.* In a report from 1877, a British official estimated that only two large pearls were found in the entirety of the Gulf during any given diving season.[15] In terms of shape, they can be spherical or oblong, depending on the shape of the irritant. Luster is probably the most important quality of the larger pearls. It is the shininess and the way that the light reflects off the pearls that make them so beautiful and attractive.[16]

The pearl as a thing-in-itself would be insignificant if not for the divers who extracted it from the mollusk's body. For them, this object was important because it could be acquired. Pearl diving occurred during the summer. The season lasted from three to six months, depending on weather, the timing of Ramadan, and the quality of the pearls extracted. The weather was hot and humid, the days were long, and the life on a pearl boat was difficult. Boat crews contended with high temperatures, well over 100F/37C, and humidity approaching 100%. On the boats, there was no shade. The Gulf is highly saline and because fresh water was precious, little was wasted for washing the salt off the divers' skin. As a result, diseases were common and could be devastating as the boats were often miles away from inhabited areas. Lacerations from the mollusk shells and from simply working in such a moist environment were common and could easily become infected. The men on the boats suffered from dehydration and malnutrition. Divers had the added challenges of being in and on the water at various depths for long periods of time, which resulted in punctured eardrums, skin lesions, and blindness. Moreover, the Gulf is a vibrant ecosystem with jellyfish, sharks, urchins, and coral, all of which provided their own hazards that made pearl acquisition difficult.[17] Although there are no reliable statistics to show how many men fell ill during a season or whether the hazards were greater in one season than another, these trials contributed greatly to the crewmen's suffering during the pearl diving season. The stories of the dangers of pearling are very common and the narrative of suffering suffuses most divers' accounts, illustrating the idea of the pearl's tyranny in littoral life.

Interestingly, despite its beauty, the pearl was rarely used locally in the lower Gulf. There are

15 Ibid., 72.

16 Carter has a useful appendix that shows the various size designations throughout the Gulf; for details, see *Sea of Pearls*, 287–308. For more U.A.E.-specific designations, see Mouza Al Hamour, *Min Adab al Ghaws bimintaqa al Khaleej al Arabi* [Diving literature in the Arabian Gulf] (Sharjah: Nadi al Muntaza al Fatayat, 1990), 15–17; and Mustafa 'Azzat Hibra, *Mosu'a al Ghaws wa al Lu'lu'fi Mujtam'a al Imarat wa al Khaleej al 'Arabi Qabl al Naft* [The encyclopedia of diving and pearls in Emirates society and the Arabian Gulf before oil] (Ras al Khaimah: Markaz al Dirasat wa al Watha'iq, 2004), 128–40.

17 Abd al Rahman, "Rihlat al-Ghaus 1," 22–27; Hamdi Nasr, "al-Ghaus fi 'I'amaq al-Ghaus," 36–41; Hamdi Nasr, "al-Yaryur al-'Ams Yakhaf min al-Yaryur al-Yaum" [The shark of yesterday is afraid of the shark of today], *Turath* no. 95 (October 2006): 18.

FIGURE 2.1 Mid twentieth-century pearl jewelry displayed in The Sharjah Heritage Museum, U.A.E.

some accounts of pearls being crushed for skin whiteners and shimmer powders, but this practice is not well documented.[18] Similarly, museum exhibits assert their use in local jewelry, such as those at the Sharjah Heritage Museum, but this practice was not largely spread (fig. 2.1). Pearls remained desirable objects, yet they were not "objects in [the inhabitants'] emotional lives."[19] So, the question arises: why did divers put themselves through such torment to acquire an object which, in itself, was not particularly important locally? The answer is that the importance of pearls lies mainly in their trade value.[20]

18 Xavier Beguin Billecocq, *Les Émirats ou la fabuleuse histoire de la Côte des perles* [The Emirates: The fabulous history of the Pearl Coast] (Paris: Relations Internationales & Culture S.A., 1995), 25.

19 Turkle, "Introduction: The Things That Matter," 5.

20 Ibid., 48 and 78, respectively.

2 The Pearl as Used

Kant argued that understanding an object is not solely based on the object's own qualities; an object is imbued with importance through its use.[21] For those who used pearls for adornment, their use value was easily identified and understood: the beauty of the thing-in-itself was sufficient to define its value. Yet, as noted above, pearls were not used regularly in the lower Gulf, so their importance was mainly constructed through their ability to be traded for more useful things. The pearl enabled inhabitants in the lower Gulf to acquire wealth and, through that wealth, to purchase necessities, including better quality dates, rice, and some luxuries like cloth from India and nuts from Persia.

Unlike the traders in the upper Gulf areas, like Bahrain or Kuwait, the traders in the lower Gulf did not become wealthy by selling pearls. Many of the leading coastal families in the lower Gulf area were involved in the pearl trade in some way, but relatively few as large scale merchants or financiers. Instead, many became mired in cycles of debt that were almost impossible to escape from, particularly as the pearl markets fluctuated dramatically in the late nineteenth century. These economic shifts reinforced a damaging cycle of debt for many families.[22]

The period between the extraction of the pearl, its manufacture, its sale, and the return of the profits to the lower Gulf emirates could take a full year in some cases, making it necessary for merchants to rely on advances and loans. Often, the pearl boats left for the summer diving season before the merchants returned with the profits from the previous year. Merchants, whether wealthy or small-time, were not incentivized to increase profit sharing with divers because they could never be sure of their profits.[23] Therefore, even in a good year, diving alone could not sustain a family. Because divers experienced agonizingly slim profit margins,[24] they often supplemented their income by hunting, fishing, or trading as bad years were common.

This instability affected the local population dramatically. Dates, a dietary staple, and fresh water were imported by many on the coast, so a lack of capital meant that many people could not purchase the basic necessities of life.[25] Commodity values fluctuated and, in the nineteenth century, pearl prices varied widely. Although precise values are unknown due to smuggling and underreporting, the trends were significant. We know, for instance, that pearl divers earned between 150 and 1,000 Rupees in a season, though, as noted above, the earnings could be lower.[26] Between 1873 and 1896, pearl values for the lower Gulf emirates swung between a low of two million and a high of eight million Rupees in any given season.[27] In the twentieth century, due to the two World Wars and the Great Depression, the values vacillated even more wildly, shifting by 30–50% between harvest

21 Colin Marshall, "Kant's Appearances and Things in Themselves as Qua-Objects," *Philosophical Quarterly* 63, no. 252 (2013): 520.

22 Victoria Penziner Hightower, "Pearling and Political Power in the Trucial States, 1850–1950: Debt, Taxes, and Politics," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 3, no. 2 (2013): 215–31.

23 Frauke Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to the United Arab Emirates: A Society in Transition* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2004), 219; Muhammad Morsy Abdullah. *The United Arab Emirates: A Modern History* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978), 105.

24 Fahad Ahmad Bishara, *A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

25 'Abdullah al-Shamsi, "Mihnat al-Ghaws fi al-Imarat" [The occupation of pearling in the Emirates], *Majalat al-Fan wa al-Turath al Sha'abi* no. 2 (June 1997): 39.

26 Man'a Sa'id al-'Otaiba, *Iqtisadat 'Abu Zabi Qadiman wa Hadithan* [Abu Dhabi economics past and present] (Beirut: Mutaba' al-Tijara wa al-Sina'a, 1971), 24–25.

27 Estimates taken from trade tables published in *Persian Gulf Administration Reports, 1873–1947,* vols. 1–4 (Gerrard's Cross: Archive Editions, 1986).

and sale.[28] This made the pearl a precarious item upon which to base an economy.

Although there are few detailed stories about how these fluctuations affected divers, there are plenty of records of how it affected merchants. In 1908, pearl merchants were forced to sell their stocks at heavy losses, which triggered a depression throughout the area.[29] Some captains were so indebted that they were not permitted to sell their pearls freely; they were required to sell them only to their money lender. This constraint gave money lenders a ready supply of pearls and encouraged them to pay below the market value for the harvested pearls.[30] In another period of crisis, captains continued to borrow, occasionally at outrageous rates of interest. In one case, captain Muhammad bin Ahmad Dalmuk took out a loan with a 36% interest rate to fund the 1930 season.[31] Understanding how merchants were affected can begin to shed light on how other parties involved in the trade experienced this instability, despite a lack of documents specific to the U.A.E.

The depressed economy affected all areas of life. By the 1940s, the economic situation was so dire that the Bedouins began eating dried, salted pearl mollusk meat, something that was particularly tough, bitter, and only eaten in case of severe nutritional emergencies.[32] In an interview published in a heritage magazine, a former diver was asked how he dealt with the hunger. He answered, "by learning to live with it, the sea is treacherous and deceitful, and it teaches you patience."[33] His answer illustrates the equanimity that littoral populations brought to the harvesting of pearls, but also reinforces the idea of the pearl was a tyrannical object. Pearling necessitated a significant outlay of effort and energy and it promised potential, rather than real, profits. It was an unpredictable object to base a lifestyle on and it could rarely provide a family the necessities of life.

Despite this instability, pearls represented a concrete path to material wealth. Boat culture encouraged the creation of a social order that could translate onto land. Prowess at sea embodied the ability to establish, reinforce, or change social status that transcended, or was augmented by, age, skill, and experience. The two most prestigious roles on the boat were those of the diver (*ghaws*) and the captain (*nokhuda*), and they were assigned to younger and older men as needed.[34] Most divers

28 The following volumes are paginated-by-report: C.F. Mackenzie, "Report on Trade of the Bahrein Islands for the Year 1909," 1; J.D. Lorimer, "Report on Trade of the Bahrein Islands for the Year 1911," 6; T.C. Fowle, "Report on Trade of the Bahrein Islands for the Year Ending 31st 1916," 1; C.K. Daly "Report on Trade of the Bahrein Islands for the Years Ending 31st 1924," 1, in *Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905–1940. Bahrain 1: 1905–1925* (Gerrard's Cross: Archive Editions, 1987); Cyril Charles Johnson Barrett, "Report on the Trade of the Bahrein Islands for the Year Ending 31st March 1927," 1; M. Worth, "Report on Economic and Trade Conditions on the Bahrain Islands for the Year 1933–34," 1–2; G.A. Cole, "Report on the Trade of the Bahrein Islands for the Year ending 31st March 1935," 1; Charles Jeffery Prior, "Report on the Trade of the Bahrein Islands for the Year Ending 31st March 1930," 1; E.B. Wakefield, "Amendments to Parts I and II of Mr. Wakefield's Report on Economic and Trade Conditions in the Bahrein Islands for the Year Ended 31st March, 1942," 1, in *Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905–1940. Bahrain II: 1925–1940* (Gerrard's Cross: Archive Editions, 1987).

29 F.B. Prideaux, "Report on Trade of the Bahrein Islands for the Year 1906," 1, in *Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905–1940. Bahrain I*.

30 al-Shamsi, "Mihnat al-Ghaus fi al-Imarat," 39.

31 Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to the United Arab Emirates,* 219.

32 Ronald Codrai, *Seafarers of the Emirates: An Arabian Album* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2003), 65.

33 Husayn Khamis Al Ali, "Malameh min al-Ghaus al-Qadim" [Glimpses of past diving], *Turath* no. 3 (1999): 25.

34 Hamdi Nasr, "al-Ghaws fi 'Imaq al-Ghaus: Saif al-Suaidi … wa Rihla 'Amar illa al-Ra'i Mahmal" [Diving the deepest dive: Saif al Suweidi and the command of the most beautiful ship], *Turath* no. 14 (2000): 38; Hamad bin Khalīfa 'Abu Shihab, "al-Ghaws … Sh'aran 2–5" [Diving … in poetry 2–5], *Turath* no. 26 (January 2001): 14–15; Jum'a Khalifa Ahmed bin Thaleth al Humairi, *Daula al Imarat al Arabiyya al Mutahda: Rijal al Ghaws wa al Lu'lu'* [The UAE: Men of diving and the pearl] (Dubai: Emirates Diving Association, 2009).

were paired with a hauler (*seeb*) whose job was to pull up the diver from the seafloor. The diver/hauler pair was often assisted by other, younger men, known as *radheef* and *tabab*. The *radheef* was typically older than the *tabab* and had more responsibilities. The *radheef* usually helped the haulers while the *tabab* was more of a general apprentice on board ship, running coffee or tobacco pipes (*shisha*) to divers and haulers. Older men served on the pearl boats as singers (*niham*), cooks (*tabbakh*), religious scholars (*mutuwa'a*), bookkeepers (*kuttab*), shell openers (*jallas*), boatswains/seconds-in-command (*qa'adi, sukkan*), and helmsmen (*mujaddami*). The specialization of roles on board a ship depended on its size: the larger the ship, the more specialized the roles. On smaller ships, these roles were often combined: the captain would be a helmsman, or all divers would open shells.[35]

Whether the boat crew was large or small, there were significant opportunities for advancement, and this helps to illustrate how the pearl could transcend the thing-in-itself into its use value. This advancement was often not only simply occupational but also social, involving an increase in status and wealth. This was particularly true for young men. A *tabab* was generally seven-fifteen years old, and a *radheef* was at least fourteen.[36] These young men could advance within the boat's hierarchy in as little as a year or two or as much as a decade, earning more as they gained more responsibility. There were significant incentives to become more skilled. As pearls were sold, the profits were recorded and divided according to orally agreed-upon allotments. Although boat owners or captains received most of the compensation, others on board received their share of the overall profits as well. How these profits were divided depended on the year, the boat crew's level of debt, and the generosity of the boat captain or owner.[37] Profits were never guaranteed, but they were always hoped for.

The instability of the profits meant that many worked to move out of the trade altogether. This is illustrated in a recollection by Abdullah bin Rashid bin Haarab al Humairi (Abu Salem), whose father, Rashid, owned four boats. One went to the pearl beds in the summer while the remainder traded goods to Africa, India, and elsewhere in the Gulf. Abu Salem recalled that his father tried to shield him from diving, bringing him on his boat, and making him a *radheef* or *tabab*. He then transferred Abu Salem from the diving boat to a trading boat. He accompanied his father on trading voyages from age 14, traveling to Dubai, Muscat, Masirah Island, Socotra, Zanzibar and back. By the

35 Abdullah Abd al Rahman, "Rihlat al-Ghaws 'ala al-Lu'lu' min al (Madah) 'illa (al-Qufal) 1" [Pearl diving trips from the embarkation to the return 1], *Turath* no. 24 (November 2000): 26; Abdullah Abd al Raḥman, "Rihlat al-Ghaws 'ala al-Lu'lu' min al (Madah) 'illa (al-Qufal) 3: al Mujaddami wa al Q'adi" [Pearl diving trips from the embarkation to the return 3: al Mujaddami and the Q'adi], *Turath* no. 23 (October 2000): 21; Abdullah Abd al Rahman, "'Abtal Rihlat al-Ghaws 'ala al-Lu'lu' min al-Madah illa al-Qufal: al-Sib … wa al-Raḍeef … wa al-Tabab" [Heroes of the pearl diving trips from the embarkation to the return: al Sib and al Radeef, and al Tabab], *Turath* no. 25 (December 2000): 49; Al Ali, "Melameḥ min al-Ghaws al-Qadim" [Glimpses of pearling's past], *Turath* no. 3 (February 1999), 25; Ahmad Ramadan al Shaqila [Ahmad R. Thakela in English abstract], "Pearl Diving Industry in the Arab Gulf," *Al Khaleej Al Arabi* no. 8 (1977): 37–54.

36 Abd al Rahman, "'Abtal Riḥlat al-Ghaws … al-Sib … wa al-Radeef … wa al-Tabab," 47–48.

37 Durand, "Appendix A," 64; Najib 'Abdullah al-Shamsi, *Iqtisad al-Imarat Qabl 1971* [The economy of the Emirates before 1971] (Abu Dhabi: Muwaqifa Wizara al I'alan wa al-Thaqafa, 1995), 91; Abdullah Abd al Rahman, "Abtal Rihlat al-Ghaus … al-Niham wa al-Mutu'a … al-Kitub wa al-Tabakh" [Heroes of the pearl diving trips: al Niham and al Mutuwa … al Kitub and al Tabakh], *Turath* no. 26 (January 2001): 20; Muhammad bin al-Samra'i, "Al-Ghaus … bi-Haqan 'an Dhakriyyat" [Diving in real recollections], *Turath* no. 26 (January 2004): 16–17; Abdullah Abd al Rahman, "Rihlat al-Ghaws 'ala al-Lu'lu' min al (Madah) 'illa (al-Qufal) 2" [Pearl diving trips from the embarkation to the return 2], *Turath* no. 22 (September 2000): 67, 70.

age of eighteen, he captained trading missions to Africa and India.[38] In many ways, Abu Salem and his father typified the hope of pearling—the ability to transfer the wealth and engage in the comparatively less taxing occupation of trading.

As these accounts demonstrate, the pearl was valued less for the thing that it was and more for the economic and social value it could be used for. Its use value was in its ability to be traded. The tension between the pearl's fragility as an object, its difficult acquisition, and its revenue unpredictability makes the pearl a problematic object to integrate into a historical narrative as a laudatory object. Despite these challenges, pearling looms large in the heritage narratives in the U.A.E., providing a useful contrast to the current period of wealth and prosperity.

3 The Pearl as Remembered

While Kant's idea of thinghood as consisting entirely of a thing-in-itself and a thing-as-used is important, it is insufficient because an object's identity is never as fixed as Kant would have us believe. He argues that, in thinking about an object, one needs both intuition, which refers to an object directly in its singularity, and concept, which refers to an object indirectly by means of characteristics that may be common to more than one thing.[39] However, both of these notions rely on a fixity of the object that is impossible given the dynamism of the memory and the past. This is where Miller's notion of "stuff" becomes so important. Miller's term considers the dialectical relationship between an object and its social and cultural importance. I am suggesting here that not only is an object's meaning created dialectically in a given time, but that, over time, an object's meaning can shift. The thing-as-remembered is far from being a unitary concept so, by bringing in this notion, it is possible to understand the central challenge of the pearl as an object in the Gulf studies.

Pearls entered the U.A.E. national narrative as a cautionary tale: pearls became the means by which the Gulf emirates accessed the global economic market but also tyrannical symbols of poverty and destitution until the effective exploitation of oil. Although in some countries this contrast would result in a systematic forgetting of the past, in the U.A.E., the rapidity of change resulted in a commemoration of the past through which many heritage objects have received new lives. Sarina Wakefield and Sulayman Khalaf have discussed extensively how heritage activities like falconry and camel racing are being reinterpreted for usage in heritage narratives.[40] In turn, the pearl and its luxurious connotations speak both to a national and international audience. It enables the U.A.E. to assert its identity on the global stage while also affirming the importance of its past for the national narrative. With oil profits and good management, the state's narrative promises that the suffering of the past will never be experienced again by the coastal inhabitants and this patronage has enabled the pearl to be rehabilitated and deployed within the image of luxury and progress.

This new image of the pearl has had dramatic ramifications on the heritage narrative of the U.A.E. Sarina Wakefield has discussed how the U.A.E. uses museums to assert a cosmopolitan identity, giving the decision to fund key museums, like the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Guggenheim, as an example.[41] This idea can be pushed because

38 "Al Humairi Yatadhekr: Qata'a al Hasa … wa al A'dhab al Ghaws" [Al Humairi remembers: Pieces of al Hasa … and the suffering of pearling], *Turath* no. 91 (June 2006): 19–22.

39 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 193–94.

40 Sarina Wakefield, "Falconry as Heritage in the United Arab Emirates," *World Archaeology* 44, no. 2 (2012): 280–90; Sulayman Khalaf, "Poetics and Politics of Newly Invented Traditions in the Gulf: Camel Racing in the United Arab Emirates," *Ethnology* 39, no. 3 (2000): 243–61.

41 Sarina Wakefield, "Heritage, Cosmopolitanism and Identity in Abu Dhabi," in *Cultural Heritage in the Ara-*

the heritage narrative has become an important part of the U.A.E.'s international branding efforts and pearling has been at the forefront of forging this narrative. In 2019, for instance, the Louvre Abu Dhabi displayed, with much fanfare, the U.A.E.'s oldest pearl (10,000 years old), which was discovered on Marawah Island. The decision to display this pearl in the Louvre Abu Dhabi was made so that the U.A.E. heritage will connect to the wider ideas of global heritage.

Heritage narratives are important for understanding the relationship between the past and the present. Jaume Franquesa argues that "heritage is not a neutral category … but a hegemonic, ideologically loaded notion operating in interlocking social fields" that ultimately reinforces power dynamics.[42] Franquesa's statement implies that there is a guided vision to transforming a thing from a thing-in-itself into a thing-as-remembered; however, there is not. Although pearls are being used to assert the U.A.E.'s role on the global stage, this effort is often not as directed or purposeful as Franquesa would have us believe. Nonetheless, the idea of pearling has clearly shifted from its nineteenth- and early twentieth-century notion of suffering.

The pearl as a thing-in-itself has been rehabilitated in recent years. Today, almost anything can have the name "pearl" associated with it—from Pearl Business Class on Etihad Airways to building names such as Dubai Pearl—to emphasize luxury and fineness. This contrasts jarringly with the memory of pearling as a difficult occupation. The narrative of past impoverishment reflects both the existing reality and an *ex post facto* assessment of the past, which takes into account the post-federation wealth and prosperity of the U.A.E.

This remembrance brings together public and private sectors to invest in heritage and history, so the shifting narrative of the pearl-as-remembered becomes mutually constructed by the government and society at large. Often, this occurs through the idea of nostalgia. Michael Field attributes the rising sense of nostalgia for the past to the governmental public relations machines and ministries of information that have produced the coffee table books and inspired the magazines that are some of the sources for his study. He suggests that these works create an "image of the Gulf in the first half of this century … of social harmony and healthy life in the date plantations and fisheries under the benign, paternalistic government of the ruling families."[43] A less cynical assessment of this support comes from Christopher Davidson, a political and economic historian of the U.A.E., who explains that traditional industries in the U.A.E. are "in a relatively better position than in most other parts of the developing world, mostly due to strong government backing, a strong interest generated by tourism, and a local culture that values history and tradition."[44] This investment in heritage, which is made clear in the Vision 2021 and Centenary Vision 2071, two guiding documents for the U.A.E. government, suggests that the past has an instrumental role in the present and future of the country.

Thus, the pearl is used for more than selling a luxurious lifestyle: it is an important marker of national heritage that helps reinforce the current prosperity by illustrating for people the alternative. An example of how pearling has been rehabilitated and how the ideas of luxury and tyranny are combined in its narrative is presented through

bian Peninsula: Debates, Discourses and Practices, ed. Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico (London: Routledge, 2016), 99–116; Sarina Wakefield, "Hybrid Heritage and Cosmopolitanism in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi," in *Reimagining Museums: Practice in the Arabian Peninsula*, ed. Pamela Erskine-Loftus (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc, 2013), 98–129.

42 Jaume Franquesa, "On Keeping and Selling: The Political Economy of Heritage Making in Contemporary Spain," *Current Anthropology* 54, no. 3 (2013): 347.

43 Michael Field, *The Merchants: The Big Business Families of Arabia* (London: John Murray, 1984), 178.

44 Qtd. in Gureni Lukwaro, "Traditional Industries in Decline," *The National*, February 27, 2010, http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100227/BUSINESS/702279894&SearchID=73387957389.

the case of the diving clubs. Diving clubs and individuals who dive as a way to connect with the past are not uncommon. In the Emirates, some heritage groups send out ships for individuals to experience pearl diving without the help of modern breathing apparatus to simulate diving as it was a century ago. In Kuwait, the Kuwait Sea Sports Club's Pearl Diving Heritage Revival Festival received a good deal of coverage in August 2009, when they sent to sea 184 Kuwaiti men between the ages of fourteen and twenty to experience pearling life.[45] The festival has been held periodically since the late 1980s and, in 1995, the U.A.E. team won this event.[46] During the event, the participants mentioned the feeling of connection to their heritage. One of them noted that "experiencing the hardships that our grandfathers had to bear is part of the experience" as he was explaining the sinus problems that arose out of repeated dives into the sea.[47] In the U.A.E., the Emirates Maritime Environmental Group held a pearl diving event in 2009, and the Emirates Heritage Club periodically does the same. On these events, individuals are invited to go onto the pearl boat to directly "experience" the life of a pearl diver or a hauler.[48]

These events have important benefits. They vividly demonstrate the difficulties of the pearl trade in the past, an aspect that is largely lost to contemporary Emiratis. They also give the participants useful insight into the pearling experience and increase their degree of sympathy for, empathy with, or respect for past populations that made a living from this practice just fifty years ago, creating connections that could otherwise be ignored or forgotten entirely. However, these events offer only a version of the past experience rather than a genuine immersion in it. First, the participants do not depend on pearls for their yearly income and the pearls they do or do not find are not the difference between life and starvation. Second, the compulsion to push to exhaustion is also missing. Third, like all living history projects, it is impossible to create the full effect of life on board the ships because the "crew" is not going to sleep on board for months on end, they do not have to fish for their sustenance, and they can return to shore, hot baths, plentiful food, and relative comfort at the end of the experience. Furthermore, participants are not taught from a young age that this is their only means of earning most of their income for the year, nor do they work their way up from *tabab* to diver to captain. They often begin at the role of diver or hauler, without experiencing the slow growth of skills and status.

With rare exceptions, diving for pearls is no longer an occupation in the twenty-first century. Pearl diving is almost entirely a heritage activity undertaken by men to connect with their family's past, their national history more broadly, or to engage in tourist activity. The hardship associated with the practice of pearling has been turned into a point of pride, a narrative of having survived and surmounted the challenges of the past. This nostalgic look at the pearl does not shy away from the idea of the pearl as an oppressive or tyrannical object; rather, it rehabilitates it into a narrative of survival

45 James Calderwood, "Return of the Pearl Divers," *The National*, August 12, 2009, http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090812/FOREIGN/708119846&SearchID=733879577908.

46 "U.A.E. Team Wins Pearl Diving Championship," *Khaleej Times*, September 6, 1995.

47 Ibid.

48 For other initiatives by local foundations or tourism agencies, see, for instance, "Embrace Arabia," Abu Dhabi Pearl Journey, 2015, http://www.adpearljourney.com/; and "Ajman Offers Pearl Diving Journey," *Gulf News,* January 5, 2018, https://gulfnews.com/business/tourism/ajman-offers-pearl-diving-journey-1.2152119. It is worth noting that, in addition to diving clubs, hotels offer diving to tourists as well, as a way to experience the Emirati past. Although not government-directed, they support the government's desire to show the dramatic growth of the state in the past century and to connect the U.A.E. to a global audience ready to consume history and reinforce the state's legitimacy.

that empowers the contemporary nation while telling its story to the world.

4 Conclusion

The pearl is not simply a piece of jewelry in the U.A.E. today. As a material object, it is fraught with painful and hopeful memories. In the nineteenth century, the pearl enabled access to the global market and provided a source of income for many on the Arabian coast. It provided the coastal inhabitants with a way to access goods that could diversify their diets or improve their material lives. As an object, the pearl was a luxury item; however, it was far from being something so simple for the Gulf inhabitants, for whom it was a means of survival and access to regional and global commodities. The value of the pearl helped to create a connection to the object. The pearl-as-remembered is bound with the national project of developing the Emirates and with the notion of identity formation. It has entered the commercial and heritage lexicon as an iconic symbol of a past of struggle and a future of boundless prosperity. The tyranny of the pearl is expressed through the tension between its reality, value, and memory, between the thing-in-itself, -as-used, and -as-remembered. It is a symbol of the good and the bad of the past that highlights the benefits and greatness of the present.

CHAPTER 3

Palm Dates, Power, and Politics in Pre-Oil Kuwait

Eran Segal

1 Introduction*

Palm dates have been a major source of subsistence and important spiritual symbols in the Arabian Peninsula since ancient times. However, much of the research done so far has mainly focused on the Gulf pearls and their transit trade due to their especially attractive nature, while less exotic commodities, such as dates, have received less critical attention, despite their essential role in the life of local populations. This chapter attempts to fill in this gap by addressing the importance of dates for the material culture of the Arabian Peninsula, and the economic and political impact they had in this area from the eighteenth century onwards. As I argue here, in pre-oil times date ownership played an essential role in the regional balance of power and shaped in significant ways the relationship between Kuwaiti rulers and merchants, on the one hand, and Kuwaiti and Iraqi rulers and the British protectorate, on the other. This case study will demonstrate the confluence of dates' material powers[1] with capital accumulation and politics in the process of state formation in Kuwait.

Since the foundation of modern Kuwait in the eighteenth century, it has been ruled by the same family. This is not an uncommon occurrence in the Gulf; however, due to existing internal conflicts and foreign influences, a unique power balance was created in Kuwait, one that is yet to be systematically studied. The main power in the Kuwaiti society remained in the hands of two main groups: rulers (the Sabah family) and merchants. It has often been claimed that the relations between these groups have changed dramatically due to the discovery of oil[2] but, as this chapter will demonstrate, this change predated oil and happened in an evolutionary rather than revolutionary way. The economic impact of palm dates and the ownership of date gardens are some of the main causes of this change.

The date gardens mentioned here were situated in the Shat al-Arab (southern Iraq) and mainly in the Fao Peninsula. Kuwaitis controlled these gardens for more than a hundred and twenty years and this had a considerable impact on their politics and society. Although historians did write about the role of dates and date gardens in Kuwait, this was done mainly on the sidelines of their narrative. Therefore, this chapter will, first, elaborate on the importance of dates and the need for studying their influence. Then, it will address the role of palm dates in the Kuwaiti history in general and in the Sabah family in particular. Finally, it will discuss the palm dates in relation to Kuwaiti merchants and the impact they had on Kuwaiti society. This impact has a broader relevance in the Arabian Peninsula given the common history of the local populations until a relatively recent past.

2 The Importance of Palm Dates

Palm dates (*Phoenix dactylifera*) have been a dietary staple in human civilization. There is evidence of their existence since 6,000 B.C. and of

* This chapter is an updated version of the article "Rulers and Merchants in Pre-Oil Kuwait: The Significance of Palm Dates," © 2014 British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis on behalf of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies.

1 I use here this notion in the sense given to it by Patrick Joyce and Tony Bennett, i.e., "recognizing distinctive forms of agency and effectivity on the part of material forces" (4). See "Material Powers: Introduction," in *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*, ed. Patrick Joyce and Tony Bennet (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 1–22.

2 See, for example, Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

their domestication since around 4,000 B.C., which make dates one of the first fruits ever cultivated.[3] There are different theories about their origin, but the domestication of dates probably started in Mesopotamia and in the Shat al-Arab area itself.[4]

There are hundreds of different varieties of dates. In Iraq, more than six hundred varieties are known but most of them are rare. The most common are *Barhi*, *Halawi*, *Khadrawi*, *Sair*, *Zahidi*, *Dairi*, *Buraim*, and *Maktum*.[5] Date palms can reach a height of up to eight meters. They need to be nurtured for seven years until they first bear fruit but, following that, within a few years, a single palm will produce between 80 to 120 kilograms of fruit per year. Palms are also resilient to difficult weather conditions, including fires, which do not affect the core of the tree.[6] Nevertheless, flooding can cause irreversible damage as it happened, for example, in the Shat al-Arab area in 1896 and 1935, when flooding caused the destruction of over one million palm trees each time.[7]

Growing palms requires a combination of relatively high temperatures, especially during the ripening process, and large amounts of water.[8] This makes Shat al-Arab an exceptionally favorable natural area for growing them. The peak of the ripening process is from September to November. In the past, this timing suited the transit trade, which could bring the fruit to India during the winter and thus finance the purchase of goods brought back to the Arabian Gulf.

The date growing process requires relatively large amounts of manual labor[9] and it needs year-round work in order to yield substantive crops. It demands skilled manpower, but it can also provide work for women and children, who are the ones packing the dates. The management of the gardens was generally under the control of field agents, who had complex relations of profit sharing with the *fallahs* (farmers). According to Hala Fattah, in the nineteenth century the trade was based on partnership contracts and long-term credit in future transactions. In return for securing the yield, the merchants paid six or seven months in advance, usually through a middle man (*dallāl*) rather than through direct contact with the cultivators.[10]

It is interesting to note that in the pre-oil era the dates were packed in special cases called *khisf* or *khasaf*, and that the boats built in the Gulf area were categorized according to the number of date cases they could carry, no matter whether the boat was made for dates, pearls, or other transit trade products. Not only the fruit but also the palm tree

3 Daniel Zohari, Maria Hopf, and Ehud Weiss, *Domestication of Plants in the Old World: The Origins and Spread of Domesticated Plants in the Southwest Asia, Europe, and the Mediterranean Basin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 131.

4 Mark Beech, "Archaeobotanical Evidence for Early Date Consumption in the Arabian Gulf," in *The Date Palm: From Traditional Resource to Green Wealth* (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2003), 11–31.

5 V.H.W. Dowson, *Dates & Date Cultivation of the Iraq* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1921–1923), 3 and 23–81. Different sources give different spellings to some varieties.

6 For details, see Abdelouahhab Zaid, ed., *Date Palm Cultivation* (Rome: Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2002).

7 Reidar Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State: Separatism and Nationalism in Southern Iraq* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), 15.

8 The average minimum temperature for palm trees to survive and grow is between 13 and 27° C; at the time of pollination, they require a temperature between 21 and 27°C. Cf. ChihCheng T. Chao and Robert R. Krueger, "The Date Palm (*Phoenix dactilifera L.*): Overview of Biology, Uses, and Cultivation," *HortScience* 42, no. 5 (2007): 1077–082.

9 Fuad Ishaq Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 39–40.

10 Hala Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf, 1745–1900* (New York: SUNY Press, 1997), 85–88. Jabir al-Mubarak, Hakim [Ruler of] al-Kuwait, to Marzuk bin Muhammad al-Marzuk (15 Dhu al-Hijja, 1334 [1916]), in *Kuwait Political Agency: Arabic Documents 1899–1949*, ed. Alan de Lacy Rush (Buckinghamshire: Archive Editions, 1994), 4:40–41.

and its leaves were used by the local populations. The palm trunk was the main source of wood for house furniture, crates, or boats. The leaves were used for ropes, baskets, and rugs, and the date stones were used for feeding the cattle.[11]

Dates have four ripening stages generally known by their Arabic names as *kimri*, *khalal* or *basr*, *rutab*, and *tamr*. *Kimri* describes the unripe fruit while *khalal* describes the fresh dates, picked and sold at an early stage of ripeness. In the third stage, the fruit is the ripest, but it lasts the shortest. In the last stage, the fruit is dried and is at its best for the longest time. This quality of the date made it a staple food for nomads, especially during harsh, long travels. It also allowed the dates to be exported to the Far East by sea since *tamr* could last for a couple of months.[12] But what made the date a major staple food was the fact that it provided all the elements of a basic diet. The fruit contains carbohydrates and most of the vitamins and minerals needed to humans.[13] Moreover, it can be easily used for making a variety of products like sugar, syrup, wine, spreads, beverage, and cakes. As a result, the material culture of food in the Arabian Peninsula has been historically centered on dates, which were called the "bread of the desert": together with the camel milk, dates were the main source of subsistence for the Bedouin tribes.[14]

Dates were not only commodities with an important economic value but also essential elements to the Arabian Peninsula material culture. Dates used to be religious symbols and were used in traditional medicine.[15] They appeared in most of the cultures of the ancient world and in all the monotheistic religions. The date is mentioned nineteen times in the Qur'ān, either as a symbol for God's generosity or as a warning against uprooting palms. Both these contexts emphasize its spiritual and economic importance for the people in the area.[16] Moreover, dates appear in many traditions related to the holy month of Ramadan. Breaking the fast is traditionally made with dates and milk, and a special non-alcoholic champagne made from dates is reserved for the night celebrations. In Oman, a large boiled dates industry has developed over time: dates are exported from here to India for wedding ceremonies.[17] Describing the date culture in Al-Hasa (North-East Arabia), American anthropologist F.S. Vidal has emphasized the large vocabulary which evolved around this industry, which indicates its importance and high degree of specialization, and compared the attitude of the local populations toward dates to the attitude of nomadic tribes toward camels.[18]

Dates were also used in important ceremonies like the *tahnik*, which involves rubbing a boy's palate with dates after his birth as a way of curbing his natural desires and as a symbol of his acceptance within the community.[19] In traditional medicine,

11 Yusuf al-Shihab, *Rijal fi Ta'arikh al-Kuwait* [Men in the history of Kuwait] (Kuwait: n.p., 1993), part 2, 298.

12 Frauke Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates* (London: Longman, 1982), 176–77. It should be mentioned that cooking the dates prolongs their durability for many months.

13 Zvi Berenstein, *Hatamar* [The palm date] (Tel-Aviv: Tirush, 2004), 237–39.

14 Nawal Nasrallah, *Dates: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 9.

15 Loutfi Boulos, *Medicinal Plants of North Africa* (Algonac: Reference Pubns, 1983), 140.

16 The date also appears in the *Hadith* and it is always a positive symbol. See F. Viré, "Nakhl," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Jean-Christophe Pellat and Jay Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 7:923–24; and David Waines, "Date Palm," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:494–95

17 W.J. Donaldson, "A Note on the Tarkabah and the Omani Boiled Date Trade," in *New Arabian Studies* 2, ed. R.L. Bidwell, G. Rex Smith, and J.R. Smart (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 68–74. For late twentieth century social functions of the dates in Oman, see Mandana E. Limbert, "The Sacred Date: Gifts of God in an Omani Town," *Ethnos* 73, no. 3 (2008): 361–76.

18 F.S. Vidal, "Date Culture in the Oasis of Al-Hasa," *The Middle East Journal* 8, no. 4 (1954): 417–28.

19 Avner Giladi, "Some Notes on Tahnik in Medieval Islam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 47, no. 3 (1988): 175–79; Avner Giladi, "Saghir," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Clifford Edmund Bosworth (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 8:824.

dates were used for disinfection, for making a syrup against colds, and for sobering up. The Yemeni used palm vinegar (*khall*) for digestive problems, and Arab sailors staved off the dangers of scurvy by eating dates during their long voyages of trade.[20]

Palm dates have been an important source of trade in the Arabian Gulf, which was the main area for their growing since ancient times.[21] According to Paul Popenoe, in 1926 there were 90 million palms in the world. Over half of these were grown in the Gulf area; out of these, 30 million were found in Iraq and about 15 million in the Shat al-Arab area.[22] During the 1930s, Basra exported 85 percent of the world date supply, mainly to the West and India.[23] During his tour of the Gulf between 1916–1917, C.M. Curstejee wrote about date that "it has been and is unmistakably the main source of the sustenance of the poor and the wealth of the rich of this country."[24] In 1924, Albert C. Wratislaw, the former British consul at Basra between 1898–1903, estimated that 90 percent of Basra's population lived on the date industry.[25] Therefore, the dates played a complex social, cultural, and economic role in the Arabian Peninsula, in general, and in the history of Kuwait, in particular, shaping the power relationship between the local merchants and the rulers. As Arjun Appadurai aptly explains, rulers and merchants are closely linked by their rivalry over the social regulation of demand. While merchants look for new tastes and commodities, the political elites strive for restricted exchanges and fixed commodity systems.[26]

3 The Sabah Ruling Family and Palm Dates

In order to understand the impact that palm dates have had on Kuwait's history, I will provide, first, a brief explanation of its involvement in the date production in Iraq. During 1918–1920, V.H.W. Dowson conducted a unique and thorough survey of the dates in southern Iraq. He estimated that the Shat al-Arab area was home to about 15 million palms and evaluated them at £2,500,000. According to his findings, date exports represented 60 to 70 percent of Iraq's total exports. In an article published in 1939, he estimated that there were only 6 million date bearing palms left in Shat al-Arab, and they produced about 130,000 tons of dates per year. About 100,000 tons of these dates and another 50,000 tons of dates from other parts of Iraq were exported from the port of Basra for a total value of about £1,000,000 a year.[27]

The date gardens in this area under Kuwaitis' possession were assessed by the British at 7,742 *jarīb* (a little more than 30,000,000 square meters,

20 Martin Vanhove, "The Making of Palm Vinegar at Al-Hiswah (near Aden) and Some Other Crafts Related to Palm Trees," in Bidwell, Smith, and Smart, *New Arabian Studies 2,* 175–85.

21 Rosemary Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1.

22 Paul Popenoe, "The Distribution of the Date Palm," *Geographical Review* 16, no. 1 (1926): 117; Visser, *Basra,* 13–17. According to Visser, the date trade is the main explanation for the rise of Basra in the second half of the nineteenth century.

23 Cecil Byford, *The Port of Basrah, Iraq* (Basra: Waterlow & Sons Ltd., 1935), 127–28.

24 C.M. Cursetjee, *The Land of the Date: A Recent Voyage from Bombay to Basra and Back, Fully Descriptive of the Ports and Peoples of the Persian Gulf and the Shat'-el-Arab, Their Conditions, History, and Customs: 1916–1917* (Reading: Garnet, 1996), 130. Dates were also the main (and almost only) export of Muhammarah; for details, see Shahbaz Shahnavaz, *Britain and the Opening Up of South-West Persia, 1880–1914: A Study in Imperialism and Economic Dependence* (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2005), 108–09.

25 Albert C. Wratislaw, *A Consul in the East* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1924), 160.

26 Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 33.

27 Dowson, *Dates & Date Cultivation of the Iraq*, 17; V.H.W. Dowson, "The Date Cultivation and Date Cultivators of Basrah," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 26, no. 2 (1939): 247.

or 3,000 hectares).[28] The main area, Fao, was 6,056 *jarīb* (more than 24,000 hectares) and contained over 300,000 palms.[29] The other areas cultivated with dates were Faddaghiya, Bashiya, Mutaw'a, Ajirawiya, and Farhaniya.[30] Estimates regarding the value of these assets are difficult to make due to lack of sufficient information. In the British records, different figures appear, which makes it clear that the value of the assets was fluctuating during that time. Throughout the 1930s, general estimates revolved around £1,000,000.[31] Existing records of date exports indicate that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Kuwaiti rulers' revenue came predominantly from the sale of dates. In the 1930s, the ruler Ahmad al-Jabir claimed that the date gardens were his family's main source of income and, although this statement came as part of a struggle over the date gardens, it was probably correct.[32]

I will start with an analysis of the main changes occurred in the period under discussion. There are three main stages in the history of palm dates and the Sabah family. The first stage describes the beginning of the family's control over the gardens; the second one is the Mubarak era (1896–1915), when the gardens assumed a major role in the Kuwaiti-Iraqi-British relationship; and the third one describes the final battle over the gardens, which eventually changed the socio-political balance in Kuwait. Naturally, there are other explanations for some of the historical events described here and they did not occur exclusively as a consequence of the trade in dates. Nevertheless, palm dates played a crucial role in the power dynamics of the region.

3.1 The Nineteenth Century: The Acquiring Stage

It is difficult to determine when the first date gardens were purchased or taken by force by the Kuwaitis. It is likely that the merchants were the first to acquire them, and that the Sabah family followed.[33] The beginning of the Sabahs' ownership of the gardens dates back to the 1830s, during the first years after the end of the Mamluks' rule over Iraq, a period characterized by political instability. The town of Zubair showed unacceptable autonomy and the Ottomans asked Jabir, the Kuwaiti ruler, to lay siege to the town. Yaqub al-Zuhair, head of one of the leading families in Zubair, escaped to Kuwait, where he was placed under Jabir's protection. According to a source, Yaqub then sold his date gardens in the Fao Peninsula to Jabir for 12,000 Shami. According to another source, al-Zuhair gave the land to Jabir in gratitude for saving his life. Later, a dispute arose as to whether the land was actually sold to the Sabah family or was given to Jabir only for the period of his life.[34] No matter

28 A *jarīb* is 3,967 square meters.

29 India Office Records R/15/5/136, F.H. Humphrys, High Commissioner for Iraq to Lord Passfield, Secretary of State for the Colonies (29 May 1931), The British Library, London (henceforth IOR). Relying on Fattah's estimation that each *jarīb* contained 100 trees, this will add to a double figure. See Fattah, *Politics of Regional Trade*, 86.

30 They appear only in the British Archives.

31 In 1958, A.S. Halford, the British Agent in Kuwait (1957–1959), estimated that the lands were worth £3,000,000, but this was probably an exaggeration. For details, see Foreign Office 371/132839, A.S. Halford to Foreign Office, London (30 June 1958), The National Archives, London (henceforth FO).

32 IOR R/15/5/135, Political Agent, Kuwait to Political Resident, Bushire (14 September 1930).

33 There were no arable lands in Kuwait, as opposed to Bahrain, for instance, so rulers and merchants went outside Kuwait for properties. It should be mentioned that in Bahrain the Shi'is were the main cultivators while the Sunnis, including the al-Khalifa ruling family, were landowners. See Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrein*, 37–53.

34 "Précis of Koweit Affairs," in *The Persian Gulf Précis. Volume v: Nejd Affairs—Koweit Affairs—Turkish Expansion ... and Hasa and Katif Affairs*, ed. J.A. Saldanha (Buckinghamshire: Archive Editions, 1986), 4; J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), 1008; Alan Rush, *Al-Sabah: History & Genealogy of Kuwait's Ruling Family 1752–1987* (London: Ithaca Press, 1987), 175 and 241–44; Abdullah al-Khatim, *Min Huna Bada't al-Kuwait* [From here Kuwait started]

which story is true, this move marks the beginning of the Sabah family's economic autonomy. Following this acquisition, evidence shows that the family accumulated substantial wealth from the date gardens.

During the Jabir period (1814–1859), the Kuwaitis were successful in exploiting the weaknesses of the Ottomans and later the Iraqis, which allowed them to control the date gardens for an extensive period of time. A significant event in the region at the end of the nineteenth century was that Midhat Pasha, *Wālī* (governor) of Baghdad (1869–1872), occupied the Al-Hasa region. After Faisal's death in 1865, Midhat entered the battle of succession in Najd to obtain a hold on Arabia. Because he lacked naval force, it is likely that Midhat would not have succeeded in his attempt, but Abdullah al-Sabah, the Kuwaiti ruler, provided him with ships and supplies for his campaign. As a result, for the first time in the Kuwaiti history, Midhat conferred the title of *Qaimaqām* (Ottoman governor of a district) on Abdullah.[35] Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that Abdullah would have risked a move against the Saudis, who controlled Al-Hasa, just for gaining an Ottoman title. For the previous one hundred and twenty years, the Sabah rulers had never tried to obtain the title, which was not important to them. This gesture should be understood, therefore, as Abdullah's need to address Midhat's enforcement of the Land Law (1858) in Iraq. Midhat had initiated a land settlement policy and conducted surveys in Iraq following which he ordered *tapu* (land registration) certificates and established tax rates.[36] When the Kuwaitis took control over the date gardens in Iraq, no structured registration process was in place, so they were not able to provide proof of their land ownership.

It is likely, then, that Abdullah was concerned about Midhat attacking him and losing his family's lands. Midhat curtailed the movement of dates in 1871, which indicated to Abdullah that he could inflict further damage.[37] This had a significant impact on the Sabah family's fortune and enabled them to solidify their economic power. It seems, however, that this fortune caused a rift within the family over how to manage it, which led to a unique period in the Kuwaiti history.

3.2 The Mubarak Era (1896–1915): Consolidating Control

Mubarak al-Sabah was the only ruler in the Kuwaiti history to take the rule by force, after killing his brother, Muhammad, in 1896. There are several stories about his motives, and they all emphasize his greed and ambition to rule. There are no direct links in historical records between the date gardens and his murderous act[38] except for one line in a British source. In the annual Administration Report of 1896, Kuwait is mentioned for the first time in a line explaining that Mubarak murdered his brothers because he "had failed to get their recognition of his claims on the joint family property."[39] No explanations or details are

(Damascus: Al-Matba'ah al-'Umumiyya, 1963), 53–57. Shami was a silver currency used by tribesmen until the early twentieth century. See Fattah, *Politics of Regional Trade*, 223.

35 Salwa Alghanim, *The Reign of Mubarak Al-Sabah: Shaikh of Kuwait 1896–1915* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 13–14; Rush, *Al-Sabah*, 140.

36 Hana Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 53–55, 74, and 240.

37 Frederick F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 21–22; Rush, *Al-Sabah*, 140. See also John Barrett Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795–1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 717–35.

38 In a 1896 report of the legal adviser to the British Embassy in Constantinople, the date gardens were described as the reason for the rulers accepting the Ottoman rank of *Qaimaqām*. See "Memorandum by Mr. Stavrides," in *Ruling Families of Arabia: Kuwait*, ed. A. Rush de Lacy (Buckinghamshire: Archive Editions, 1991), 14–15.

39 "Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residence for the Year 1896–7," in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports, 1873–1947* (Buckinghamshire: Archive Editions, 1986), 8–9. Abdullah Williamson, who was in Kuwait at the time, also claimed that one of the reasons for Mubarak's acts was his brother, who was depriving him of any share in the date revenues. See

given, but other clues in the records clarify these circumstances.

According to Rush, Mubarak's dissatisfaction with his brothers was fueled by his mother, Lu'lu'a al-Thaqib.[40] The Thaqib family owned many date gardens in the region and it was the greatest rival of al-Zuhair in Zubair. Lu'lu'a married Sabah, Jabir's son, after Jabir helped her father. Although the records do not contain any other information, it is likely that she was the one who urged Mubarak to take possession of these profitable lands. Indeed, throughout Mubarak's era, the date gardens were central to his economic policies.

One of the major steps taken by Mubarak was to sign an agreement with the British in January 1899. The British had already entered into agreements with Bahrain and other rulers from the Gulf area. Mubarak accepted their terms but demanded from M.J. Mead, the British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf between 1897–1900, to add a letter to the agreement whereby the British agreed to give their "good offices" to Mubarak.[41] Mead was aware of the possible consequences of such a commitment but he was compelled by Mubarak to sign the agreement following Mubarak's disclosure of his contacts with the Russians, French, and Germans, who were also interested in reaching an agreement with him. At the time, the British were determined to block an Ottoman-German plan to build the Baghdad railway, which was supposed to end in Kuwait. Mead also reported that Mubarak's brothers declined to sign an agreement because of the lack of commitment of the British "to protect Koweit family [*sic*] in their estates near Fao."[42] He reported Mubarak's explanation that those properties were part of Kuwait and had been gradually conquered by the Ottomans. This was the first time that the British had heard about the date gardens and, not surprisingly, the first time they used their "good offices" when Mubarak demanded their help with his properties on the Fao Peninsula in April 1899.[43] This explains the place of the dates in the agreement. Nearly every year of his rule, Mubarak filed complaints to the British about the Ottoman activities against him. At that time, Mubarak was buying more date gardens in Fao and applying for loans from the British, seemingly due to a shortage of money.[44]

Lorimer estimated that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Mubarak's annual revenue was 399,000 Thalers (Maria Theresa Dollars), or £80,000.[45] The revenues from the date gardens were 108,000 Thalers, which was about 27 percent of his total income. The rest of his taxes, which were considerably higher than those of his predecessors, including the taxes on pearls, did not come even close to his revenues from dates.[46] In 1913, he declared that he could pay back the loan he had taken from the British, which was about 600,000 Rupees (£60,000), after the money from the sale of dates arrived.[47] Although he probably exaggerated, it is obvious that the dates were his principal sources of revenue and, more importantly, that his income was not dependent on his

also Stanton Hope, *Arabian Adventurer: The Story of Haji Williamson* (London: Robert Hale, 1951), 132.

40 Rush, *Al-Sabah*, 121 and 241–44.

41 Kelly claimed that Mead told Mubarak the "good offices" included the protection of his estates in Fao, but there is no written record of this agreement. See John B. Kelly, "Salisbury, Curzon and the Kuwait Agreement of 1899," in *Studies in International History: Essays Presented to W. Norton Medlicott*, ed. K. Bourne and D.C. Watt (London: Longmans, 1967), 281.

42 Robin Bidwell, ed., *The Affairs of Kuwait, 1896–1905* (London: Frank Cass, 1971), 39–40.

43 Political Resident to Sheikh Mubarak (21 April 1899), in Rush, *Kuwait Political Agency*, 1:180–81. Probably only then did the British understand the complexity of the problem and its consequences on their relations with the Ottomans. The agreement was supposed to be secret in order not to harm the stability of the Ottomans.

44 Bidwell, *The Affairs of Kuwait*, 64–66; see, also, the note by L.W. Reynolds, Offg. Deputy Secy. to the Government of India (1 June 1909), in *Records of Kuwait, 1899–1961*, ed. Alan de Lacy Rush (Buckinghamshire: Archive Editions, 1989), 1:733.

45 At the time, a Thaler was about two Rupees. See Anscombe, *Ottoman Gulf*, xiii-xiv.

46 Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 1076.

47 IOR L/P&S/10/48, Political Agent, Kuwait to Political Resident, Bushire (11 November 1913).

merchants' economic success. There are no similar estimations of the Kuwaiti rulers' revenues on record. However, it is more than likely that the share of dates grew gradually throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

At the start of World War I, the British were keen on ensuring Mubarak's support. On November 3, 1914, only days before invading the Basra area, the British gave Mubarak a letter with three commitments in return for his siding with them. The first commitment read: "your gardens, which are now in your possession, viz., the date gardens situate between Fao and Qurnah, shall remain in your possession and in possession of your descendants without being subject to the payment of revenue or taxes."[48] This commitment turned into a major problem in the Kuwaiti-Iraqi-British relationship at the end of World War I, until the final settlement of this issue in the 1950s.

3.3 Ahmad al-Jabir Era (1921–1950): The Fruits of the Struggle

In the 1920s and 1930s, the world saw a gradual economic decline; for Kuwait, this period was extremely difficult. The decline in the transit trade and the demise of the pearl trade after the introduction of cultured pearls brought many Kuwaitis to starvation. In this context, the revenues from the date gardens became even more important. The fact that the Sabah family and the ruler, Ahmad al-Jabir, continued to enjoy the profits of the dates was critical in strengthening their political position.

Due to the commitment made by Britain to Kuwait, the date gardens became a problem for the former. Starting with 1922, the Iraqi government continually complained that they were not part of the British commitment and that the agreement was an assault on their sovereignty and lowered their revenues. The Iraqis began pushing for a decision in their favor by publishing numerous newspaper articles that emphasized their enormous loss of tax money.[49]

Ahmad al-Jabir, on the other hand, did everything he could to keep the date gardens and to strengthen his hold on them. He used the fact that the British officials were frequently changed to his advantage and he told different things to different agents. Most of the time, he claimed that the lands were his but in 1930, after the British advised him to sell the gardens in order to improve his strained relationship with Iraq, he informed them that the land belonged to all his family members and any selling "might easily cause revolution in Kuwait."[50] Ahmad knew, of course, that this was one of the things the British were afraid of. It did not take them long to realize that Ahmad had fooled them and he had been managing all the date gardens without any involvement of his family.[51] Ahmad did not need the support of his family as the merchants had become weaker; however, he did change his attitude toward his family members and started relying on them to preserve his power.

The British-Iraqi negotiations in 1930 were not successful on the date gardens issue, but it was clear that, as Iraq approached independence in 1932, some arrangement had to be made.[52] Starting with 1930, probably as a result of the encouragement from the Iraqi government, a series of private lawsuits were filed by members of the Zuhair family and others, claiming small parts of the Sabah date gardens. These lawsuits were followed

48 Political Resident in the Persian Gulf to Mubarak as-Subah (3 November 1914), in Rush, *Kuwait Political Agency*, 1:210–12.

49 See, for example, IOR R/15/5/135, "Press Extracts, AL-Iraq No. 2320 of 17 August 1927. Exemption of the Shaikhs of Kuwait and Mohammerah from Miri Fees. When Is This Prejudice to Iraq's Right to Disappear?"

50 IOR R/15/5/135, Political Resident, Bushire to Secretary of State for the Colonies, London (31 August 1930).

51 IOR R/15/5/136, Political Agent, Kuwait to Political Resident, Bushire (1 January 1931).

52 The details in this section are mainly based on the "Summary of Negotiations over as Subah Date Gardens, 1914–1952," found in Rush, *Records of Kuwait*, 6:207–26, and H.V.F. Winstone and Zahra Freeth, *Kuwait: Prospect and Reality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), 111–18.

by many appeals by all sides which created legal complications that lasted many years. Moreover, the new Iraqi state began to issue new rules and regulations that, at least in Kuwaitis' eyes, were meant to diminish their profits.[53]

In 1933, Faisal, the Iraqi king, declared that the lands would stay under the Kuwaiti ruler's management, but his death prevented the conclusion of a settlement. Under king Ghazi's rule, the Iraq-Kuwait struggle escalated, and the date gardens became an obstacle to any possible appeasement. In the 1940s, it became obvious to the British that the Sabah family could not hold the date gardens for long, so they concentrated their efforts on a joint agreement and settlement of the different aspects of the issue. In 1947, Rupert Hay, the British Resident in the Persian Gulf (1946–1953), had already decided to offer the Kuwaiti ruler a sum of £400,000, half of the value (as the British estimated) of all date gardens, in order to end the problem, but this decision was eventually dropped and no compensation was offered.

During the rule of Abdullah al-Salim (1950–1965), the date gardens period came to an end. It seems that, even though the date gardens were no longer important economically to Kuwaitis due to the oil money, keeping them was a question of honor. So, Abdullah refused to compromise, and the British representatives recommended not to offer any compensation to avoid offending him in the eyes of his family.[54] More importantly, because he was striving to achieve the Kuwaiti independence, Abdullah detached himself from the British and sought Arab recognition instead.[55]

After money became abundant in the 1950s, Abdullah was less keen on confronting Iraqi lawyers and the Iraqi government,[56] but the revolution of July 1958, which resulted in an overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy, completely changed the political landscape again. In August 1958, the British reported that the Iraqi authorities had used every means to stop the *fallahs* from taking the Sabah family's lands,[57] but it was probably the other way around. In December 1958, Abdullah met Abd al-Karim Qasim, the Iraqi ruler, and although he had promised to agree on a solution, Abdullah told the British he was not satisfied with any.[58] Interestingly, on June 1959 it was the *fallahs* of Fao who petitioned Qasim to find a solution, and a few months later, Abdullah informed the British that he was about to approach the Iraqis for a settlement.[59] This was only to inform the British, though, and, not surprisingly, it is the last mention of this question in the British archives. The British lost their influence as Iraq withdrew from the Baghdad Pact, and the agrarian reform of September 1958 further complicated the Sabah family's ability to control the lands. Further information regarding the arrangement that put an end to this epoch is still to be found.

4 Merchants and Palm Dates

Besides the Sabah family, merchants were the most influential elite in pre-oil Kuwait. This elite (also known as *tujjār*) was mainly engaged in the import and export trade. In many urban centers of the Middle East and in the small societies of the Gulf, the merchant elite stood at the top of the

53 IOR R/15/5/136, "Note on a Conversation Which the Hon'ble the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf Had with the Shaikh of Kuwait" (25 October 1931).

54 Foreign Office 371/82042, Political Agent, Kuwait to Political Resident in the Persian Gulf (2 May 1950).

55 Simon C. Smith, *Kuwait, 1950–1965: Britain, the Al-Sabah, and Oil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 46–48.

56 Political Agent, Kuwait to the Eastern Department, Foreign Office (26 June 1958), in Rush, *Records of Kuwait*, 6:236–37.

57 Telegram from Consul General, Basra to Foreign Office (21 August 1958), in Rush, *Records of Kuwait*, 6:239–40.

58 FO 371/132594, Political Agent, Kuwait to British Ambassador, Iraq (16 December 1958).

59 FO 371/140221, British Consul, Basra to Political Agent Kuwait (23 June 1959), Political Agent, Kuwait to Political Resident in the Persian Gulf (5 October 1959).

commercial communities. This elite did not include all merchants but only those with large enterprises, profits, and liquid assets. This enabled them to operate vast commercial networks, make significant investments, and attain political power. The state formation following World War I reduced the power of the merchants who, following the economic crisis of the late 1920s, found themselves in a different position in relation to Kuwaiti rulers, who maintained their control of the palm dates.

It cannot be determined exactly when the Kuwaitis began to invest in date gardens, but it is known that that the ones who started the process were the merchants. In the eighteenth century, Kuwaiti rulers relied for their income mainly on taxes, which were relatively low, so their income was modest. On the other hand, the merchants' revenues increased quickly, especially after the two conquests of Basra by the Iranians (1776–1779 and 1793–1795), which transferred British economic activities from there to the Kuwaiti ports. Possibilities to invest money in Kuwait were rather limited, so the merchants gradually started to invest outside Kuwait in order to secure their wealth.

Existing evidence shows that the merchant al-Saqir purchased land in the year 1245 to the *hijra* (1829/30), just before the Sabah family did.[60] Indirect evidence also shows that merchants had purchased date gardens before Sabah. In 1908, a deed of sale from 8 Sha'ban 1233 to the *hijra* (1818) was brought before S.G. Knox, the British Political Agent in Kuwait (1904–1909). This was provided by Saqir al-Ghanim, the son of one of the wealthiest and most important families in Kuwait, who owned date gardens in Bahrain. The circumstances of this transaction are not clear.[61] Owning lands in that period did not generally require written proof as the land was passed from generation to generation within families. The merchant families maintained economic relations with local farmers with minimal outside interference. Another indication of the ways in which merchants started owning lands is the story of Abd al-Jalil al-Tabtaba'i. He owned large date gardens in the Basra area and immigrated with his family from Zubair to Kuwait in 1842.[62] We can assume that al-Tabtaba'i was not the only one who did so and that other merchants immigrated to Kuwait "with their lands" in the same way.

There is considerably more information about the merchants who dealt with palm dates in the twentieth century. Probably the leading merchant was Hamad al-Saqir, who initiated and stood as head of the first *Majlis* (council) formed in Kuwait in 1921. He was known as Malik al-Tummūr (the King of Palm dates), as he was a major exporter of dates and owned several date gardens in the area.[63] Interestingly, Hilal al-Mutairi, who was the wealthiest merchant in Kuwait due to the trade in pearls, also bought date gardens in the late 1920s as he moved away from pearls just before their trade crashed. In 1929, existing reports mention his visits to the many date gardens he owned in the Shat al-Arab area.[64]

Unfortunately, there is almost no information about the level of merchant ownership of the date gardens. In 1936, Gerald de Gaury, the political agent in Kuwait (1936–1939), assumed that about thirty-five Kuwaiti families had date gardens in Iraq, but he did not mention where this figure

60 Yusuf Bin Muhammad al-Nisf, *Nahlatak* [Your date gardens] (Kuwait: n.p., 1998), 39.

61 IOR R/15/5/21, Political Agent, Kuwait to Political Agent, Bahrain (28 December 1908).

62 Adnan bin Salim bin Muhammad al-Rumi, *Ulema al-Kuwait w-A'alamiha hilal Thalathat Qurun* [Scholars and famous people of Kuwait in the past three centuries] (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Manar al-Islamiyya, 1999), 37–53.

63 Hamad Muhammad al-Sa'idan, *Al-Musu'a al-Kuwaitiyya al-Muhtasira* [Brief Kuwaiti encyclopedia] (Kuwait: Al-Matba'a al-'Asriyya, 1970–1972), 875.

64 IOR R/15/5/181, Political Agent, Kuwait to Administrative Inspector, Basrah (9 November 1929).

came from or on what he based his information.[65] A British document, probably from the 1930s, claimed that "[r]ich Kuwaitis find the soundest investment for their surplus money in land, and preferably the date gardens of lower Iraq. Many had and have gardens there; the Shaikhs of Kuwait among their number."[66] There is almost no other information about their ownership, except by indirect means.[67]

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that, as the Iraqis took control of the region, the Kuwaiti merchants' opportunities to invest in dates decreased. There are also indications that some lands, one way or another, came into the hands of the Sabah family. In 1911, Qasim al-Ibrahim, a big Kuwaiti merchant who resided in Bombay, purchased a vast date garden in Shat al-Arab for 180,000 Turkish Lira (1,620,000 Rupees, or £162,000). In 1935, when rumors spread about the possibility of finding oil there, he first approached Ahmad al-Jabir, the Kuwaiti ruler, and then the British officials, claiming that these were his lands, not the Sabahs', and that he was entitled to the profits from them.[68] This case may indicate that the Sabah family took over the Kuwaiti merchants' lands, but it can also be an outcome of the many lawsuits started in the 1930s and the confusion created by them.

Merchants are mainly mentioned in sources as traders in dates involved in exporting them from the Shat al-Arab to India and East Africa. As Ahmad al-Jabir claimed in the 1930s, most of the export from this area was done by Kuwaiti merchants using agents of the Sabah family.[69] In the 1930s, the involvement of the merchants in the date trade grew considerably as the pearl trade and the transit trade sharply declined. It is interesting to note that five of the fourteen members of the second *Majlis* (1938) were engaged in the date trade, compared to only one, al-Saqir, in the first *Majlis*. This increase is a clear indication of the rising importance of palm dates during that period. However, the merchants could not manage the date trade as freely as they did in the nineteenth century and obviously lacked the political power of the Sabah family.

5 Conclusion

Palm dates have been a dietary staple in human civilization, especially in the Arabian Peninsula. Throughout history, they have been an important source of subsistence and played an essential role in the cultural traditions of the region. Moreover, the dates had an important impact on the economy and socio-political life of pre-oil Arabia. By being aware of the economic strength that the trade in dates brought to the Sabah ruling family of Kuwait, one can better understand their resulting political power at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since the pre-oil Kuwaiti society was based on a merchant elite and collecting high taxes from them was not possible, the ruling family's resources were quite limited. Therefore, over a long period of time, the Sabah family gradually purchased and took control of extensive date

65 Political Agent, Kuwait to British Consul, Bushire (12 March 1936), in Rush, *Records of Kuwait*, 6:425.

66 IOR R/15/5/157, "Introductory Note by Political Agent to the Case of the Heirs of Zuhair Versus the Mail Heirs of Shaikh Mubarak and their Descendants." n.p.

67 For example, in an interview, Badir Khalid al-Badir al-Qina'i described his childhood in the 1920s and his visits to his father's date gardens, which were located between the date gardens of the Humaidhi family and those of the Ghanim family. See Yusuf al-Shihab, *Rijal fi Ta'arikh al-Kuwait* [Men in the history of Kuwait] (Kuwait: Matabi' Dar al-Qabas, 1993–2000), 3 and 38, respectively.

68 Rush, *Records of Kuwait*, 1:342. Translation of the letter received from Sheikh Jasim bin Mohamed Ebrahim, Bombay, in Rush, *Records of Kuwait*, 2:100–01; the letter was probably written in November 1935. Al-Nisf described his family as the biggest owner of date gardens in Kuwait. For details, see Al-Nisf, *Nahlatak*, 35.

69 "Proofs of Nature of Tasarruf Maintained in Ruler's Fau Property" (n.d.), in Rush, *Kuwait Political Agency*, 7:534–36. IOR R/15/5/136, "Note on a Conversation Which the Hon'ble the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf Had with the Shaikh of Kuwait" (25 October 1931).

plantations in southern Iraq, and thus built up its economic power base in parallel with the creation of a political power base.

The date gardens period lasted for a hundred and twenty years and deserves special attention in the Kuwaiti pre-oil history. The importance of this period is clearly shown by the uncompromising struggle of Ahmad al-Jabir to keep the date gardens they owned in Iraq in the hands of the Sabah family. Although more than once this struggle against Iraq jeopardized al-Jabir's relations with the British, which were critical for Kuwait and the Sabah family's survival, it shows how far the ruling family was ready to go in order to maintain its economic power. The economic importance of the dates in the power dynamics of the area is also reflected by the ruling family's competition with Kuwaiti merchants over the ownership of date gardens in the nineteenth century and beyond. Thus, this case study indicates the essential role played by material powers in the state formation in Kuwait: as a source of economic wealth, the dates translated in political power for the ruling family and shaped in complex ways its relations with the British protectorate. Further studies on the trade in dates in the Arabian Peninsula may unveil more about their effect on processes of state formation in the region.

PART 2

Imagining Arabia: Exotic, Fabulous, and Misplaced Things

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CHAPTER 4

Circulating Things, Circulating Stereotypes: Representations of Arabia in Eighteenth-Century Imagination

Ileana Baird

The fictions indeed of a poetical fancy are commonly as arbitrary as the stories of the vulgar are incredible and ridiculous; yet many traditionary fables, however wild and improbable they appear, are capable of being traced up to a very distant origin of truth.

Athenian Letters, Letter xxi, 1741[1]

In his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1789), Edward Gibbon provides a description of Arabia that sums up the distinctive features of the place in the collective imaginary of eighteenth-century British subjects:

"The Arabian Peninsula contains the vacant space between Persia, Syria, Egypt, and Æthiopia; and the entire surface of it exceeds in a fourfold proportion that of Germany, or France; but the far greater part of it has properly acquired the epithets of the *stony* and the *sandy*. In the dreary waste, a boundless level of sand is intersected by sharp and naked mountains. The winds diffuse a noxious, and even deadly vapour; the hillocks of sand which they alternately raise and scatter have buried whole caravans, and even armies; destitute of navigable rivers, the refreshment of water is precariously to be enjoyed by the Arabian traveler; and a scanty supply of rain is collected for its use in cisterns and aqueducts. But the high lands that border on the Indian Ocean are distinguished by their superior plenty; wood and water freely present themselves; the air is more temperate; the fruits more delicious; the animals and the human race more numerous; the peculiar gifts of frankincense and coffee have attracted, in different ages, the merchants of the world; and this part of the peninsula, contrasted with the *stony* and the *sandy*, has been honored with the epithet the *happy*."[2]

The space is described as a *summa* of striking opposites: the "dreary waste" and "boundless sand" are contrasted here to the abundance of wood, water, and "gifts" of trade; the "deadly vapours" brought by harsh winds are juxtaposed to the reviving scents of frankincense and coffee; and the "precarious" and "scanty" rains are counterbalanced by a "plenty" of fruit, animals, and inhabitants in the mountainous areas. The death trope contained in the image of the "buried" caravans is opposed to the trope of bountiful life suggested by the thriving commerce that characterizes the southern area of the peninsula. While Arabia the *stony* and Arabia the *sandy* are afflicted by a harsh environment and a lack of natural resources, Arabia the *happy* has a "more temperate" climate and is rich in products that attract merchants to its shores (fig. 4.1).[3]

Gibbon's description of the Arabian Peninsula through the things that stand for this place is

1 *Athenian Letters: Or, the Epistolary Correspondence of an Agent of the King or Persia, Residing at Athens during the Peloponnesian War. Containing the History of the Times, in Dispatches to the Ministers of State at the Persian Court. Besides Letters on Various Subjects between Him and His Friends* (London: Printed by James Bettenham, 1741), 1:80.

2 The quote comes from an early reprint of *Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Abridged in Two Volumes* (London: Printed for A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1790), 2:250–51.

3 Gibbon's description follows that of Ptolemy's, who was the first one to refer to the three Arabian provinces as Arabia the Stony, Arabia the Desert, and Arabia the Happy.

FIGURE 4.1 H. Moll, *Arabia. Agreeable to Modern History*, Cornhill, 1736(?)

symptomatic of the century's redefinition of *the other* spaces in ways that often give rise to stereotypes, standardized mental pictures or, to use Edward Said's words, "imaginative geographies" that coalesce into simplified opinions and prejudiced attitudes toward *the other*.[4] Said's argument is well-known: during the Oriental stage, a period roughly placed between 1765 and 1850,[5] "the Orient, and in particular the near Orient, became known in the West as its great complementary opposite"[6] in a process of ideological redefinition he famously described as "orientalizing the Oriental."[7] This process employs the same binary opposites so effectively used by Gibbon in his description to suggest a hierarchy of value: while "Europe is powerful and articulate," "Asia is defeated and distant"; the "European superiority" is contrasted to the "Oriental backwardness."[8] As a European invention, the Orient is "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences,"[9] a space both vague and alluring that crams within its loose boundaries the wildest fantasies of the West.

It is my intention here to challenge some of these interpretations by exploring the mechanism of stereotyping in relation to the Arab world as mediated by the things that represented this space during the eighteenth century. I am particularly interested in understanding the process of stereotyping outside a colonial lens and outside a political

4 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 49.

5 See Raymond Schwab, *La Renaissance orientale* (Paris: Payot, 1950), qtd. in Said, *Orientalism*, 51. Said also discusses two more meanings of Orientalism. As a field of study, he argues that Orientalism commenced in 1312 with the decision of the Church Council of Vienna to establish Chairs in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac in Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon, and Salamanca. As a "style of thought," or imaginative construct of the Orient, Orientalism permeates all fields of knowledge up to this day (2).

6 Said, *Orientalism*, 58.

7 Ibid., 49.

8 Ibid., 7.

9 Ibid., 1.

rendering of the stereotype. As Gibbon correctly pointed out, "[t]he transient dominion obtained by the Abysinians, the Persians, the sultans of Egypt, and the Turks over the kingdom of Yemen, has not precluded the Arabs from the praise of perpetual independence."[10] Arabia was not a Western colony during the eighteenth-century, nor did it occupy a fully subservient position in relation to Western civilizations later on, so the power binaries employed by postcolonial readings do not work well when describing Arabia's relationship with the West. Unlike other colonized territories, the Arabian Peninsula benefitted from the flourishing trade in spices, coffee, dates, perfumes, pearls, and medicines it facilitated as one of the main trade routes between Europe and Asia. Moreover, during the eighteenth-century these commercial exchanges were accompanied by cultural ones. During the time, Arabia started to occupy a distinctive place in the Western imaginary due to a book that, as Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum argued, "changed the world on a scale unrivalled by any other literary text":[11] Antoine Galland's translation of *Les mille et une nuits* between 1704–1717 and its subsequent translation in English as *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* between 1706–1721 created an immensely influential, albeit inaccurate, representation of "Arabia" from this point on, which will further complicate the process of cultural transmission and interaction between the Arabian Peninsula and the Western world.

Given these unique circumstances that define the contact between Arabia and Europe during the eighteenth century, unique sets of questions arise. What taxonomies are in place when the relationships between the two areas do not involve imperial vs. colonial binaries? How did the Arabian things contribute to the formation of an Arabian identity? What can a "reinjection of things into our understanding of the social fabric"[12] reveal about the networks of exchange—commercial, cultural, and not only—developed between Arabia and the Western world during the Enlightenment? Finally, how accurate were these stereotypes in their time and how relevant are they today? As this chapter will argue, the rendition of Arabia during the eighteenth century is heavily reliant on things—both real and fictional—that represent this place in the Western imaginary. These representations have often led to sets of stereotypes which, when describing Arabia itself and not one of its misnomers, function very differently than the stereotypes that stem from a colonial discourse.

1 Representing Arabia: Things and Place

Given Arabia's strategic position at the confluence of the trade routes between East and West, numerous stereotypes about its immense riches and abundance of goods started to emerge during the Age of Reason. In the *Spectator* No. 69 [The Royal Exchange], Joseph Addison mentions at least four commodities intensely associated with the Arab Peninsula: scarves, spices, oils, and silks.[13] Similar references are abundantly found in the scientific, instructional, and literary productions of the time. In the *Athenian Letters* (1741–1743), for instance, Arabia the Happy is described as "one universal altar ever breathing forth spontaneous incense to the heavens," and as a place where "the sweet effluvia are wafted by the winds and spread a grateful Fragrance for many miles beyond the coasts." So many cassia and other odoriferous plants are along the Arabian shores that they "perfume the air with a strange variety of healthful and pleasant scents."[14] A 1745 *Collection of Voyages and Travels* similarly mentions the abundance of "things precious and

10 *Gibbon's History*, 2:253.

11 Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, introduction to The Arabian Nights *in Historical Context: Between East and West,* ed. Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.

12 Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory. A Few Clarifications," *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 369–81.

13 Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, 8 vols. (London: Printed for S. Buckley and J. Tonson, 1712), 1:48.

14 *Athenian Letters*, 1:80.

aromatic," such as "frankincense and myrrh, palm-trees, cinnamon, cassia, and lignum-aloe," whose smell is so sweet that they "seemeth rather to be heavenly, than earthly."[15] References to the spices of Arabia appear in Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* 120 ["The History of Amamoulin, the Son of Nouradin"], as well as in his *Dictionary* (1750), where he lists several things coming from the Arab world: *assa foetida* ("a gum or reisin of a sharp taste and a strong offensive smell … of known efficacy in some uterine disorders"), the balsam tree (whose blossoms are "like small stars, white and very fragrant"), and the bdellium ("a tree … which yielded a certain gum sweet to smell").[16] In his *Compendious Geographical and Historical Grammar* (1795), John Mair indicates that "[t]he produce of this country is principally aloe, cassia, spikenard, frankincense, myrrh, mana, and other costly gums,"[17] and in *Lex Mercatoria Rediviva* (1792), Wyndham Beawes mentions fragrances like "Incense, Balsam, Myrrh, and Calamus Aromaticus" as originating from Arabia.[18] Finally, maybe the most famous eighteenth-century reference to Arabic things, Alexander Pope's description of Belinda's dressing table in *The Rape of the Lock* (1712–1714/15) includes a reference to the exquisite perfumes that stand, metonymically, for Arabia itself: "This casket *India*'s glowing gems unlocks, / And all *Arabia* breathes from yonder box."[19] The place is reduced to a thing of ephemeral beauty, to a signifier, or stereotype, that encapsulates the very essence of Arabia in the Western imaginary: its highly sought-after, thoroughly expensive, intoxicating scents.

Not only perfumes and aromatics but also spices and exotic foods were commonly associated with the area. In a 1790 *Geography and History* textbook by "a Lady" "for the use of her own children," Arabia the Happy is described as being "blessed with an excellent soil, and very fertile, and produces many valuable gums, fruits, honey, and wax; and is particularly famous for its coffee and dates."[20] Mair's survey also indicates that "cinnamon, pepper, cardamom, dates, figs, oranges, lemons, pomegranates, and other fruits; likewise honey and wax" can be found in Arabia "in great plenty."[21] Carsten Niebuhr's *Travels through Arabia* (1792) mention gum Arabic, saffron, and dates as staples of the place.[22] "The sweets of Arabia calm sickness and pain,"[23] according to Mary Robinson's "Pastoral Stanzas" and, as suggested in "An Epistle from Mr. Pope to Mr. Gay," they stand out for their unique fragrance.[24] Similarly, a note from *Vathek* (1786)

15 *A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Consisting of Authentic Writers in Our Own Tongue, Which Have Not before Been Collected in English, or Have Only Been Abridged in Other Collections*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for and sold by Thomas Osborne of Gray's-Inn, 1745), 1:620.

16 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of English Language; in Which the Words Are Deduced from Their Originals and Illustrated in Their Different Significations by Examples from the Best Writers. To Which Are Prefixed, a History of the Language, and an English Grammar*, 2 vols. (London: Printed by W. Strahan, 1755), 1: n.p.

17 John Mair, *A Compendious Geographical and Historical Grammar Exhibiting a Brief Survey of the Terraqueous Globe. And Shewing the Situation, Extent, Boundaries, and Divisions of the Various Countries; Their Chief Towns, Mountains, Rivers, Climates, and Productions; Their Governments, Revenues, Commerce, and Their Sea and Land Forces…* (London: Printed for W. Peacock, 1795), 42.

18 Wyndham Beawes, *Lex Mercatoria Rediviva: Or, A Complete Code of Commercial Law* (London: Printed for R. Baldwin et al., 1792), 23.

19 Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, ed. Cynthia Wall (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998), 57.

20 *Geography and History. Selected by a Lady, for the Use of Her Own Children* (London: Printed for B. Law, 1790), 157.

21 Mair, *A Compendious Geographical and Historical Grammar,* 42.

22 Cartsten Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia, and Other Countries in the East*, trans. Robert Heron (Edinburgh: Printed for R. Morison and Son, 1792), 1:24, 99, and 190, respectively.

23 Mary Robinson, *Poems* (London: Printed by J. Bell, 1791), 166.

24 *Miscellanea. In Two Volumes. Never before Published. Viz. I. Familiar Letters Written to Henry Cromwell Esq. by Mr. Pope. II. Occasional Poems by Mr. Pope, Mr. Cromwell, Dean Swift etc. III. Letters from Mr. Dryden, to a Lady, in the Year 1699* (London: Printed for E. Curll, 1727), 1: 135.

indicates the use of balsam, which is "indigenous in various parts of Arabia," as an ingredient in the "Myrabolan comfit."[25] Such references emphasize Arabia's exoticism and refined taste, as well as the sweetness and fragrance of its products, which were much valued during a time when the consumption of sugar and spices was rising rapidly among European populations.

Coffee is another staple thing customarily associated with the area. In his *Dictionary,* Johnson indicates the Arabic origin of coffee and rightly so, as one the most popular types of coffee is called "Arabica" because it was first domesticated for commercial use in the southern part of Arabia the Happy (present-day Yemen). Given the Muslim prohibition of alcohol, coffee became particularly attractive to the Muslim world as "the wine of Islam,"[26] and spread through the ports of the Persian Gulf in Western Europe, where it became immensely popular. Collections of travels published during the time mention that coffee was "the product of Arabia only."[27] Imported largely from Yemen, which was credited with producing the best coffee in the world, coffee was considered to have stimulating and therapeutic properties.[28] The former quality is famously described by Pope in *The Rape of the Lock*: "*Coffee* (which makes the politician wise), / And see thro' all things with his half-shut Eyes) / Sent up in vapours to the *Baron*'s brain / New Stratagems, the radiant Lock to gain."[29] According to Beawes, the product was brought to Mecca through the port of Jeddah, whose "[t]rade consists mainly of coffee brought here by the Arabians and bought by the

FIGURE 4.2 William Hogarth, *Taste in High Life* [graphic]. PRINT MADE BY ISAAC MILLS AFTER WILLIAM HOGARTH'S PAINTING, WITHOUT THE ARTIST'S PERMISSION, LONDON, 1798

Turks … [and] by the Merchants of Mogul, Persia, and several places on the coast of Ehiopia."[30] From here, coffee spread rapidly in England, France, and Italy, giving rise to the coffeehouse culture that is a hallmark of the eighteenth century. Coffee was also regularly paired in the visual culture of the time with expensive china (fig. 4.2), was employed as a mark of the culture of sociability (fig. 4.3), or was used for its oracular properties[31] (fig. 4.4).

Arabian medicines were also much sought-after in the Western world. As indicated by Beawes, "from Arabia, Medicinal drugs, Dragon's Blood, Manna, Myrrh, [and] Incense,"[32] were brought to the British metropolis. *Pharmacopoia Reformata* (1744) mentions gum Arabic, aloe, cassia, acacia, cardamom, saffron, myrrh, and spikenard, which were all used for their therapeutic properties.[33] To

25 Wiliam Beckford, *An Arabian Tale, from an Unpublished Manuscript: With Notes Critical and Explanatory* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1786), 165.

26 For the association between coffee and wine, see Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Middle East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 18–19.

27 *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 1:440.

28 Coffee was customarily used as a mild painkiller during the eighteenth century. Poet Alexander Pope, for instance, used it as a palliative for his migraines.

29 Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, 69.

30 Beawes, *Lex Mercatoria Rediviva,* 791.

31 Again, the custom of reading one's fortune in coffee grounds is of Turkish provenance, not Arabic. Such mistaken attributions were pervasive during the eighteenth century.

32 Beawes, *Lex Mercatoria Rediviva,* 792.

33 M.M., *Pharmacopoia Reformata: Or, An Essay for a Reformation of the London Pharmacopoia, by a Set of Remarks on the Draught for a New One, and a Brief Account of the Proceedings of the Committee Appointed by the College of Physicians, to Thoroughly Reform Their*

FIGURE 4.3
The Honey-Moon [graphic]. Mezzotint, hand-colored.
PRINTED FOR CARINGTON BOWLES, LONDON, JUNE 1777

this list, Richard Walker, apothecary to the Prince of Wales, adds Arabic henna, manna, and rhubarb.[34] The influence of the Arabian medicine first on the Greek, then on the French and English physicians, although often decried, brought an influx of medicinal plants from or through the Arabian Peninsula to Europe, where they were customarily used in tinctures, purges, and other more or less effective elixirs.[35] Alternately, incense was used for its love-inducing and rejuvenating properties, as seen in an 1787 etching by James Gillray representing a group of five elderly women of fashion attending an altar of Love (fig. 4.5).[36]

Book. Interspersed with Some Occasional Observations on Some of the Most Celebrated Modern Dispensatories, and the Present State of Pharmacy (London: Printed and Sold by R. Willock, 1744). This volume contains a wealth of detailed recipes for various afflictions, albeit providing few specifics as to what was treated by using them.

34 Richard Walker, *Memoirs of Medicine; Including a Sketch of Medical History from the Earliest Accounts to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1799).

35 For the influence of the Arabian medicine on Western Europe, see volume 3 of John Astruc's *Treatise on the Diseases of Women, in Which Is Attempted to Join a Just Theory to the Most Safe and Approved Practice...* (London: Printed for J. Nourse, 1767). For detailed recipes of medicines containing ingredients of Arabic origin, see *Pharmacopoia Reformata* cited above.

36 Arabian incense is made by using frankincense or gum Arabic resin mixed with sweet-smelling essential oils, such as myrrh and oud.

FIGURE 4.4 *Telling Fortune in Coffee-Grounds* [graphic].
PUBLISHED BY ROBERT SAYER, LONDON, 1790

FIGURE 4.5 James Gillray, *La belle assemblée* [graphic]. Etching with stipple on laid paper.
PUBLISHED BY H. HUMPHREY, LONDON, 1787

The stereotypical representation of the Arabian Peninsula as a bearer of many "riches," a surprising descriptor given the bareness of most of the area, is likely to have originated from the trade in "Turquoises and Pearls,"[37] as well as ivory, gold, cornelian, and other valuables which were trafficked by the Arab merchants during the time. As mentioned in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, the place abounded in "raisins, dates, *gold, ivory*, and slaves" [emphasis added] which the Arabs bartered "for small cloths of diverse sorts and colours."[38] In turn, Mair mentions that "[i]n their seas are found coral, pearl, and a species of cornelian which is much esteemed, because it is easy to be engraved upon."[39] Pearls were harvested in an area extending from the present-day coastal Saudi Arabia to Dubai, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar. The Bahrain pearl market was the most important in the region, followed in the second half of the century by new centers in Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, and Zubara.[40] In his *Travels through Arabia*, Niebuhr mentions that Kuwaitis were making a living from the fishery of pearls, for which they employed "more than eight hundred boats,"[41] while Bahrain had "the best pearls"[42] in the Persian Gulf. Similarly, Beawes remarks that pearl fishery in the Persian Gulf island of Barbarem "produces at least a Million [pearls] yearly," many of them of "a Large Size … even to a Weight of fifty Grains."[43] In *Nature Display'd* (1763), Noël Antoine Pluche mentions "the Gold of Arabia" and "the Pearls of Katif"[44] as identifiers of the place while in *Geographical Dictionary* (1800) Clement Cruttwell indicates that Arabia had "the best coral and pearls" in the world.[45] The use of pearls for adornment was widespread at both the Asian and Western European courts, bearing connotations of nobility, purity, wealth, and exoticism, as often seen in the visual culture of the time (figs. 4.6 and 4.7).

Camels and Arabian horses are other emblematic things customarily associated with the place.[46] Johnson mentions the camel as a representative animal of the place in his *Dictionary* and, in *The Prince of Abissinia* (1759), he remarks that the Arabs' "only wealth is their flocks and herds."[47] "The camel is in Arabia … a beast of burden, that helps to carry off its spices," explains Addison through the voice of Philander, who goes on to cite Dryden's lines about "the tir'd camel's back," carrying "pepper and Sabaean incense."[48] According to Mair's account, "camels, which are very numerous, are of singular use for

37 Beawes, *Lex Mercatoria Rediviva,* 792.

38 *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 620.

39 Mair, *A Compendious Geographical and Historical Grammar*, 42.

40 By the beginning of the nineteenth-century, the Gulf area became the major global supplier of natural pearls. The high quality "Oriental" pearls were much sought-after by the great jewelry houses of Europe. For details, see Robert Carter, "The History and Prehistory of Pearling in the Persian Gulf," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48, no. 2 (2005): 139–209, and *Sea of Pearls: Arabia, Persia, and the Industry That Shaped the Gulf* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2012), 109–40.

41 Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia*, 2:127.

42 Ibid., 2:152.

43 Beawes, *Lex Mercatoria Rediviva,* 792.

44 Noël Antoine Pluche, *Spectacle de la nature; or, Nature Display'd* (London: Printed for R. Francklin et al., 1763), 6:53.

45 Clement Cruttwell, *The New Universal Gazetteer;* Or, *Geographical Dictionary: Containing a Description of All the Empires, Kingdoms, States, Provinces, Cities, Towns, Forts, Seas, Harbours, Rivers, Lakes, Mountains, and Capes; the Extent, Boundaries, and Natural Productions of Each Country; the Trade, Manufactures, and Curiosities of the Cities and Towns, Collected from the Best Authors; Their Longitude, Latitude, Bearings, and Distances Ascertained by Actual Measurement, on the Most Authentic Charts. Together with an Atlas, Containing Twenty-Six Whole-sheet Maps* (Dublin: Printed and Sold by John Stockdale, 1800), 28.

46 Johnson, *A Dictionary of English Language*, 1:n.p. Johnson also mentions "cilicious," "a garment of camel's hair; that is, made of some texture of that hair, a coarse garment … suitable to the austerity of [an Arab's] life."

47 Samuel Johnson, *The Prince of Abissinia. A Tale. In Two Volumes* (London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley, 1759), 1:63.

48 Joseph Addison, *Dialogues upon the Usefulness of Ancient Medals, Especially in Relation to the Latin and Greek Poets* (Glasgow: Printed by R. Urif, 1751), 167.

FIGURE 4.6 Phillip Dawe, *The Beauty Unmask'd* [graphic]. Mezzotint, hand-colored.
PRINTED FOR CARINGTON BOWLES, LONDON, 1770

FIGURE 4.7 *The Female Florist's* [graphic]. Mezzotint, hand-colored.
PRINTED FOR ROBERT SAYER, LONDON, 1773

carriage, especially for the caravans," and "seem to be formed by Providence in a more special manner for the sultry and dry soil of Arabia where no water is to be found in a journey of several days over the sandy desarts [*sic*]."[49] These comments echo other accounts of the time that detail the multifarious use of Arabia's camel, such as *The Wonderful Magazine,* a weekly entertainer, which reports: "[t]he milk of the camel nourishes the family of the Arab under the varied forms of curd, cheese, and butter; and they often feed upon his flesh. Slippers and harness are made of his skin; tents and cloathing of his hair."[50] Similarly, Gibbon describes the camel as "strong and patient," and "capable of performing, without eating or drinking, a journey of several days." Moreover, "almost every part, alive or dead, is serviceable to man. The milk is plentiful and nutritious; the young and tender flesh has the taste of veal; a valuable salt is extracted from the urine; the dung supplies the deficiency of fuel; and the long hair, which falls each year, and is renewed, is coarsely manufactured into the garments, the furniture, and the tents of the Bedweens."[51] The beast's thingness is, thus, suggestively emphasized by its description as a collection of parts, each of them fulfilling a particular function for the subject, and supports its fundamental role in the life of the Beduin population. As regards the Arabian horses, they were wide-

49 Mair, *A Compendious Geographical and Historical Grammar*, 42.

50 *The New Wonderful Magazine, and Marvellous Chronicle: Or, New Weekly Entertainer. A Work Recording Authentic Accounts of the Most Extraordinary Productions, Events, and Occurrences, in Providence, Nature, and Art* (London: Printed for the Proprietors, 1794), 5:16.

51 *Gibbon's History,* 2:250–52.

ly acknowledged as "the best in the world,"[52] being "much admired"[53] by locals and travelers alike. According to Gibbon, "[t]he Bedweens preserve, with superstitious care, the breed and pedigree of the horse" whose original country of origin is Arabia.[54] As mentioned in *The World Displayed* (1795–1796), a selection of travel narratives by several hands, "[t]he Portuguese … get supplies of rice here … and bring back in return *horses*, dates, pearls and other merchandise of the produce of Arabia"[55] [emphasis added]. As the eighteenth-century horse breeder Richard Wall explains, the Yemeni horses "are often sold for four hundred and some of the finest of them for five hundred guineas a horse" to Persian and Indian nobility.[56] First brought to England for breeding during the eighteenth century, Arabian horses were much valued for their beauty, noble bearing, resilience, and speed.[57] Such accounts suggestively illustrate various aspects of the everyday life of the local populations, their intense commerce with the rest of the world, and the important identification of product and place ("Arabian" or "Yemeni" horses) when the former is imbued with extraordinary value.

Among other things typically associated with the Arabian Peninsula, one can recognize the gilded slippers, the turban, the veil, the long gowns, the *hookah*, and the tobacco. A spicy footnote to the "Original Dedication" to *The Tatler* tells the story of the second son of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Edward, who "became so enamored of the dress and manners of Arabia" that "he sat in his … dress, squat, after the eastern fashion, to regale himself with smoaking [*sic*] tobacco and drinking coffee," leaving upon his sudden death "several widows behind him."[58] In his *Travels*, Niebuhr mentions the Arabs' fondness for coffeehouses where they "maintain a profound silence … [and] prefer conversing with their pipe."[59] He also provides details on the "beautiful simplicity of the eastern dress,"[60] and explains that the veil is "the most important piece" of Arab women's clothing, as "their chief care is always to hide their face."[61] Although their modesty prevents them from revealing themselves, Arab women are very fond of adornments, which include earrings, ankle and arm bracelets, and bells, and they "paint their hands yellow, and their nails red, fancying these whimsical colourings irresistible charms."[62] Niebuhr's *Travels* is an early source that documents the use of henna as a means of embellishing the body, a practice with Egyptian origins that is widely spread in the Arabian Peninsula to this day, so it has a clear documentary value. What makes such narratives significant, however, is, first, that they depict less a place than a lifestyle (the more relaxed, more sensual,

52 *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 620.

53 *Geography and History*, 158.

54 *Gibbon's History,* 2:252.

55 *The World Displayed: Or, A Curious Collection of Voyages and Travels, Selected and Compiled from the Writers of All Nations by Smart, Goldsmith, & Johnson* (Philadelphia: Published by Dobelbower, Key, and Simpson, 1795–1796), 4:147.

56 Richard Wall, *A Dissertation on Breeding of Horses, upon Philosophical and Experimental Principles; Being an Attempt to Promote Thereby an Improvement in the Present Manner of Breeding Racers, and Horses in General. Also Some Material Observations upon Those Sorts of Foreign Horses, Which Are Adapted to Racing; Particularly Those of the Kingdom of Yemine, in Arabia Fœlix, or South Arabia. Also Those of Arabia Petrea, or North Arabia. And Likewise Those of Barbary, Turky, and Ethiopia. In a Letter to a Friend* (London: Printed for G. Woodfall, 1760?), 75.

57 During the eighteenth century, the Darley Arabian, Byerly Turk, and Godolphin Arabian, which were the three foundation stallions of the modern Thoroughbred breed, were brought to England for the first time. For details, see Rosemary Archer, *The Arabian Horse* (London: J.A. Allen, 1992), 104–09.

58 *The Tatler* (London: Printed by Rivington, Marshall and Bye, 1789), 2: iii-iv. The scene, although located in "Arabia," actually took place in Turkey, a place visited by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Her travel accounts were immensely popular during the eighteenth century.

59 Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia*, 1:126.

60 Ibid., 1:24.

61 Ibid., 1:118.

62 Ibid., 1:118–19.

and more contemplative, "Eastern" approach to life), and, second, that they conflate under the term "Arabia" or "Arab" various fashions, establishments, or customs belonging to areas extending from Egypt to Turkey and everything in between. The "Arabian" things speak, in other words, of the complex entanglement of multiple cultures in the identity formation of "Arabia" by an eighteenth-century subject.

Such accounts, most of which originated from travelers and traders coming in direct contact with the local populations, offer more or less accurate descriptions of the Eastern things and of the customs associated with them which, as we will see, compete with alternative, fictional narratives about the place. Interestingly, the inaccuracies one may find in such accounts—such as certain commodities originating from Arabia—are in most cases self-generated by the local merchants, who exaggerated the difficulties or dangers they encountered in acquiring these products in order to increase their sale value. This practice is discussed by Beawes in relation to some "Arabian" spices, such as cassia or cinnamon, about which "Arab merchants invented fables or pretended difficulties" in procuring them, "which made all Antiquity believe that these Spices or Aromatics were scarce and only to be found in Arabia."[63] Whether using correct descriptors of the place, such as "immense sands,"[64] caravans, palm trees, camels, and dates or, on the contrary, inaccurate attributions, such as exotic animals, spices, fruits, and precious metals, these accounts depict the things of the trade and the things of the imagination as intersecting, again and again, on ideas of wealth, danger, and exoticism.

2 Orientalizing Arabia: Mistaken Identity

One of the main difficulties encountered by scholars involved in the study of the Arabian culture in general, and of the Arabian culture of the eighteenth century in particular, is what Janice J. Terry called "mistaken identity":[65] the proliferation of fallacious representations of the Middle East that often involve blurry spatial identifications. Indeed, there is a lot of uncertainty of what an "Arab" and, through extension, what an "Arabic" or "Arabian" denomination encompass, both historically and geographically. Many eighteenth-century accounts use "Arabian" as an umbrella term for cultures that have little to do with the Arabian Peninsula or with Arabs themselves. At the time, the term "Arabian" was quite capacious and included, undistinguishably, "Arabian Persians," Syrians, Ottomans, Egyptians, and a whole host of Muslim populations from northern Africa and the Far East. This mistaken attribution has several reasons. First, many eighteenth-century accounts use the language and the religion of the populations in these areas as stronger identifiers than their geographical location, which was quite fluid at the time; in this sense, an "Arab" is a speaker of Arabic or a believer in Islam. The complicated history of the area and the spread of the Arabic language through the Arab conquests of the seventh and eight centuries to regions extending from the confines of Tartary and India to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean also plays an important role in this misattribution. To complicate things even more, although the Turkish governance in the Arabian Peninsula had ceased in the seventeenth century and the control of the region reverted to its Bedouin chiefs,[66] local identities were still in flux,

63 Beawes, *Lex Mercatoria Rediviva*, 15.

64 *Geography and History*, 158.

65 Janice J. Terry, *Mistaken Identity: Arab Stereotypes in Popular Writing* (Washington: American-Arab Affairs Council, 1985), 8.

66 In 1663, the Ottoman governor of Al Hassa in the Arabian Peninsula was overthrown and a reform movement headed by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab of Najd started. He entered an alliance with Muhammad ibn Sa'ud and participated in several raids in Iraq. The Sa'uds then made inroads into Oman, Muscat, Bahrain, the southern Persian coast, and East Africa and eventually signed a treaty with the British East India Company (1798) to counter the growing threat of the Wahhabis.

Arabs from the Peninsula being often perceived as being under the influence of the Ottoman Empire. Finally, another reason for this misattribution is cultural: it lies in the power of a text inadvertently translated in England as *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*. This Grub Street translation of Galland's translation of *One Thousand and One Nights* was an instant success, being insistently republished, pirated, enlarged, adapted, and reimagined throughout the century.[67] However, although coined "Arabian," the collection contained very few tales that were actually Arabic in origin. *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* is a composite collection of stories with roots in India, Persia, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, and even China (as is the case of Aladdin's famous tale), which clearly reflect the folklore of their place of origin. Little of this complicated history of the manuscript used for this translation was known at the time,[68] hence the subsequent emergence and solidifying of false stereotypes about "Arabs" and all things "Arabian."

Many of the stereotypes emerging from *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* rely on very specific things that consistently suggest excess, beauty, wealth, luxury, and magic. The beauty of a woman, for instance, is enhanced by her wearing "flower'd Satin … with Pendants in her Ears, a Necklace of large Pearl, and Bracelets of Gold, garnished with Rubies."[69] The "great Halls" of the Sultan's palace are "hung with Silk Tapestry, the Alcoves and Sofas [a]re covered with Stuffs of Mecca, and the Porches with the richest Stuffs of the Indies, mixed with Gold and Silver."[70] The "admirable Saloon" where Scheherazade tells her stories has "a great fountain" in the middle, "with a lion of massy Gold at each corner: Water issued at the mouths of the four Lions and this Water … form'd Diamonds and Pearls."[71] A case "cover'd with yellow Satin, richly embroidered with Gold, and green Silk"[72] is used to shelter a lute used to accompany a lover's song. Opening the "fatal Door" to a forbidden chamber, Dinarzade steps on a pavement "strew'd over with Saffron," discovers "several candlesticks of massy Gold, with lighted Tapers that smell'd of Aloes and Ambergreese," sees "Lamps of Gold and Silver that burnt with Oil made of several sorts of sweet scented Materials,"[73] and then is kidnapped by a winged horse. During his voyages, Sinbad is presented with such rarities as "Aloes, Sanders, Camphire, Nutmegs, Cloves, Pepper and Ginger,"[74] walks through a valley "strew'd with Diamonds … of a surprising bigness" which is guarded by serpents "so long that the least of

The Ottomans regained control of the Arabian Peninsula in the nineteenth century but their suzerainty was mainly nominal. Arabia was freed from Ottoman control in 1918. See Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), esp. 315–19.

67 Some of the works inspired by *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* include: Richard Johnson, *The Oriental Moralist or the Beauties of the "Arabian Nights Entertainments,"* trans. Rev. Mr. Cooper (London: Printed for E. Newbery, 1790?); *Arabian Tales. Being a Continuation of the "Arabian Nights Entertainments." Consisting of One Thousand and One Stories, Told by the Sultaness of the Indies, to Divert the Sultan from the Execution of a Bloody Vow He Had Made, to Marry a Lady Every Day, and Have Her Cut off Next Morning, to Avenge Himself for the Disloyalty of His First Sultaness…* (Edinburgh: Printed for G. Mudie et al., 1792); and William Bond, *The Fortunate and Unfortunate Lovers; or, The Histories of Dorastus and Fawnia, Hero and Leander, or, New Arabian Tales* (Dublin: Printed by W. Jones, 1793).

68 For a detailed history of the origins of this book, see Robert Irwin, "The Book without Authors," in *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2005), 43–62.

69 I use here the 12-volume edition of *Arabian Nights' Entertainments: Consisting of One Thousand and One Stories. Told by the Sultaness of the Indies, to Divert the Sultan from the Execution of a Bloody Vow He Had Made to Marry a Lady Every Day, and Have Her Cut off Next Morning, to Avenge Himself for the Disloyalty of His First Sultaness…*, 7th ed. (Dublin: Printed by S. Powell et al., 1728), 1:66.

70 Ibid., 1:63.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 2:14.

73 Ibid., 2:84.

74 Ibid., 3:119.

them was capable of swallowing an Elephant,"[75] and encounters Roc, a "bird of a monstrous size."[76] King Saleh's purse is filled with "three hundred Diamonds, as large as Pigeons' eggs; a like Number of Rubies, of extraordinary Size; as many Emerald Wands of half a foot long; and with thirty Strings of Necklaces of Pearl, consisting each of ten pieces."[77] When rubbed by its owner, Aladdin's magic lamp releases "a hideous Genie of a gygantick Size"[78] that fulfills all his wishes (fig. 4.8). A Dervish lights a fire and casts in it a magic perfume that opens the doors to a magnificent Palace "built in the hollow of a Rock"[79] and hiding an inconceivable treasure. The Prince of Samaria has a "white horse who had a Gold Bit and Shoes, his Hoofing was of Blew Sattin, embroder'd with Pearls; the Hilt of his Cimiter was of one entire diamond, and the Scabbard of Sandal-Wood, all adorn'd with Emerauds and Rubies."[80] Princess Neuronnibar is courted with such rarities as a tapestry that may transport the holder in an instant "wherever he desires to be," an "Ivory Prospective Glass," and an "artificial Apple."[81]

A few conclusions can be drawn from this quick sampling of the things that fill the pages of the *Arabian Nights*. First, when juxtaposed to the bareness of Arabia described by many of the travel narratives of the time, the things that make this phantasmatic Arabia have an obvious magical quality. As Bill Brown correctly put it, "[w]e begin to confront the thingness of objects when they *stop* working for us; when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the window gets filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been

FIGURE 4.8 *The Bottle Imp*. Lewis Walpole Library's Collection of Eighteenth-Century Theatrical Prints.

arrested, however momentarily"[82] [emphasis added]. In the case of the Arabian things, however, this thingness becomes evident when the things *start* working for us in a way that exceeds their normal abilities to perform. Magic becomes, thus, a way of accessing an *other* place, one in which "the virtues of things" are united "through the application of them one to the other."[83] Within this fictional realm, the things of "Arabia" gain an agency of their own: perfumes split mountains in two, lamps fulfill a subject's wishes, horses can fly, and

75 Ibid., 3:122.
76 Ibid., 3: 121.
77 Ibid., 7:85.
78 Ibid., 9:300.
79 Ibid., 10:83.
80 Ibid., 8:197.
81 Ibid., 12:206–16.

82 Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 3.
83 Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy or Magic* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), 35.

FIGURE 4.9 Isaac Cruikshank, *The Gallery of Fashion* [graphic]. Etching on wove paper, hand-colored. PUBLISHED BY S.W. FORES, LONDON, 1796

tapestries have transporting qualities. At other times, the extraordinariness of these objects is enhanced by the soft music and faded lights that blur their contours, placing them somewhere between reality and fantasy—a realm of magical materialism which, although strikingly different from that of European rationalism, bears, nevertheless, positive connotations of desirability, curiosity, and imaginative gratification.

Following this translation, Orientalist narratives started to proliferate and supernatural things of Oriental origin entered the theater, opera, pantomime, and, later in the century, children's literature, being absorbed in the Western culture for their ability to expand the limits of one's imagination and because, simply put, magic sells. Such things became part of an Orientalist narrative whose fantasy is, indeed, a form of desire, but not necessarily one for conquest and appropriation: rare or supernatural things are but a way of filling the spaces of the Near East with things of the imagination that make the unknown knowable and fuel dreams of power unbound by one's limited human abilities.

Within this narrative, tropes of affluence, pleasure, and excess are repeatedly employed, aggrandizing the place and enveloping it in an aura of danger and adventure whose attraction is impossible to resist. However, the things that describe Arabia stand out not only for their excessive size or number but also for their exquisite quality, beauty, and power. Gold, silver, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and pearls become the raw material of everyday life, giving ordinary things an extraordinary expression

FIGURE 4.10 James Gillray, *High Change in Bond Street; ou la politesse du grande monde* [graphic]. Etching on wove paper, hand-colored.
PUBLISHED BY H. HUMPHREY, LONDON, 1796

meant to bewilder the viewer. Satins, silks, ivory, gigantic eggs, and "artificial" apples describe, in fact, the things of the trade: expensive and rare fabrics, on the one hand, strange collectibles and exotica, on the other. Lavish dresses and embellishments become insignia of wealth, power, and nonconformity, of a way of life outside the economic constraints of the Western civilization. Interestingly, such projections were internalized by eighteenth-century British subjects in the fashionable "Turquerie" that allowed the wearers to display their wealth by wearing Oriental dress, turbans, ostrich plumes, long capes, veils, and flattering shalvars (figs. 4.9 and 4.10). Another infusion of Orientalism in the West, the tradition of painting European figures in Middle Eastern dress, becomes a form of cultural cross-dressing meant to suggest misuse of power or excessive wealth (fig. 4.11). Such cultural imports are difficult to be understood, to use Said's qualification, as expressions of the Occident's cultural "antipathy"[84] toward the Orient; rather, they reflect the West's attraction to a space that connotes difference understood as extraordinariness rather than inferiority.

Besides their connotations of magic, exoticism, and wealth, the things in the *Arabian Nights* are also rich bearers of cultural information: as Marina Warner correctly pointed out, "stories are lodged in goods"[85] and as such, they expand the reader's

84 Said, *Orientalism*, 260.

85 Marina Warner, introduction to *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the* Arabian Nights (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011), 8.

FIGURE 4.11 A. Birrell, *Sir Robert Shirley* [graphic]. Engraving on wove paper.
PUBLISHED BY EDWARD HARDING, LONDON, 1799

knowledge about remote civilizations. There is an obvious cultural coincidence, for instance, between carpet-making and storytelling among nomadic peoples, which these stories convey through their intricate plot development. They also tell fascinating stories about the the traffic in diamonds, gold, and spices between the Indies, China, Arabia, and Western Europe that still wait to be unveiled. Rather than looking at the things of the *Nights* as colorful details in Sheherazade's tales or protagonists in the fantastic stories they make for themselves, we could explore, instead, their role as as bearers of cultural knowledge *unintentionally* embedded in the fabric of the text. In such a reading, "historically and theoretically overdetermined material charactersitics of objects are sought out beyond the immediate context in which they appear"[86] in order to defetishize them and expose the power structures in which they are involved.

Thus, as Makdisi and Nussbaum sum up in their introduction to The Arabian Nights *in Historical Context: Between East and West*, "the *Nights* offered a particularly powerful vision of an Asiatic culture seemingly saturated with references to sensuality, extravagance, indulgence, violence, supernaturalism, and eroticism … [and] added a supernatural dimension to the Enlightenment; the tales offered an avenue into modernity through its magical opposite, an alternative to European identity, and an antidote to neoclassicism."[87] However, reading such imports as an expression of European powers' disavowal of the East in order to "justify their conquest and rule over other peoples, particularly in Asia,"[88] is an oversimplification of a rather complicated process of cultural exchange. None of these descriptions of Arabia were caused by colonial "distortions," as Said feared, but by false attributions: "Arabian" was a misnomer that rarely described Arabia itself. While fictional narratives like *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* represented Arabia as a land of magic and exorbitant riches, they were too far-fetched to be part of a Westerner's belief system during the Age of Reason; rather, they were popularized because their wild fictionality turned them into bestsellers at the time. Such stories competed with descriptions of the Arabian Peninsula by travelers and traders who had visited the area and had unmediated contact with the local culture. However, while the Orientalist literature described Arabia in terms that emphasized its exoticism, magic, superstitions, extravagance, wealth, eroticism, excess, and myriads of other peculiarities that contrasted it with the European normativity, travel narratives created an "Arabian" identity that was generally congruent with the reality of the place.

86 Elaine Freedgood, "Introduction: Reading Things," in *The Idea in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 5–6.

87 Makdisi and Nussbaum, introduction to The Arabian Nights *in Historical Context*, 5.

88 Ibid.

3 Arabian Stereotypes

Arabia's box of wonders contains things that create a mental picture of the place with highly distinctive characteristics. The stereotypes associated with the Arabian Peninsula during the eighteenth century generated from merchants and travelers who documented their trips to the dangerous deserts of Arabia, and were recycled in the instructional, entertaining, and literary productions of the time in ways that subtly altered the stereotype to reflect the authors' intentions. Arabia's things range from spatial landmarks (deserts, sands, oases, palm trees) to commodities (spices, perfumes, coffee, dates, tobacco, pearls, ivory, gold) to animals (camels, horses, goats, sheep) to slaves.[89] They describe a space both hostile and alluring, barren and fertile, poor and lavish, deserted and extravagant. Its undisputable exoticism is a play of contraries that simultaneously signify danger and heavenly bliss. In this landscape, the source of a thing's value is, as Georg Simmel correctly put it, not the productive labor, but the subject's desire.[90] Depending on who writes the account, the object reflects a variety of projections meant to highlight its commercial value, exoticism, luxury status, or fictional power. The things of Arabia circulate outside their place of origin on commercial routes that enrich the Western world but at the same time bear with them narratives of affluence, danger, and desire whose traces can still be found in our culture today.

In "The Other Question. Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," Homi Bhabha defines the stereotype though a postcolonial lens as part of "an apparatus of power which contains an *other* knowledge," "an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference, constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject."[91] Here, Bhabha calls attention to the inherent ambivalence of the colonial stereotype, which encapsulates various racial, cultural, and historical differences: "rather than a false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices," the stereotype is a text of "projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt, aggresivity; the masking and splitting of 'official' and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse."[92] What is left, concludes Bhabha by quoting one of Fanon's memorable sententia, is "on the one hand a culture in which qualities of dynamism, of growth, of depth can be recognized" and, on the other hand, colonial cultures in which "we find characteristics, curiosities, *things* [emphasis added], never a structure."[93]

Such qualifications should give us pause. As simplified "pictures in our head," stereotypes involve a process of selection that places objects and events into conceptual categories to help us navigate an object- and subject-packed reality. They are part of a normal cognitive process that requires simplification, categorization, intuitive thinking, and indiscriminate adoption of "what our culture has already defined for us."[94] As such, they fulfil three fundamental human needs: the need to be efficient, promote feelings of self-worth, and justify the social structure.[95] Through processes of *anchoring* (classifying the unfamiliar in terms of what is known) and *objectification* (processing

89 For references to "Christian slaves," see *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 509, 620, et alia.

90 *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 37.

91 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 75.

92 Ibid., 34.

93 Ibid., 84. Bhabha cites here from Frantz Fanon's speech, "Racism and Culture," published in *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (London: Pelican, 1970), 44.

94 Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 55.

95 Steven J. Sherman, Jeffrey W. Sherman, Elise J. Percy, and Courtney K. Soderberg, "Stereotype Development and Formation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Cognition*, ed. Donald E. Carlston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 564.

ideas about places or individuals into an "objective," socially-constructed reality),[96] stereotypes help us create social identities based on existing knowledge and involve comparison, contrast, and interpretation. So, are they, indeed, inaccurate, or distorted views of reality? When we think about "Arabia," just like Johnson did, as a "sandy desert" crossed by caravans, is this mental picture a bearer of slanted cultural representations? Is Alexander Pope's description of Arabia in terms of its perfumes, or the recurrent mention of its spices, coffee, sweets, or aromatic tobacco in travelers' reports or in the eighteenth-century literary imagination a symptom of a culturally-constructed superiority complex? Are "the women dressed in *haiks*, the palm groves and the camels" just "the natural backdrop" of the civilizing West, as Fanon described them?[97]

I fear that such interpretations stereotype the stereotype even more. They simplify a rather complicated cognitive process of cultural representation and, even worse, read the stereotype as necessarily distorted, rigid, biased, divisive, and politically incorrect. Of course, such approaches may make sense in postcolonial readings of the non-European *other* as not only different but *less* than his or her European counterpart, and *lesser* in a racially-, ethnically- or culturally-constructed hierarchy. Such representations, however, do not work well when qualifying the West's depictions of the Arabs or Arabia, as this chapter extensively illustrates: during the eighteenth century, the stereotypes associated with the area contained strong tropes of desirability, adventure, and wealth rather than subjectification and scapegoating. The "consensual universe," or socially-constructed image of "Arabia" that these stereotypes depict aligns well with the "reified universe" of positivist knowledge[98] when stereotypes focus on the things that stand for the place—that is, "when the criteria [a]re objective"[99]—and not on conflicting ideologies. While some stereotypes may bear negative connotations, not all of them do, and they all have some degree of accuracy.[100]

But Bhabha's definition of *otherness* as "at once an object of desire *and* derision"[101] [emphasis added] is highly significant not only for its implications of racial and cultural marginalization but also because it refers to *the other* as *an object* in a way that makes the object an undesirable encapsulation of the subject. I argue, instead, that the things things say matter and that the object's relation with the subject should not necessarily be one of subordination but of mutually informing coexistence. I echo here Latour's defense of the nonhuman actors as indispensable to a correct understanding of the very nature of societies through a network-like ontology.[102] Instead of speculating on the politics of the object, or on its diminished value when compared with a subject, we may better consider the networks of relations—commercial, cultural, emotional—that make the humans and non-humans partners in an expanding, inclusive, nonhierarchical network of relations. In this sense, during the eighteenth century, the things of Arabia participated in an active process of identity

96 Serge Moscovici, "The Phenomenon of Social Representations," in *Social Representations*, ed. Rob M. Farr and Serge Moscovici (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 28–43.

97 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 182.

98 Moscovici, "The Phenomenon of Social Representations," 19–23.

99 Lee J. Jussim, Jarret T. Crawford, Stephanie M. Anglin, John R., Chambers, Sean T. Stevens, and Florette Cohen, "Stereotype Accuracy: One of the Largest and Most Replicable Effects in All of Social Psychology," in *Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination,* ed. Todd D. Nelson (New York: Psychology Press, 2016), 41.

100 For a compelling defense of stereotypes, see also *Stereotype Accuracy: Toward Appreciating Group Differences*, ed. Yueh-Ting Lee, Lee J. Jussim, and Clark R. McCauley (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1995).

101 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 67.

102 Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory," 370.

formation, representing the Arabs to other cultures while circulating outside their place of origin.

By reading a space in terms of its things depoliticizes the discourse and legitimizes the stereotype by shifting attention to its intrinsic accuracy: as social representations, stereotypes "are not a product of a failure to think 'properly,' or a distortion. Rather, they evolve out of the communication within a social group which objectifies and legitimizes the social knowledge of the group."[103] We still think of Arabia in terms of its spices, coffee, or aromatic oils; even more, the Arabs of the Peninsula themselves have internalized Orientalized representations that emphasize the lure and mystery of the place. When visiting Abu Dhabi's Official Visitor Website, for instance, tourists are invited to a "once-in-a-lifetime experience" of pearl journey aboard a pearling *dhow*, where they are "seated on traditional Arabian floor cushions" and enjoy "locally-made Arabic coffee and dates." Alternately, visitors are invited to explore "the desert expanse … [with] high dunes and long sand valleys" outside the Liwa oasis, where they can practice dune bashing, sand skiing, camel riding, and have "a traditional meal under the stars." In the Empty Quarter, "the magnificent Qasr Al Sarab or Mirage Palace is a luxurious oasis in the midst of the desert" whose beauty is reminiscent of "a fairytale from '1001 nights.'"[104] Such things have become, through ongoing processes of cultural and commercial exchange, strong identifiers of the place. In turn, the stereotypes associated with them reflect a form of knowledge that, while embellished or refined during its circulation, is still based on a distant origin of truth. In this case study, the correlation between the beliefs we hold about "Arabia" and the criteria against which we measure them is high because things don't lie. Things describe a subject or a place without bias, disseminate information through their networks of commercial exchange, and shape our cultural imaginary as bearers of distilled truth. By following their trajectories, Arabia will become less different, less alien, and less threatening, and will start to signify, as we all hope, a new thing altogether.

103 Perry R. Hinton, *Stereotypes, Cognition and Culture* (Hove: Psychology Press, 2000), 158.

104 Abu Dhabi's Official Visitor Website for Travel & Tourism Information. *Visitabudhabi.ae*. https://visitabudhabi.ae/ae-en/default.aspx (accessed September 1, 2018).

CHAPTER 5

"Who Will Change New Lamps for Old Ones?": Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp in British and American Children's Entertainment

Jennie MacDonald

On Tuesday, the 20th of April, 1813, the dramatic reviewer for *The Morning Chronicle* reported on the previous night's opening of Theatre Royal Covent Garden's new "Melo-Dramatic Romance" by actor/playwright Charles Farley, *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp*:[1]

"Whoever has read the Arabian Nights Entertainment[2] (and who has not) cannot fail to recollect with pleasure the story of *Aladdin, and the Wonderful Lamp*…. The machinery of the piece, on which all the effect of a tale of enchantment depends, was admirably worked, and seemed tangibly to perform the fabled operations of magic. This was aided by a splendour and magnificence truly oriental, and which threw over the spectacle a most imposing grandeur. The *tout ensemble* was certainly captivating, and it would be difficult for the sternest critic to remain unmoved by the scenes of enchantment passing before his eyes…"[3]

Thanks to the familiarity of the play's origin story, theatrical spectacle presenting a "truly oriental" wonderland of scenery and special effects, and an affecting cast, the reviewer concluded, "[t]he Managers having thus got possession of the *Wonderful Lamp*, it will probably be productive to them of considerable profit." Over the next six weeks, the play was presented thirty nights and consistently revived through to the end of 1815. During subsequent revivals that saw it performed well into the mid-nineteenth century, it found additional life in the booming juvenile drama and its companion industry, the toy theater, and contributed to later nineteenth-century reconceptions of the tale that can still be found in residual form in modern British pantomime. This chapter, therefore, will examine ways in which the Aladdin tale was interpreted for visual consumption in England during the Romantic era, and how an "Arabian" idealized look could be seen in stage costumes, props, and scenery, finding expression in children's public and domestic entertainment in England and America well into the twentieth century.

The 1813 production of *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp* reaches back to the early eighteenth-century translation and publication of the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* in England, comments on its own cultural moment, and anticipates later renditions of the tale. It functions as a *compass rose* event, a term I have borrowed from Paula Findlen: "the global lives of things emerge within and at the interstices between local, regional, and long-distance trading networks. Much like the compass roses on a medieval portolan, networks only exist when a connection is made—no line touches another without a node that creates the

1 The review refers to the play using a slightly different title, *Aladdin, and the Wonderful Lamp*. The play mentioned here is Charles Farley's *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp*, first performed on April 19, 1813 at Covent Garden Theatre but not printed until 1836. John Larpent Plays, LA1766, The Huntington Library.

2 Robert Irwin notes that Jonathan Scott's translation, "the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, which appeared in 1811, was the first literary translation into English of [Antoine] Galland's" early eighteenth-century French compilation of the tales. For "[w]hoever has read the Arabian Nights Entertainments (and who has not)," Scott's recent version may have been familiar. See Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, 2nd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 22.

3 "Covent-Garden Theatre," *The Morning Chronicle*, April 20, 1813, 3.

point of contact which is also the moment of exchange."[4] In the staged play, the lamp is represented by a physical prop supposed to resemble an ancient oil lamp; as a material object, the lamp functions as a node which creates points of contact when transferred from one character to another as a possession. One character's possession of the lamp also indicates its absence from other characters' possession, particularly of those who desire it. When the lamp moves from one character to another, it takes with it wish-fulfilling power, expressed in material objects and wealth. *The Morning Chronicle*'s view of Covent Garden's new play as a "Wonderful Lamp" serves not only as a clever metaphor but also as a way of transforming the production itself into a node, or a magical vessel which, just like Aladdin's lamp, can be transferred through time and space in revivals and adaptations, participating in a network of literature, performance, commodification, and cultural significance. The "Wonderful Lamp" ascription abstracts from literature the idea of Aladdin's lamp being both a socially-resonant symbol and a material object capable of metamorphosing from a lamp as a stage prop to a theatrical production itself.

Long before the Covent Garden production, however, Aladdin's story knew many iterations and participated in other *compass rose* events. As Findlen points out, "[e]ach exchange" of material goods "becomes an opportunity to observe how things metamorphose from one society to another."[5] A multiplicity of exchanges builds a network between cultures through geographical space, like the rhumb lines on a portolan chart, making possible connections through time. As with many other literary tales, subsequent retellings via translation and adaptation to other media resulted in altering and streamlining elements of this early version. Through its adaptation into dramatic form for children in England and America over subsequent decades, *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp* underwent many changes, including simplification of incidents and scenes, as well as conflation, combination, elimination, and addition of characters. In his article, "*A Thousand and One Nights* at the Movies," Robert Irwin notes that "skilled scriptwriters do not merely excise and abridge, they also find ways of saying things visually."[6] Over time, locations, character names, and design elements of Aladdin's story have changed in response to shifting aesthetic, cultural, and political interests. The roles of Aladdin, the lamp, its genie, the magician, and the princess have remained firmly attached to the story, however, as have crucial plotlines concerning how the lamp was obtained, how it was stolen, its recovery, and the riches it bestows as a wish-fulfilling device.

In *Representing China on the Historical London Stage: From Orientalism to Intercultural Performance*, Dongshin Chang extends Edward Said's concept of Orientalism,[7] which focused on European, British, and American socio-political constructions of Arabic and Islamic cultures, and examines the incorporation of Chinese elements in British Orientalist theatrical productions.[8] The epilogue traces the developments of Aladdin's story as a vehicle for expressing "the evolving, *interculturated* depictions of China as a feminized and material attraction," from early British theatrical renderings of plays set in Chinese locations to modern British pantomime, or "panto" versions. Given the nominal and visual flourishes presented in the 1813 Covent Garden production of *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp* and the toy theater versions it engendered, assigning a Chinese cultural identity to the play is tempting. As Chang points

4 Paula Findlen, "Afterword: How (Early Modern) Things Travel," in *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World*, ed. Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 244.

5 Ibid.

6 Robert Irwin, "*A Thousand and One Nights* at the Movies," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 7, no. 2 (2004): 224.

7 See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1994).

8 Dongshin Chang, *Representing China on the Historical London Stage: From Orientalism to Intercultural Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 1.

out, however, "the lack of translated Chinese dramatic texts, and the associated lack of understanding of Chinese theatre" in early nineteenth-century Britain, "resulted in a situation in which British theatre practitioners could not have drawn on Chinese dramatic literature and aesthetic principles for textual and conceptual inspiration even if they had wanted to."[9] Concerning today's now-traditional "Chinesely British" pantos adumbrated by Farley's early play, Chang finds "[most] notable" the "interculturalization of [the tale's] Chinese locale with characters in Muslim names, which creates an impossible Oriental setting that clearly demonstrates the tale's fictitiousness."[10] In the present discussion, Chang's terms, "interculturalize" ("the act of creating a relationship between elements that belong to disparate cultures"[11]) and "interculturation" ("the ongoing process in which disparate cultural elements are interculturalized over a substantial period of time"[12]) are used in order to encompass myriad geographical locations and references. I have taken a cue from Chang's response to Said's *Orientalism* to extend Chang's notion of interculturalizing to consider the multifaceted and culturally-blurring effect of combining elements from multiple cultures in the creative industries involved in handing down Aladdin's story to nineteenth- and twentieth-century children. Such performances combined British and American conceptions of the fantastic not only with Chinese elements but also with Arabic, Ottoman, Indian, Persian, Egyptian, and northern African elements. Chang's term "Chinaface" ("the creative choice to represent China on a visual, formal level as opposed to a textual, conceptual level"[13]) is here broadened to "Orientalized look" to discuss multiple cultural influences observable in character prints and toy theater sheets depicting *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp.*

In the cultural transmission of Aladdin's story from its introduction as a lesser tale in a compendium of Arabian folklore to the Western cultures of Great Britain and America, its central object, Aladdin's wonderful lamp, with its power of wish-fulfillment, has played a key role in making the story an attractive property for children's dramatic entertainment from the early Romantic era to the twentieth century.[14] In this process, the tale was represented in ways that gestured at authenticity but promoted an exotic and magical image of an interculturalized "Arabia" which drew upon disparate aesthetic and cultural practices and had little to do with a specific, geographically identifiable place.

1 Aladdin's Lamp in the West: Eighteenth-Century Translations and Early Dramatic Adaptations

The French scholar and archeologist Antoine Galland (1646–1715) is the central figure responsible for introducing the remarkable folktales of medieval Arabia, northern Africa, India, and adjacent regions to the West. Based on a fourteenth-century Syrian manuscript, *Alf Layla Wa-Layla* (*One Thousand Nights and One Night*), and supplemented by nine additional tales, Galland's translation, *Les mille et une nuits* (*One Thousand and One Nights*), appeared in twelve volumes published in Paris over the period 1704–1717. The first part of "L'histoire d'Aladdin, ou la lampe merveilleuse" appeared at the end of volume nine, with the conclusion at the beginning of volume ten. Traditionally referred to as an "orphan tale," along with "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," "The Story of Sindbad the Sailor," and several others, "Aladdin; or, The

9 Ibid., 10.
10 Ibid., 182.
11 Ibid., 2.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.

14 For more on the development of the tale in English pantomime, see Chang and also Millie Taylor, "Continuity and Transformation in Twentieth-century Pantomime," in *Victorian Pantomime: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Jim Davis (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 185–200.

Wonderful Lamp" was not part of the original Syrian collection. Madeline Dobie indicates Galland's acquaintance "with a Syrian Maronite whom he calls 'Hanna,' and later 'Jen Dippi,'" who "told him a number of beautiful Arab tales … widely presumed to derive from Syrian oral tradition, though the possibility remains open that they were of his own invention."[15] More recently, Paulo Lemos Horta has celebrated the discovery of Hanna Diyab's memoir, "long neglected in the collection of the Vatican Library," and examined elements of Diyab's travels that suggest, if not his own invented contributions to the tales he told to Galland, at least a personal sympathy with Aladdin's struggles that might have prompted him to recount it.[16] The story of Aladdin was one of these tales. Although the first English translation of the book was entitled *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, emphasizing the geographical origin of Scheherazade's tales in Arabia, Aladdin's story is located in China and Africa.

In the tale, the youth Aladdin is a good-for-nothing scamp whose father, Mustapha, dies of despair that his son will ever make something of himself.[17] An African magician, whose forty years of study have pointed him to a magic lamp hidden in a cave near the Chinese city where Aladdin lives, arrives to procure the lamp. He has been warned, though, that it can only be retrieved by an innocent, and he employs Aladdin in this task under the pretense of being the boy's long-lost uncle, brother of his father. Aladdin accompanies his "uncle" to the cave, where the magician outlines a series of intricate instructions on how to retrieve the lamp and gives him a ring for protection. Aladdin descends into the cave and passes through a garden of beautiful trees hanging with fruit made of jewels. Upon a terrace-walk, the magician instructs him: "you will see a niche before you, and in that niche a lighted lamp. Take the lamp down and put it out; and when you have thrown away the wick, and poured out the liquor, put it in your breast, and bring it to me."[18] When Aladdin attempts to exit the cave, his pockets full of jewels weigh him down and he is unable to give the lamp to the magician, who pushes him back down, causing him to be trapped in the cave. When Aladdin asks to be released from the cave, the genie of the ring appears and grants his wish. After returning to his widowed mother, Aladdin expresses an interest in the sultan's daughter, Princess Badroulboudour, although she is supposed to be marrying the son of her father's vizier. Aladdin's mother is the one who first rubs the lamp, releasing its genie.[19] Aladdin asks the genie for wealth and a magnificent

15 Madeline Dobie, "Translation in the Contact Zone: Antoine Galland's *Mille et une nuits: contes arabes*," in The Arabian Nights *in Historical Context: Between East and West*, ed. Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 35.

16 Paulo Lemos Horta, introduction to *Aladdin: A New Translation*, trans. Yasmine Seale (New York: Liveright, 2019), xi. See also Paulo Lemos Horta, *Marvellous Thieves: Secret Authors of the* Arabian Nights (Cambridge, CT: Harvard University Press, 2017).

17 For the purposes of this discussion, the character names are presented as in the first English translation titled *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* (1706–1712), although spellings varied widely over the subsequent two centuries of adaptations and translations. The princess's name, in particular, was subject to many changes and later replaced with completely different names, which are used when discussing specific adaptations. The Aladdin story title has also been variously rendered for plays, and within individual plays character names had multiple spelling variants, due partly to printing errors and partly to the "exotic" or "foreign" nature of these names.

18 *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, ed. Robert L. Mack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 658.

19 Galland's translation and early dramatic adaptations present several genies of the lamp that seem indistinguishable from one another rather than the single genie of later versions. The magical ring and its genie also disappeared from later versions. Of note is the distinction of the genies' capabilities. The genie of the ring's magic is limited to magically transporting Aladdin from place to place, while the genie(s) of the lamp are able to magically create physical objects for him, as well as move the palace and its inhabitants to and from a faraway country.

palace in order to prove himself a worthy suitor and persuades his mother to convey to the sultan his wish to marry the princess. After thwarting the vizier's son's marriage to the princess, Aladdin is seen to be learning wisdom and generosity, and the two are wed.

The magician, however, has not forgotten the lamp. In the guise of a simple trader, he appears in the street near Aladdin's palace, calling, "Who will change new lamps for old ones?"[20] Aladdin is away hunting, but the princess, thinking it a good joke, tells her servant to bring his old lamp and obtain a new one from the foolish merchant. At last in possession of the lamp, the magician orders its genie to carry away the palace and the princess to a faraway country. Aladdin, however, still has the ring of protection, and its genie magically conveys him to the palace. Once there, Aladdin provides the princess with poison, which she gives to the magician in a cup of wine. Upon the magician's death, the genies of the lamp return the palace to its rightful place where Aladdin and Badroulboudour will live happily ever after.

Following the publication and success of Galland's *Les mille et une nuits*, in a key *compass rose* event and alongside other European translations, an anonymous English translation titled *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, also known as the "Grub Street" edition (1706–1721), soon appeared. British reprints, adaptations, chapbooks, and serializations in newspapers like *Parker's London News* proliferated shortly thereafter, ensuring that the tales of the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* took up residence in eighteenth-century England's popular imagination.[21] Aladdin's lamp and its genie readily served as literary shorthand for wish-fulfillment, as illustrated in Horace Walpole's letter of July 1, 1782, to his long-time friend, George Harcourt: "I did but mention the head [portrait] of Addison—and I found it on my table. I must have Aladdin's lanthorn, without knowing it, and you are certainly one of the *génies* subservient to it, that obey in a twinkling whatever—but no, for once, Mr. Génie, you are mistaken. I not only did not order you to send Addison, but you must transport it back, or I will."[22] Walpole's playful commentary casting Harcourt as a genie of the lamp exemplifies David A. Brewer's notion of "detachability": "the ways in which print and theater … could make a character seem detachable from his originary context and the desire to figure the virtual community which forms around such a character as a network of friends bound together through that character."[23] Not only can the genie function as a "detachable" character who may be portrayed by Walpole's acquaintance, but "Aladdin's lanthorn" also can be "detachable" as an object whose power is summoning and conveying wishes to the genie, who carries out the magic. The term "Aladdin's lamp," more generally, has come to signify the whole of the story, as well as the concept of wish fulfillment. Moreover, as a literarily "detachable" character in possession of a literarily "detachable" object, Aladdin and his magical lamp started a process of constructing "Arabia" in the Western imagination as a place of wonder, exoticism, and transport.[24]

20 Mack, *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 703.

21 See Nicholas Seager, "The Novel's Afterlife in the Newspaper, 1712–50," in *The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, ed. Daniel Cook and Nicholas Seager (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 111–32.

22 Horace Walpole, "To Harcourt, Monday 1 July 1782," in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W.S. Lewis, A. Dayle Wallace, and Robert A. Smity (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 35: 516.

23 David A. Brewer, *The Afterlife of Character, 1726–1825* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 79.

24 A number of nineteenth-century translations arose to supersede the Grub Street edition. These included Jonathan Scott's 1811 literary translation; Edward Lane's expurgated version (1840), which was often repackaged in children's editions; John Payne's *The Book of a Thousand Nights and One Night* (1882); and Sir Richard Francis Burton's *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (1885–1888). Alongside these editions rose an industry in editions specifically for children, which were then adapted into hybrid book toys, such as the Pantomime Toy Books series issued by McLoughlin Bros. in America.

The magical element of the story embodied by Aladdin's lamp made it a welcome and even subversive entrant into the Enlightenment's ardent pursuit of fact, reason, and scientific investigation. As Marina Warner has noted, the popularity of the *Arabian Nights* tales during the Age of Reason was due in large part to their embrace of magic, which "follows processes inherent to human consciousness and connected to constructive and imaginative thought.... At one pole (myth), magic is associated with poetic truth, at another (the history of science) with inquiry and speculation.... Magical thinking structures the processes of imagination, and imagining something can and sometimes must precede the fact or the act; it has shaped many features of Western civilization."[25]

As Romanticism emerged from Enlightenment thinking, the magical quality of Aladdin's lamp also made the story a ready vehicle for the theater in forms that included pantomime, romantic melodrama, and "A Fairy Opera."[26] Leo Hughes notes that the "chief attraction of pantomime from the beginning had of course been scenic display, especially as assisted by 'magic.' It is not surprising, therefore, that at Theatre Royal Covent Garden John O'Keeffe started Aladdin and his 'wonderful lamp' on their long career on the day after Christmas 1788,"[27] a career that would carry them directly into the heart of the emerging market for children's entertainment, where stories infused with magical elements were a welcome and natural fit. Unfortunately, O'Keeffe's version of *Aladin; or, The Wonderful Lamp* survives only in its libretto;[28] however, the libretto indicates an interest in adhering to an "Arabic" setting with "the magic lamp ... hidden in 'Arabia's spice vales,' in 'a valley dark and deep'"[29] rather than setting the scene near Aladdin's home, in a Chinese location. Changing the setting from China to an idealized Arabia rendered in the sensuous and sublime terms of Romanticism imbued the name "Arabia" with qualities of wonder and exoticism, effectively interculturating the theatrical representation of Arabia while also claiming to present an "authentic" view of it as a specifically "Arabian" *Nights' Entertainments*.

Subsequent theatrical iterations also demonstrated a similar interest in affiliating the tale with its "Arabian" literary origin through interculturalized character and place names, cultural references, and theatrically powerful visual signifiers, such as settings and costumes conveying an Orientalized look. To exemplify, a manuscript copy of *Alladin; or, The Wonderful Lamp, a Romantic Drama in Two Acts*, held by the John Larpent Plays collection at the Huntington Library, offers a different version from that of O'Keeffe's and its descendants. Written for the Theatre Royal, Norwich, and licensed on 4 April 1810, *Alladin* is set in "Bagdad" [sic], although Alladin's home is a room decorated

25 Marina Warner, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the* Arabian Nights (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 22–23.

26 Burton comments, "Alaeddin [*sic*] has ever been a favourite with the stage. Early in the present [nineteenth] century it was introduced to the Parisian opera by M. Etienne, to the Feydeau by Théaulon's *La Clochette*; to the Gymnase by *La Petite-Lampe* of MM. Scribe and Melesville, and to the Panorama Dramatique by MM. Merle, Cartouche and Saintine (Gauttier, vii. 380)" (51). For details, see Richard Francis Burton, "Alaeddin; or, the Wonderful Lamp," in *Supplemental Nights to the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night with Notes Anthropological and Explanatory* (London: Privately Printed by the Burton Club, 1887), 3:51–91. For some reason, Burton neglects to mention any nineteenth-century English productions.

27 Leo Hughes, *The Drama's Patrons: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century London Audience* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 160.

28 See John O'Keeffe's *The Recitatives, Airs, Choruses, &c. in Aladin; or, The Wonderful Lamp. A Pantomime Entertainment. Performed at the Theatre-Royal, Covent-Garden. The Music Composed by Mr. Shield*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1788), 8.

29 Chang, *Representing China on the Historical London Stage,* 182.

"in the Turkish Style."[30] Moreover, the Cave of Albumanzor is located "westward of Bagdad" in a "deep Valley surrounded with stupendous Rocks" where the "Lamp of Idmon"[31] is also found. Most character names are generically "Arabic": these include Alladin (spelled either as "Aladin" or "Aladdin"), his mother Zulima, Princess Palmira, Sultan Mahmoud, and the genie and/or fairy Abra.[32] Various Arabian-type officials also appear: an Imam, an Officer of the Divan, Janissaries, and Vizier Usoph and his son, Solim. Several characters make appeals to Allah, but in this confection of Arabian wonder, Romantic sublime, and English fairy tale, it is the Fairy Abra who ultimately restores order and returns the lamp to Alladin.

On the 29th of April, 1826, Drury Lane premiered George Soane's new opera, *Aladdin; or the Wonderful Lamp, A Fairy Opera*, with music by Henry Rowley Bishop. The characters included Aladdin, the Schah of Persia, Mourad (an Enchanter), Zeenab (Aladdin's mother), and Nourmahal (the Schah's sister whom Aladdin marries). Three Genii of the Lamp and one Genius of the Ring carried out the magic. The settings included the city of "Ispahan" (a theatrical invocation of Isfahan, in Iran) and an ambiguous "African desert." As Kristin Tetens comments, "[t]he audience of Bishop's opera is never allowed to forget that the world of Aladdin is an Eastern—specifically a Muslim—world," that is, a "Muslim world" as interpreted by the opera's English author: "[t]he Prophet Muhammed's name is invoked constantly and Allah's protection is sought at every turn."[33] Various other linguistic turns signify "Muslim" speech and concerns, resulting in a dramatic vision of "Arabia" in which religion, alongside magic and exotic visual imagery, contributed to the fanciful and culturally "other" image of the place.

Unlike Soane and Bishop's unfortunate opera,[34] however, revivals of Farley's 1813 grand Romantic spectacle fared far better and introduced new elements that would prove complex and enduring, particularly in the realm of children's entertainment. As a *compass rose* event, its debut showcased and capitalized on an intersection of Romantic sensibilities, a vogue for antiquarianism, and the incalculable "Grimaldi effect" on character physicality, comedy, and pathos.[35] It also anticipated the rise of moral and fantasy stories for children. Part of this production's lasting legacy is due to its participation in an experimental and invaluable record of theatrical history: the juvenile drama (i.e., play scripts for children adapted from stage versions) and its visual adjunct, the toy theater.

2 Aladdin's Lamp and Children's Entertainment in the Romantic Era

As Bridget Orr has observed, "[t]heatrical versions of tales from the *Thousand and One Nights* have

30 *Alladin; or, The Wonderful Lamp, a Romantic Drama in Two Acts*, 4 April 1810, Norwich, John Larpent Plays LA1623, The Huntington Library, 39 (hereafter cited as Norwich MSS).

31 Ibid., 17. The "Lamp of Idmon" probably refers to Greek mythology, where a number of individuals are named "Idmon." A likely source figure is the seer Idmon, or "the knowing one," who accompanied the Argonauts and was Apollo's son.

32 The Enchanter is inexplicably called Olmosnooko, and he is attended by Trombollo (possibly an Italian name), "a discarded Servant of the Genii," who befriends Alladin. Zulima also has a daughter, Pyscho (also spelled "Psycho"), around whom a secondary love story revolves.

33 Kristin Tetens, "Scheherazade on the English Stage: *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* and the Georgian Repertoire," *The Victorian Peeper: Nineteenth-Century Britain through the Looking Glass* (blog), October 1, 2016, http://victorianpeeper.blogspot.com/2015/03/scheherazade-on-english-stage-arabian.html.

34 Despite its ambitious staging and creators' reputations, the opera was poorly received and closed after only ten performances.

35 Joseph Grimaldi (1778–1837) was an English actor whose buoyant and pathetic development of the popular Harlequinade pantomime role of Clown has indelibly marked subsequent portrayals of this ubiquitous character to the present day.

been doubly occluded" from critical assessments of eighteenth-century and Romantic drama because "they were almost exclusively adapted into 'illegitimate' genres of pantomime, burletta, melodrama, spectacle, and romance, modes whose development they were crucial in shaping."[36] These genres, Orr adds, have undergone a fertile transformation today: "Recent scholarship has suggested that, far from being trivial diversions, these extraordinarily successful theatrical forms created peculiarly modern modes of performance and spectatorship whose legacy is the cinema and mass audience of late modernity."[37]

If the adult versions of "illegitimate" drama have been "doubly occluded" from critical inquiry, it might be said that children's versions have been trebly occluded.[38] Apart from classic studies by enthusiasts like George Speaight and A.E. Wilson,[39] scholarly consideration of the juvenile drama, in general, and of the toy theater repertoire, in particular, has been fairly limited and inconsistent due, in part, to their original intended audience of children and critical dismissal of any material goods related to children's literature and entertainment, such as toys and games.

Toy theaters developed in the nineteenth century as adjuncts to the publication of play versions for children's performances and now appear as a kind of hybrid souvenir/coloring book/action figure sort of toy. They have their origins in the popular theatrical prints of the eighteenth century that portrayed actors costumed and posed in roles for which they were best known or were currently playing. William West and John Kilby Green are variously credited with first conceiving of sheets of theatrical characters, faithfully sketched by artists attending these performances. Very quickly, these character sheets started to be accompanied by sheets of scenery (including stage wings) and "tricks" (i.e., magic and special effects), purpose-built miniature theaters, and playbooks abridged from professional scripts. A child—usually a boy—would be given or purchase for himself the sheets one by one or in sets, depending on his available funds. Sheets could be purchased already colored for two pence (two pennies), or plain (uncolored) for one penny. The child would paint with watercolors the figures and scenes, and then paste them to "card" (cardstock) and cut them out with a pen knife. A performance for family and friends would follow sometimes, with the child attempting to enact the characters, read the script, move characters about onstage, change the scenery, and carry out the special effects. This was often fraught with disaster and disappointment, and many children opted for the intricate and hard-won joy of decorating the sheets. For modern researchers, these ephemeral versions offer a visual history of the professional productions they were copied from, an insight into theatrical adaptation, and a view of childhood and "children's commodity culture—their books, their games, their theater—that has enabled the popular culture of early modern Britain to survive today at all."[40]

The 1813 production of *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp* prompted the production of at least two

36 Bridget Orr, "Galland, Georgian Theatre, and the Creation of Popular Orientalism," in The Arabian Nights *in Historical Context*, ed. Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 103.

37 Ibid.

38 This is changing, however, with recent contributions to the history of children's literature and its many adaptive forms. See, for example, Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); *Popular Children's Literature in Britain*, ed. Julia Briggs, Dennis Butts, and M.O. Grenby (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); and *Victorian Pantomime: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Jim Davis (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

39 George Speaight, *Juvenile Drama: The History of the English Toy Theatre* (London: MacDonald, 1946) and *The History of the English Toy Theatre* (Boston: Plays, 1969); A.E. Wilson, *Penny Plain Two Pence Coloured: A History of the Juvenile Drama* (London: G.G. Harrap, 1932).

40 George Speaight with Brian Alderson, "From Chapbooks to Pantomime," in Briggs, Butts, and Grenby, *Popular Children's Literature in Britain*, 97.

FIGURE 5.1 Mr. Bologna Jun-r as Kalim Azack in *Aladdin, or The Wonderful Lamp*.

FIGURE 5.2 Mr. Grimaldi as Kazrac (the Chinese slave) in *Aladdin, or The Wonderful Lamp*.

theatrical prints, which are informed by interculturation and illustrate the Orientalized look of the tale's theatrical life: one of John ("Jack") Peter Bologna as Kalim Azack, the vizier's son betrothed to Badroulboudour, and one of the extraordinary pantomime clown Joseph Grimaldi as Kazrac, the magician's Chinese slave, who, disillusioned by the magician's cruel plans concerning the lamp, befriends Aladdin (figs. 5.1 and 5.2). The creation of this non-speaking role (Kazrac's tongue had been removed by the "Tartarian Hord" from whom the magician rescued him) added much to the play, besides giving both the magician and Aladdin an ally and a confidant. Interestingly, these two prints likely represent a notable scene in the play, certainly a favorite with children playing with a toy theater. The prints show Kalim Azack and Kazrac fighting while Aladdin follows the princess to the royal baths. The wealthy Kalim Azack is depicted wearing an elaborate ensemble: long embroidered tunic with fringe, short jacket with embroidery and tassels, full trousers tucked into boots, a sash, necklace, earrings, and brooches. With his fanciful hat and long moustache, he depicts a theatrical version of "a Tartar," or "a Man from Crimea." An illustration with the same title was included in an 1804 edition of *The Costume of Turkey* that aptly associates Kalim Azack with the "Tartarian Hord" responsible for Kazrac's disfigurement.[41] Kazrac's "Chinese" costume resembles contemporary Qing Dynasty (1636–1912) fashion with its *changshan* tunic, long, loose trousers, and a cap with upturned brim, topped with a knob. Despite his role as a poor peasant, Kazrac's theatrical costume is embellished with embroidery and a gold trim, and the character wears white stockings. Additionally, Grimaldi sports a braided pigtail and long moustache and brandishes two curved swords. Taken together, these two cultural images exemplify the Orientalized look that contributed to the fantasy

41 "A Tartar. A Man from Crimea," in Octavien Dalvimart, *The Costume of Turkey, 1802* (London: Printed for William Miller, 1804), n.p.

element of the play. An audience of children might be inclined to prefer the poor clown, "Kazrac," in this battle and to notice differences between a powerful figure like Kalim Azack, in his expensive clothing and armour, and a funny, loyal, and voiceless peasant, who could be said to represent childlike innocence and the silent powerlessness of the young.

Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp quickly became a staple among the many publishers of toy theaters, appearing on lists of available titles (often shortened to *Aladdin*) throughout the nineteenth century. Part of the difficulty for the researcher lies in the limited access to surviving examples of this ephemeral art form, which are often incomplete and yet to be catalogued by major academic databases and bibliographies. Exemplifying the play's popularity, as well as the fractured nature of the archive, the British Museum lists several early sheets depicting the 1813 *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp* which duplicate its Orientalized look: one character sheet by Mrs. M. Hebberd dated 1811–1814 featuring ten characters (including Aladdin, twice, in different costumes);[42] one sheet featuring scenery and wings for the second scene by J.H. Jameson dated 1813;[43] and four scene plates, inlcuding "a street in Cham Tartary," by B. Perkins dated 1813–1814.[44] Sets by Orlando Hodgson[45] and William West[46] were published in 1822–1825; these retain the Orientalized look of the early versions. Later sets not catalogued at the British Museum include John Kilby Green's half-price set (simplified and reprinted from Hodgson's beautiful 1831–1832 set), which was published on January 1, 1841, to accompany the Christmas 1840 revival, and a later (undated) set by M. and B. Skelt. Significantly, all of these sets retain the Orientalized look of the 1813 production. Because publishers regularly acquired each other's inventory of printing plates and repackaged the sheets to sell them under their names, various sets of *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp* with its original Orientalized look remained available for decades.

The following discussion centers on Hodgson's 1831–1832 set held by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, which is the most complete early set of the play readily available online. It includes a playbook, eight character sheets, and thirteen sheets of scenery.[47] Particularly interesting for our discussion is an apparent interculturalized vision of Arabia, which is visually captured in an Orientalized look that includes a fanciful melding of components derived from contemporary Chinese, Ottoman, North African, and Arabic imagery. As Chang observes, these influences are further "informed by English (British) knowledge about China, Anglo-Chinese relations, English (British) dramatic and theatrical practices, and individual

42 "One of Hebberd's plates of theatrical characters from the play *Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp*, for the toy theatre," The British Museum, No. 1886, 0513.1849 (London: M. Hebberd, 1811–1814).

43 "Stage scenes for Jameson's toy theatre; including the second scene in Aladdin, with landscape and rock wings," The British Museum, No. 1886, 0513.1781–1791 (London: J.H. Jameson, 1813–1822).

44 "Four scene plates from the play *Aladdin*, for Perkins's toy theatre," The British Museum, No. 1886, 0513.1862–1864 (London: B. Perkins, 1813–1814).

45 "Four of Hodgson's extra large scenes from *Aladdin*, for the toy theatre," The British Museum, No. 1886, 0513.1618–1622 (London: Hodgson, 1822); and "Three of Hodgson's scene plates for the play *Aladdin*, for the toy theatre," The British Museum, No. 1886, 0513.1271–1273 (London: Hodgson, 1823).

46 "Eight stage scenes for West's toy theatre, for the play *Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp*," The British Museum, No. 1886, 0513.17–29 (London: William West, 1824). Two other items are catalogued for a play designed by West titled *Aladdin, and the Forty Thieves*, but the descriptions seem instead to describe scenes for a version of "Ali Baba, and the Forty Thieves," also a popular juvenile and toy theater title of the day; see The British Museum No. 1886, 0513.30, and No. 1886, 0513.1230–1231.

47 [Orlando Hodgson], *Aladdin; or the Wonderful Lamp: A Juvenile Drama. Adapted to Hodgson's Scenes and Characters*. Playbook, eight character sheets, thirteen scenery sheets. The Victoria and Albert Museum, Theatre Royal Drury Lane Collection, THM/234/1/8/1 (London: Orlando Hodgson, 1832).

FIGURE 5.3 Hodgson character sheet featuring "Aladdin's 2nd Dress" and others.
PUBLISHED BY O. HODGSON, LONDON, 1831.

creative choices."[48] The script, "A Juvenile Drama," is an adaptation of the 1813 play further "Adapted to Hodgson's Scenes and Characters." The toy theater sheets depict the characters in multiple costumes and dramatic postures, including images that echo the earlier character prints of Kalim Azack and Kazrac, while the scenery represents Romantically desolate locations in "Africa" and "a certain part of Tartary" near "one of the greatest cities in China," complete with buildings resembling pagodas. Rather than evidencing concern for realism or authenticity, this toy theater's Orientalized look, like Aladdin's lamp, offered magic, wonder, and transport to appeal to a young audience.

In toy theater versions like Hodgson's, it is exactly this Orientalized look that appeals in marrying the tale to theatrical spectacle and excitement. Gorgeous scenery and costumes, special effects like the use of "blue fire,"[49] melodramatic events like battles, processions, and abductions, and the ready employment of magic and suspended disbelief were the common elements of the most popular toy theater sets, just as they were on the live professional stage. As Liz Farr notes, "[l]ike many of the theatrical productions it represented, the toy [theater] was concerned less with high art than with spectacular forms of entertainment."[50] The child proprietors of toy theaters expected and demanded value for their pocket money. *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp* regularly satisfied their demands and thus remained on available titles lists well into the twentieth century.

Reimagined in the tiny figures and scenes of the toy theater, *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp* offered a wondrous Orientalized look for the child impresario (figs. 5.3 and 5.4). As in the stage play, character names include an interculturalized mix of "Chinese" and "Muslim" names, variously spelled throughout the playbook and on the figural and scenic sheets: Widow Ching Mustapha (Aladdin's mother); Tahi Tongluck, the Cham of Tartary (who is referred to as a "sultan"); Abanazar (the unnamed African magician in Galland's and Scott's versions of the story); Kazrack (the mute Chinese slave); and Zobyad (Princess Balroubadour's servant). Even more interestingly, the characters are costumed in clothes that try to create an "Orientalized" atmosphere. Aladdin (regularly played by an actress) wears a short tunic embellished with hearts and a sash over gathered Ottoman-style trousers. A courtier, Kara Konjou, carries a Persian-inspired scimitar and is richly costumed in an ermine-trimmed long coat with Ottoman trousers and curled-toe Ottoman shoes, as is Abanazar, the African magician. Widow Ching wears her Ottoman-inspired dress with a veil covering her hair. The magnificent second Genie of the Lamp is resplendent in armor that appears to mix Persian and Mongolian elements. The petite Geni of the Ring wears a Grecian-like tunic with wings, a crown, and sandals. This conflation of Turkish or Persian clothing with Arab-style garments is highly indicative of how pervasive these

48 Chang, *Representing China on the Historical London Stage,* 2.

49 This is a flame effect that, along with the miniature theater's tiny oil footlamps, often resulted in unintended conflagrations.

50 Liz Farr, "Paper Dreams and Romantic Projections: The Nineteenth-Century Toy Theater, Boyhood and Aesthetic Play," in *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*, ed. Dennis Denisoff (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 45.

FIGURE 5.4 *Hodgson's Scenes in Aladdin,* Seventh, including a genie of the ring, Kazrack, and Aladdin in a fantastic setting decorated with elephants, sphinxes, elaborate columns, and trees.
PUBLISHED BY O. HODGSON, LONDON, 1832.

inaccurate representations of "Arabia" were during the nineteenth century.

Often, props and scenery appear on toy theater character sheets. Such is the case here, with the depiction of the crucial scene in which Abanazar is found "Commanding Aladdin to descend into the Cavern." Between them burns Abanazar's magical fire. Abanzar holds a torch to direct Aladdin to the cave's entrance, which features a stone with indecipherable engravings signifying mystery and power. Through the opening, one can see the descending steps. An interesting item on this sheet is a toy theater "trick": the "Table Rises" effect, which would have been a set piece intended to "appear" as if by magic, probably through a stage trap door or pushed on from the wings and perhaps with an accompanying special effect, such as smoke or a flash of light. A scenic image titled "Aladdin" (echoed in a scene titled "Finale in Aladdin") depicts Aladdin's adventure in the cave and, unusually, includes Aladdin and Kazrack gazing in amazement at the Genie of the Ring. Together with the figures in Chinese-like costumes, the scene's Orientalized look is obtained through dramatic carved arches, curving staircases, decorated columns with classical acanthus leaves, trees hanging with jewels for fruits, and statues of elephants and sphinxes lending air an of an Egyptian tomb.[51] Standing upon its pedestal with a basket of jewels below, the lamp with its glowing flame promises magic.

Aladdin's wonderful lamp was, thus, an essential object that contributed to the spectacular effect depicted on toy theater sheets. As an emblem of material culture, it represents its historical cousins and, like them, it has evolved in form, according to prevailing tastes and technological

51 Charlotte R. Long comments, "Like *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, the first part of *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp* describes a tomb robbery.... [but] in the story of Aladdin the subterranean rooms which Aladdin explores are not called a tomb, and their location is veiled by setting the action far off in China" (210). For details, see Charlotte R. Long, "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp," *Archaeology* 9, no. 3 (1956): 210–14.

FIGURE 5.5 *Collection d'antiques. 1–7. Lampes en bronze; 8.9. Pierres gravées*. In *Description de l'Égypte*
PARIS: DE L'IMPRIMERIE IMPERIALE, 1809–1829.

developments. Early theatrical designers drew upon contemporary collections and source materials and may have consulted repositories such as the British Museum, which from 1805 to 1814 received the Charles Townley collection of antiquarian objects that included dozens of ancient lamps from Townley's multiple *grand tours* to the continent. Following the 1798 Napoleonic invasion of Egypt, the vast *Description de l'Égypte*, with its thousands of illustrations, was being readied at this time, reflecting France's imperial ambition toward the people, places, and objects of this ancient land.[52]

As an object depicted on stage and in printed illustrations, the form of Aladdin's lamp was shaped by theatrical requirements, artistic vision, and its historical predecessors, such as the one beautifully illustrated above (fig. 5.5). In the 1810 play, *Alladin; or, The Wonderful Lamp*, Alladin tells his mother, Zulima, that the lamp "seems to [him] to be brass,"[53] which perhaps prompted theatrical versions resembling gold. In the 1813 set by Hodgson, the characters and scenes look like sketches that might have been made by an artist attending a performance. The lamp can be seen in the form of an urn with a lid and a chain, standing on a pedestal.[54] With a spout, handle, and chain, the distinctive coffee/teapot-shaped lamp of the 1831–1832 toy theater sheets became the standard image although, chameleon-like, no two of its depictions in the set are alike. Henry J. Byron's 1861 pantomime *Aladdin; or, the Wonderful Scamp!* opens in the "Hand-tea room in the Sultan's Palace" with characters drinking tea. The significance of this crucial commodity from China is seen throughout this early modern panto (including character names such as "Widow Twankey" and "Pekoe"). It's possible that the now-familiar slipper-shaped lamp design evolved from an English teapot interculturalized with an ancient oil lamp. Of course, the lamp was supposed to be dirty or in need of polish, to prompt Aladdin's mother's effort to clean it and bring out the genie, but this isn't always evident in the toy theater illustrations.

In a compelling and perhaps irresistible linguistic development, new technology capitalized on the tale in the form of illustrated slides for magic lantern projectors by English companies such as W. Butcher & Sons (Primus Junior Lecturers Series), York & Son, and Theobald & Co. In these visual versions, in tandem with the theatrical evolution of the interculturated story in panto form, the Orientalized (Chinese-British) look took hold and can still be seen in modern panto for children today. Importantly, the magical lamp at the heart of the tale readily found a home in an industry for children's books and toys eager for fabulous material.

52 *Description de l'Égypte, ou Recueil des observations et de recherches qui ont été faites en Egypte pendant l'expedition de l'armée française*, 23 vols. (Paris: de l'Imprimerie Imperiale, 1809–1829).

53 Norwich MSS, 67.

54 The "niche" in which the lamp resided in Galland's and the Grub Street version was often reinterpreted as a "pedestal" for the lamp to sit upon. In theatrical productions, a pedestal could be a handy set piece for making possible the sudden appearance of the genie of the lamp in the scene.

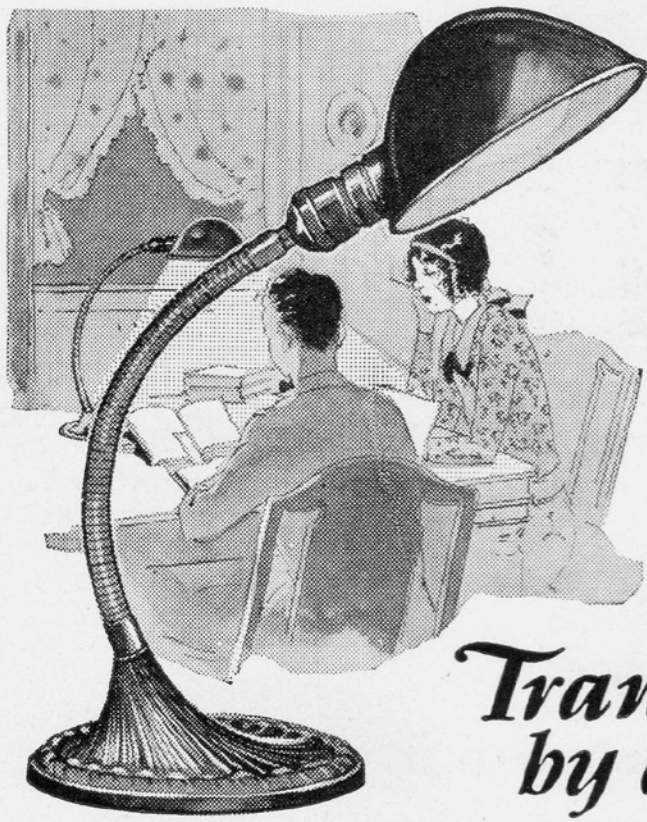
3 Aladdin's Lamp and Its Twentieth-Century Iterations

Initially a summoning mechanism that required rubbing to make the genie appear, by the twentieth century Aladdin's lamp had become the genie's residence/prison in films such as *Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp* (1939), a two-reel animated film in the Popeye Color Specials Series, *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940), produced by Alexander Korda, and the full-length animated film *Aladdin* (1992) by Walt Disney Pictures. In such period films, the genie emerges with the aid of ingenious illustration and special effects, like smoke from the lamp's spout, and is revealed to be a giant. Although the origin of the theatrical lamp's form is unidentifiable, its slipper shape has made it easily recognizable and helped to distinguish it from the many other prop vessels present in various scenes. Its uniqueness comes from its magical properties, which are obvious in moments of exchange. When the magician offers to change a new lamp for an old one, Aladdin's lamp stands out on stage among the many newer lamps as singular, antique, and wonderful. Indeed, Aladdin's lamp could be said to symbolize the magical Arabian tale captured by Galland in the midst of modern appropriation and commodification, surrounded by interculturalized characters and settings with an Orientalized look that, nevertheless, do not resemble its original culture. As a magical vessel in a play for children, it romanticizes Arabia and solidifies sterotypes of the place. As a stage prop, it represents a dream of wealth and exotic travel experiences that would have been impossible for most nineteenth-century children.

As a child growing up in America, I was astonished to learn that the *Arabian Nights* story of Aladdin and his lamp had long been presented in British panto and set in China. I had not yet read an authoritative version of the tale, and this cultural difference puzzled me until I learned that my struggle was due to the indelible spell wrought by Walt Disney Pictures' 1992 full-length animated film *Aladdin*, which invokes the now centuries-old effort to recover a "more authentic" vision of Arabia in the late twentieth century's own *compass rose* event of the evolving portolan map of Aladdin's history. Starring Scott Weinger as Aladdin, Linda Larkin as Princess Jasmine, and Robin Williams as the Genie, *Aladdin* may be the most influential of the children's versions to date due to its worldwide release and afterlife. The exuberant narrative of the 1992 *Aladdin* draws upon *The Thief of Bagdad*, but it also returns to the original tale to craft an elaborate recounting of the retrieval of the lamp from the cave and the magician's removal of the princess and the palace to a faraway land. The lamp is rendered in its traditional slipper shape and forms the basis for the design of the magical flying carpet. Costumes approximate Middle Eastern styles (with Jasmine notable in a harem-type outfit), although the sultan's palace design is derived from the Taj Mahal in India. A nod to Aladdin's Chinese roots is seen in the final location of the sequence accompanying the signature song, "A Whole New World," when Aladdin and Jasmine arrive at a palace complex resembling Beijing's Forbidden City. This Disneyfied combination of cultural elements presents an American Orientalized look. Not only has the film remained available in recorded editions, theatrical and television re-release, and licensing agreements for books, toys, and more but also has engendered what Irwin calls an "autocannibalistic" version, a live action film based on the animated one and released in 2019.[55] Also titled *Aladdin*, the main roles are played by Mena Massoud (Aladdin), Naomi Scott (Princess Jasmine), and Will Smith (Genie). The 2019 *Aladdin* largely parallels its predecessor but dazzles with elaborate production numbers, particularly Aladdin's procession to the palace. One notable change is the frame story of a father telling the tale to his children. At the end, he is revealed to be the genie, who has married—and grown old with—Jasmine's maid, Dalia.

Similarly, modern panto, exemplified by Simon Nye's 2000 *Alladin* production for ITV, carries forward to the twenty-first century cultural elements

55 Irwin, "*A Thousand and One Nights* at the Movies," 228.



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(in Years or Spirit)

Send for your copy of the Aladdin Story of the Magic Lamp and rejoice in its power to touch the humdrum with transforming magic.

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ALADDIN MANUFACTURING COMPANY
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Insist on the Genuine **"ALADDIN"** ELECTRIC PORTABLE LAMPS QUALITY AT A PRICE At all Leading Dealers

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Send me copy of the Aladdin Story of the Magic Lamp and tell me how to become a "Fellow-Aladdin." I enclose two stamps for mailing.

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FIGURE 5.6 Aladdin Magic Lamp Story Ad, 1927.

of the story's earliest British versions: interculturalized Chinesely-British characters and settings in China (Peking), an Egyptian tomb with a diabolical walking mummy, and a magical cave that is a nod to India, all combining for a continued Orientalized look. Lost in both of these traditions is a genuine sense of Arabia; however, the richness of Aladdin's story has always lain in its capacity to entertain and create wonder about a fantastical place that becomes a matrix of original tale, reinterpretation, and imaginative visualization.

In a notable *compass rose* event, the story of Aladdin and his wonderful lamp took an interesting turn at the beginning of the twentieth century, when, as Victor S. Johnson, founder of the Mantle Lamp Company of America, recalls:

"(…) a very small boy [Johnson] on a Nebraska farm read and re-read the *Arabian Nights* story of Aladdin in a room of darkness but for the flickering yellow light of an open flame 'coal oil lamp.' Several years later that boy, grown to manhood, found a lamp that erased the darkness with a soft white light and it was only natural that he named the lamp 'Aladdin.' An appropriate name, indeed, for this revolutionary boon to rural America seemed nothing short of magical in the intensity of its light."[56]

While the story may be apocryphal, "Aladdin" lamps proved invaluable to households across America and were touted as improving children's education by enabling them to attend to their studies after rural chores had been completed. Claiming early on to be "The Best Rural Home Lamps in the World," Aladdin lamps (also known as "Aladdins") have been manufactured from 1908 to the present, evolving with technological advances and often driving them in the industry (fig. 5.6). In an enticing move, a 1927 advertisement addressed "To the Young (in Years or Spirit)" invited readers to "[s]end for your copy of the Aladdin Story of the Magic Lamp and rejoice in its power to touch the humdrum with transforming magic." Depicting an up-to-date "goose-neck lamp," the company alerted readers that the "modern 'Aladdin's Lamp' has not lost this magic power. It can arouse in your boy or girl a slumbering giant of power and purpose, as the light of a pine knot did for Lincoln." Aligning an Aladdin Lamp's power with Abraham Lincoln's invested it with American patriotism and twentieth-century education-based vigor, making of the tale's magical lamp a beacon for the future in a distinctly American way.

4 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the evolution of the tale "Aladdin; or the Wonderful Lamp" as entertainment for children in Britain and America, with a focus on the lamp as a material object and nexus of dreams about an exoticised Arabia connoting magic, wealth, and joy. Like the tracery of a portolan map, the tale and the lamp move through time and place, generating *compass rose* events when they transform and are transformed by cultural engagement and appropriation. These events included the first translation of *Les mille et une nuits* into French, then English, then to the stage, the juvenile drama and toy theater, a brief consideration of twentieth-century film and panto, which along with the evolution of Aladdin portable lamps bear the tale into modern times. All these cultural elements reveal a continuing and diverse interculturation pictured in varying Orientalized looks, each culminating in culturally infused fantasies gesturing at literary authenticity and representing either the setting of Scheherezade's tale-telling (Arabia) or the settings named in the original story (China and Africa). The two approaches diverge geographically and visually, with English signifiers of British imperial history in China, India, and Africa, and American signifiers of its complex relationship with the Middle East. Driving these two traditions are historical circumstances involving cultural

56 J.W. Courter, *A Brief History of Aladdin Lamps* (Chicago: Mantle Lamp Company of America, 2002), n.p.

contact and trade beyond the scope of this discussion but ready for further investigation.

In Findlen's terms, the nodal lamp as physical object, "becomes a *material interface*, a repository of social and economic exchange as well as a bearer of cultural meaning that can be subject to physical inspection and analysis."[57] As a material and symbolic object, as well as a detachable "character" signifying a story, Aladdin's lamp aptly illustrates this description: it is a repository for oil, which can be burnt and transformed into light, vanquishing darkness and fear and making possible vision and creation with its inherent property of illumination. Aladdin's lamp has also become a unique signifier for the boy Aladdin, the genie, the tale itself, a culture of wish-fulfillment, and the entire *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* compendium. Horta points to folklore scholar Ulrich Marzolph's coining of the term "Aladdin Syndrome": "the tendency to use this story to represent the *Thousand and One Nights*, Arabic literature, and Middle Eastern cultures as a whole."[58] Its magic conjures an Orientalized Arabia that is textually interculturated and visually exoticized, a representation that persists to this day although it has little to do with the actual place. Indeed, a quick online search for "image Aladdin lamp" renders many results of Aladdin lamps by Johnson's Mantle Lamp Company of America, with their glass chimneys, urn-shaped pedestals, and curved glass lampshades. More images by far, however, are of slipper-shaped lamps with a handle, often made of brass resembling gold and highly decorated, all hinting at a touch of the magic of Arabia.

57 Findlen, "Afterword," 245.

58 Horta, "Introduction," xviii.

CHAPTER 6

Creative Cartography: From the Arabian Desert to the Garden of Allah

Holly Edwards

Rendering a particular place and its inhabitants will always be a reductionist process.[1] Words can never fully capture the experience of being there in person, subject to light and wind, heat and sound, conversation and even conflict. The somatic reality, affective impact, and social engagement are hard to convey across social, political, and cultural time and space; personal perspective, after all, is unique and things get lost in translation. This is especially true for a much-storied region like the "Orient." And what about images—might they work better than words? Surely, un manipulated photographs capture places and people legibly. Alternatively, a skilled painter can observe and depict the real world with compelling verisimilitude. One might simply call such image-making "art," but, like any good cover story, a great picture works on multiple levels: it commands attention with beauty or spectacular surface effects and then it tells a good tale. The challenge is to get beyond the headlines and the images that accompany them.

My rhetorical foil of the "cover story" suggests that this project entails looking at text/image relationships,[2] and it will. But the phrase is also meant to *un*cover a deeper process that I term "creative cartography"—i.e., mapping, picturing, and narrativizing the world around and through self/other, here/there, and now/then.[3] That "self" might be a single person, a community, or a nation; the setting that results will depend on how the participants wield artifacts, information, and images over time and space. For those participants, of course, it *is* the world, realistically rendered, engaged, and crafted around valued things and performed ideas. Two key players in the story that follows are a French painter and an American lithographer, both of whom depicted a vaguely defined region from diverse perspectives and with access to different source materials. One termed it the Arabian Desert, while the other called it the Garden of Allah. Their lives overlapped implicitly, indirectly, and distantly, somewhere on the surface of the globe,[4] and their work offers us vicarious access to that enigmatic place in retrospect.

1 I would like to thank my colleagues at the Francis Oakley Center for the Humanities, Williams College, for their critical reading of a draft of this project. I also thank Kailani Polczak, Williams College, for her expertise and generosity on all things Hawaiian.

2 Such relationships have garnered insightful attention in Orientalism studies. See, for instance, Wendy M.K. Shaw, "Between the Sublime and the Picturesque," in *The Poetics and Politics of Place*, ed. Zeynep Inankur, Reina Lewis, and Mary Roberts (Istanbul: Pera Museum, 2011), 115–26. Other issues related to ekphrasis and image/word relationships are covered in Sugata Ray, "Introduction: Translation as Art History," *Ars Orientalis* 48 (2018): 1–19.

3 The term "creative cartography" is an extension of my prior study, "A Million and One Nights: Orientalism in America, 1870–1930," in *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: American Orientalism, 1870–1930*, ed. Holly Edwards (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 11–58, though subsequent pertinent scholarship is extensive, especially the "worlding" discourse. E.g. David Trend, *Worlding: Identity, Media and Imagination in a Digital Age* (Boulder: Routledge, 2013).

4 The so-called "Global Turn" is the backdrop and conceptual context for this case study. Addressing that is beyond the scope of this project but, for present purposes, I cite here a collection of perspectives: Jill H. Casid and Aruna

FIGURE 6.1 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Arabs Crossing the Desert*, 1870.

My primary sources are archives, objects, and images left behind, but the cumulative discourse is a vexing *thing* itself, borne of and lodged in the minds of its makers. Such entanglements have wielded very real agency in the world, just as physical artifacts do,[5] generating a dense palimpsest to excavate, layer by layer. So, let the reader be warned: This argument might appear to meander as I wander from desert to garden, but that is quite purposeful. In so doing, I will traverse a landscape collaged and condensed over time—somewhere between East and West, self and other, now and then. As this trip unfolds, nations emerge and interact—the United States at the turn of the twentieth century and oil-rich Arab countries at the turn of the twenty-first century—even as modernization transpires at varying paces around the world. I recount this journey in an interrogative, exploratory fashion on the premise that retrospect is often selective and even creative.

Two cover stories offer insight into this claim. *Arabs Crossing the Desert* (fig. 6.1) graces Gerald Ackerman's *catalogue raisonné* of the nineteenth-century French painter, Jean-Léon Gérôme.[6] An

D'Souza, eds., *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

5 Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

6 Gerald M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme with a Catalogue Raisonné* (London: Sotheby's, 1986). The painting has been exhibited and/or published frequently. Two key places are Roger Benjamin and Mounira Khemir, eds., *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee* (Sidney: Art

FIGURE 6.2 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Snake Charmer*, 1879.

unsurprising choice for the art historian, the image is indicative of both the artist's virtuosity and his sustained engagement with a vast, arid region. A second deployment of Gérôme's work—the appearance of his painting, *The Snake Charmer*[7] (fig. 6.2), on the cover of Edward Said's *Orientalism*—consolidates the painter's centrality in any discussion of that place, however obscure its character, location, and boundaries. These two reproductions epitomize what art historian Linda Nochlin termed "the imaginary Orient," even as they manifest a now self-perpetuating scholarship in the wake of Said's publication.[8] Images of nude bodies, sensational settings, and dramatic

Gallery of New South Wales, 1997), 105, and Laurence des Cars, Dominique de Font-Réaulx, and Édouard Papet, eds., *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme* (Los Angeles: Skira, 2010), 238–39.

7 Sophie Makariou and Charlotte Maury, "The Paradox of Realism: *Gérôme* in the Orient," in Cars, Font-Réaulx, and Papet, *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme,* 278–89.

8 Orientalism discourse is vast and tangled. For this project and art historians, in particular, the foundational study is Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 33–59. For general overviews of the conceptual scope, roots, and evolution of the concept, see Alexander Lyon Macfie, *Orientalism: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and François Pouillion and Jean-Claude Vatin, eds., *After Orientalism: Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and Eastern Re-Appropriations* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). Of particular synthetic and place-specific importance is Mary Roberts, *Istanbul Exchanges: Ottomans, Orientalists, and Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015). Current comments prompted by the anniversary of Said's publication include Nasser Rabbat, "The Hidden Hand: Edward Said's Orientalism and Architectural History," *Journal of the Society of Architectural*

swashbuckling led scholars to identify and reify tropes of eroticism, despotic force, and exotic behavior, thereby corroborating Said's thesis of colonial power and condescension with visual evidence. Such patterns of representation have been further nuanced with reference to the identity and nationality of individual artists, different mediums of expression, collective versions, and internalized iterations. As I will elaborate further below, what was once deemed binary and hierarchical is now appreciated as multi-centric, interactive, and heterochronic.[9] While much critical scholarship has focused on cultural encounters and exchanges transpiring in and around the Ottoman sphere, comparable processes have unfolded around other centers of political gravity and a wide range of material evidence, thereby disrupting geographies and enriching the study of globalizing visual culture.[10] The following chapter is a case in point, distinguished by its winding path—from "Arabia" to Hawaii to Washington D.C.—and its disparate sources—from painting and photography to theater and public performance. So, what does all that look like?

1 Picturing the Orient

To answer this question, I return to my starting point—Gérôme's painting—to dive more deeply into the artist's practice and his results. Touted as "realism" in comparison with other modes of rendering the "Orient," such as Romanticism, Impressionism, or Aestheticism,[11] his work seems to offer compelling journalistic veracity. That verisimilitude, however, has rightly been deemed paradoxical. Cumulative study of *The Snake Charmer*, for example, has demonstrated that the painting is actually a pastiche of accurately rendered elements which were brilliantly but creatively merged into a contrived whole.[12] The tilework, drawn (and somewhat rearranged) with the help of photographs back in the studio, derives from a palatial setting that would never have hosted such a gathering. The clothing that the actors wear and the artifacts that are displayed are equally incongruous. Still, it is riveting false advertising—the quintessential cover story for documenting the "Orient."

That Gérôme mined the work of contemporary photographers for raw material has already been documented; that there was plenty of material available is also clear.[13] However, what the artist

Historians 77, no. 4 (2018): 388–89, and Zeynep Çelik, "Reflections on Architectural History Forty Years after Edward Said's Orientalism," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 77, no. 4 (2018): 381–87.

9 One of several examples of deploying the concept within the "Orient" itself is Ussama Makdisi's "Ottoman Orientalism," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 768–96. Further revisionist issues were covered in the "Objects of Orientalism" symposium organized by Mary Roberts and Marc Gotlieb in April 29–30, 2016, at Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

10 On the notion of disruptive geography and broader horizons see Mary Roberts, Reina Lewis, and Zeynep Inankur, "Introduction: Disruptive Geographies," in *The Poetics and Politics of Place: Ottoman Istanbul and British Orientalism*, ed. Zeynep Inankur, Reina Lewis, and Mary Roberts (Istanbul: Pera Museum, 2011), 19–29. Sugata Ray's formulation of "entangled web of connected geographies" appears in "Introduction: Translation as Art History," 16.

11 On the stylistic sequencing and the realism debate at the time see Benjamin and Khemir, *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*, 7–31. On different motivations to depict the Orient see Tim Barringer, "Orientalism and Aestheticism," in Inancur, Lewis, and Roberts, *The Poetics and Politics of Place*, 243–58.

12 Cf. Mary Roberts, "Gérôme in Istanbul," in *Reconsidering Gérôme*, ed. Scott Allan and Mary Morton (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2010), 119 and note 3.

13 Ibid., 119–31. See also Mounira Khemir, "The Orient in the Photographers' Mirror: From Constantinople to Mecca," in Benjamin and Khemir, *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*, 188–98; Nancy Micklewright, "Orientalism and Photography," in Inancur, Lewis, and Roberts, *The Poetics and Politics of Place*, 99–114. Indigenous photographers are a critical subset that has engendered an important and mushrooming discourse of its own. E.g. Ali Behdad, "Mediated Visions: Early Photography of the Middle East and Orientalist Network," *History of Photography* 41, no. 4 (2017): 362–75; Zeynep Çelik and Edhem Eldem, *Camera Ottomana: Photography and*

did was not just a matter of appropriative copying. His willingness to undertake arduous travel and seek out "direct engagement with the physical world"[14] was also critical to the optical verisimilitude that he achieved in paint. Indeed, the artist's virtuosity, a product of embodied experience, assiduous study, and incisive synthesis of the available materials, is evident in both *The Snake Charmer* and *Arabs Crossing the Desert*; in the latter, for instance, the viewer *feels* the light and heat of the desert though the image might hang in a gilt frame on a museum wall.

It is important, moreover, to situate this "realism" diachronically, both at the moment of contextualized production and then in retrospect, as subsequent patterns of consumption emerge. In the nineteenth century, accelerated mobility and increased tourism generated amplified desire to document these terrains of broadening horizons. Thanks to improved modes of travel (e.g., Ottoman rail, Mediterranean steamship), many people were traversing land and sea, with cascading ramifications for the crafting of self, depiction of others, and the formation of communities, institutions, and nations. Moreover, Western travelers were not the only ones wielding paint brushes or cameras. Indigenous image-makers were also rendering homelands and neighbors—i.e., the "Orient"—from embedded proximity with very cosmopolitan perspectives, thereby blurring boundaries and transposing the binary of self and other into a multi-centric, visualized arena.[15] Additionally, technologies of reproduction made it possible to turn unique paintings into more shareable experience, with the result that the sheer volume of images mushroomed.[16]

As outsiders, insiders, transplants, migrants, and proliferating image-makers assembled, scholarly rhetoric around "Orientalism" has responded to address nation-specific iterations and indigenous manifestations.[17] Inevitably, the nuances proliferate. For example, an entrepreneurial individual might try to capitalize on a stereotype in answer to the prevailing market, while a gifted painter might aspire to master transnationally-lauded style and craftsmanship. Political boundaries do not necessarily determine the activities of enterprising artisans. What kind of Orientalism is it when a Turkish painter learns his craft in Paris and returns home to paint his fellow citizens?[18] What sort of picture results when a Persian photographer renders a familiar trope like the snake charmer encountered

Modernity in the Ottoman Empire, 1840–1914 (Istanbul: Koç University Publications, 2015); and Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlan, eds. *Photography's Orientalism* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2013).

14 Peter Benson Miller, "Gérôme and Ethnographic Realism at the Salon of 1857," in Allan and Morton, *Reconsidering Gérôme*, 108. On realism more generally, see Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880–1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 23–31. On somatic experience and its interpretation, see Marc Gotlieb, "Figures of Sublimity in Orientalist Painting," *Studies in the History of Art* 74, Symposium Papers LI: Dialogues in Art History, from Mesopotamia to Modern: Readings for a New Century (2009): 316–41.

15 Indigenous image-makers blur boundaries of artist/patron/power in provocative ways. E.g. Aykut Gürçağlar, "The Dragoman Who Commissioned His Own Portrait," in Inankur, Lewis, and Roberts, *Poetics and Politics of Place*, 210–19.

16 The discourse surrounding mass-produced imagery in the nineteenth century is beyond the scope of this project. For present purposes, see Roberts, *Istanbul Exchanges*, 88–89, and 105, and Emerson Bowyer, "Monographic Impressions," in Allan and Morton, *Reconsidering Gérôme*, 22–39.

17 French Orientalism, the paradigmatic case, has been supplemented with other studies, e.g.: Nicholas Tromans, ed., *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* (London: Tate, 2008); Claudia Hopkins, "The Politics of Spanish Orientalism: Distance and Proximity in Tapirò and Bertuchi," *Art in Translation* 9, no. 1 (2017): 134–67; and Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

18 See Edhem Eldem, "Making Sense of Osman Hamdi Bey and His Paintings," *Muqarnas* 29 (2012): 339–83, and Renata Holod and Robert Osterhout, *Osman Hamdi Bey and the Americans* (Istanbul: Pera Museum Publications, 2011).

on the street where he lives?[19] Might a neighbor become an *other* over time? Or, might an *other* become a compatriot, with the passage of time or the changing of borders?[20] In cases like these, the lives and perspectives of particular image-makers override glib boundaries of *other*, trope, culture, and nation. As I reference this "thing" called Orientalism, then, I hope to maintain a mindful oscillation among individuals and morphing collectives, and an appreciation of the agency of the art therein. In the words of Talinn Grigor, "[t]he other is never outside us; it is this search for the other in us and us in the other that renders art-historical undertakings, regardless of localities, global."[21]

Retrospective narrative, then, is no small challenge. The lived present is instantly gone, but the physical evidence of the past remains. The things that we craft, find, cherish, and historicize define that which we call self and, by extension, community or nation. Millennial curation is a particularly challenging site of mapping time and space for diverse audiences.[22] Making, viewing, sharing, and owning art or artifacts are modes of place-making and identity fashioning and how that material works to shape worlds depends on who holds the evidence and who is telling the story.

2 Owning the Pictures

I return now to my first cover stories to probe more deeply still. Gérôme's *Snake Charmer*, owned by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, has become the icon of objectifying condescension toward the "Orient" and its inhabitants in the academic community, while *Arabs Crossing the Desert* is one of the 156 works owned by an anonymous collector from the Arab world.[23] This apparent dissonance demands attention. If Gérôme's art does demean and essentialize its subjects with some creative duplicity, as many scholars have claimed, that seeming realism also holds the potential to render Arab dignity at a time when nation-states in the Arab world are crafting local identities in global visual culture. The Najd collection of Orientalist painting referred to above was assembled over the 1980s by a Saudi businessman who trusted French realism/Orientalism to safeguard "the true customs and traditions of the Arab people" in the face of rapid modernization.[24] And he is not the only one who has done so.

Roger Benjamin tracked the longevity of postcolonial taste to articulate how Arab collections of this sort have worked to contextualize the present and augur the future, while Nicholas Tromans has explored the issue further, querying the "globalized placelessness" and branding that transpire in transnational consumption.[25] Mercedes Volait expressed it concisely: "Orientalism has been Orientalized," and the market for such painting in the

19 Ali Behdad, *Camera Orientalis: Reflections on Photography of the Middle East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), and Aphrodite Desiree Navab, "To Be or Not to Be an Orientalist? The Ambivalent Art of Antoin Sevruguin," *Iranian Studies* 35, no. 1/3 (2001): 113–44.

20 Cf. Ella Shohat, "On Orientalist Genealogies: The Split Arab/Jew Figure Revisited," in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Postcolonial Middle East*, ed. Anna Ball and Karim Mattar (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 118–59.

21 Talinn Grigor, "What Art Does: Methodological Privileging of Agency and Art History's Global Dispute in 1901," in Casid and D'Souza, *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, 140.

22 Cf. Christine Riding, "Staging *The Lure of the East*: Exhibition Making and Orientalism," in Inankur, Lewis, and Roberts, *The Poetics and Politics of Place*, 33–46.

23 Caroline Juler, *Najd Collection of Orientalist Paintings* (London: Manara, 1991).

24 Brian MacDermot, "Introduction: One Man's Choice," in Juler, *Najd Collection of Orientalist Paintings*, 1.

25 Roger Benjamin, "Post-Colonial Taste: Non-Western Markets for Orientalist Art," in Benjamin and Khemir, *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*, 32–40; Nicholas Tromans, "Bringing It Home? Orientalist Painting and the Art Market," in Inankur, Lewis, and Roberts, *The Poetics and Politics of Place*, 65–76, quote p. 70.

oil-rich Gulf region simply reflects that change.[26] Moreover, collections are not confined to gilt framed pictures, nor to a small cadre of wealthy individuals: public institutions reflect similar aspirations.[27] Such self-fashioning has many iterations, and it is not without precedent, nor is it medium-specific.[28] With respect to painting, however, it is precisely the "realism" and sheer beauty of the pictures that produce and enshrine a regionalized heritage for Gulf constituencies in vivid and flattering detail. Crafting a preface for the present in this way is often the purpose of the material and visualized past.[29] As I will explore further below, this might also describe Arab participation in modern museum culture. I base that argument on the conviction that the rich extant archives of Orientalist imagery can sustain multiple curations and work to rectify, claim, or resuscitate history in myriad ways for diverse individual and collective identities.[30] If such materials are being mobilized in the millennial present by emerging Arab nations, fledgling countries elsewhere have deployed partialized notions of the Orient as well, albeit decades earlier, for different purposes. Stated otherwise, the Arabian Desert is an extraordinary place, a setting for life and a foil for creative cartography.

3 Going Places, Making Pictures

So finally, now, I turn from *Arabs Crossing the Desert* to that other story mentioned in the title to this paper, *The Garden of Allah*. This second story is about place-making and identity crafting among American citizens, whose images and performative antics are documented in paintings, photographs, souvenirs, and commemorative albums. It is a story rooted in the frontier spirit of the nineteenth century, in which Christian mission was overlaid on Manifest Destiny, and the Middle East was overlaid on the Wild West. As I have argued elsewhere, for painters like Albert Pinkham Ryder, Frederic Remington, Charles Russell, and William Merritt Chase, the Orient served as a template to organize the expanding world they occupied and represent it in vivid, legible terms for their audiences. Russell, for example, bemoaned the disappearing frontier, the Wild West, even as he had his wife masquerade as a Native American woman, posed as a languid odalisque from the harem.[31] In effect, stereotypes of the exotic East served as a visioning lens through which to view a different landscape and render it for American audiences.

26 Mercedes Volait, "Middle Eastern Collections of Orientalist Painting at the Turn of the 21st Century: Paradoxical Reversal or Persistent Misunderstanding?" in Pouillon and Vatin, *After Orientalism*, 258.

27 See Karen Exell, "Desiring the Past and Reimagining the Present: Contemporary Collecting in Qatar," *Museum and Society* 14, no. 2 (2016): 259–74; "Doha's Cultural Armature on Display: A Response to *Artifacts and Alegliances: How Museums Put the Nation and the World on Display*," *Identities* 24, no. 1 (2017): 19–25; "Utopian Ideals, Unknowable Futures, and the Art Museum in the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 7, no. 1 (2017), 49–64; and "Collecting an Alternative World: The Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim al Thani Museum in Qatar," in *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula: Debates, Discourses and Practices*, ed. Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014).

28 Natalie Koch has made the connection to Hobsbawm's "invention of traditions" in regard to falconry in "Gulf Nationalism and Invented Traditions," *The London School of Economics and Political Science: Middle East Centre Blog*, June 13, 2018, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2018/08/03/gulf-nationalism-and-invented-traditions/.

29 Gordon Wood, *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).

30 For self-fashioning case studies outside the Arabian Peninsula, see Costanza Caraffa and Tiziana Serena, eds., *Photo Archives and the Idea of Nation* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015). Regarding complexities within the region, see Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico, "'There Is No Heritage in Qatar': Orientalism, Colonialism and Other Problematic Histories," *World Archeology* 45, no. 4 (2013): 670–85.

31 Holly Edwards, "Catalogue of the Exhibition," in Edwards, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures,* 186–87.

Thus, the world was shrunk to fit a bigger and better United States, a form of creative cartography that I will articulate below.

I begin with Robert Hichens' novel, *The Garden of Allah*. Written in 1904 and set in the terrain around Biskra, Algeria,[32] where the author had traveled extensively,[33] it is a romance between an adventurous English woman named Domini, and an apostate priest, meeting by chance and falling in love. For them, the stifling nature of their own "civilized" societies prompted escape into a more invigorating, untrammeled, "primitive" culture. The desert turns, thus, into a place of refuge and spirituality. As the book's flyleaf declares: "They met by chance but so irrevocably were they bound together that it seemed as if destiny had led them to each other … and so they journeyed together through the beautiful Garden of Allah to meet a fate they knew they could never escape."[34]

Such a description captures the somewhat florid tone of the novel; nevertheless, it went through multiple editions and became a hugely successful Broadway play of the same name. Before I turn to that theatrical rendering, however, it is instructive to consider the life of Robert Hichens (1882–1940), the author of the novel, in hopes of mapping his brand of Orientalism more precisely.[35] The son of an English preacher, he did not follow in the footsteps of his ecclesiastical father; instead, he traveled and wrote of his adventures. Having set his sights on the Holy Land early on, he traversed North Africa and Egypt, documenting his trips in travelogues which betray a unique brand of spirituality even as they typify the visual culture of his era. Supplemented with color lithographs by Jules Guerin and photographs by Félix Bonfils[36] and others, Hichens' publications reflect the options and acumen of a talented and enterprising Orientalist travel writer, courting a broadening market. In some respects, Hichens operated in the same vein as Gérôme. Both experienced the Middle East personally and documented it for more sedentary audiences back home. While Gérôme was primarily a painter and Hichens a writer, both capitalized on increasingly sophisticated modes of mechanical reproduction to disseminate the Orient with vivid realism.

In Hichens' case, passages in his beautifully illustrated volumes are germane to understanding that imagined place, "the Garden of Allah." In particular, I turn to his personal travelogue, *The Holy Land*, published in 1910.[37] The book begins in Baalbek and ends in Jerusalem, with each chapter dedicated to a particular place in the topography of Abraham. The culmination of the book (and an inspiration for the travel in the first place) was the celebration of Easter at the Holy Sepulchre. Hichens' description of this ritual verges on babbling ecstasy and ends rather abruptly on the last page of the book, as though further verbiage was unnecessary or inappropriate. While Hichens may not have followed in his father's footsteps, he certainly performed his inherited tradition with heartfelt piety. Ironically, in an earlier chapter, "The Spell of Damascus," a different spirituality surfaces. Some of this chapter is quintessential and stereotypical Orientalism:

"An Oriental city of magic called up by a slave of the lamp to realize one's dream of the Orient; a city ethereally lovely, exquisitely Eastern, ephemeral,

32 Robert Hichens, *The Garden of Allah* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1904). Roger Benjamin specifically addresses this place in "Biskra, or the Impossibility of Painting," in *Orientalist Aesthetics*, 160ff.

33 Robert Hichens, *Yesterday: The Autobiography of Robert Hichens* (London: Cassel, 1947).

34 Cf. Edwards, "A Million and One Nights," in Edwards, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures,* 43–44.

35 For the larger context of British Orientalism, see Tromans, *The Lure of the East*, and Barringer, "Orientalism and Aestheticism," in Inankur, Lewis, and Roberts, *The Poetics and Politics of Place*, 243–58.

36 Carney Gavin, *The Image of the East: Nineteenth-Century Near-Eastern Photographs by Bonfils: From the Collections of the Harvard Semitic Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

37 Robert Hichens, *The Holy Land* (New York: The Century Company, 1910).

to be blown away by a breath like a tuft of thistledown … Farther off are low, romantic, cinnamon-colored hills melting away into spaces that look like the beginning of the desert—spaces that seem to be trembling gently as watery mirage seems to tremble ghostlike amid the sands. For the desert is very near to Damascus—so near to it that is like a town set in a lovely oasis, a paradise of shade and waters … through which there sometimes filters a breath from the burning wastes, like a Bedouin passing through a throng of chattering townsfolk."[38]

Subsequently, the magic of the lamp-dwelling slave works to create a place of ghostlike mirages and desert wastelands with spiritual implications:

"I knew the essence of the wonderful charm of Damascus. It is a garden city touched by the great desert. Under its roses, one feels the sands. Beside its trembling waters one dreams of the trembling mirage. The cry of its muezzins seems to echo from its mosque towers to that most wonderful thing in nature which is 'God without man' …. Its spell is the spell of the desert and the spell of the oasis."[39]

Thus, evocative aspects of the place—the sand, the oasis, and the mosque—have a powerful somatic impact which, in turn, sustains another spell-driven landscape, the one that the heroine Domini eventually occupies in "the Garden of Allah. In effect, Hichens' embodied experience and idiosyncratic spirituality are conveyed through things, smells, and sounds that coalesce as a palpable setting of mysterious beauty.

This telescoping narrative can be tracked from Hichens's autobiography[40] to the introductory text of the souvenir book wherein the conception and production of the play are described.[41] That brochure makes it clear that travel, documentation, and sustained engagement with the desert environment contributed to the production of a powerful fabrication on stage: "One summer Mr. Tyler, accompanied by Mr. Hichens, Hugh Ford, stage-director, and Edward Morange, scenic artist, spent several months in the heart of the Desert of Sahara, photographing, sketching and purchasing costumes and properties *that would help to convey the illusion of the East* [emphasis added]."[42] With appropriated materials in hand, the transposition happens: Biskra becomes Beni-Mora and "those in the great desert itself seem to breathe the spirit of Algeria, and *The Garden of Allah* proved to be the most magnificent spectacle that had ever been offered American or any other audiences."[43] In this way, a real place was rendered in a fake setting and granted a new name, which enjoyed substantial independent agency thereafter. Lest one miss the point, an earnest decoding of the metaphorical place is made explicit in Part Three of the souvenir brochure. The play's heroine, Domini,

"thought of the desert as a soul that need to strive no more … And she, like the Arabs, called it always in her heart the Garden of Allah. For in this wonderful calm, bright as the child's idea of heaven, clear as a crystal with a sunbeam caught in it, silent as a prayer that will be answered silently, God seemed to draw very near to his wandering children. In the desert was the still, small voice, and the still, small voice was the Lord. "[44]

In the play (again, as described in the souvenir pamphlet), "real Arabs," elaborate tentage, real camels,[45] faked windstorms, and heartfelt performance brought the story to life. For the era, it was a particularly extravagant production. Indeed, as one critic noted, "[n]o poorer play was ever so magnificently gilded."[46] On one level and similar

38 Ibid., 49 and 53, respectively.

39 Ibid., 85–86.

40 Hichens, *Yesterday*, 278–87.

41 Robert Hichens, *The Garden of Allah: Souvenir Book for the Play* (New York: Liebler, 1911).

42 Ibid., n.p.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Finding real camels for the original production is described in Hichens' autobiography, *Yesterday*, 282–83.

46 For further context, see Edwards, "A Million and One Nights," in Edwards, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures,* 43–44 and footnote 123. The quote is from the 23 October 1911 issue of *The Evening Sun*.

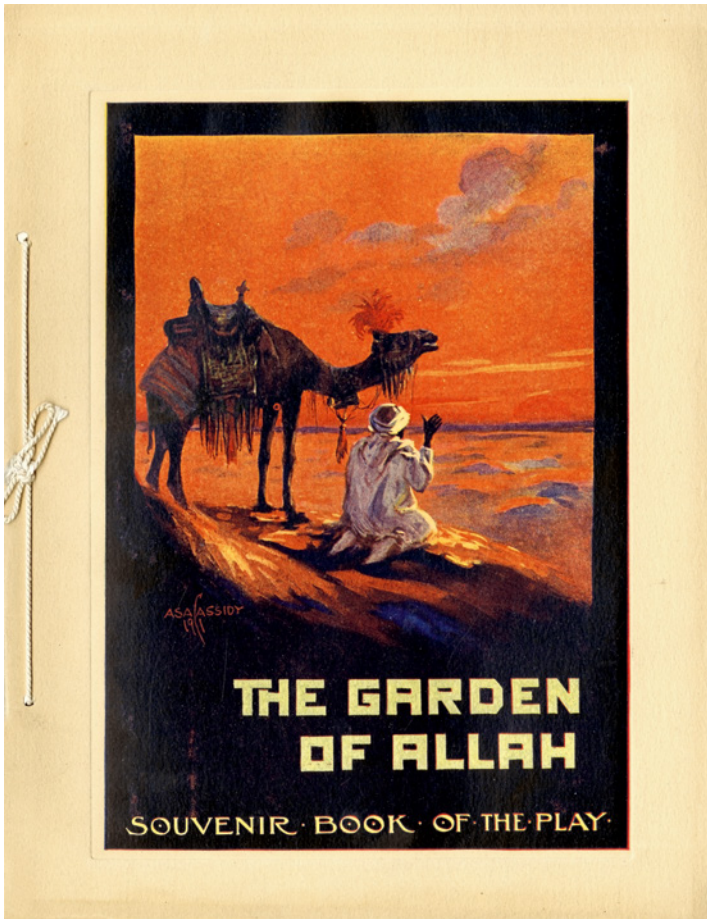

FIGURE 6.3
Robert Hitchens, *The Garden of Allah. Souvenir Book of the Play*.
NEW YORK. LIEBLER, 1911.

to Gérôme's painting, the drama was engaging, palpable realism for avid audiences. In this theatrical iteration, Orientalized spirituality became a vehicle for romance, scandal, and pathos, for which there was a ready market in the United States, particularly in the entertainment industry. Play became film, Hollywood productions mushroomed, and hotel designs housed star-studded fantasy and extravagant indulgence.[47] Recounting that entire history, however, is not my point here. I turn, instead, to another iteration of the metaphorical place that was first evoked on stage.

47 For larger context, see Edwards, "A Million and One Nights," 44–53. Regarding hotel architecture and related notorieties, see "The Garden of Allah: A History of the Name," The Garden of Allah, accessed April 1, 2019, https://gardenofallah.com/GOA_original.asp.

4 Transplanting the Garden of Allah

The souvenir book of the Broadway play is a fascinating collage which helps reconstruct an ephemeral staging of the "Orient." Indeed, I could dwell at length on the photographs therein, so evocative of early twentieth-century stagecraft, but I want to focus here only on the cover image, a lithograph by American artist Asa Cassidy (fig. 6.3). This picture is reductionist in myriad ways—a broad-stroke rendering of man, camel, and desert, accomplished with limited palette and captioned with the title, *The Garden of Allah*. The cover thus conjoins two modes of expression—word and image—to identify a particular place, but despite comparable subject matter, it is also radically different from Gérôme's painting, *Arabs Crossing the Desert*. The obvious dissonance between the two

raises interesting questions about the artist's intentions. To find out, I would interrogate the lithograph's agency: how does it work and why should we care? The blunt answer is that the image conjures a potent theme with minimalist visual code; it is not a photograph, nor does it deploy optical verisimilitude. Rather, it is evocative shorthand for some *thing* that had broad and deep appeal for a particular audience.

To identify that audience, it is useful to step back and consider interest groups with Orientalist proclivities that were active at the time. For example, the general taste for theatrical extravagance, manifest in the Broadway moment described above, was shared by other enterprising entrepreneurs, many of whom were members of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, a secretive cohort within the larger order of Freemasonry. The backstory is revealing: the guild's instigator, Billy Florence (1831–1891), was an actor and playwright; in 1870, he was in Marseille, France, where he attended a party given by an Arab diplomat that took the form of an elaborately-staged musical comedy, at the end of which the guests became members of a secret society.[48] That experience, ostensibly reflecting true Arab culture, inspired Florence to undertake similar merry-making back home, in effect forging a reiteration of a fundamentally fanciful affair. Over subsequent decades, Florence and one of his colleagues, Walter Fleming, launched the North American Shrine, which grew considerably in the wake of the Civil War. Its distinctive pageantry was explained with reference to Florence and his professional theatricality: "It is not difficult to see why one as skilled as he was should have selected the picturesque jewels and costumes of the Orientals. The jeweled costumes, the picturesque Arab with his tent, and the holy city of Mecca, together with all that surrounded it and the religion which it typified, naturally appealed to the actor. To him, the whole world was a stage."[49]

Acknowledging the performative overlap between Broadway and the Shrine, and the extent to which Arabs, the Arabic language, and Islam figure in the society's activities bears further scrutiny as an index of the "verisimilitude" of its Orientalism. Again, we encounter a cover story of sorts. Certainly, there are abundant references to the Arab world, such as the place names of its meeting centers. Mecca Shrine, for example, held its first formal meeting in New York on September 26, 1872 and Chicago's Medina Temple went public at the Columbian Exposition in 1893. During that seminal event of nation-building,[50] the Shriners participated in the dedication ceremony for the mosque in the Turkish Village on the Midway Plaisance. Erected by special permission of the Ottoman government, that sanctuary was established with formal ritual but arguably incongruous participants. When the call to prayer was sounded, three thousand people convened, led by a military band; the majority were members of the Shrine, not a local mosque.[51]

These public and private practices were all part of the Shriners' fabricated Arabized identity. In general, the standard greeting among initiates was "Salaam Aleikom" and such declarations as "Allah is great, and the hearts of the true believers are strong … learn of our mysteries and become, verily a Moslem and true believer."[52] While this

48 This society was ostensibly founded in Mecca by Ali, the son-in-law of prophet Muhammad.

49 For broader context, see Edwards, "Catalogue of the Exhibition," in Edwards, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures,* 218. For the quote, see William B. Melish, *The History of the Imperial Council, Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine for North America 1872–1921* (Cincinnati: Abingdon Press, 1920), 10.

50 On this event generally, see Zeynep Çelik, "Speaking Back to Orientalist Discourse at the World's Columbian Exposition," in Edwards, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures*, 77–98.

51 Edwards, "Catalogue of the Exhibition," in Edwards, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures*, 217.

52 Charles Chipman, *Honolulu: The Greatest Pilgrimage of the Mystic Shrine* (s.l., 1901), 28 and 43, respectively.

might suggest an authentic or substantive connection between the practices of Islam and the convictions of the Shriners, the stance was actually confined to a superficial appropriation of Arabic phrases and behaviors. Shortly after the Columbian Exposition, leaders of the order admitted that, "from an academic standpoint our shrine and our Ritual would be held in ridicule by the savant, or even the progressive student of Arabic learning…" In effect, the Islamic world was reduced to a metaphor, and explained in exoticizing terms: "And of all the lands of mystery, magic, glamour, charm and delight, none excels that of ancient Arabia. Beautiful, strange, colorful, a land of mystery, peculiar customs, yet one of pomp, ceremony, majesty and glory, the ancient courts and civilization of Arabia have stirred the imagination and haunted the dreams of millions."[53] Rhetoric of this sort suffused the public identity for the guild as the United States came into its own on the world stage.

With diachronic distance, it is possible to gauge the character and the stakes of such theatricality. For the participants themselves, mobilizing stereotypes and Arabic catch phrases in flamboyant parades and other performances was intended to expand Shrine membership and generate community around altruism and active entrepreneurship.[54] This was evident in the so-called pilgrimages that crossed the country, enabling members of different clubs to travel, meet, and share convivial experience and conviction. In what follows, I will track two caravans that transpired at critical moments in American history—one to Hawaii (1901) and the other from Hawaii to Washington D.C. (1923). Rhetorically mimicking the Muslim *hajj* ritual, both worked to situate and consolidate the Shrine in American national identity, both defined the pertinent patriotic landscape, and both instantiated the United States as a major power in the international arena.

5 Tending and Extending the Garden

The first caravan began in Washington with considerable formality and was documented in enthusiastic detail in a volume by Charles Chipman entitled *Honolulu: The Greatest Pilgrimage of the Mystic Shrine*:

"At the meeting of the Imperial Council, held in Washington, D.C., in May, 1900, a dispensation was granted to the Nobles now residing in that newly-acquired garden spot of Uncle Sam's domain (Hawaii) for the formation of a new Temple of the Mystic Shrine… Believing that a pilgrimage to this far-off Oasis would prove to be one of profit as well as pleasure, and that such a visit would tend to cement more closely the ties of brotherly love and affection between the Nobles and Brothers of these two widely separated parts of our Uncle Samuel's growing territory, the Imperial Potentate was pleased to grant their request for a personal visit, granting also to Saladin Temple the distinguished honor of acting as his escort on this most glorious pilgrimage."[55]

This paragraph sets the conceptual stage and also betrays a great deal: with its mention of a pilgrimage to the newly-acquired garden spot of Uncle Sam's domain, it signals the entrepreneurial tone, "brotherly" patriotism, and presumed power evident throughout this commemorative volume. That there was already a welcoming enclave in Honolulu is indicative of sustained Masonic activities there; that Hawaii was an "acquisition" bears further scrutiny below. But, first, more can be gleaned from the rhetoric and subsequent passages in the Shriner album.

53 Melish, *The History of the Imperial Council*, 12.

54 Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 12

55 Chipman, *Honolulu*, 13.

Going west, traveling across the continent aboard the Chicago Limited, was a bold and self-validating geography lesson and much care was devoted to the comfort and luxury of the participants along the way: "This wonderful train, the finest in the world, with its electric lights, bath-room, barber shop, stenographer and typewriter (free service), model dining-car, observation car, news agent, conductors, porters and dressing maids, along with other comforts, all combine for the peace and happiness of its patrons."[56] Such train travel, a result of the transformative and ongoing industrialization of the young nation, demonstrated the modernity of the Shriner community in flattering ways. Moreover, while the country was vast and still unevenly settled, American entrepreneurship and cosmopolitan sophistication were deemed evident along the way in the Lind Jewelry Bazaar and the Oriental Hotel in Dallas.[57] The breadth of the continent and the diversity of its inhabitants were candidly described by the author: whereas Leavenworth, Kansas, is called "a typical town of Prohibition, hatchets and fanatics," Kansas City is "progressive and prosperous, the New York of the Southwest."[58] When the Shriners opted to engage with local populations, it was sometimes legitimized as "jollification": "a team of burros and their Mexican drivers, their wagon partly filled with potatoes, several ladies and Nobles took possession and were photographed."[59] Even as the words betray condescension, the fact that cameras were used to record such moments also asserted the self-absorbed superiority of the participants.

By the time the Shriner caravan reached Hawaii, its participants wearied by seasickness *en route*, the celebratory finale was heralded in erotic, exotic terms: "The mystic Inauguration of 'Aloha Temple' will be conducted with magnificent pomp and ceremony. Duty accomplished: There are flower-crowned *houris* in this land, bronze beauties that shall dance before your divans until the senses are intoxicated. There will be other intoxicants: there will be yarn-spinning across the *hookahs* and coffee cups where Noble out-doeth Noble and truth hides its head in a hubble bubble. *Aloha*!"[60] While this bit of prose is incongruous but stereotypical Orientalism, the Shriner arrival in Honolulu also generated local newspaper coverage wherein the rhetoric is rather different. Three weeks of hospitality were planned at elite locations and souvenir *fez* headgear made "by native hands from the dried *lahala* used for the regular native hats"[61] were produced for the visitors. Clearly, there is a palimpsestic cultural encounter underway, permeated with both "Arab" charade and "Hawaiian" reception. While such reportage would offer rich insight into the polyglot environment that the Shriners encountered and complicated, I turn, instead, to the longer and deeper story beyond the headlines to acknowledge the costs and sustained accommodation of outsiders in the island chain. It is not a celebratory tale.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Hawaii was subject to waves of missionary activity launched from East Coast institutions, as well as depredation, infestation, and invasion.[62] The last

56 Ibid., 14.

57 Ibid., 20–22.

58 Ibid., 19.

59 Ibid., 24–25.

60 Ibid., 99.

61 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser,* Honolulu, March 13, 1901, 3. I thank Kailani Polzak for her nuanced advice on Hawaii and related traditions.

62 Studies of missionary and colonizing activities in Hawaii are numerous and most of them are written from outsider perspectives. A useful overview is Noenoe K. Silva's *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Williams College Museum of Art's exhibition, *The Field Is the World* (2018), curated by Kailani Polzak and Sonnet Coggins, addressed critical issues with particular reference to photography and Williams College's role in mission activities. For one iteration of the missionary perspective, see Clifford Putney, *Missionaries in Hawaii: The Lives of Peter and Fanny Gulick* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 1–11.

decade had witnessed the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, the American annexation of the island chain, and its formalization as a territory: that status lasted until statehood, in 1959. Viewed from this diachronic perspective, the caravan takes on a more insidious tone, a place-specific iteration of settler colonialism. It was not militarized but mission-driven and entrepreneurial, transpiring over decades and manifest in diverse ways.[63] Spreading "proper" religious convictions and extending mercantile/political control was the proverbial two-edged sword, not unlike what happened in that other "Orient" under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. In both cases, America's Manifest Destiny carried overtones of converting "heathen" populations and universalizing Christianity.[64] The United States may not have deployed power as overtly as France did in North Africa, or as the Ottomans did in the Arabian Peninsula, but incursions were underway on the other side of the globe that defaced indigenous religion, language, social structures, cultural institutions, and practices over time. While I will look further at these issues below, I want to conclude this step in my argument simply by underscoring the rhetorical camouflage that I have detailed above. In effect, as the pious industrializing adventurers went West rather than East, the stereotypical Orient was mapped over a new terrain and a new topography was conquered. A particularized performance of Orientalism, this was creative cartography in the service of a young nation and it was just the first chapter in a longer story of globalization.

6 From Garden to Country

As the twentieth century unfolded, the United States became an incontrovertible power in transnational arena and the Shriners continued to augment that profile in inimitable public ways. Just two decades after the Hawaiian adventure and a few short years after World War I, a similar caravan ran East rather than West, to be welcomed in Washington D.C. with a parade down Pennsylvania Avenue. It was 1923. What is striking here is the theme of the whole event: "The Garden of Allah."

By this point, the Shrine had reached the upper echelons of society, including President Harding himself, now a *fez*-wearing member of the guild.[65] The pilgrimage parade entailed months of planning and a huge budget; along the way, postcards, souvenirs, and other consumer items were available, urging constituents to "park your camel with Uncle Sam'l [*sic*]." The appropriate dress and accoutrements evoking the Orient—jewels, jackets, and scimitars—were *de rigor*, and commemorative keepsakes and postcards spread the word and kept the memories alive in the aftermath.[66] While the formative impact that Masonic/Shriner activities had on the trajectories of American capitalism

63 For terms, themes and structures, see Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Eve Tuck, "Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies: Ongoing Settlement, Cultural Production, and Resistance," *Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies* 17, no. 1 (2017), 3–13.

64 Cf. Edwards, "A Million and One Nights," in Edwards, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures*, 19–20. See Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Janet Marquardt, "The Haystack Monument at Williams College," in *Monumental Troubles: Rethinking What Monuments Mean Today*, ed. Erika Doss and Cheryl Snay (Notre Dame, IN: Midwest Art History Society and the Snite Museum of Art, 2018), n.p.; and Fuad Shaban, *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought: The Roots of Orientalism in America* (Durham: Acorn Press, 1991).

65 Warren G. Harding's portrait appears, for example, in the commemorative album of the 1923 caravan along with an acknowledgement of his death shortly before the album was published in 1924. See Joseph Edgerton, *Across the Burning Sands to the National Homecoming: The Pilgrimage 1923: The Official Story by Word and Picture of the Imperial Council Session of the AAONMS at Washington, D.C.* (Washington, DC: AAONMS, 1923), xvii.

66 Edwards, "Catalogue of the Exhibition," in Edwards, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures*, 216–23; cat. #71–78.

FIGURE 6.4 The Garden of Allah Pilgrimage down Pennsylvania Avenue, 1923. In Joseph Edgerton, *Across the Burning Sands*, n.p.

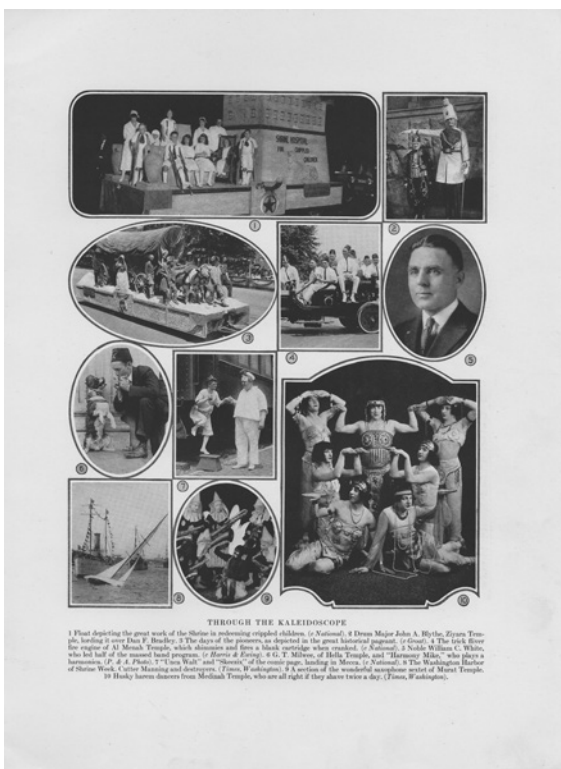

FIGURE 6.5 An "Oriental Princess," "Baghdad Clowns," Cleopatra, "Queen of the Shrine," and "Harem Dancers from Medinah." In Joseph Edgerton, *Across the Burning Sands,* p. 136.

has been documented elsewhere,[67] I would like to focus more narrowly here on the material evidence that remains from the caravan, in the form of photographs and stories in Joseph Edgerton's leather bound album, an artifact currently in the collections of the Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Masonic Library in New York City.

The simple choice to assemble such a volume is itself an act of commemorative self-fashioning whereby key patrons and participants are enshrined and pivotal moments are documented for posterity. The pilgrimage is a compelling tale beginning with a preface by Charles Warner about "The Garden of Allah" and a contribution by President Warren Harding entitled "True Fraternalism."[68] In his opening statement, Warner sets the stage in a manner reminiscent of Hichens' rhetoric: "the Garden of Allah is unknown to the senses … its atmosphere is the quiet, ineffable purity under the dome of the oak leaf beneath the snow where the arbutus dwells. Its music is the harmony of the silent hand of conscience. It is the heart of God."[69] Thereafter, the caravan is rendered as an adventure in chapters, accompanied by pictures and evocative titles: "Of the Camels Who Came Not out of the West," "East Breathes a Touch of Magic," "The Trek of the Gasoline Camels," and "The Red Sea Inundates the Capital." Along the way, the celebration of American technology and industry is a prominent theme again, this time tied to automobile culture and electrical delights. At the culminating event, Washington D.C. was transformed with "the most conspicuous scheme of decoration ever attempted in this country," with lighting that "employed 37,000 Westinghouse spray-colored lamps, the first time this type of bulb had been used for out of door decoration. The electric features alone cost $50,000."[70]

If the caravan celebrated American modernity for its own sake, the overland pilgrimage to the

67 Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream*, 19–50.

68 See Edgerton, *Across the Burning Sands*, xiv.

69 Ibid., xiii.

70 Ibid., 80.

capital was recounted in exoticizing terms, with unparalleled views and topographical wonders of the American landscape extolled with Orientalizing enthusiasm. Nor was the rhetoric confined to sightlines; rather, it stretched to capture embodied experience effusively. For example, the travelers were particularly "impressed by the desolate beauty of the Painted Desert … in which they counted sands of nineteen different colors. Here they saw two desert whirlwinds and were caught in the tail end of a sandstorm, when they emerged feeling like true Arabs."[71] Seeing the desert, feeling the desert, and coming out changed were electrifying moments, demanding description in evocative trope. In this way, direct experience is conveyed vividly, knitting together familiar stereotype and palpable feeling, imagined place and traversed terrain.

Arriving in the nation's capital thereafter was deemed an extension of that same exotic topography in the commemorative album. The parade route (fig. 6.4) is termed "the Road to Mecca" and is documented photographically, with important (albeit non-Arab) sites along the way, including the Library of Congress, the White House, and the Washington Cathedral. Images of people (fig. 6.5) complement the architectural milestones, encompassing a wide range of characters, serious and otherwise: John Phillip Sousa,[72] "an Oriental Princess," "Baghdad Clowns," and Cleopatra, "the Queen of the Shrine." "Harem Dancers from Medinah" are there as well, indicative of the absurd masquerading entertainments in which Shriners indulged.[73] Such a collage captures a group identity visually, so that subsequent generations might deploy that past as preface for ongoing Masonic philanthropy. I turn away now from this zenith of institutionalized Shrine activity to consider a single individual therein, whose story figures in the spaces between the United States and the Arab world, via Hawaii.

7 Who Is in Charge Here?

James Sutton ("Sunny Jim") McCandless was Imperial Potentate of the Shrine and Venerable Master of Lodge of Perfection from 1922 to 1924, as well as one of the founders of the Shriners Hospitals for Children in Honolulu. His biography is telling. Having joined the Aloha Temple of Freemasonry in 1904 (three years after the Shriner caravan to Honolulu), he was instrumental in the conception and staging of the Garden of Allah Caravan, so his portrait prefaces that commemorative album. Not surprisingly, McCandless' exalted Masonic status was congruent with his role in Hawaiian industry and history over the course of decades. He had moved to Hawaii in 1880 at the age of 25, whereupon he and his brothers founded a drilling company, constructing over 700 artesian wells across the island and thus helping to foster, support, and irrigate the sugar and pineapple plantations central to the Hawaiian economy. From such commercial embeddedness, the McCandless brothers participated actively in the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 and in the cascading ramifications thereafter.[74] While time and space preclude exploring these major events in island history, suffice it to say that the entanglement between the McCandless family, Freemasonry and the Shrine, and the American nation was sustained and formative.

And what of "the Garden of Allah"? James McCandless never set foot in the Arab world, but his carefully-staged pilgrimage invoked Islam and its

71 Ibid., 110.

72 John Philip Sousa was a renowned composer of band music who wrote "Nobles of the Mystic Shrine March," dedicating it to the Almas Temple in 1923. Cf. Edwards, "Catalogue of the Exhibition," in Edwards, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures,* fig. 72.

73 Ibid., 218–20 and figs. 71–78.

74 Peter T. Young, "Sunny Jim, John and Link," *Ho'okuleana* (blog). 2014. http://totakeresponsibility.blogspot.com/2014/09/sunny-jim-john-and-link.html?m=1; for biography, see also the official website of the Honolulu lodge at http://honolulufreemasons.org/.

sacred terrain to provide a very public experience for his fellow Masons. How to decode this invocation of a globally-disseminated faith? Is this spiraling path of world-making a matter of Orientalism, or have we gotten lost in the wake of the Shriners? In response, I circle back to my starting point—Gérôme's *The Snake Charmer*—to ask if its iconic character and the Saidian ideology that it conjures are pertinent for any other audiences. It would seem so. Paul Rich and Guillermo De Los Reyes have asserted the toxic character of the Shrine and its impact in the world of Islam and other arenas of religious conviction.[75] Decrying the Nobles' practices as "Orientalist Fraternalism," the authors document diverse Shrine centers in the Middle East and the resentment that the order has inspired for disrespectful appropriation of ritual and belief. If Shrine activities have engendered a range of responses in the original landscapes of monotheism, however, neither Islam nor Christianity was indigenous to Hawaii.[76] By extension, how Shrine behaviors, in particular, collided or colluded with local religious and spiritual practices in the early twentieth century would be a case study unto itself. Clearly, however, location matters. Clearly, too, that thing, "Orientalism," is a transferable heuristic tool as diverse selves fashion worlds to occupy and *others* are cast in supporting roles.

8 So, Where Are We?

At this juncture, then, I return to the continental United States to contextualize some emerging institutions with reference to themes I have laid out above—Orientalism, religion, museum culture, and nation-building. First, I invite the reader to consider the synchronicity of the Garden of Allah pilgrimage in 1923 with the growth of Islam on American soil. Admittedly, a pivotal event had occurred earlier, on September 20, 1893.[77] At the first World's Parliament of Religions transpiring in downtown Chicago, Alexander Russell Webb gave a talk, "The Spirit of Islam," delivered to a packed house. It was an audience of primarily Protestants along with representatives of other faiths. In that speech, Webb sought to emphasize the broader monotheistic tradition and thereby encourage greater understanding of the religion to which he had converted during his ambassadorial tenure in the Philippines: "The system is one that has been taught by Moses, by Abraham, by Jesus, by Mohammad, by every inspired man the world has ever known. You need not give up Jesus, but assert your manhood. Go to God!"[78] From that vantage point and with seed funds from India, he opened the Moslem World Building on W. 20th Street in New York as his headquarters and published a journal to foster the religion in the United States.

Over time, then, Detroit, Michigan, came to be called "a microcosm of Islam in America."[79] There,

75 As pointed out by Rich and Los Reyes, "to Muslims, it is a ritual monster founded on cultural plagiarism" (9). The authors argue further that the intrusion and appropriation of Shriner rituals also impinges on Christian denominations and other faith bodies and call it a "surrogate religion" (17). Paul Rich and Guillermo De Los Reyes, "The Nobles of the Shrine: Orientalist Fraternalism," *Journal of American Culture* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 9–19.

76 Mission efforts transformed island landscapes and entailed construction of institutions, establishment of literacy, and indoctrination. Cf. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed,* 30–35.

77 I present the preface to this event elsewhere. See Holly Edwards, "Yankee Mahomet," in *The Image of the Prophet between Ideal and Ideology: A Scholarly Investigation*, ed. Christiane J. Gruber and Avinoam Shalem (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 337–56. Also relevant are Shaban, *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought*, and Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

78 Umar F. Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America: The Life of Alexander Russell Webb* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 274.

79 Mucahit Bilici, *Finding Mecca in America: How Islam Is Becoming an American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 15–20.

the first mosque in America was built in 1921, just two years before the Shriner caravan to Washington: it was established in Highland Park by Lebanese Sunni immigrants. In 1930, the Nation of Islam was founded by Wallace D. Fard and led by Elijah Muhammad, its first "temple" being anchored in Detroit. I mention only these two disparate benchmarks to suggest the variegated nature of American Islam and, by extension, to underscore the spiraling scope of the story I have told here. Clearly, Shriner masquerade is not Islam, but both are headline news in the 1920s America and both are "Arab" variables in a broader picture, the rich *mélange* of identities and institutions coalescing at the time around the globe. Now, I would look beyond that cover story to spotlight another cast of characters active between Detroit and Washington and consider how they figure in the emergence of the American nation.

On May 9, 1923, just a few short weeks before the Garden of Allah pilgrims paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue, the Freer Gallery of Art opened on the Mall. At that time, it was the first art museum on the Smithsonian campus and the culmination of an elite collaboration between Detroit businessman Charles Lang Freer and President Theodore Roosevelt that had begun years before.[80] The two men had recognized in Asia an emerging force deserving of study and respect and, in 1906, Freer deeded to the nation his burgeoning array of Asian and American art. By exploring the differences in materials from around the world, the Freer Gallery of Art would unite, in Freer's own words, "modern work with masterpieces of certain periods of high civilization harmonious in spiritual suggestion."[81] That enterprising traveler and connoisseur thus augmented museum culture[82] in the nation's capital along globalizing lines, collapsing time and space around extraordinary artifacts for the edification of future generations.[83]

While it is tempting to dive deeper still into the web of worlds that Freer occupied—surely his railroad car business would have directly or indirectly figured in the 1901 Shriner caravan journey across country—broader issues deserve acknowledgement. It is important to underscore that, while Freer's collections derived from that ambiguous place, the Orient, his attitudes cannot be glibly equated with Orientalism in the Saidian sense, nor was his "Orient" the same as that of Robert Hichens. Indeed, that place was morphing in collective imaginations and Freer's travels were centered further east, in China and Japan. Moreover, his methodical acquisition of artifacts was but one part of a larger phenomenon of nation-building by means of museum-building.[84] The monument that Freer founded (and others thereafter) has enshrined objects and defined cultures in endlessly protean ways,[85] but in the early twentieth century many of those things had yet to be taxonomized as "art," or natural history, or

80 Thomas Lawton and Linda Merrill, *Freer: A Legacy of Art* (New York: National Arts Club, 2007).

81 "History and Building," Freer Gallery of Art, accessed April 1, 2019, https://www.freersackler.si.edu/about/about-the-freer-gallery-of-art/.

82 Comparing the formation of the Freer collections and that of the Metropolitan Museum of Art collections would enhance the scope of this project. Cf. Priscilla Soucek, "Building a Collection of Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum, 1870–2011," in *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. Maryam D. Ekhtiar, Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheilla R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011), 2–9. See also Richard H. Collin, "Public Collections and Private Collectors," *American Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1994): 448–61.

83 That those future generations are now also challenged to de-colonize museums and revise "art history" accordingly is the ironic quandary of globalized visual culture.

84 Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995).

85 The work that museums do is a field of study unto itself. Cf. Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), esp. 86–137, and Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff, *Museum Culture: Histories, Discussions, Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

"other."[86] At that formative moment, Freer's approach was globalizing, utopian, and aesthetically-driven, working to re-frame objects from Asia as fine art in the U.S.A. This was a collectivizing vision at a tumultuous time in history.

While I make no pretense of tracing that story here, I want to return to a basic premise of this chapter in conclusion. "Art" is a category of things that wields vast power in millennial circumstances, the material evidence of illustrious heritage, sophistication and political legitimacy. In grandly-conceived exhibition spaces, "art" is more than mere stuff. It offers sanctuary and arsenal at once. Contemplating a masterpiece can be a sustaining, inspiring, and even therapeutic experience; owning and exhibiting that masterpiece can be a powerful stance. Museums in the Arab world are currently wielding this tool, performing individuation diversely in response to oil wealth and rapid modernization. Thus, mobilizing the past for present and future purpose, citizens, collectors, and curators are proactive cartographers in global visual culture even as the "Orient" morphs in the minds of others.

9 Epilogue

As this tale has wandered from place to place—from the Orient to the Arabian Desert to the Garden of Allah, and from imaginings to artifacts to institutions—many boundaries have been crossed and also drawn. Nations have emerged on the world stage and cultural identities have taken shape with reference to art, collections, and historical traditions. Such is the power of things for the fashioning of self. And so, the path is neither simple nor linear nor even really topographical. Rather, it has been a globalizing route through a multi-centric and heterochronic landscape, trailing behind some powerful pictures and stretching from somatic to spiritual experience. Gérôme's painting bears little resemblance to Cassidy's lithograph, but both martial a certain "realism," reducing the world to manageable metaphors and graspable ideas by visual means. That, I would argue, is what things do—create and sustain a habitable setting or place for generations to occupy and build on. Producing and deploying such images, either literally or figuratively, is one way by which the world is mapped and imaginative stories are told, shaping a conducive arena for the future to unfold.

How inclusive or trustworthy the resulting tales are is, of course, a matter of opinion, even as the force and agency of art depends on how it is wielded and by whom. In our technologically-assisted world, images are metastatic and metathetic things. No longer just mechanically-reproduced, now they are multiplied, mediated, and marketed online in a collage that offers myriad Arab places for the delectation of others. Within that visuality, Gérôme's painting is reproducible but not replaceable; its uniqueness is amplified by its gilt frame and enshrined status in a private collection. By contrast, Asa Cassidy's *Garden of Allah* is available for purchase, poster size and in the color of your choice, from Wal-Mart. What digitized desert voices murmur to millennial consumers about the Arab world, however, will vary considerably with time, place, and players.

86 The institutional trajectory of the Jenks Museum at Brown University is revealing of museum histories, taxonomies, enshrined things, and institutional structures. See Steven Lubar, *Inside the Lost Museum: Curating Past and Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

PART 3

Emblems of Arabia: Things as Identity Markers

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CHAPTER 7

Kinetic Symbol: Falconry as Image Vehicle in the United Arab Emirates

Yannis Hadjinicolaou

1 The Desert Falcon

A bearded laughing man wearing his *kandoura* emerges from a fuzzy background (fig. 7.1). On his left hand, he is holding a falcon. The standing man, wearing a falconer's glove, looks toward the falcon, tracing in a proprioceptive way the bird's movement. The photograph reminds one of a ruler's image (view from below, monumental figure). And, indeed, the man in the photograph is none other than Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan, the first President of the United Arab Emirates, who played an immense role in the union of the Emirates in 1971. A passionate falconer, Sheikh Zayed is depicted in many photographs with birds of prey that became a sort of *alter ego* of the ruler: in an early 1974 biography, he was even described as a desert falcon.[1]

As a dual symbol of power and heritage, falconry is a productive addition to the economic globalization of the U.A.E.[2] From ancient times, falconry has explicitly cultivated a place of memory, yet it is not oriented only toward the past. On the one hundred Dirham banknote, for instance, tradition merges with technological innovation since the local saker falcon is represented looking in the direction of a modern building (fig. 7.2). The bird of prey is placed nearer to the viewer in comparison to the architectural landmark, which enhances its identification by the Emirati beholders as their national symbol. Modern buildings, such as the one on the one hundred Dirham note, were already

FIGURE 7.1 Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan with a falcon.

1 Claud Morris, *The Desert Falcon: The Story of H.H. Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan al Nahiyan President of the United Arab Emirates* (London: Morris International, 1974).

2 See for instance Ahmed K.A. Al Mansoori, *The Distinctive Arab Heritage. A Study of Society, Culture and Sport in the United Arab Emirates* (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Heritage Club, 2004); Ken Riddle, *The Art of Falconry from Arabia Westward. Training and Conditioning Captive Raised Falcons* (Abu Dhabi: Motivate Publishing, 2009); Katrin Bromber and Birgit Krawietz, "The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain as a Modern Sport Hub," in *Sport Across Asia: Politics, Cultures, and Identities*, ed. Katrin Bromber, Birgit Krawietz, and Joseph Maguire (New York: Routledge 2012), 189–211; Sarina Wakefield, "Falconry as Heritage in the United Arab Emirates," *World Archaeology* 44, no. 2 (2012): 280–90; Birgit Krawietz, "Falconry as a Cultural Icon of the Arab Gulf Region," in *Under Construction: Logics of Urbanism in the Gulf Region*, ed. Steffen Wippel, Katrin Bromber, Christian Steiner, and Birgit Krawietz (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 131–46.

FIGURE 7.2
A one-hundred-dirham banknote with the local saker falcon, the national symbol of the U.A.E.

emerging in the early 1980s. This visual medium points to the modernity of the country, on the one hand, and to the popularity of the traditional practice of falconry, on the other. In this example, the building is the well-known World Trade Center in Dubai, a symbol of the economic boom of the Emirates and of the astonishing prosperity of the country.[3] The falcon is not only a symbol of the past but also of the present, although it currently bears different connotations than in the pre-oil era.

My focus in this chapter is on the iconic power of images of falconry in the U.A.E. I discuss here falconry as a deeply visual phenomenon, an issue yet to be investigated by current scholarship. In the case of the U.A.E., the imagery of falconry, both in its compositional and technical sense, derives from an Occidental medial point of view. I refer here less to the practice of falconry itself, which was imported from the East to the West, and more to its visual representation.[4] The East-West interactions are not one way communications but, as I argue here, interfaces of constant and ongoing dialogue. Because the falconry imagery in the U.A.E. and in the Gulf in general has its origins in Western pictorial practices, I will start by taking a brief look at those images and their Occidental pictoriality in order to highlight their similar use of falconry as a symbol for power and ruling. I will then turn to the symbolic value of the falcon in the U.A.E. and discuss its role in the process of Emirati identity formation. Finally, I will introduce Aby Warburg notion of "image vehicle," an image that does not simply illustrate a practice but constructs it in a certain way, as a bridge to the discussion of the falcon's iconic life and afterlife in the Arabian Peninsula today.

2 The Power of Images

Images do not simply illustrate linguistic meanings. They are complex entities that help us think about and affect our perception of the world. Falconry images, in particular, have specific aesthetic qualities while also representing sometimes conflicting views and ideas. These issues are often implicit since they involve non-verbal communication; however, the arguments these images make must be put into words, an attempt that has its own challenges as it involves the verbalization of a non-linguistic medium.

After the introduction of falconry as a practice in Italy and Germany by Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (d. 1250), falconry images had a huge impact on the Western world and helped create a global imagery heavily influenced by Arabic sources.[5] This pictoriality of falconry in Europe had a significant impact on the Arab world subsequently, functioning as a

3 With thanks to Melissa Gronlund for the identification of the building.

4 This is one of the goals of my monograph, *The Visual Power of Medieval Falconry*, forthcoming from Reaktion Books (2021/2022).

5 See Yannis Hadjinicolaou, "'Ich zog mir einen Falken.' Das ikonische Nachleben der Falknerei" ["I trained a falcon." The visual afterlife of falconry], *Pegasus. Berliner Beiträge zum Nachleben der Antike*, 18/19 (2018): 188.

kind of iconic feedback loop. In other words, Frederick II's promotion of falconry contributed, among other things, to the formation of an "Arab heritage": Frederick took up Arab falconry techniques that appeared in Western images of falconry depicting a "genuine Arab" practice, images that were later introduced in the Gulf area.

Historically, images of falcons have often been associated with the art of war, bearing connotations of valiance and bravery. In a sixteenth-century emblem by Joachim Camerarius, for instance, one can see an open landscape with a village in the background and a falcon falling upon a heron (fig. 7.3). The struggle between the two is a common emblematic theme in Western iconography and, as such, it has a meaning that goes beyond the visual one because emblems are always connected with texts. In this case, the image refers to the art of war because the accompanying text reads: "The outcome of the fight is uncertain."[6] The bald branch in the foreground, growing out of a tree stump, points to the fight, leaving open the possibility of decay or rebirth and underlining the uncertain outcome of the confrontation. A miniature from the Museum in Aurangabad (Maharrashtra, India) similarly comments on this fact: it shows a falconry scene above, where a falcon triumphs over a heron, and a battle below, where elephant riders kill a warrior on a horse (fig. 7.4). As indicated by such images, both Western and Eastern cultures use a similar iconography of falconry as a paradigm for battle.

When analyzing the above-mentioned images, it is obvious not only that falconry was perceived at the time as closely related to the idea of war but also that it had broader political implications. The image of the falcon as a war and political symbol is found, for example, in a painting of the Flemish court artist David Teniers the Younger (fig. 7.5).

FIGURE 7.3 *The Outcome of the Fight Is Uncertain* (*Exitus in dubio est*). Emblem, Joachim Camerarius, Symbolorum & Emblematicum, III No. 32, Nurenberg 1598.

FIGURE 7.4 [Unknown artist from Maratha], *Battle Scene*. Miniature, 18th century.

6 Arthur Schenkel and Albrecht Schöne, *Emblemata. Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts* [Emblemata. Handbook of symbols of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries] (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1967), 785.

FIGURE 7.5
David Teniers the Younger, *Heron Hunt with Archduke Leopold William*. Oil on canvas, ca. 1654.

Teniers painted his benefactor and defender of the southern provinces of the Netherlands in the Thirty Years' War, Count Leopold Wilhelm, mounted on a horse. He follows here a painting tradition established by Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer, who placed religious scenes in the background and brought to the foreground genre and still-life motives, such as markets or butcher shops.[7] Teniers merges here historic and genre painting with still-life painting into an original pictorial composition. The image is very different from common royal portraiture. In this work, the heron is attacked from both sides by falcons. Up in the sky, a similar confrontation takes place, suggesting the war between the southern provinces of the Netherlands, on the one hand, and France and the northern provinces of the Netherlands, on the other. This emblematic constellation leaves the outcome open although the painter and Leopold Wilhelm are clearly on the side of the southern Netherlands. According to some scholars, the falcons symbolize here France and the northern Dutch provinces while the herons symbolize the southern Dutch provinces.[8] However, the falcons are encircled by Leopold Wilhelm's hunting party, a detail that may suggest a different interpretation of the scene. In this case, the falcons may symbolize the southern Dutch provinces fighting against their enemies in general. Teniers purposefully placed his signature on a stone on the right-hand side of the painting, where a falconer with a lure in his hand is running toward the birds of prey, to suggest his role as an observer and commentator on the political implications of the scene. In other words, the artist serves here the sovereign without neglecting his own artisanal sovereignity, as underlined by the placement of his signature on a political allegory.

3 Origins of Falconry

The idea of falconry as a ruler's exercise and its pictorial afterlife have a global dimension, as testified by images deriving from or circulating throughout the Arab world, Europe, and Asia.[9] It is common knowledge that Frederick II hired

7 For details, see Victor Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image. An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).

8 Hans Vlieghe, *David Teniers the Younger (1610–1690). A Biography* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 33.

9 For a compelling argument about the transnational circulation of ideas and things, see Michael Edwardes,

falconers from different parts of the world to learn this art.[10] This fact not only explains how various cultural practices shape images of falconry associated with a ruler but also provides very concrete proof of Frederick II's universalism. The iconic afterlife of falconry is a cross-cultural phenomenon that has taken new shapes and meanings throughout the centuries.

As Hans Epstein and Kurt Lindner have shown, falconry was considered as a barbaric practice in the Occident.[11] It was cultivated in the Asian and African-Roman provinces and, later, in the Byzantine Empire, wherefrom it was subsequently brought to Europe in the 6th century A.D.[12] Aristotle mentions falconry in his *Historia Animalium* (*History of Animals*), where he indicates that this practice was common in Kedripolis (Thrace).[13] Similarly, the Near and Middle East (according to Xenophon, Persia was the main place for raising birds of prey),[14] China (during the Han Dynasty), India (around 400 B.C.),[15] and Mongolia (since prehistoric times) were, among other places, known areas for practicing falconry. Frederick II "imported" this cultural practice from the Arab world, where it started to unfold its iconic status.[16] Thus, from its very beginning, falconry emerged more or less simultaneously in widely disparate places, such as Scandinavia, Central

East-West Passage: The Travel of Ideas, Arts and Inventions between Asia and the Western World (London: Cassell, 1971).

10 John Cummins, *The Hound and the Dog. The Art of Medieval Hunting* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1988), 219.

11 Kurt Lindner, *Beiträge zu Vogelfang und Falknerei im Altertum* [Contributions to bird trapping and falconry in ancient times] (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973). I return to this idea when discussing Aby Warburg's notion of "image vehicle" below.

12 Hans Epstein, "The Origin and Earliest History of Falconry," *Isis* 34, no. 6 (1943): 497–509; Lindner, *Beiträge zu Vogelfang,* 90. Augustine of Hippo indicates that Vandals in North Africa were keeping birds of prey and hunting dogs. For details, see Robert Seidenader, *Kulturgeschichte der Falknerei mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Bayern. Von Augustinus bis Kurfürst Maximilian I* [Cultural history of falconry with special consideration of Bavaria. From Augustinus to Elector Maximilian I] (Munich: Private Printing, 2007), 1:29.

13 Aristotle, *Historia animalium IX*, 36, 620b. Loeb Classical Library, www.loebclassics.com/view/aristotle-history_animals/1965/pb_LCL437.3.xml (accessed November 5, 2018); Lindner, *Beiträge zu Vogelfang*, 112.

14 Henry Maguire, "'Signs and Symbols of Your Always Victorious Reign.' The Political Ideology and Meaning of Falconry in Byzantium," in *Images of the Byzantine World: Visions, Messages and Meanings: Studies Presented to Leslie Brubaker*, ed. Angeliki Lymberopoulou (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 144. See also Epstein, "The Origin and Earliest History of Falconry," 501.

15 Lindner, *Beiträge zu Vogelfang*, 117. See also Thomas T. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

16 Lisa Anna Medrow, "Falkenjagd in Arabien im 8.-13. Jahrhundert" [Hawk hunting in Arabia in the 8th-13th centuries], in *Kaiser Friedrich II. (1194–1250). Welt und Kultur des Mittelmeerraums* [Emperor Frederick II (1194–1250). World and culture of the Mediterranean], ed. Mamoun Fansa and Karen Ermete (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern 2007), 15; Javier Ceballos, *Falconry. Celebrating a Living Heritage* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2009), 146–47. It is known, for instance, that Frederic II imported from the Arab world the hood: "The falcon's hood is a discovery of oriental peoples, the Arabs having, so far as we know, first introduced it into active practice. We ourselves, when we sailed across the seas, saw it used by them and made a study of their manner of manipulating this head covering. The Arabian chiefs not only presented us with many kinds of falcons but sent with them falconers expert in the use of the hood. In addition to these sources of knowledge from the time when we first decided to write a book, a complete treatise on falconry, we have imported partly form Arabia, partly from other countries, both birds and men skilled in the art, from whom we have acquired a knowledge of all their accomplishments." See Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, *The Art of Falconry; Being the De Arte Venandi cum Avibus of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen*, trans. and ed. Casey A. Wood and F. Marjorie Fyfe (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1943), 205. This does not mean however that there was no falconry in Europe before Frederick II. Here I rather refer to certain techniques also manifested in images.

FIGURE 7.6
A male figure holding a bird of prey dated between the third century B.C. and the second century A.D. Copper alloy.

FIGURE 7.7
Tetradrachm of Alexander the Great. Reverse Zeus with eagle with the Greek inscription "King Alexander," the fourth century B.C.

Asia, and the Arabian Peninsula.[17] When dealing with falconry images, therefore, one should consider a broader, global antiquity rather than a narrow, European one.

Even if images of birds of prey were not widespread in the pre-Islamic period, they can still be found in the art of the time. For instance, a male figure holding a bird of prey dated between the third century B.C. and the second century A.D. and

17 See the English summary to *Raptor and Human—Falconry and Bird Symbolism throughout the Millennia on a Global Scale*, ed. Karl-Heinz Gersmann and Oliver Grimm (Kiel: Wachholtz, 2018), 18–25.

displayed at the Archaeological Museum in Sharjah (fig. 7.6) shows a figurative coupling of a human and a bird in this region. Even if this representation may have been a Western import similar to the famous coins depicting Zeus holding an eagle (fig. 7.7), it is, still, an important example as it indicates a visual engagement with this subject. Such images have certainly played an important role in the development of visual representations of a human being (or ruler) holding a bird of prey, which is one of the most common iconographic renditions of falconry in this region.

4 Falconry in the Emirates

As argued above, falconry was often represented in European images and texts as an explicitly political activity. This is also obvious in the programmatic book, *Falconry as a Sport—Our Arab Heritage*, which was published for the First Falconry Festival in 1976, five years after the founding of the U.A.E. (fig. 7.8).[18] Celebrating falconry was a way for the young state to create an identifying figure and make it known internationally through the organization of a local event. Thus, the festival created visibility for the new state after its declaration of independence from the British protectorate. The falcon was an ideal identifying image not only inside but also outside the borders of the newly-established state. The current perception of the U.A.E. outside the country is based, among other things like its megamalls or oil drills, on this particular symbol. The falcon has now become the official symbol of the Emirates.[19]

The insistence on falconry as a sport should not take, however, from another central function

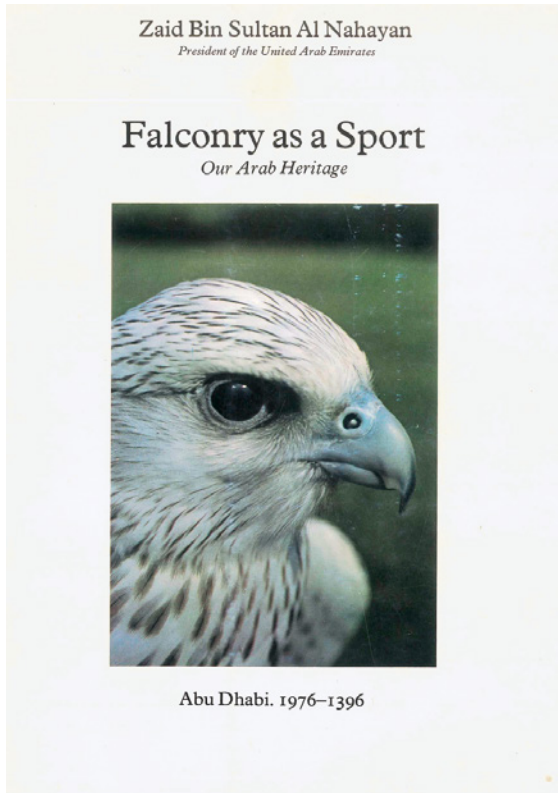

FIGURE 7.8 Cover image, Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan, *Falconry as a Sport—Our Arab Heritage*.

of the falcon, namely that of hunting. The latter activity ensured the daily nutrition of the local Bedouin population, who elevated falconry to an art form. Sheikh Zayed's *Falconry as a Sport* reminds one of Frederick II's *De Arte Venandi Cum Avibus* (*The Art of Flying with Birds*).[20] Frederick's book is heavily based on Arabic knowledge

18 Zaid Bin Sultan Al Nahayan, *Falconry as a Sport—Our Arab Heritage* (Abu Dhabi: Westerham Press, 1976).

19 It is not a coincidence that UNESCO's declaration of falconry as intangible heritage was heavily based on the decisive role played by the U.A.E. For details, see "Falconry, a Living Human Heritage," *UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage*, https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/falconry-a-living-human-heritage-01209 (accessed July 15, 2018).

20 An essential bibliography on this topic includes: Baudouin van den Abeele, *La Fauconnerie dans les lettres françaises du XIIe au XIVe siècle* [Falconry in French literature from the twelfth to the fourteenth century] (Leuven: Presses Universitaires, 1990); Johannes Fried, *Kaiser Friedrich II. als Jäger oder Ein zweites Falkenbuch Kaiser Friedrichs II.?* [Emperor Frederick II as a hunter or a second falcon book of Emperor Frederick II?] (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); Daniela Boccassini, *Il volo della mente. Falconeria e sofia nel mondo mediterraneo: Islam, Federico II, Dante* [The flight of the mind. Falconry and wisdom in the Mediterranean world: Islam, Federico II, Dante]

and practices that he had became familiar with during his expeditions in the Holy Land and through direct contact with Arab falconers whom he employed in his court. Just like Frederick II, in *Falconry as a Sport—Our Arab Heritage*, Sheikh Zayed refers explicitly to the similarity between hunting and handling affairs of state:

"Despite the heavy demands of my task in building up our young state I resolved to meet this request [of writing this book] … Some wise kings and rulers have been criticized for their attachment to the hunt on the grounds that it distracts them from affairs of State. They reply that they derive great benefits from their indulgence in it. Not least of these is the knowledge acquired about the state of the land, its progress, development and prosperity, or otherwise. If they find shortcomings or things which displease them they can set them right. At the same time, under-privileged citizens have an opportunity to make their problems known to the king."[21]

FIGURE 7.9 Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan during a falconry expedition. Reprinted from Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan, *Falconry as a Sport—Our Arab Heritage*, p. 76.

The role of companionship in strengthening the body of the state during falconry expeditions is also highlighted by a 1970 photograph featuring Sheikh Zayed (fig. 7.9). A group of men are drinking coffee in the desert, gathered in a circle. In the foreground, Zayed is shown surrounded by falcons and looking at his companions. This image reminds the viewers that the origins of the Emirates lie in the desert. Falconry reinforces a sense of physical and spiritual community, regardless of the social status of the participants. This aspect is emphasized by Sheikh Zayed himself:

"Another very important factor which led me to prefer falconry was its more sociable aspect. A hunting expedition with falcons brings together a group of men, never more than sixty and never less than ten. It may last for a week or more. The group may include a king, a governor, a prince or a

(Ravenna: Longo, 2003); Michael Menzel, "Die Jagd als Naturkunst. Zum Falkenbuch Kaiser Friedrichs II" [Hunting as a nature art. To the falcon book Emperor Friedrich II], in *Natur im Mittelalter*, ed. Peter Dilg (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), 342–59; Fansa and Ermete, eds., *Kaiser Friedrich II*; Mamoun Fansa and Carsten Ritzau, eds., *Von der Kunst mit Vögeln zu jagen. Das Falkenbuch Friedrichs II. Kulturgeschichte und Ornithologie* [From the art of hunting with birds. The falcon book of Frederick II. Cultural history and ornithology] (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern 2007); Stefan Georges, *Das zweite Falkenbuch Kaiser Friedrichs II, Quellen, Entstehung, Überlieferung und Rezeption des Moamin* [The second book of falconry of the Emperor Frederick II, sources, origin, transmission and reception of Moamin] (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008); and Johannes Fried and Gundula Grebnerand, eds., *Kulturtransfer und Hofgesellschaft im Mittelalter. Wissenskultur am sizilianischen und kastilischen Hof im 13. Jahrhundert* [Cultural transfer and court society in the Middle Ages. Knowledge culture at the Sicilian and Castilian court in the 13th century] (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008).

21 Al Nahayan, *Falconry as a Sport*, 8 and 16, respectively. A long iconographic tradition (systematically speaking since the early Middle Ages) shows that ruler and falcon have often been associated with each other. *The Book of Saint Albans* (1486) is a famous example: it employs a taxonomy of birds of prey corresponding to different positions in the court. The king, for instance, is associated with a gyrfalcon. For more details, see Helen Macdonald, *Falcon* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 52–53.

prominent merchant or, again, just an ordinary man who has a house and a family to support, but a love of sport, friendship and a desire for the chase brings them all together … Each one feels a sense of release and well-being in both body and soul … [A] hunting trip provides a good opportunity to assess men's strength or weakness of character irrespective of the chance it offers the hunter in the way of physical and spiritual exercise and unforgettable comradeship."[22]

This statement reminds again of Frederick II.[23] Indeed, Sheikh Zayed positions himself in this heritage and it is not by chance that he knew Frederick's book by heart.[24] A passage from Frederick's *Art of Falconry* opens similar perspectives: "We have studied with the greatest detail all that relates to falconry, exercising both mind and body so that we might be qualified to interpret the fruits of knowledge."[25] Thus, personal practice and communal experience are of central importance for the two rulers. The famous image of Frederick II with his falcon displayed on the second page of the Manfredi Manuscript (fig. 7.10) finds an iconic equivalent in a painting depicting Zayed with his two falcons and a cup of coffee in his hand (fig. 7.11).[26] Both images make it clear that ruler, power, and falconry are interrelated. It is not a coincidence that a picture of Zayed with three falcons hangs in

FIGURE 7.10 Friedrich II, *De Arte Venandi Cum Avibus.* Folio 1v, Manfredi Manuscript, 1258–1266.

FIGURE 7.11 [Unidentified Painter], Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan with falcons in the desert, ca. 1990. Oil on canvas.

the *majlis*, or the audience room, of his palace in Al Ain, which, according to the Bedouin tradition, is reserved for discussions of state matters. The painting illuminates the falcons' role in this specific context: they fly free and are untamed, they are at the benevolence of the ruler (who feeds them when they complete their task), and they stay on their perch forming a unity with the ruler. The idea formulated in *Oneirocriticon*, the dream

22 Al Nahayan, *Falconry as a Sport*, 8–9.

23 Frederick II, *The Art of Falconry*, 3.

24 For details, see Hadjinicolaou, "'Ich zog mir einen Falken.' Das ikonische Nachleben der Falknerei," 165–68.

25 Frederick II, *The Art of Falconry*, 3–4. See also, Robin S. Oggins, *The Kings and Their Hawks. Falconry in Medieval England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 5.

26 Carl Arnold Willemsen, ed., *Das Falkenbuch Kaiser Friedrich II. Nach der Prachthandschrift in der Vatikanischen Bibliothek* [The falcon book of Emperor Frederick II. After the manuscript in the Vatican library] (Dortmund: Harenberg 1980), 2; Dorothea Walz and Carl Arnold Willemsen, eds., *Das Falkenbuch Friedrichs II* [The falcon book of Frederick II] (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 2000).

interpretation treatise of the scholar Achmet of Basra (653/4–728/9), that "the hawk and the falcon signify a position of power second to the king," is eloquently illuminated by this picture.[27] It is also significant that the artist's signature and the date of the painting (i.e., 1999) are placed next to the falcon, which is rewarded with meat, a clear hint to the painter working under the patronage of Zayed's court.[28]

Furthermore, Zayed's idea of a communal experience during falconry expeditions seems to echo Frederick II's notion of falconry as a social leveler:

"The pursuit of falconry enables nobles and rulers worried by the cares of state to find relief in the pleasures of the hunt. The poor, as well as the less noble, may earn some of the necessities of life; and both classes will find in bird life attractive manifestations of the processes of nature."[29]

Both sovereigns share the idea that falconry, as *cura publica* (benefit of the state), is a practice that combines state action, hunting, sport, and art. Therefore, one can argue that not Frederick's falcon practices are of interest to Zayed but his consecrating of the image of the falconer-sovereign, and of a Western visual vocabulary in general, through the miniatures in *De Arte Venandi Cum Avibus*. Zayed does not explicitly mention Frederick because, in his eyes, the latter draws inspiration from falconry practices that Zayed considers as genuinely Arabic.[30] In this sense, unlike Frederick, who transfers this knowledge through these images, Zayed does not need an intermediary because falconry is part of an uninterupted Arab heritage.

Knowing how to handle a falcon can be seen as analogous to knowing how to rule the state.[31] The falcon is never fully tamed and can be lost, which can frustrate the falconer, even if this problem is less acute nowadays due to new technological developments. Similarly to the falconer, the ruler must learn early on how to approach an unexpected situation and one of the pedagogical tools used to this effect is falconry itself. For instance, a young Maximilian I, later the Holy Roman Emperor (1508–1519), is depicted in a sixteenth-century print by Hans Burgmair removing the hood of a falcon, thus demonstrating his expertise in the art of falconry, while in the background the hunting game has already begun (fig. 7.12). Learning how to handle a falcon is a complex and long process. The sovereign should pass many hours with his or her bird of prey. Ideally, they should sleep in the same room so that the interaction and substitution between the two can be reinforced.[32] A ruler has to empathically understand the needs of his falcon similarly to the way he understands the needs of his subjects. Falconry can also prove the prince's maturity and leadership abilities. That's why images of young rulers (mostly male but not exclusively) with their falcons were very common in the fifteenth-, sixteenth-, and seventeenth-century portraiture.

The tradition of the ruler as a falconer is continued today in the Emirates, as already demonstrated

27 *The Oneirocriticon of Achmet: A Medieval Greek and Arabic Treatise on the Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. and ed. Stevern M. Oberhelman (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1991), 239. Achmet, who claims to be the dream interpreter of Mamun, the caliph of Babylon, explains that the treatise "was written to provide his master with a convenient … compendium of dream-symbols, with their various interpretative meanings, so that his master could prognosticate future events" (11). See also Maguire, "Signs and Symbols," 141.

28 For the social history of the European court artist, see Martin Warnke's seminal book, *Hofkünslter. Zur Vorgeschichte des modernen Künstlers* [The court artist. On the ancestry of the modern artist] (Cologne: Dumont, 1985).

29 Frederick II, *The Art of Falconry*, 4; Oggins, *The Kings and Their Hawks*, 127.

30 This is the reason why, throughout his book, Sheikh Zayed mentions the Arab origins of falconry as an almost perpetual practice in the Gulf region.

31 Yannis Hadjinicolaou, "Macht wie die des Königs. Zur politischen Ikonographie der Falknerei" [Power like the king's. On the political iconography of falconry], in *Hunting without Weapons. On the Pursuit of Images*, ed. Maurice Saß (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 87–106. Aristocratic women also practiced falconry during the time.

32 Cummins, *The Hound and the Dog,* 202.

FIGURE 7.12
Hans Burgmair, *Maximilian I on His Falconry Expedition*. Woodcut, 1515.

by Zayed's image. Schools for falconry, such as the Emirates Falconers' Club, target a broad audience and convey the educational value of handling birds of prey. Besides the state advertising this practice by imprinting the image of the falcon on stamps, many illustrated books promote it among the youth.[33] Thus, an identification with this heritage and way of life is crafted early on. This kind of habitus is a deeply visual one. Such pictures create "images" of young falconers who, at least iconically, continue the practice of their forefathers. This pictorial staging is of paramount importance because it is currently more visible in an Emirati's everyday life than the practice of falconry itself. Indeed, this practice has become more and more exclusive since hunting is strictly limited to very few protected regions in the U.A.E.[34]

Another vital source for such images is the film industry. Frédéric Mitterrand's documentary, *Cheikh Zayed, une légende arabe* (*Sheikh Zayed, an Arab Legend*) (France, 2014), for instance, deals with the history of the U.A.E. and its founding father, Sheikh Zayed.[35] In one scene, the viewers can see a classroom in an Emirati school in the early 1970s. The teacher carries a falcon on his fist and asks the children what kind of animal he is holding. The children answer all together "a falcon" and the teacher explains, "This is the national bird of the United Arab Emirates."[36] The school functions here as an ideological state apparatus, being the medium whereby the founding power of the nation is identified with the material symbol of the falcon.[37]

33 See, for instance, Randa Hamwi Duwaji's very popular, *Hamad. The Young Falconer* (Abu Dhabi: Erwda, 2000).

34 This is the reason why Emirati falconers go hunting mostly in Pakistan, Morocco, or Azerbaijan, among other places.

35 Frédéric Mitterrand, *Cheikh Zayed, une légende arabe*. France, 2014. YouTube video, 1:15. Posted September 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pVjVpr2Rdo.

36 The fifteen-second scene I refer to here is to be found between 1.01.15 and 1.01.30. There are also many scenes with armed Bedouins inside and outside the court in Abu Dhabi who dance together, carrying falcons on their fists.

37 I use here Louis Althusser's term, as defined in *Ideologie und ideologische Staatsapparate. Aufsätze zur marxistischen Theorie* [Ideology and ideological state

FIGURE 7.13 Cover image, Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands,* showing a group of Bedouins, two of them holding hooded falcons.

In Wilfred Thesiger's famous book, *Arabian Sands* (1959), readers can see photographs taken by the author that capture the *modus vivendi* of the Bedouins.[38] Among their activities, the handling of falcons is repeatedly presented in various images. These are some of the first falconry images in the U.A.E. since no artifacts or things related to this practice (apart from certain falconry furniture) have survived, partly due to the hostile climate and nomadic life of the local communities. For this reason, these photographs are valuable visual testimonies beyond the actual practice of falconry, which has been transmitted from one generation to the next. For instance, one of these images shows five camels and four men riding them, two of them holding hooded falcons. Accompanied by a dog, the Bedouins are moving toward sand dunes barely covered with vegetation to soon blend in the surrounding desert (fig. 7.13). The falcon is elevated to an iconic object, that in its intangible heritage is handed down to the next generation of (primarily male) Bedouins. It is a nomadic object, a weapon, a means for survival, and an ally in the desert.[39] This memory in movement crafted and still crafts, to a certain degree, identities in the Arabian Gulf and beyond.

Birds of prey, camels, dogs, and weapons have been fixed features of Bedouin iconography throughout the centuries. It is through the Western eye (in this case Thesiger's) that a certain way of life is captured through the medium of photography, which creates an iconic identity of the Arabian Peninsula in general, and of the U.A.E. in particular. These images are elevated and aestheticized for a non-Arabic audience and are widely acknowledged as genuinely Bedouin and Arabic. And not only that: these images have gradually become historical testimonies for the locals. Thus, Thesiger's photographs have made a non-verbal contribution to a century-long tradition that was never made visible in photographic form before his book. Such photographs are not only reminders of previous times and of a way of life that has practically vanished nowadays, but in themselves, in their aesthetic construction, they are iconic creators of a Bedouin-Arabic identity. In other words, they are highly sophisticated ways of constructing historical memory and, henceforth, reality.

5 Aby Warburg and the Notion of "Image Vehicle"

The art historian or, rather, "image" historian (as he preferred to call himself) Aby Warburg coined the notion of "image vehicle" (*Bilderfahrzeug*), which he conceived not only as a mobile object (in this case, the falcon itself or images of falconry) but also as a motif and symbol that brings new associations and meanings to the object and may either overcome or conserve certain ways of

apparatuses. Essays on Marxist theory], ed. Frieder Otto Wolf (Hamburg: VSA, 1977), 108–68.

38 Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands* (London: Longmans, 1959). This book has gone through several editions; the one printed by Motivate Publishing in Dubai contains several of Thesiger's images. Besides Al Jahili Fort in Al Ain, which has a section dedicated to Thesiger (alias Mubarak bin London), many other museums in the U.A.E. show Thesiger's photographs to illuminate the country's recent history.

39 Christine Göttler and Mia Mochizuki, eds., *The Nomadic Object: The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

perceiving it.[40] Falconry images are "image vehicles" in both a literal and a metaphorical sense. For Warburg, the European afterlife of pagan antiquity and philosophy and the Mesopotamian and Arab adoption of these values were of crucial importance because they enabled him to trace back the Western origins of a motif that had either been lost in time or transmitted and disguised in objects from these areas. Falconry belongs to this latter category, and its afterlife is reflected in and through images that do not simply illustrate this practice but construct it in a certain way. Images of falconry produce visual associations and, through them, ideas: we think through them and even act and interact with them.[41]

In his seminal lecture, "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia," considered today as having laid the foundations of iconology, Warburg maintained that "symbols for the fixed stars … over the centuries, in their wanderings through Asia Minor, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Arabia and Spain … have lost their Grecian clarity of outline."[42] Warburg only mentioned hunting *en passant*, although the image he is referring to in this lecture clearly shows a falconry scene which can serve as the perfect example of a migrating image and its afterlife. The fresco shows "the worldly activities of the court of Duke Borso, who can be seen attending to official business or cheerfully riding out to hunt."[43] In this image, different modes are brought together that may be described as "movement" and "stillness," and "the tamed" and "the untamed" and are all part of the dialectic of handling falcons (fig. 7.14). One can see, on the one hand, the hunting party with the hooded, calm falcons and, on the other hand, the restless horse rider whose falcon almost flies away from his fist. To describe both the inner and outer movement suggested by the image, Warburg coined the term "pathos formula" (*Pathosformel*).[44]

As shown in this image, falconry, hunting, and state business are interlinked, which reminds viewers of the similar images of Zayed and Frederick II. Considering falconry within a European courtly context, it is clear why its transformation from a non-Western practice to an Occidental image remained for Warburg invisible, a kind of blind spot: because a Western style of falconry derived from the Greek antiquity did not exist. The afterlife of European antiquity was, however, at the center of Warburg's interests. Indeed, Warburg mentioned the Mesopotamian and Arabian knowledge, especially in relation to astrological images. His fixation on European antiquity in relation to the image of the falcon and its afterlife is well-known.[45] He gives the falcon a symbolic force, or *dynamis*, that is closely related to the images representing it and their materiality, especially when the bird of prey becomes an image itself. It is the floating of the bird and the intrinsic force of the animal in its co-productive relation to humans that are at the core of its *dynamis*. The falcon as actor and as material symbol is a model for a critical material

40 Aby Warburg, "Mnemosyne Einleitung (1929)" [Mnemosyne introduction (1929)], in Aby Warburg, *Werke in einem Band* [Works in a volume], ed. Martin Treml, Sigrid Weigel, and Perdita Ladwig (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 636–37.

41 Regarding the agency of an image, see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989); Horst Bredekamp, *Image Acts. A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018); and Carolin van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence: From the Animated Image to the Excessive Object* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

42 Aby Warburg, "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara," in Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity. Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 565.

43 Ibid.

44 Marcus Andrew Hurttig, ed. *Die entfesselte Antike. Aby Warburg und die Geburt der Pathosformel* [The unleashed antiquity. Aby Warburg and the birth of the pathos formula] (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung König, 2012).

45 See, for instance, Warburg's unfinished *Mnemosyne Image Atlas*, a project interrupted by his death in 1929. To fill out this gap, on the one hand, and to pursue the Warburgian tradition, on the other, I currently work on a book project titled *The Political Iconology of Falconry.*

FIGURE 7.14
Francesco del Cossa, detail image of *Allegory of April*, ca. 1468. Fresco.

FIGURE 7.15 Aegidius Sadeler, *Portrait of Mechti Kuli Beg*, 1605. Etching.

iconology that understands basis (i.e., matter) and superstructure (i.e., symbol) as the horizontal field of a bestial activity, or *ergon*. Thus, Warburg spoke of animals as kinetic symbols,[46] a view which finds a felicitous expression in the figure of the falcon as both an image vehicle and a nomadic object.

6 The Falcon as Kinetic Symbol

The transfer of functions, motives, and meanings, the (physical) movement of crafted objects, the falcons themselves (as diplomatic gifts),[47] and the instruments of falconry (such as the hood or the lure) were used in the past to connect and still connect today countries and civilizations. A print from 1605 by Egidius Sadeler with inscriptions in Persian and Latin shows the Persian ambassador Mechti Kuli Beg *ad vivum* at the court of Rudolf II, in Prague, carrying a falcon (fig. 7.15). The bird of prey is not only a symbol of the Orient but also a means for strengthening diplomatic relations. This speaks not only for the movable medium of images printed on paper but also for the content depicted by such images, which was meant for an international audience, not only a Persian or a Bohemian one. Thus, the interactions among Prague,

46 Aby Warburg, "Reise-Erinnerungen aus dem Gebiet der Pueblo Indianer in Nordamerika (1923)" [Travel memories from the region of the Pueblo Indians of North America (1923)], in Warburg, *Werke in einem Band*, 573.

47 See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990).

FIGURE 7.16 Falcon statue. Gift to the German Interior Minister from his U.A.E. counterpart, 2010.

Persia, and other civilizations are underlined and reinforced through this falcon iconography.[48]

The continuous movement of falcons as gifts occurred through diplomatic missions and gift exchanges that often included and still include live falcons or images of falconry. A 2010 gift from the U.A.E. Interior Minister, Saif bin Zayidal Nuhayyan, to his German counterpart, Thomas de Maizière, identifies the falcon as the symbol of the United Arab Emirates (fig. 7.16). Since the foundation of the U.A.E. in 1971, the falcon has been used as a symbol of unity by the Bedouin tribes while also alluding to the tribal structure of the local society. In other words, the protection of the interior is represented in the exterior through the apotropaic falcon.

Similarly, the work of contemporary artist Raja'a Khalid from Dubai (born 1984) brings together the global and the local through performances such as *Palace Gossip* (2018), which

48 Keelan Overton, "Ambassadors and Their Gifts," in *Gifts of the Sultan. The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, ed. Linda Komaroff (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 140; Rudolph Matthee, "Die Beziehungen des Iran zu Europa in der Safawidenzeit: Diplomaten, Missionare, Kaufleute, und Reisen" [Iran's relations with Europe in the Safavid era: Diplomats, missionaries, merchants, and travel], in *Sehnsucht Persien. Austausch und Rezeption in der Kunst Persiens und Europas im 17. Jahrhundert & Gegenwartskunst aus Teheran* [Yearning Persia. Exchange and reception in the art of Persia and Europe in the seventeenth century & contemporary art from Tehran], ed. A. Langer (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2013), 26; Gary Schwartz, "Terms of Reception. Europeans and Persians and Each Other's Art," in *Mediating Netherlandish Art and Material Culture in Asia*, ed. Thomas da Costa Kaufmann and Michael North (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 46; Lydia R. Dorn, *Diplomatenporträts der Frühen Neuzeit. Botschafter und Gesandte in der Malerei von Tizian über Van Dyck bis Aved* [Diplomatic portraits of the early modern period. Ambassadors and diplomats in paintings from Titian to Van Dyck to Aved] (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2017), 187.

FIGURE 7.17 *Palace Gossip*. Performance reading by Raja'a Khalid, 2018.

employs falconry as a unifying symbol.[49] The dialectical relation between local traditions and an international audience is not only one of harmonious togetherness, though. Khalid's work contains pictures from the famous Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital (its lesser known *mews*, which houses birds of prey), where every year thousands of falcons from around the region and beyond are cared for, as well as photographs of a woman falconer reading indoors during the aforementioned performance (fig. 7.17). She is wearing an inconspicuous, white T-shirt, allowing the viewers to focus their attention on the hooded gyrfalcon on her fist. The image sheds light on the major role of the falcon in the region, which is embedded in the multicultural context of today's Emirati society. Significantly, her work also points to the growing interest of local Emirati women in falconry. More and more women participate in falconry workshops in the U.A.E., an engagement which originated in Medieval Europe and, later, in Moghul India, where Muslim aristocratic women were an integral part of falconry imagery.[50]

Falconry migrated to Europe from the Arab world and went through various visual transformations through printing, painting, and, more recently, new media, such as photography, film, or the Internet. This renewed interest in falconry has unleashed its iconic afterlife in the Arabian Peninsula. While the Western media has attempted to shed light on this Arab theme, it has often created a productive conflict between form and content in a unified world that acknowledges local traditions, as the example of Sheikh Zayed has shown. However, the point of departure of the falcon iconography is not the Greek antiquity; rather, it is a multilocal one. As Warburg used to say, "Athens wants again and again to be recaptured from Alexandria."[51] Today, we should add, "Not only from Alexandria but also from Arabia."

A falcon is a bird of prey and a cultural symbol with a huge visual impact, iconic agency, and kinetic power in the U.A.E. It is, in itself, a *locus* of vivid memories, a means of survival in a hostile environment, and a symbol that has allowed the Emiratis to preserve their identity in a place where history and culture are constructed in totally different ways than in the Western world. In their constant movement and transformation, falcon and falconry are ideal ways of thinking of the U.A.E.'s past in its dynamic continuity with the present, a continuity that is greatly reliant on local images that act as forms of kinetic and symbolic capital.

49 Something similar, with different references, does the Bahraini artist Ghada Khunji who, in her self-portraits, follows Cindy Sherman's and Frida Khalo's tradition. For details, see her photo series *faRIDA*.

50 See Sami Ur Rahman, *The Art of Falconry in the Mughal Empire* (Abu Dhabi: Rainbow Graphic, 2017), 104.

51 I use here Christopher D. Johnson's translation of "Athen will eben immer wieder neu aus Alexandrien zurückerobert sein," in *Memory, Metaphor, and Aby Warburg's Atlas of Images* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012), 119.

CHAPTER 8

Al-Sadu Weaving: Significance and Circulation in the Arabian Gulf

Rana Al-Ogayyel and Ceyda Oskay

1 Introduction

Traditional Bedouin *al-Sadu* weavings are nomadic, narrow-loom weavings that are warp-faced,[1] a technique used mostly by women to weave tent dividers, cushions, and pillows inside the tent. The cloth is woven to become tight and strong to prevent the rain, wind, and sand from entering the tent. The most decorative parts of the nomadic tents are the tent dividers, which are often woven with a pattern in the center called *shajarah*, while the decoration on the outside of the tent is simpler and mostly striped. The warp-faced *al-Sadu* weavings are occasionally combined with the *ragaoum* technique, in which additional threads are woven horizontally across the weft, making the fabric look slightly raised above the regular weaving and creating a different texture (fig. 8.1).

Al-Sadu weavings are widespread across Middle Eastern countries and their motifs differ from region to region. They can be categorized by date, tribe, weaver, or region, and as such they can help in tracing regional and personal trends, as well as, possibly, historical and tribal events. Although over the course of time *al-Sadu* weavings have experienced significant alterations under the influence of urban development, synthetic dyes, mass production, commercialization, and expanding urbanization, they are still important elements in the construction of a local, tribal, or personal identity for the women weavers.

This chapter builds upon existing literature on *al-Sadu* weaving and the authors' direct knowledge of being a Saudi or living in Kuwait for extended periods of time.[2] As *al-Sadu* tradition is transmitted orally, first-hand information was essential for this study. It involved direct observation, interviews, and focus group discussions with contemporary weavers from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. To find the weavers, the authors contacted Al Sadu Weaving Cooperative Society in Kuwait City, Kuwait (also known as Sadu House), and the Ministry of Culture in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Because most of the symbols in the *al-Sadu* weavings or the stories behind them have been forgotten or intentionally kept secret, the authors have also engaged in archival work in order to unveil and catalogue some of their meanings.[3]

This chapter attempts to situate *al-Sadu* weavings in relation to cultural and historical knowledge, thus enriching its technical aspect with a

1 The warp and the weft are vertical and horizontal threads in a weaving, respectively. In different types of weavings, the pattern may appear on the weft or on the warp, hence the terms "warp-faced" or "weft-faced."

2 Rana Al-Ogayyel is a Saudi fine artist and Lecturer in the College of Art and Design at Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University, K.S.A. She has observed the craft and studied the changes in *al-Sadu* weavings, which are an important part of her culture, throughout time. Ceyda Oskay is a an artist who consulted for The Sadu House in Kuwait, where she developed and ran the first Sadu Art and Design Initiative (SADI) program. She took weaving courses from Joy Hilden, Um Turqi, and, in recent years, Muteira Al-Muassalim. Her observations are based on fieldwork carried out in Kuwait over a period of two years (2015–2016), previous fieldwork on tribalism in Kuwait (2007–2010), and having lived in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for over thirty years.

3 An electronic archive of symbols and a physical archive of weavings are currently hosted at Sadu House in Kuwait City. Oskay initiated focus group discussions around some of these pieces with Kuwaiti weavers. She also consulted the Sadu House database of recorded symbols, *al-Sadu* collections in Kuwait, and the *al-Sadu* displays at the Safir Hotel, Failaka Island.

FIGURE 8.1 *Al-Sadu* weaving with *ragaoum* technique displayed at The Safir Hotel, Failaka Island (date unknown).

cultural and social understanding of this practice.[4] Because the symbols in these weavings include astronomical and social elements, the authors concluded that, in the past, women may have been more involved in the socio-political structure of their communities than they are currently thought to be. While weaving, women were in a position of narrating or documenting stories whose meanings are lost to us now. This idea was emphasized by the weaver Umm Mohammad in her interview with Keireine Canavan and Ali Alnajadah: while careful to note that she only spoke for herself, she pointed to the practice of using *al-Sadu* to pass messages between tribes.[5] Therefore, this chapter aims to shed new light on women's social role in the Arabian Middle East and challenges narratives, myths, and stereotypes of the place not through external descriptions but through the voices of the female weavers who wove about the society or community they lived in. Because the nomadic tribes of the Gulf area did not keep many written records, textiles are also important historical and trans-cultural documents, with the scribes in this case being the women of the tribes. As such, *al-Sadu* is significant not only for textile studies but also for material, regional, and gender studies at large.

2 *Al-Sadu* Weaving from Past to Present

Traditional *al-Sadu* is a nomadic weaving used for tent and its furnishings that is mainly done by women. It is still carried out today by weavers in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the U.A.E., Bahrain, Qatar, and other Gulf countries, despite the radical social and economic changes they experienced after the oil boom.[6] As many Bedouin tribes traveled to Syria, Jordan, and Iraq, *al-Sadu* weaving has extended to those areas as well, although the need for this practice has significantly decreased in recent times.[7]

As Homi K. Bhabha suggests in his seminal book, *The Location of Culture*, repeating the past by re-presenting it in different forms is an attempt to establish authority over unfamiliar situations.[8] In other words, we try to gain knowledge about the things of the past to establish our position in relation to them. This gives rise to questions about time: as a thing changes its function over time, it reflects the time in which it was made. While *al-Sadu* as a material object is fixed, it is also rooted

4 See also Ceyda Oskay, "Tribalism, State-Formation and Citizenship in Kuwait" (Master's thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2010).

5 Keireine Canavan and Ali Alnajadah, "Material Symbols of Traditional Bedouin Al-Sadu Weavings of Kuwait," *Textile: Cloth and Culture* 11, no. 2 (2013): 152–65.

6 As of 2011, *al-Sadu* is on the UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in the U.A.E. Cf. UNESCO Decision of the Intergovernmental Committee: 6.COM 8.21.

7 For details, see Joy Totah Hilden, *Bedouin Weaving of Saudi Arabia and Its Neighbours* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2010); Dawn Chatty, *From Camel to Truck: The Bedouin in the Modern World* (New York: Vantage Press, 1986).

8 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 52.

in nostalgia and history, so our way of reading it changes depending on how much we know about the meanings of its symbols and the conditions in which it was made and used. Moreover, by being reproduced in new materials or designs, *al-Sadu* allows for a reclaiming of heritage and personal expression. As the Gulf countries' economies and environments have developed rapidly in recent past due to the discovery of oil, they have also displayed a strong impulse toward preserving their local culture, which explains their renewed interest in *al-Sadu* weaving. As a result, its design has been adapted onto new materials, re-worked in new colors and patterns (mainly in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait), re-interpreted in fine art (in Kuwait, the U.A.E., and Saudi Arabia), or preserved in traditional weavings used for decoration, national competitions, and personal expression rather than for practical purposes (Kuwait).

Al-Sadu must have come into being primarily as a domestic necessity, before any patterns and motifs emerged. However, the patterns and motifs used are a form of self-expression, a recording of the local visual culture, and a way of inter-tribal communication.[9] The symbols add a new dimension to the weavings, allowing us to look back and gain insight into the local cultures in which they were produced. As important material culture researcher, author, and patron of Al Sadu Society in Kuwait, Sheikha Altaf Al-Sabah, notes, *al-Sadu* weaving illustrates the nomadic Bedouin understanding of an eternal space. Unlike the designs in the frame of a floor carpet on a frame loom, which symbolize a window or a door to the world, and thus a settled relationship with home, landscape, and space, *al-Sadu* designs are suggestive of openness.[10] In other words, the concept of a measured

FIGURE 8.2 Desert land, Al-Qassim region, 2019.

space did not exist for the Bedouins traversing a vast, open desert, as it was not necessary for their understanding of the world. As Sheikha Altaf Al-Sabah explains, space to the nomad was without borders or boundaries. Therefore, the Bedouins were presented with a great challenge when they switched from a nomadic way of life to a life determined by a boundary, that is, a settled and permanent space.[11] Their lifestyle shifted from inhabiting an open space, without a fixed architecture, to living in a more organized and strictly delineated space, with architectural landmarks and town planning (figs. 8.2 and 8.3).

9 For details, see Joy Totah Hilden, "Bedouin Textiles of Saudi Arabia," in *Oriental Carpet and Textile Studies*, ed. Murray L. Eiland, R. Pinner, and W. Denny (Berkeley: International Conference on Oriental Carpets, 1993), 4:1–18, and, by the same author, *Bedouin Weaving of Saudi Arabia and Its Neighbours*.

10 Sheikha Altaf Al-Sabah, interviewed by Ceyda Oskay, Kuwait City, December 2015.

11 Some tribes would migrate back and forth to specific territories according to seasons, so they were semi-settled.

FIGURE 8.3
City land, Riyadh, 2019.

For Bedouins, therefore, the tent itself is not an object in the same sense as other architectural elements, such as doors or bricks, are because it is both an object and a *space*. This space is occupied according to the demands of the land, weather, and relationship with guests. For example, the separation created by a tent divider affects people's behavior and the way they move: the materiality of the space impacts the fluidity of their movement and the rhythm of their navigation through different parts of the home. When male and female guests arrive, the space of the tent is used in a segregated way; however, if the inhabitants are close family members, the leisure and sleeping spaces are not separated anymore. In *The Arab of the Desert*, H.R.P. Dickson describes the general architecture of a three-pole tent, mentioning *nattu*, or *mattarih* (both names for *al-Sadu* weaving ground loom), and explains the structure of a tent divider, sketching its first, second, third, and fourth strips (i.e., *saif*, *al-ghadir*, *al-ba'ij*, and *al-muta'ba*).[12] These details highlight the importance

12 H.R.P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Sau'di Arabia* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), 66–67 and 56, respectively. Different regions have different names for the ground loom, such as *naul*, *nattu*, *sadu*, or *matraha*; the tent divider is called *qati* or *ibjad*.

that *al-Sadu* weavings had in organizing the inhabited space of the nomadic populations.

In the past, these woven soft homes sheltered both animals and people during their seasonal migrations. As animal herders, the Bedouins used to migrate to the desert during the rainy winter season and move back to the cultivated land in the dry summer months. Today, after the movement of most nomadic people to cities or villages, these portable houses and the practice of moving from one place to another have been replaced with modern living conditions. The contrast between the Bedouin home and the house reflects to some extent the contrast between the desert and the city: in the desert, there were no large groups of people living together, like in a city. The closest thing to a city was a soft quarter of moving homes inhabited by people belonging to the same tribe. As a result, belonging to a tribe constructed one's identity more than the space did. A tribe's identity was depicted as a sign, known as *wasm*, which was sometimes included in the *shajarah* section of *al-Sadu* textiles (i.e., a narrow-patterned stripe that runs through the tent divider). Customarily, a tribe's *wasm* was composed of a combination of simple, quasi-linguistic elements or abstract symbols, laying on a semi-symbolic plane.

According to Jean Baudrillard, two criteria must be met by an object to be identified as art: it must have a signature, and it must be part of an oeuvre.[13] In the past, the *wasm* was such a signature: it helped Bedouins identify the tribal and regional origins of the Arabian weavings, as well as the animals branded with the tribe's mark. Today, *al-Sadu* has started to be signed by weavers by using their personal signs rather than the tribal signature *wasm.* Moreover, the weavers have their own body of work which displays their individual style. This makes the difference between "craft" and "fine art" objects difficult to define in *al-Sadu* work. For example, in contemporary times, weaver Refah Al Raheel has designed her sign as a symbol composed of the first letter of her first name and the first letter of her surname, "R.R." (fig. 8.4a–d).[14] This is not a *wasm* anymore but a logo, similar to the ones in Western cultures: it identifies a brand or shows the identity of the weaver rather than that of the tribe.

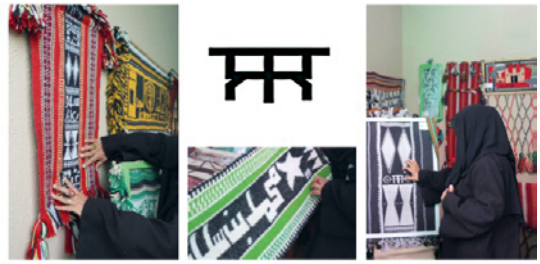

FIGURE 8.4A–D Refah Al Raheel's individual sign, 2016.

3 *Al-Sadu* as Material Culture

Material culture considers not only the physical nature of an object but also its cultural associations. This implies a revaluation of the material culture of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries because, in their case, we need to compare nature and culture and regard them as valuable resources that need to be preserved and presented to a wider audience. On the one hand, their material craft culture is in danger of disappearing because of the fast and radical changes in the economy of these countries; on the other hand, this economic shift has created the need for a consolidation of these countries' identities in the contemporary, increasingly globalized world. This double process has triggered a series of festivals and other opportunities for artists to practice their craft and promote their work both inside and outside the Arabian Peninsula, as well as a strong move toward

13 Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981), 102.

14 Refah Al Raheel, interviewed by Rana Al Ogayyel, Riyadh, January 2017.

museum building and other forms of cultural preservation.[15]

Al-Sadu is only one of the many early cultural objects that emerged from the Arabian desert. Because *al-Sadu* was so vital to the life in the desert, it has changed less than other objects and it lends itself closer to an authentic Arabic thing. Moreover, *al-Sadu* has never become mass-produced as a commodity from "Arabia." In other words, it was not commercialized early on in the same way coffee pots, trinkets, and Anatolian or Persian carpets were. As most of those carpets were made for interiors of settled shelters, they could be adopted into a European home easily,[16] whereas *al-Sadu* did not fit well in non-tent homes or structures made of hard material, such as brick, concrete, or mud walls. Therefore, its history as a commodity, an object, or a thing was not extensively written,[17] unlike that of the coffee pots, *kilims*, and other weavings. However, it is this very quality that has made it less prone to be transformed into some *thing* else.

The material culture of the Arabian Gulf is especially significant because it belongs to a society that has greatly relied on and valued the trade of objects throughout its history. As it was a mostly nomadic culture,[18] its population used to keep only what could be carried on the backs of horses, donkeys, or camels. Thus, objects became even more significant as one had to carefully decide which object was worth carrying or not. To be easy to carry, *al-Sadu* was made of a flat weave woven in narrow strips hand-stitched together (figs 8.5a–b). An uncompleted weaving could be transported with ease as the loom was easy to dismantle and roll up (fig. 8.6). This nomadic tradition of the narrow loom and weaving sewn together in strips is also seen in eastern Turkey and Peru. However, in Turkey, it is a regular thin flat *kilim* weave, and not the thick warp-faced weave of the *al-Sadu* technique. Traditional weaving in Peru has also been noted to be similar to *al-Sadu* weaving.[19]

In this nomadic Bedouin setting, the home itself, that is, the tent itself, transforms from an object—weavable, foldable, packable, contained for transport—to a *thing*.[20] The tent changes from wool to yarn to dyed yarn to a weaving in progress and then becomes a home when set up, a thing that "names … a particular subject-object relation,"[21] and an object again when packed up to

15 Examples include architectural decorations, calendar spreads, and company promotional objects that display traditional *al-Sadu* patterns. For additional examples, see Keireine Canavan, "Applications of Textile Products," in *Textiles and Fashion: Materials, Design and Technology*, ed. Rose Sinclair (Amsterdam: Woodhead Publishing, 2015), 541.

16 See, for instance, the many Renaissance paintings that show such carpets. Cf. Donald King and David Sylvester, eds., *The Eastern Carpet in the Western World, From the 15th to the 17th century* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1983).

17 Interestingly, *al-Sadu* is hardly mentioned in early Arabian travel writing. It appears, though, in illustrations by H.R.P. Dickson, albeit their function there is strictly illustrative.

18 *Hadhar* is the word used to refer to the settled populations or tribes of the Arabian Gulf (including Iraq and Iran as many *Hadhars* are seen to be originating from there), while *Bedu* or *Bedouin* is the word used to describe populations that were once nomadic. This distinction is still made today, even though a truly nomadic lifestyle is no longer widespread in this area.

19 Lucero Rodriguex, "Peruvian Textiles: The Origins, and Comparative Study with Traditional Textiles of Kuwait" (lecture, Al Sadu Society/Sadu House, Kuwait City, November 17, 2015). See also Elena Phipps, "Andean Textile Traditions: Material Knowledge and Culture, Part 1," in *PreColumbian Textile Conference VII,* ed. Lena Bjerregaard and Ann Peters (Lincoln: Zea Book, 2017), 162–75; and Yanni Petsopoulos, *Kilims, Flat-Woven Tapestry Rugs* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979).

20 We use the term here in the sense given to it by Bill Brown, who aptly points out that things are more than objects of possession; for individuals belonging to a particular community, things are perceived as "inhabited" and "animated," while for others they are not. See Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 9.

21 Ibid., 4.

FIGURE 8.5A–B
Al-Sadu carpets.

FIGURE 8.6 *Al-Sadu* ground loom.

be transported on a camel for nomadic journeys. The notion of "thing," therefore, is quite complex when examining a Bedouin tent. As Arjun Appadurai pointed out, the "things-in-motion" always illuminate their human and social context.[22] A tent is an object the individuals have control over, then becomes external to them, a thing of complex symbolic value, and next becomes rolled up and object-like again. Moreover, the Bedouin tent can be reconstructed and moved to a different location, so it is recreated identically but slightly differently.[23] Its feel is modulated by its new location in space.

The tools used in *al-Sadu* weaving are also important elements of the material culture of the area. Significantly, they come directly from animals. For example, a gazelle horn is used to divide the threads as the warp is picked up according to the patterns to be woven (figs. 8.7a–c). The tool originates from an animate being who is made into an inanimate object, unchanged except for being cut and cleaned. *Al-Sadu* wool is another object originating from a living source, an animal, as is the wool used in the weaving process itself. Thus, the craft itself is connected to nature in a profound, meaningful way.

22 Arjun Appaduari, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Ajun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.

23 Weavers interviewed by Rana Al-Ogayyel, Riyadh, January 2017.

FIGURE 8.7A–C A gazelle horn used in *al-Sadu* weaving.

FIGURE 8.8 Symbol of stars in contemporary *al-Sadu* weaving by Leila Yaser.

4 *Al-Sadu* Symbols and Social Significance

Perhaps the main reason for the uniqueness of *al-Sadu* weaving is that it was never mass-produced for export in the same way other carpets were. Although it was traded among tribes, due to the length of time it takes to produce a tent, and due to its particular function in the harsh climate of the desert, it was not replicable in other geographies. *Al-Sadu* weaving could not be commercialized in the same way that other objects—such as *kilims*, clothes, bags, blankets, and tablecloths—were in other parts of the world. Therefore, although the weaving practice and the symbols used may have changed, they did not change as much as in other textiles, so examining the symbols embedded in these weavings may yield a wealth of information about the life of local populations. In the absence of written records, *al-Sadu* weavings become, thus, records of memories embodied in a thing.

The natural environment of the nomadic tribe can be seen in *al-Sadu* designs, which contain symbols that reflect astronomical elements and the desert environment.[24] Quite frequently, *al-Sadu* symbols indicate constellations and stars (fig. 8.8).[25] In the vast sky of the pre-electric desert, the stars, the moon, and the sun had a great significance, being the main sources of orientation. It is important to note that, currently, the weavers in Kuwait explain these symbols simply as "stars,"

24 For more details on the symbols that appear in *al-Sadu* weavings, see also Altaf Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, *Ibjad: Ornate Tent Dividers and Weavings of the Kuwait Desert* (Kuwait: Al Sadu Society, 2006); Khawla Mohamed Abdel and Aziez Al Manai, *Al Sadu* (Doha: National Museum of Qatar, 2013); and Ali S. Alnajadah, "The Pictographic Codes in Al-Sadu Weavings of Kuwait," *International Design Journal* 8, no. 3 (2018): 63–74. In this latter study, Alnajadah tracks changes in the meanings of some *al-Sadu* symbols.

25 Khawlah M. Manna, *Al-Sadu in Qatar: Traditional Technical Values and Techniques* (Doha: Qatar Museums Authority, Qatar National Museum, 2013), 99–100.

giving various symbols the same definition,[26] which is consistent with the meanings identified in documentation from Qatar.[27] However, in earlier weavings they may have been used to symbolize time, meteorological phenomena, the location of a particular event or, given the use of astronomy in the desert, wayfinding.[28]

Traditional symbols also included snakes, which are represented by a zig-zag pattern, or water, which is represented by concentric diamonds. The use of these symbols may be due to the fact that it is technically more difficult to weave curved shapes than straight ones, and it is easier to abstractify by repeating symbols. In contrast, Western cultures generally use more realistic, as well as anthropomorphic, images in crafted or handmade objects, although it is worth mentioning that *al-Sadu* weavings in Kuwait did contain images of human figures in the past (fig. 8.9). Human and animal imagery within weavings became taboo around the mid-1970s due to religious restrictions.[29] The weaving shown here is currently on Failaka Island; however, the deep blue color indicates that it may have been woven by the northern tribes. Most of these deep blue weavings use strong cotton thread for the white patterns and some can be more decorative, repetitive, motif-based, and flowery than the traditional red-and-orange Kuwaiti weavings.

Al-Sadu weavings also contain images within the weaving, such as earrings, which are of particular significance for women. As Shelagh Weir explains, a Bedouin woman has her first jewelry collection when she gets married, so such a collection is an indication of her marital status, similar to a wedding ring in other cultures.[30] These pieces of jewelry were made by *nuwar* (gypsies) who used to travel the desert as silversmiths and made a living this way.[31] *Al-Sadu* weavings reflect such practices and may contain a "record" of the jewelry's circulation. Indeed, when looking at these weavings, one can easily see symbols of earrings (fig. 8.10), which makes clear that socially-significant objects are embedded and archived in textiles.[32]

FIGURE 8.9 *Al-Sadu* weaving depicting a human figure on display at The Safir Hotel, Failaka Island, Kuwait (date unknown).

26 Muteira Al-Muassalim and Leila Yaser, interviewed by Ceyda Oskay, Al Sadu Society, Kuwait City, May 2016.

27 Manna, *Al-Sadu in Qatar*, 99–100.

28 Cf. Ceyda Oskay, "Sadu Nomadic Weaving in Kuwait: Looking at Possibilities of the Arabian al-Sadu Tent Divider Wall as Maps, Stories, and Self-Expression" (paper presented at the Fashioning Inclusivity Symposium, Textiles and Materials panel, London College of Fashion, London, June 2019). Special thanks to Deema Al Ghunaim for her useful insights into the possible meanings of the symbols.

29 Al-Sabah, *Ibjad*, 38.

30 Shelagh Weir, *The Bedouin: Exhibition Catalogue* (London: British Museum Press, 1990), 71.

31 Ibid.

32 See Canavan and Alnajadah, "Material Symbols of Traditional Bedouin Al-Sadu Weavings of Kuwait." This idea also surfaced in Ceyda Oskay's interview with

FIGURE 8.10 Symbols of earrings in contemporary *al-Sadu* weaving (weaver unknown).

FIGURE 8.11 Symbol of scissors in *al-Sadu* weaving (date unknown).

Moreover, each weaver has her own motif and design related to the tribe. Joy Totah Hilden refers to this as a means of identification of the tribe and the weaver. As she explains, "a weaver can express herself here by writing names, dates and quotes from the Qur'ān. She can use traditional patterns and invent some of her own, using subject matter from everyday life."[33] For example, weaver Refah Al Raheel mentioned during her interview that, "sometimes I weave a special type of *al-Sadu* souvenir for family occasions, such as weddings and births. And not just for my family; I also weave special pieces for the Prince's visits at national

weavers Muteira Al-Muassalim and Leila Yaser, Al Sadu Society, Kuwait City, May 2016.

33 Hilden, "Bedouin Textiles of Saudi Arabia," in Eiland, Pinner, and Denny, *Oriental Carpet and Textile Studies*, 4:3.

FIGURE 8.12A–B *Al-Sadu* weaving containing abstract representations of a kneeling camel with a carriage placed on top of it, used during wedding ceremonies (date unknown).

festivals."[34] Thus, the weaving becomes a record of material culture as weavers frequently included images of new objects that the Bedouins encountered during travels or market exchanges, such as scissors (fig. 8.11).

Unfortunately, nowhere in the existing literature can one find an analysis of an entire weaving or of a group of symbols. In an attempt to explain the symbols used in a carpet displayed at Al Sadu Society in Kuwait, for instance, weaver Muteira Al-Muassalim interprets them as describing the movements of a camel.[35] She points out the different positions of the camel in the weaving and clarifies that it belongs to the Ajman tribe because of the vivid reds and oranges that the tribe was known for (fig. 8.12a–b).[36] She also notes that the tribe was o known for its strong regard of its camels. What is unknown, however, is whether these sequential positions are purely decorative or are indicative of a pathway in the desert, a ceremony, or have another meaning. Although we no longer know the extent of the storytelling in the carpets, we can assume that it played a major role in earlier weavings.

A major change to the Bedouin culture and, consequently, to *al-Sadu*, was the rapid economic development of the Arabian Peninsula after the discovery of oil and state formation in the twentieth century. This caused the Bedouin traditions to decline as many locals became employed in the petroleum industry and the government. The nomadic lifestyle changed to a sedentary one, and the number of weavers dropped significantly. As a

34 Refah Al Raheel, interviewed by Rana Al Ogayyel, Riyadh, 2017.

35 Muteira Al-Muassalim, interviewed by Ceyda Oskay, Al Sadu Society, Kuwait City, May 2016. Muteira is an experienced weaver who weaves her own contemporary pieces (mostly of blocks of color) in addition to more traditional ones, and who currently teaches weaving classes at Al Sadu Society.

36 For details, see Al Sadu Weaving Cooperative Society, 2009, https://www.alsadu.org.kw.

FIGURE 8.13 Laila Yaser's weaving showing the logo of the Kuwait television. This weaving was awarded the first place in the Al-Sadu Society's Weaving Competition, 2015-2016.

result, only few women weavers still have the knowledge, technical skills, and oral memories to handmake these artifacts. Following these economic developments and social changes, the symbolic value of *al-Sadu* has changed. For example, in Saudi Arabia the old motifs inspired by the surrounding natural environment have been gradually replaced with new ones, which reflect an urban environment. As a disappearing memory, *al-Sadu* has also changed its value from a functional to a cultural object. After losing its original function, it has gained new meanings, reflecting a changed lifestyle. For example, weaver Leila Yaser from Kuwait indicated during an interview that a symbol she was weaving was actually the logo of the Kuwait Television (KTV)[37] (fig. 8.13). Other changes can be seen in the way weavers have developed their practice. Some use patterns that depict surrounding elements, such as figurations of buildings and the city, while others continue to consider *al-Sadu* as a symbolic language, although they often cannot remember its meanings due to the passing of time (figs. 8.14a–b).

Al-Sadu weaving contains motifs which, unlike motifs on carpets in other parts of the world, such as Turkey, for instance, which contain abstract symbols of abundance or fertility,[38] function more like direct records of social history, current events, or spatial directions. Moreover, unlike other weavings, *al-Sadu* symbols are not as repetitive or only decorative. As these symbols are related to nature, seasons, stars, and tribes, this suggests that women-weavers may have been in an empowered position in society: their role of record keeping was not a passive but an active one. However, because the first writings that mention *al-Sadu* are travel narratives of the Middle East authored by foreign men who may have had limited access to the inside of the tents or less interest in the weavings, they do not include explanations of *al-Sadu* patterns that could shed light on women's empowered role in their communities. Only recently have researchers begun to explain the meanings of *al-Sadu* symbols and unveil the role played by female weavers in the Bedouin society.[39]

Given that nomadic tribes lived in close proximity, it would have been difficult for women weavers

37 Leila Yaser, interviewed by Ceyda Oskay, Al Sadu Society, Kuwait City, May 2016. Leila is a well-known weaver who has won many medals in weaving competitions in Kuwait and who regularly displays woven pieces for sale at the Sadu House giftshop.

38 See, for instance, Dario Valcarenghi, *Kilim: History and Symbols* (Milan: Electa, 1994), and M. Nurdan Taşkıran, "Reading Motifs on Kilims: A Semiotic Approach to Symbolic Meaning," Kocaeli University, Istanbul (2006): 1–28.

39 As Canavan and Alnajadah argue in "Material Symbols of Traditional Bedouin Al-Sadu Weavings of Kuwait," "the women transmitted their own ideas of identity and culture over time" while also acting as preservers of "ideals and memory" (159).

FIGURE 8.14A–B Contemporary weavings by Refah Al Raheel (a) and Wazifah Al Shamrii (b), showing modern *al-Sadu* patterns with figurations of buildings.

not to be aware of the social and political structures affecting the tribe. While it is assumed that a tribe would take the utmost care to segregate men from women, one wonders if this segregation was also extended to ideas and political participation. As Shirley Kay correctly points out, "Bedouin women have been less affected by such exclusions than town and village women. Segregation is not possible for a nomadic, tent-dwelling people as the women's work is necessary to the survival of the community. Women look after the flocks of goats and sheep and may spend long hours alone in the desert. Their safety is assured by a strict code of honor, but nothing prevents them from talking to a male friend."[40] These relationships are reflected by *al-Sadu* weavings in the color symbolism and patterns that describe tribe associations and traditional labor interactions. From this perspective, *al-Sadu* weavings play an important role in challenging assumptions of a strict hierarchy between men and women in the Arabian Gulf.

Al-Sadu weavings also function as records of economic and social exchanges in an indirect way. Plant dyes necessary for the craft were exchanged during the nomadic journey for a variety of things. These exchanges indicate that the tribes were engaged in networks of commercial relations with other tribes. Later, chemical dyes would be imported to Kuwait from India,[41] so *al-Sadu* weavings also indicate political relations. It was not only the dyes that traveled but also currency and knowledge. For example, the Rupee was used as currency in Kuwait, many prominent Kuwaiti families went to India for education, and the British employed many Indian nationals to work in the Gulf. These multi-layered

40 Shirley Kay, *The Bedouin* (New York: Crane, Russak/David and Charles, 1978), 27.

41 See the display of dyestuff at Al Sadu Society, which includes boxes of chemical dyes from India.

exchanges are indirectly embedded in *al-Sadu* weavings. As such, *al-Sadu* can be examined, to use Tim Dant's words, as "an object that mediates."[42] Such an object "carries communications between people—information, emotions, ideas, and impressions that could have been communicated by speech, gesture, touch, or expression if the people had been in contact with each other. The mediating object carries messages across space or time (or both) between people who are not co-present."[43]

The colors used by the weaver encode important socio-cultural information as well. The standard colors (red, orange, beige, white, and black) may vary among tribes: Ajman tribes, for instance, have a predilection for orange and red. These colors also indicate the geographical expanse of a tribe's movement because they are based on plants growing in specific areas. Generally, bright red and bright or pinkish orange are extracted from madder; tan or yellowish orange come from onion skins; beige, black, and white are the original colors of the sheep's wool; and black comes from squid ink. Blue is extracted from indigo, and green may be a mixture of yellow and blue.[44] Interestingly, the use of blue and green has varied throughout regions and time periods, indicating changes in fashion.[45] These colors also varied among geographies and tribes, as seen in the example of the weaving on Failaka Island. As Patricia Joyce Redding explains, the "preferred colors in Kuwait were the natural colors of sheep, camel, and goat hair," and dyed threads were "red and orange range, and occasionally with the addition of green and blue," while "the northern Arab tribes preferred dark blue and maroon."[46] it is also possible that the northern tribes used blue more often due to the availability of certain dyes. This is, of course, a conclusion based on examining textiles only of the last century or so; the climates and plants of centuries ago, as well as past trade routes and personal and tribal preferences, would have had an influence on these choices. Thus, through colors and symbols, the weaver provides a variety of information about social roles, customs, landscape, and natural elements, playing a fundamental role in maintaining the identity and the social fabric of the tribe.

When looking at *al-Sadu* weavings through this lens, what differentiates them from other textiles is that the weaving itself contains a narrative component, like a scroll. Unfortunately, the secrecy that surrounded *al-Sadu* motifs has remained, and today the weavers are either reluctant to share these stories or have forgotten the stories behind the weavings. Also, the stories that used to be passed down orally from mothers to daughters have disappeared due to changes in culture and lifestyle. While older weavings contain a rich variety of shapes and symbols that form elaborated stories, the newer ones are more repetitive in motif and pattern and have fewer narrative elements, in line with the current commercialization of the craft as decoration and loss of the symbolic meanings of the patterns.

42 Tim Dant, *Material Culture in the Social World: Values, Activities, Lifestyles* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 153.

43 Ibid.

44 This information on natural dyes was gathered by Ceyda Oskay from interviews with carpet sellers in Turkey between 2012 and 2014, and weavers in Kuwait between November 2015 and June 2016. Although the Kuwaiti weavers indicated that they used natural dyes, during the discussions about dye recipes it became apparent that the percentage of alum mordant (dye fixer) they use was far lower than that used by the Turkish dyers.

45 For example, green was used in 1996 when Ceyda Oskay was taking weaving classes from Um Turqi at Al Sadu Society. However, in 2016, this was no longer a preferred color to weave with, which indicates natural changes in taste, styles, and materials over time.

46 Patricia Joyce Redding, "Al Sadu Collection: Preserving Bedouin Weaving," in *Museums and the Material World: Collecting the Arabian Peninsula,* ed. Pamela Erskine-Loftus (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc, 2014), 347.

5 *Al-Sadu* as Transportable Home

"Home" has a multiplicity of meanings. It can be the place where one grows up, one's family, the place where an individual receives an education and learns new skills, or simply a place where one feels safe. In her book, *Art and the Home: Comfort, Alienation and the Everyday*, Imogen Racz discusses the idea of home as a container of the self, as a physical memory of the individual and of his or her childhood. The author also outlines the concept of "threshold," which separates the internal from the external, the private from public spaces. In these spaces, different sets of rules apply. In her words, "[t]o cross the threshold from the public to the private world is one of the many transitions and rites that we unthinkingly perform every day. This physical movement creates a corresponding mental shift from being in a public area, where the rules and threats are beyond our control, to being in an area with which one is intimate."[47] In the Bedouins' portable home, such a threshold is embodied by *al-Sadu*.

For Bedouins, home means many different places that are put together. It is home as a work in progress, which ultimately has less to do with a piece of soil and more with a space of the soul. The traditional Bedouin home (the tent, or *bayt al-shaer*, or "house of hair") is the protective home transported around by a nomadic family in its migrations. The reason why the *bayt* is called "the house of hair" is because the external panels and ceiling are made from goat hair that has been shorn, spun, dyed, and woven by the hands of *al-Sadu* weavers. It encompasses the ancestral idea of constructing one's home with one's hands; however, it is not the traditional home built by men's labor, but the soft home built by women's toil. The tent is the largest woven structure used by the Bedouins: it is completely surrounded by hand-made cloth—or *al-Sadu* fabric—which acts as a barrier that protects them against the hot, harsh sun in the summer and the cold or rain in the winter. This protection is extended to the livestock as well. The fabric walls of the *bayt al-shaer* can be lifted or draped, allowing the breeze to keep the interior cool in hot weather. The thick, heavy textile of the tent is the result of the process of shearing, spinning, dyeing, and weaving, which is all done by Bedouin women. Bedouin women are well known for manufacturing the "house of hair." They take part in the construction of the *bayt* right from its early stages, from shearing the animals and spinning the hair to weaving the threads to participating in erecting the *bayt* and taking it down again, in preparation for a move to a new place.

Claude Lévi-Strauss described the house as a social institution rather than just a space in which we live. A house is more than a physical entity: it is a construct of the mind, it is a home.[48] While we build houses and make them suit our own purposes, we also use these houses and their image to identify ourselves as individuals and groups. Thus, the house becomes a home, which is a safe place that gives women the opportunity to work and create. In this environment, the women become providers for the family. The home is also the place where women first learn, practice, and develop their *al-Sadu* textile work. Although this practice has largely become a memory today because most of the Bedouin communities have moved to the city, where such artifacts are unnecessary, the nostalgia for that fading life continues to be alive in people's imagination and in contemporary visual culture.

The *bayt*'s distinctive appearance is also important. It is different from other tents, such as the canvas tent, in that the outside of the *bayt* is mostly black (fig. 8.15). This is because the material comes from black goats, whose hair is very strong and almost waterproof. Some white sheep wool is used in the weave as well, so we may see some fine, white lines in the weaving too. Inside the tent, dividers are decorated with beautiful designs in

47 Imogen Racz, *Art and the Home: Comfort, Alienation and the Everyday* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 25.

48 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropology and Myth: Lectures, 1951–1982*, trans. R. Willis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 151–52.

FIGURE 8.15 Typical black-and-white Bedouin tent.

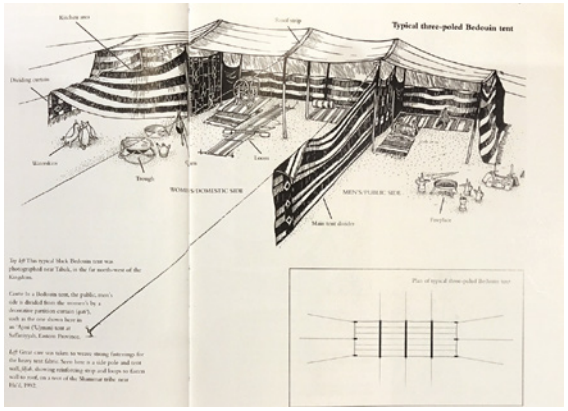

FIGURE 8.16 Typical three-poled Bedouin tent

black and white, with a little red-dyed wool for decoration. This wool comes from sheep and camels, whose wool is known for its softness and, when left undyed, for its beautiful natural colors.[49]

Figure 8.16 indicates the complex nature of the interior of a Bedouin tent. The inside area is divided into many parts, each of them with its specific use. It is important to note that a "well-to-do" Bedouin tent like the one shown in figure 8.16 indicates the higher status of the family living in it than that of a family living in the humbler, three-poled tent in figure 8.15. These images also show that different areas are used by men and by women.[50] For example, the tent contains a space which is allocated to female weavers, like a studio where they perform their craft and practice their skills.[51] Thus, in the Bedouin society, the tent is a not only a signifier of social relationships and family status but also of gender roles. It is, therefore, an extremely important space because here women make items that support their family or tribe.

While the function of the textile is to create and demarcate the Bedouin space, the way the space is constructed influences the way the nomads live and the way the family or the tribe is perceived by the outside world. The textile is, therefore, structuring the formation of a private and a public identity by delineating the space: the outside, non-patterned textiles are public, while the inside, patterned textiles are private.[52] We can infer,

49 For details, see Al-Sabah, *Ibjad,* 17.

50 See also Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, 66–67; and Canavan, "Applications of Textile Products," 541. Here, Canavan explains that dividers were parts of women's possessions, accompanying them into marriage, as well as "testimony of a tribe's wealth and prestige."

51 Refah Al Raheel, interviewed by Rana Al-Ogayyel, Riyadh, 2017.

52 While the outside of the traditional tents is black and without much pattern except for stripes, the inside of

therefore, that the best way of accessing the private is to be able to "read," or decode, the textiles and to actually spin, dye, and weave patterns from wool. An important area of examination would be to establish if the different patterns in different areas inside the tent correspond to any delineated space. Because traditional tents have few, if any, windows, the woven patterns also serve as windows to the soul of the weaver, the tribe, and the external world, with all its geography and culture.

There is also a kind of versatility to the function of the textiles. As the tent dividers become old, they may be mended or turned into cushions, thus serving both sentimental and practical functions. The mending on the tent divider also creates a visual dialogue between the various generations of women in the family, assuming a life of its own and changing constantly due to the normal wear and tear and the relentless act of undoing, packing, carrying, and re-assembling required by the Bedouin life.

Women's activity in the home, in a non-commercial capacity, has often been regarded as essentially selfless: the Bedouin women did not take visible ownership of their creative work, which was seen as made for and by the community, as an expression of a plural identity. However, as a master of a craft, a female crafter has more power than a woman who does not practice one. Because the weaver was needed by the family and tribe to fill the home with objects made from *al-Sadu* textiles, she was in a position of power. Moreover, handmade artifacts suggest value, effort, and dedication and are more expensive than those serially-made by machines. They also represent unique human intentions, as they reflect the specific moment when the creation of the object took place in the life of a crafter, which is unique to that particular object and reflects the creator's memory and time. The weaver has the know-how and skill to provide the tribe with soft-furnished homes and, in return, this gives her a higher status in the Bedouin society.

6 Non-traditional Uses and Appropriations of *Al-Sadu* in Contemporary Art and Design

In his seminal study, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin notes: "The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable."[53] The work of art and the craft object are similar in that they both reflect the uniqueness and the individuality of the artist. However, the craft object, more like a technical object, raises questions of function and use. Therefore, within the digital and media art, the relation between the hands of the artist and the work of art adds a new layer of complexity to the object.

While traditional weavers continue to practice their craft, the bold colors, symbolism, and narrative quality of *al-Sadu* have attracted a growing interest among many artists from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the rest of the Gulf area. The use of traditional techniques in their practice has become a trend for the local artists. One such artist is

FIGURE 8.17 Nabila Al Bassam, "Bedouin Varieties," 1998–1999.

the tent is decorated with patterns on tent dividers and cushions.

53 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. H. Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 6.

FIGURE 8.18A–B *Al-Sadu* weavings by Bader Al-Mansour, 2019.

Nabila Al Bassam, who has traveled to several cities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to learn about local traditions and techniques in the production of *al-Sadu* weaving, textiles, and popular clothing.[54] Choosing women as her inspiration, she imbued her work with vibrant colors aimed at asserting women's relationship with this ancestral art and celebrating its aesthetic beauty. In 1979, she started the Arab Heritage Gallery, where artists and craftsmen display their work in individual or group exhibitions. The first exhibition of the gallery fittingly displayed Bedouin weavings, along with other local forms of art and craft. Also, through her paintings, Al Bassam aims at highlighting women's relationship with the *al-Sadu* craft that they handed down over generations (fig. 8.17). If Al Bassam's interest in women is more didactic, focusing on their relation to heritage arts, another artist, Bader Al-Mansour, transforms non-textile materials into textile-like ones containing *al-Sadu* patterns and motifs (figs. 8.18a–b). As he explains, "as a Kuwaiti artist, I believe it is my duty to perpetuate my culture, and *al-Sadu* is an integral part of my identity."[55]

Currently, there is a renewed interest in *al-Sadu* weaving both in the Arabian Gulf and internationally. Al Sadu Weaving Cooperative Society in Kuwait has the largest formal collection of *al-Sadu* weavings in the world, playing an important role in keeping the local culture alive and evolving. Al Sadu Society is located in a historic house formerly belonging to the Behbehani family in Kuwait. It is a museum-house for traditional Kuwaiti textiles, from nomadic weavings of the desert to new weaving styles, which is dedicated to preserving, documenting, and promoting this rich and diverse textile heritage. It celebrates the creativity of past generations and weaves together a cultural identity for both present and future

54 For more details about the artist, see "Nabila Al Bassam," Hafez Gallery, accessed May 25, 2018, https://www.hafezgallery.com/copy-of-nabila-al-bassam-1, and the home page of the Arab Heritage Gallery, http://www.arabheritage.com.sa/default.htm.

55 For details, see Chaitali B. Roy, "'Saduing' with Waste to Create Unique Art," *The Arab Times*, November 28, 2013, http://www.pressreader.com/kuwait/arab-times/20131128/282518656290400.

generations by exhibiting historical weavings and holding weaving workshops, dyeing workshops, *al-Sadu* weaving exhibitions and competitions, and textiles fairs. It also has a gift-shop where variations on *al-Sadu* weaving or *al-Sadu*-inspired products are sold. Following many years of collaboration between contemporary artists and *al-Sadu* weavers, Al Sadu Weaving Cooperative Society held a multi-artist event in 2016, the "Sadu Art and Design Initiative" (SADI). This was a contemporary art exhibition of eight artists-in-residence who met over a period of a few months and created artwork inspired by *al-Sadu*. The group met weekly, had workshops on natural dyes, invited craftspersons and lecturers, and hosted an exhibition at Al Sadu Society in June 2016.[56] The initiative was repeated in 2018, 2019, and 2020[57] "Weaving Stories" was another exhibition curated by Sheikha Altaf Al-Sabah and supported by Leslie Robertson and Shelby Allaho. First exhibited at the Al-Shaheed Park in Kuwait City in November 2016 and later re-exhibited in many other locations in Kuwait, it brought together dozens of pieces by textile artists working across various textiles mediums and inspired by various themes related to Kuwait.

Another contemporary initiative inspired by *al-Sadu* is Zeri Crafts, a company created by Laila Al-Hamad, a Kuwaiti woman who used to work for the World Bank and who developed a sustainable, and ethical company based on project models she managed in Asia. In recent years, she held *al-Sadu* motif competitions to discover contemporary designs for her products. The brand includes *al-Sadu*-inspired designer products for the home, such as pillows, bedsheets, table cloths, and *mubkhar* (incense burner), as well as notebooks and bags for personal use (fig. 8.19). As Al-Hamad explains, "we create pieces that aspire to illuminate the beauty of our heritage and try, through design, to evoke concepts that were once intrinsic to this heritage, such as simplicity, modularity, functionality and understated aesthetic."[58] Other Kuwaiti designers, such as Abdullah Al-Awadhi, Muneera Al-Sharhan, Fareed Abdal, and Reem Al-Shammari, have drawn inspiration from *al-Sadu* for their carpet, jewelry, and fashion designs, respectively.

FIGURE 8.19 Zeri Crafts Showroom, Kuwait, 2019.

7 Conclusion

Al-Sadu weaving plays an important role in the material culture of the Arabian Gulf. *Al-Sadu* iconography contains elements that are repeated over and over by different weavers who may give them different interpretations. Because *al-Sadu* displays an abstract, symbolic language whose meanings have been transmitted orally, it is a

56 Altaf Al-Sabah and Ceyda Oskay, *SADI: Sadu Art and Design Initiative Exhibition Catalogue* (Kuwait: Al Sadu Society and the National Council for Arts and Letters, 2016).

57 The artists who participated in SADI 2016 were Aziz Al-Humaidhi, Amani AlThuwaini, Rua Al-Shaheen, Mona Al-Qanai, Muneera Al-Sharhan, Judy-Ann Moule, Adel Ashkanani, Manal AlDowayan, and Ceyda Oskay, who was also the curator of the project. The artists who participated in SADI 2019 were Mishari Al-Najjar, Munirah Al-Shami, Abdullah Al-Saleh, Jawad Al-Tabtabai, and Fadha Al-Omar. The artists who participated in SADI 2020 were Ahmad Jamal, Husain Al-Banay, Maha Al-Asakar, Salem Al-Salem, and Sultan Samhan.

58 Vittoria Volgare, "Meet the Kuwaiti Woman Reinventing Kuwaiti Traditions and Crafts," *Muftah*, May 1, 2018, https://muftah.org/meet-the-kuwaiti-woman-reinventing-gulf-traditions-and-crafts/#.XESl8C9odDU.

powerful form of expression for the women artists who practice it. As we have tried to suggest here, *al-Sadu* allows for a revaluation of women's status in the Arabian Peninsula and indicates that the women weavers used to play a central role in the tribe. In other words, we challenge here one of the many stereotypes about Arab societies perpetuated by Western cultures.

Al-Sadu also embodies the idea of home as a portable environment that is capable of adapting and mutating in relation to different landscapes and social contexts. The concept of home as an object, as well as a space, is very topical nowadays when computers and phones, these *passe-partouts* of contemporaneity, simultaneously represent an object/tool and an environment/home. Not coincidentally, digital artists traveling around the world have been called "digital Bedouins." Thus, while the lifestyle and the traditions of the Bedouin society are seen as archaic, some aspects of their *modus vivendi* can be considered as being ahead of time.

As noted above, the Bedouin tribes used to indicate their identity through an *al-Sadu* symbol called *wasm*, which was also used to mark animals. This was an identity marker more powerful than the space they belonged to. This trans-local use of a symbol to indicate a group united by an idea, a brand, or a kinship is common in our contemporary world, where identity is not necessarily related to belonging to a particular place. Similarly, although the Bedouin tribes move from one place to another, their identity can still be recognized even if they travel to a territory that does not belong to them. While abstraction is a distinctive form of postmodern communication, as seen, for example, in contemporary graphic design and advertising, it has been used by the Bedouin weavers for millennia. This form of visual language—which we believe to be the easiest way to communicate with other cultures—has become, once again, a fundamental medium of communication today given its unique power to be universally understood.

Each nation has its own treasures within its material culture. Today, as the world becomes closer and more similar due to globalization, it is the right time for artists and designers to take their local material culture to new places. As this chapter suggests, *al-Sadu* is a fertile medium for artistic exploration because of the unique relationship between its practical functions and its cultural associations.

CHAPTER 9

Head Coverings, Arab Identity, and New Materialism

Joseph Donica

Collective identity consists of a constellation of shared events, memories, traumas, successes, and geographies, among a variety of other things. Some of these "other things" are the shared everyday objects so connected to a people's collective identity as to seem inseparable from it. These objects, though, have recently become battlegrounds over questions of whether outsiders should participate in the formation of these collective identities or not. At the writing of this piece, an anti-cultural-appropriation moment is in full swing. National campaigns have been launched to educate people about what objects from another culture are appropriate to use or not, and several high-profile cases of politicians who have appropriated another culture's things have been brought to public attention. The "cultural appropriation wars," as they have come to be called, began, in their most recent iteration, around Halloween costumes on college and university campuses.[1] Some of the tensions over appropriation have addressed the use of stereotyped bodies of racial and ethnic groups, as well as attire stereotypically associated with Black Americans, Native Americans, and Asians—somewhat broadly defined. While the cultural appropriation wars over Halloween rarely mention attire associated with Arabs, that attire has certainly taken a central position within recent controversies.

The line between what is acceptable use of a cultural object that is not one's own and what is "mindless" appropriation is still quite blurry. However, many are genuinely offended, and discussions are happening, primarily on campuses, about the balance between educating students and calling them out online. Controversies over the cultural appropriation of attire stem, in part, from a tendency in the United States to politicize objects traditionally associated with certain ethnic or cultural groups.[2] The process of politicizing objects, however, has often dire effects on people who use them on a daily basis. While perhaps useful to some, this politicization is hard to undo once its political purpose has been served. What happens, though, when we de-politicize objects? Or, is their de-politicization even possible?

In this chapter, I examine the *keffiyeh* and the tension that its politicization causes within the object's everyday use to open up a conversation about how a focus on *keffiyeh* itself as an object

1 The Yale University incident in 2015, in which faculty pushed against students' demands for safe spaces, free from offensive costumes, became the symbol for these "wars." Halloween has become the most contested event around which the conversation about appropriation occurs, given the holiday's freedom to play with identities not one's own. For details, see Conor Friedersdorf, "The New Intolerance of Student Activism," *The Atlantic*, November 9, 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/the-new-intolerance-of-student-activism-at-yale/414810/.

2 This topic has increasingly gained in prominence in current years. For some insightful discussion on sartorial expressions of cultural appropriation vs. appreciation, see, for instance, Hsiao-Cheng Han, "Moving from Cultural Appropriation to Cultural Appreciation," *Art Education* 72, no. 2 (2019): 8–13; Michelle Liu Carriger, "No 'Thing to Wear': A Brief History of Kimono and Inappropriation from Japonisme to Kimono Protests," *Theatre Research International* 43, no. 2 (2018): 165–84; Regan de Loggans, "Selling Headdresses to Hipsters: A Discussion on the Cultural Appropriation of Native American Regalia" (Master's thesis, State University of New York, 2017); and Nadim N. Damluji, "Imperialism Reconfigured: The Cultural Interpretations of the Keffiyeh" (Honors Thesis, Whitman College, 2010).

with its own agency can illuminate the construction of an Arab identity through everyday objects. I do so by shifting focus from political controversies over the *keffiyeh* to the *keffiyeh* as a thing with a politics of its own. I will start by looking at how the scarf has become politicized, turn then to the scholarship on the entanglement of things with human intentions, and next ask if it is possible to reach a fuller understanding of the *keffiyeh* as an object we can simply appreciate without forcing conversations about appropriation on it. My examination of the *keffiyeh* through the lenses of new materialism will, thus, lead me to question the fine line between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation when considering the *keffiyeh* as a fashion item in a globalized world.

1 Head Coverings as Identity Markers

Head coverings are some of the material objects most often associated with an "Arab" identity. Whether it is the *hijab* or the *keffiyeh*, these objects usually denote an Arab identity even though they are worn worldwide by many non-Arab Muslims. Despite calls that a collective "Arab" identity is a thing of the past, Christopher Phillips argues that this notion has seen a resurgence not just during the Arab revolts of 2011, or the Arab Spring, but also in recent discussions about everyday markers of identity, such as clothing. Phillips admits that "Arab identity has been constructed, reproduced and disseminated … by the state regimes" and that narratives of Arab identity "are now reproduced every day in a largely routine and everyday manner."[3] The "everyday Arabism" that Phillips describes—such as the supra-national discourses promoted by some political regimes or news outlets like *Al-Jazeera*—is seen not only on television and online but also on the Arab streets. One of the crucial aspects of this urban scene is the distinctive clothing seen in the Arab world, especially head coverings. Such coverings have multiple levels of utility and meaning in Arab cultures. The *hijab* is one of the most recognizable of them as it indicates the religious identity of the Arab-Muslim women. There is also their practical level: head coverings are used by both men and women for protection against harsh weather. Because many Arab-majority countries are geographically located in hot, arid climates, this requires people living there to cover their head and face during parts of the day. This mix of culture, religion, and practical use has caused head coverings to build up a history and life of their own.

Head coverings have also been used in more pointed ways by Arabs and non-Arabs alike to indicate an Arab identity on other levels. The veil, in any of its forms, has been used by Arab-Muslim women to identify themselves religiously, culturally, and even politically, and it has been used by non-Arab and non-Muslim people to identify Arab-Muslim women as culturally *other*—especially in Europe and the U.S. There is also a long history of Western film and art using head coverings to identify characters as Arab, at times in a derogatory way. Jack Shaheen's book and subsequent documentary, *Reel Bad Arabs*,[4] outline just how influential these images are on the attitudes toward Arabs in the West. His ideas, of course, are informed by the seminal work of Edward Said and his field-defining "Orientalism."[5] Both theorists point out some of the hard truths that Western cultures have yet to come to terms with in their representations of Arabs.

While the veil, in its many forms, has attracted significant scholarly attention in the past decades,[6]

3 Christopher Phillips, *Everyday Arab Identity: The Daily Reproduction of the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1–2.

4 Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Northampton: Interlink, 2001).

5 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

6 For recent scholarship on the veil, see Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); Elizabeth Bucar, *The Islamic Veil: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2012); Hilal Elver, *The Headscarf*

the traditional head covering worn by Arab men, the *keffiyeh* (spelled *kufiya*, *kufiyah*, or *kaffiyeh* depending on transliteration), has received comparatively less attention. However, the *keffiyeh* signals everyday Arabness in more ways that the veil does, being one of the most distinctive items defining an Arab man's cultural identity. Although, unlike the veil, there is little religious significance placed on the *keffiyeh* as Arab Christians, Muslims, Druze, and secular Arab men wear it, the *keffiyeh* has been intensely politicized, gaining new meanings in changing historical contexts. Since the 1930s, for instance, the *keffiyeh* has become a symbol of Palestinian nationalism and of solidarity with the rights of Palestinians. Yasser Arafat solidified the *keffiyeh*'s association with the idea of national independence in the 1960s, a significance that it has maintained to this day. Outside the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the *keffiyeh* has become an object used to stoke controversy. This controversy came to a head in 2007, when Urban Outfitters began selling what they called "anti-war woven scarves." The company was criticized both by those who saw them highlighting Palestinians' plight and by those who were offended by its implicit critique of the Israeli policy toward Palestinians. While solidarity around objects can be productive for political movements, the politicization of an everyday object presents challenges for those who use it daily to no political ends.

In recent years, the appropriation versus appreciation debate has focused on an outsider's right to use a certain culture and its representations. Much of the debate has centered on attire associated with certain cultures, but it has also addressed the use of language and images by individuals not from that culture. The question frequently focuses on the word "right," but this is not the most helpful word to use when thinking of culture. "Right" is a word with legal implications, and what we refer to when addressing issues of appropriation can be better categorized within the language of taste, sentiment, and offense. We have the right to offend, but the question is whether we should. Cultural appropriation has not hit the courts, so the language needs some fine tuning. In an interview with Conor Friedersdorf about the appropriateness of white artists to use images of Black lynching victims, for instance, Jonathan Blanks cautioned that, "[t]oo often … what a cultural-appropriation argument boils down to is a misapplication of voice and representation." The aspect that Blanks is most interested in when engaging another's culture is that of "risk."[7] To engage one's culture is to take a risk at offense, but what are the implications for not engaging? Indeed, the controversies over the use of the *keffiyeh* outside the MENA are less about the politics of the region and more about the politics of representation. They are more about the appropriation of Arab identity than the Palestinian struggle for justice. A question remains, though. Is wearing the *keffiyeh* merely a way of "Orientalizing" Arabs, or just a way for many younger people in the U.S. to access history through fashion—unlike other generations who did so exclusively through printed material?[8] The question is a complex one. The *keffiyeh* has a long and complex history, and this particular moment in its history needs to be put in a larger social, cultural, and political context.

When asking where the power of this piece of clothing comes from or, more broadly, where any thing's power comes from, the answer is simple: it is the human subject who ascribes meanings to a thing. Similar to the veil, the *keffiyeh*'s politics has been imposed on it. Its history and the meanings

Controversy: Secularism and Freedom of Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Noreen Abdullah-Khan and Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, *The Veil in Kuwait: Gender, Fashion, Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

7 Conor Friedersdorf, "What Does 'Cultural Appropriation' Actually Mean?" *The Atlantic*, April 3, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/04/cultural-appropriation/521634/.

8 Fashion as a way of accessing history is a rich theme within anthropological studies. Closer to our focus, see, for instance, Emma Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (Oxford: Berg, 2010).

we derive from it are more organic, though, and they change when we give a thing more agency in constructing its own meanings. If the new materialism's goal is to "rethink subjectivity by playing up the role of inhuman forces within the human" and "explore dissonant relations between those processes and cultural practice,"[9] then the *keffiyeh* opens up a conversation about the fragility of things and the limits humans place on them in their meaning-making process. The *keffiyeh*'s association with Arab identity, as seen from its history, is clearly the sticking point in its controversial status today. Its recent history has shown that it has moved from an article of clothing that provides an Orientalist gaze into the MENA to one that creates hard dividing lines for politics in the region. Therefore, the *keffiyeh*'s recent history as a politically divisive fashion item cannot be discounted as a mere moment in its long history. As Djurdja Bartlett points out, "one of the biggest casualties in its transmutation from political statement to a fashion accessory might be the *keffiyeh*'s association with methods of subaltern resistance."[10] This association is also part of the object's history, which is largely lost when it is appropriated for mere fashion statement. In fact, in trying to de-politicize the *keffiyeh*, the fashion industry has disentangled it from the meaning it held for much of the twentieth century.

2 The Thing Itself

Each thing has a history, but some things' history is sometimes overshadowed by the controversies that have surrounded it. The *keffiyeh* falls within this latter category. Its name derives from its origins in the Kufa area of Iraq; literally, it means "from the city of Kufa"[11] It also goes by different names: *shemagh* in Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Jordan, and Iraq; *dastmaal yazdi* in Iran; *chafiyeh* in parts of Iraq and Iran, and in Lebanon; *ghutra* (the white versions of the *shemagh*) in the Gulf states; and *rezza* in North Africa and Egypt.[12] Usually made from cotton, or a cotton and wool blend, and square in shape, the *keffiyeh* grew to be an essential piece of clothing for the Bedouins of the desert, who needed protection from heat and sand storms. It is important to note that head coverings were used in this region prior to the rise of Islam. As Djurdja Bartlett states, well before Islam, keeping one's head covered was a sign of respect.[13] Bartlett also explains that geography and social class had a lot to do with covering one's head, hence the role of the *keffiyeh* in signifying social status:

"It was headwear that marked men as city dwellers, villagers, or Bedouin, and indicated their religious affiliation and socio-economic position.... The *keffiyeh* was a marker of low status, distinguishing the *fellah*—peasant—from the *effendi*—the educated middle-class men of the town, who wore the maroon-coloured *tarbush* or *fez*."[14]

Those living in cities and seeing themselves as more cosmopolitan than their fellow Bedouins living in rural areas usually wore a turban or, in later centuries, a *fez*. Thus, not wearing the *keffiyeh* became a sign of one's status as a city-dweller and different from the Bedouin class.[15] Although

9 William E. Connolly, "The 'New Materialism' and the Fragility of Things," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 3 (2013): 399.

10 Djurdja Bartlett, *Fashion and Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 135.

11 Ali Ameer, *A Short History of the Saracens* (London: Routledge, 2013), 424.

12 "What Do Arabs Wear on Their Heads?" *UAE Style Magazine*, August 24, 2013, http://www.uaestylemagazine.com/24/what-do-arabs-wear-on-their-heads.html.

13 Bartlett, *Fashion and Politics*, 126.

14 Ibid., 126.

15 Ibid. See also "From Kaftan to Kippa," The Textile Research Center, accessed January 25, 2020, https://trc-leiden.nl/trc-digital-exhibition/index.php/from-kaftan-to-kippa/item/55-04-the-bedouin. The Textile Research Center in Leiden has traced the material history of Bedouin clothing within the larger context

eventually the *keffiyeh* became a symbol of Islam and became associated with those living more traditional lifestyles within Islam itself,[16] it is important to keep in mind its secular origins. Its association with geography, class, and decorum distinguishes the *keffiyeh* from the veil, which has a clear religious significance.

In Saudi Arabia, the *keffiyeh* is an object that ties men back to their Bedouin past, and also an object that has taken on a particular significance as a symbol of Arab pride. Ghazanfar Ali Khan goes so far as to call the *ghutra*, the Saudi name for the *keffiyeh*, "a historical dress code."[17] The black rope that fits the cloth to the head is called *igal*: it is a two-loop coil of black braided cord heavy enough to hold a grip on the *ghutra* and prevent it from slipping. The *keffiyeh* also comes in a dazzling variety of styles. The design of the *keffiyeh* is usually a checkered pattern, but it can vary in color depending on the region. At times, a *fez* hat is worn underneath. The cloth drapes over men's shoulders and back, a style that has become synonymous with men's fashion in the Gulf states. While mainly a head covering, the *keffiyeh* is also often worn around one's shoulders.

There is disagreement as to where the pattern on the *keffiyeh* emerged, but Khan argues that the red and white-checkered *ghutra* has its roots in Europe, from where it was introduced in ancient Arabia.[18] Others claim that the red-and-white-checkered *ghutra* has its origin in ancient Mesopotamia, being a symbol of fishing nets, or that it arrived in Saudi Arabia circuitously from England only a few decades ago.[19] According to Ezra Karmel, the red-and-white *keffiyeh* "started to develop into a prominent article of clothing in Transjordan in the early 1930s after the British Officer John Bagot Glubb … included it in the uniform of the Desert Patrol—a Bedouin unit of the Arab Legion that he created."[20] From here, it spread to Saudi Arabia and other countries from the area. Regarding the origins of *keffiyeh*'s colors, Luisa Gandolfo notes that, for some, "the red-and-white keffiyeh denotes Jordanian and the black-and-white Palestinian," while for others the colors are "the legacy of the British military presence."[21] Photographic evidence from the earliest visual records of Saudi men shows them wearing checkered *keffiyehs* and, by the 1960s, the object had become a fashion staple.

An earlier, albeit important, moment in the transformation of the *keffiyeh* into a symbol of Arab pride is the iconic image of Thomas E. Lawrence, known widely as Lawrence of Arabia, wearing it during his guerilla attacks against the Ottomans in World War I. Lawrence is a complicated figure in the history of the Arabs. A British archeologist and army officer, Lawrence fought alongside them during the Arab Revolt of 1916–1918. The film that fictionalizes his life and the Arab Revolt is advertised to this day with the image of Lawrence, played by Peter O'Toole, wearing a white *keffiyeh* with a gold *agal*. This image is an exact reproduction of a photograph of Lawrence himself wearing the scarf in Jidda in 1917 (fig. 9.1). The image is complicated in that it shows Lawrence, a man infatuated with Arab culture, as the British savior of

of the MENA history. Their online exhibition focuses on clothing as material culture, although it does acknowledge the politics of the *keffiyeh* as a divisive object.

16 Elon Gilad, "The History of the Kaffiyeh: From Proto-Hat to Symbol of Pride," *Haaretz,* last updated November 26, 2014, https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-the-history-of-the-kaffiyeh-1.5334284.

17 Ghazanfar Ali Khan, "Not Just a Checkered Scarf," *Arab News*, last updated July 4, 2015, http://www.arabnews.com/fashion/news/769871.

18 Ibid.

19 "Traditional Urban Men's Dress of Saudi Arabia," *Saudi Arabesque*, August 29, 2016, http://saudiarabesque.com/traditional-urban-men-s-dress-of-saudi-arabia/.

20 Ezra Karmel, "The 'Jordanian' Keffiyah, Redressed," *7iber*, January 4, 2015, https://www.7iber.com/2015/01/the-jordanian-keffiyah-redressed/.

21 Luisa Gandolfo, *Palestinians in Jordan* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 130. For the origins of the *keffiyeh*, see also Joseph A. Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

FIGURE 9.1 T.E. Lawrence (aka Lawrence of Arabia) by B.E. Leeson. Rabegh, north of Jidda, 1917.

the Arabs.[22] Moreover, as Isabella Hammad notes, after the 1962 film came out, "a comparable fashion phenomenon occurred. Vogue labeled it 'Desert Dazzle,' Elizabeth Arden released a series of 'Sheik' beauty products, and McCall's magazine published a spread on the 'Lawrence look.'"[23] Thus, Lawrence represents an important moment in the

22 Technically, Lawrence was a spy for the British government tasked with keeping an eye on the Arabs in their subaltern resistance against the Ottomans, so his alliances were somewhat murky. For details, see Jeremy Wilson, *The Authorized Biography of T.E. Lawrence* (New York: Atheneum, 1990).

23 Isabella Hammad, "Dressing for Others: Lawrence of Arabia's Sartorial Statements," *The Paris Review*, April 8, 2019, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/04/08/

keffiyeh's history—one that has maybe been underplayed. The *keffiyeh*'s role as a symbol of Arab pride and self-determination has been solidified by its circulation in cinematic form from the twentieth century onward.

At one time or another, the *keffiyeh* took on various roles, becoming more than just an identifier of Arabness. Over the course of the last one hundred years, for instance, the *keffiyeh* grew into a political symbol and a controversial item of clothing as non-Arab Westerners have taken up wearing it. The political beginnings of the *keffiyeh* came during the 1930s, when Palestinians from rural areas started their revolt against the British. Not wearing a head covering was seen as bending to the will and fashion of the British, so the *keffiyeh* took on the symbolism of Palestinian nationalism.[24] Yasser Arafat, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leader in the 1960s, capitalized on the symbolic potential of the *keffiyeh* for Palestinian nationalism. Indeed, the visual memory of the Oslo Accords was marked by Arafat wearing a head scarf while shaking hands with Yitzhak Rabin as Bill Clinton stands between the two. Arafat represents a larger moment in the *keffiyeh*'s history and its association with Arab identity and subaltern protest. Students and intellectuals of Europe's left began to wear this head covering in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle, and it has been associated with that struggle within the Western left ever since.[25]

Of course, the politicization of the *keffiyeh* did not stop with Arafat. The *chafiyeh* was worn during the Iran-Iraq war to signal Shi'a resistance to Saddam Hussein. This black-and-white version of the head covering was also worn ten years ago by many rappers in Iran.[26] Its use in Iran demonstrates that the *keffiyeh* is tied both to Arab identity and the identity of the region. In a strange twist, as Robert Trait notes, "the *chaifiyeh* … worn by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his loyal followers has become an unlikely fashion item for young Iranians drawn to the same western pop culture that country's leaders disdain."[27] This use of the head covering both as a symbol of revolt against state-enforced norms and as a symbol of tradition shows how flexible and volatile the meanings attached to this piece of clothing are.

While the above examples show the *keffiyeh* being used as a symbol of Arab pride and self-determination, the *keffiyeh* has also been used to vilify Arabs and those seen as favoring their rights over others.' During President Obama's 2009 tour of the MENA, which culminated in his speech in Cairo, protests broke out in Jerusalem, a city he did not visit on the tour. The protesters held up images of Obama with a *keffiyeh* on his head and described him as an anti-Semite.[28] Another iteration of Obama in a head scarf was used by Barry Blitt for his *New Yorker* cover titled "Fist-Bump: The Politics of Fear." The cover art of the magazine appeared in 2008 and depicted Barrack Obama dressed in the typical long robe worn in the MENA and wearing a head scarf.[29] By placing a *keffiyeh* on Obama, the meaning of the head covering took on a more negative connotation. The implication was that Obama supported Muslims' rights, and by proxy Palestinian rights, denying Israeli Jews a voice. Throughout his administration, Obama was accused of being a Muslim and an Arab—both of those words being used as epithets. The use of the *keffiyeh* on Obama during these protests

dressing-for-others-lawrence-of-arabias-sartorial-statements/.

24 Gilad, "The History of the Kaffiyeh."

25 Ibid.

26 Gandolfo, *Palestinians in Jordan*, 130.

27 Robert Trait, "Iran's Underground Rap Artists Take to Wearing a Symbol of Islamic Revolution," *The Guardian,* November 30, 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/dec/01/iran-chafiyeh-rap-music.

28 "Obama a Jew Hater, Say Israeli Protestors," *NDTV*, June 4, 2009, https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/obama-a-jew-hater-say-israeli-protesters-395551.

29 Mary Louise Kelly, "'I'm Just Trying to Make Myself Laugh': 'New Yorker' Artist Shares His Cover Stories," *NPR*, October 20, 2017, https://www.npr.org/2017/10/20/558777025/im-just-trying-to-make-myself-laugh-new-yorker-artist-shares-his-cover-stories.

demonstrates that the association of the object with Arabness can be used in a very divisive way.

The question remains, though, why is the *keffiyeh* used as a symbol of Arabness, whether worn with pride or to signal controversy? Is it simply that it is so universal in the MENA that it provides a recognizable visual? The moments when the *keffiyeh* gained political significance are rather straightforward, but the reasons why it became a symbol of Arabness are more difficult to explain. Its association with non-elites because of its functional appeal to those living and working in desert environments and its ability to tie one back to a distant past and culture have a significant impact on its meanings. However, the shrinking of the distance between cultures due to globalization and the easily transferable meanings of the *keffiyeh* via images to a wide audience have contributed to its widespread use as a signifier for a range of meanings, from Arab identity to solidarity with Palestinian liberation. For instance, one can easily signify Arabness by photoshopping a *keffiyeh* on someone's head since the scarf is closely associated with Arab and/or Muslim identity nowadays. The visual rhetoric of the *keffiyeh* is so ingrained in the Western culture that, as the examples above show, it can signal both disdain for Arabs and disdain for those who fear them or perform a fear of them for political purposes. Such instances fall in line with what James Der Derian calls "the political pornography of modernity."[30] Derian is concerned with the too-easy associations enabled by mass media between common cultural attire and extremism. Such associations are problematic for those who use the attire on an everyday basis. He discusses how such images have been used to distance some groups from their opponents and mentions the use of photographs of Afghan *mujahideen* in this war of images—referencing Ronald Reagan's frequent use of such images and their description as "freedom fighters."[31] Likewise, the *keffiyeh* has been too easily appropriated in an attempt to associate it with extremist ideologies. Derian's project of releasing everyday objects from their association with ideology is a necessary intervention for objects like the *keffiyeh*, which have such easy slippage in their meaning. Conflating actions and attitudes with particular things creates polarized positions over meanings that are either socially constructed or essentialist. Susan Yi Sencindiver puts a fine point on this problem when she indicates that such "'intra-actions' between meaning and matter … leave neither materiality nor ideality intact."[32]

To think about the de-politicization of an everyday object like the *keffiyeh* involves doing a lot of imaginative work. There is no scenario in which the object will become widely divorced from its politics anytime soon. However, its other association with Arab identity in general is not necessarily political. To address this complex association, I turn to the new materialism and its subset, thing theory, fields that hold some potential for releasing things from the lives we give to them. The productive strain that runs through this thinking is one that pushes against the politicization of objects and images.[33] What would the de-politicization of the *keffiyeh* look like, though? Further, why would we seek its de-politicization since so many Arabs have found significant meaning in its identity-enabling quality? The answer lies partly in recent controversies over non-Arabs wearing the *keffiyeh* in attempts at solidarity or at simply being fashionable. These controversies must be understood in the larger

30 James Der Derian, "Imagining Terror: Logos, Pathos, and Ethos," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2005): 25.

31 Ibid., 23.

32 Susan Yi Sencindiver, "New Materialism," *Oxford Bibliographies*, July 26, 2017, http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0016.xml.

33 As discussed later in this chapter, a productive strain within new materialism rearticulates the need for a breaking up of the human/nonhuman binary. Such a rearticulation of humans' relationship to the nonhuman is central to much of the posthumanist thinking about climate change and late capitalism, to give just a few examples.

context of the conversation about cultural appropriation. First, though, I would like to outline the basic ideas from the new materialism that I bring to thinking about head coverings and Arab identity.

3 The *Keffiyeh* as an Entangled Thing

The *keffiyeh* is an entangled thing. It is literally entangled with one's head or neck and has become entangled culturally with Arab identity, in general, and Palestinian liberation, in particular. The field of physics provides a helpful concept in thinking about the *keffiyeh*: quantum entanglement. Quantum mechanics examines entanglement at photon level to explore "whether or not single, isolated particles or photons may entangle over large distances."[34] Karen Barad has used this concept to address how objects become entangled both with each other and with ideas that are applied to them.[35] In this sense, the *keffiyeh*'s meaning is entangled linguistically and visually with Arabness; the object and the identity it is applied to are inseparable. To some, this can be limiting due to its easily reducible meaning. They argue that, by reducing the *keffiyeh* to an easy definition, one could easily reduce the Arab identity to a stereotype as well.

There are many things that exist in this entangled state and their interdependence is what matters here. Take the cowboy hat, for instance. This thing is an easy way to associate oneself with the western U.S. However, while a thing that can be easily identifiable with a locality or a movement can be helpful for building identities or coalitions, it can also have the effect of creating caricatures out of individuals, as it happens frequently with those who don cowboy hats. This association leads some to ignore the life of the thing itself and its intrinsic functions, which go beyond the politics of the thing. The goal of the new materialism, in general, and thing theory, in particular, is to change one's thinking about things as being inanimate or lacking agency. Part of the larger post-constructionist turn in the humanities, the new materialism shifts focus from human uses of the material world to the material world as separate from human activity. The idea that objects have agency aside from the meanings the humans assign to them can guide one into more productive ways of thinking about head coverings as things with a history, meaning, and politics of their own. As Sencindiver explains,

"The polycentric inquiries consolidating the heterogeneous scholarly body of new materialism pivot on the primacy of matter as an underexplored question, in which a renewed substantial engagement with the dynamics of materialization and its entangled entailment with discursive practices is pursued, whether these pertain to corporeal life or material phenomena, including inorganic objects, technologies, and nonhuman organisms and processes."[36]

Likewise, Jane Bennett's book, *Vibrant Matter*, has put into accessible language a critique of "the philosophical project of naming where subjectivity begins and ends."[37] Here, Bennett claims that her intention is to address "slowly an idea that runs fast through modern heads: the idea of matter as passive stuff, as raw, brute, or inert." In her opinion, we have been conditioned "to ignore the vitality of matter and the lively powers of material formations."[38] As humans, we assume that matter is dead, lifeless, and only significant as it reinforces the narratives we create about ourselves. Bennett's argument states that our relationship to

34 Bengt Nordén, "Quantum Entanglement: Facts and Fiction—How Wrong Was Einstein After All?," *Quarterly Reviews of Biophysics* 49 (2016): 1–13.

35 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 349.

36 Sencindiver, "New Materialism."

37 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), ix.

38 Ibid., vii.

non-human matter has been nothing less than contentious. Indeed, the controversies surrounding the *keffiyeh* have demonstrated the same damaging human intrusion into the life of a thing that has changed its meanings to serve a human agenda. This does not always imply a negative use of things, though: humans often benefit from linking things to their purposes. However, other critics have noted how humans' interference in the lives of things and non-human objects has often turned out for the worse.

Bill Brown made similar moves in the field of material culture with the publication of the special issue of *Critical Inquiry* in 2001. His introductory essay expresses the concern many have raised before with why we should not just "let things alone."[39] Attempting an answer, Brown argues that "[o]nly by turning away … from the object/thing dialectic, have historians, sociologists, and anthropologists been able to turn their attention to things."[40] Similarly, in his introductory study to *The Social Life of Things*, Arjun Appadurai highlights pointedly that, while "from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context."[41] This process involves moving theory from the realm of human hubris and acknowledging, instead, that the meaning of things begins with the things themselves.

Indeed, if there is a candidate for an object that comes before its political meaning yet relegated only to its political meaning, the *keffiyeh* is a top contender. To begin an analysis of the *keffiyeh* with the *keffiyeh* itself raises three concerns about the "thing-power" of the scarf, to use Bennett's words.[42] First, the ability of the *keffiyeh* to gain new meanings tied up with fashion shows that the object reasserts itself as a *new thing* independent of the meanings imposed on it by the politics of the moment. Second, a new materialist analysis of the *keffiyeh* leads to a reevaluation of its potential as a meaning-bearing thing, as opposed to a meaning-making thing. While its distant past meaning was made by its utility, its current sets of political meanings have been imposed upon it. Finally, an analysis of the *keffiyeh* as a thing manifesting agency highlights that it has become, in Barbara M. Benedict's words, "no longer merely [a bearer of] aesthetic enhancements" but "the context of life" itself.[43]

While new materialists have done much for disentangling things from "mind/body, nature/society, human/nonhuman, animate/inanimate, and subject/object binaries,"[44] theorists of the thing have done even more: they have used things as a way to recover meanings that a culture forgot, imbued them with agency, and cautioned that a thing's current cultural or political meanings do not include *all* of its past or future meanings. As John Plotz reminds us, such an approach focuses on "the places where any mode of acquiring or producing knowledge about the world runs into hard nuts, troubling exceptions, or blurry borders … where the strict rules for classifying and comprehending phenomena seem suddenly no longer to apply."[45] Indeed, the *keffiyeh* occupies such a place. We should be reminded, for instance, that the *keffiyeh* is a signifier of a common past: all the Bedouin populations of the Arabian Peninsula used to wear it for reasons that had nothing to do with the politics of the moment. In other words, disentangling the *keffiyeh* from controversies that

39 Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 1.

40 Ibid., 6.

41 Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.

42 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2.

43 Barbara M. Benedict, "Finding Room for Things," *The Eighteenth Century* 51, no. 1/2 (2010): 251.

44 Jeanette Samyn, "Thing the Real: On Bill Brown's 'Other Things,'" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, February 8, 2017, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/234780/.

45 John Plotz, "Can the Sofa Speak? A Look at Thing Theory," *Criticism* 47, no. 1 (2005): 118.

surround it may reposition it as a social unifier, a cultural symbol, and a fashion staple for the Arab people.

As Brown points out, "[w]e begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us … when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested."[46] The *keffiyeh*, to many, has stopped working as it was initially intended to. It is no longer just a piece of cloth that protects one from the sand and heat of the desert but also a sartorial item that carries with it many associated meanings. The "thingness" Brown raises here aptly describes the moment when the *keffiyeh* began to signify more things than it can be expected to. Once the controversies over its cultural appropriation began, the *keffiyeh* no longer worked only as an object for keeping sand from one's face.

4 Fashion, Appreciation, and Cultural Appropriation

In 2007, Urban Outfitters began selling what the company marketed as "anti-war woven scarves." The scarves were marketed, as much of Urban Outfitters' products, as benign statements of peace. However, one design on the scarf included a skull-and-crossbones that a blogger compared to a Nazi SS symbol.[47] The controversy primarily played out in the blogosphere. The first to comment on the strangeness of the item being sold was blogger Daniel Sieradski, the founder of the progressive movement Occupy Judaism. His post began with the comment that "in hipster enclaves such as Berlin and Brooklyn, the kaffiyeh [*sic*] is so ubiquitous it's already passe [and] as a fashion item is viewed by many in the Palestinian solidarity movement as a trivialization of the Palestinian struggle."[48] The debate just ballooned from there. Nadeem from the blog Kabobfest, a pro-Palestinian site, posted a virulent critique of cultural appropriation. He noted that the *keffiyeh* is being worn by individuals "who know little more about the scarf than its patterns," expressing his disgust at the idea of "people expropriating aspects of my culture … especially when they strip those things of all meaning."[49] Another blogger on the site *Jewlicious* commented on Nadeem's outrage by mentioning that the *keffiyeh* is just a scarf that "British and U.S. soldiers in Iraq use … to keep dust off their faces," with the added remark that "a death's head design embroidered on them … might be a bit too much."[50] As a result of this controversy, Urban Outfitters canceled the sale of the scarf online, at least in the U.S. However, the company continued to sell it under a different name on their European site. *The New York Times* picked up the controversy and recorded Urban Outfitters' response on the site once the item was taken down: "Due to the sensitive nature of this item, we will no longer offer it for sale. We apologize if we offended anyone, this was by no means our intention."[51]

The controversy over the *keffiyeh* started well before the 2015 flare-ups that culminated in the infamous Halloween costume incidents mentioned at the outset of this chapter. A few years earlier, in 2013, the site *Complex* had published a piece titled "Check Your Privilege: Clothes White People Shouldn't Wear." Included in the list were American-Indian headdresses, Du-rags, Dashikis, Kamikaze *hachimakis*, and the *keffiyeh*. The article warned white wearers of the *keffiyeh*, somewhat humorously, that those who wear it think, "My

46 Brown, "Thing Theory," 4.

47 Ck, "Urban Outfitters Bends to the Will of the Jews on Keffiyeh," *Jewlicious* (blog), January 1, 2007, http://jewlicious.com/2007/01/urban-outfitters-bends-to-the-will-of-the-jews-on-keffiyeh/.

48 Daniel Sieradski, "Strangely Familiar 'Anti-War Scarves' Now at an URBN near You!" *Jewschool* (blog), January 16, 2007, https://jewschool.com/2007/01/11720/oddly-familiar-anti-war-scarves-now-at-an-urbn-near-you/.

49 Qtd. in Ck, "Urban Outfitters."

50 Ibid.

51 Kibum Kim, "Where Some See Fashion, Others See Politics," *The New York Times*, February 11, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/11/fashion/shows/11KAFFIYEH.html.

style icon is Kanye West," while what the writers of the piece thought the scarf really said was, "My style icon is Rachel Ray and all of my social activism is done via Twitter hashtags."[52] The reason the writers gave for why "white people" should avoid the head covering was the object's political associations.

Published during the heat of the cultural appropriation wars, this piece sheds light on another aspect of this debate: the role played by fashion in an increasingly globalized world. Should anyone other than Arabs wear the *keffiyeh* or not? Critics of cultural appropriation claim that certain groups have exclusive rights to display a certain behavior, performance, or item. Because the line between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation has been blurred over the past couple of decades, now many choose to stay away from certain cultural productions or products rather than risk being accused of appropriation or insensitivity. As the abovementioned examples demonstrate, the line between using another culture's products and being offensive or racist is no longer clear. The "you know it when you see it" test does not work for all cultural objects. In order to understand the *keffiyeh* as a thing-in-itself rather than entangled with politics as it is now, it is essential to understand the theoretical tools with which we can either allow it to remain entangled to conditions created by late capitalism, or undo that entanglement by acknowledging its broader material history and thus relieve some of the tension caused by this incredibly complex piece of cloth.

Coming back to quantum entanglement for a moment to work through this entanglement of objects, I turn now to Ian Hodder's work in anthropology. Hodder's work on entanglement theory from an anthropological perspective raises an important point that helps balance thinking toward things that have become so controversial that they almost lost their original meaning. As Hodder explains, many times when humans attempt to disentangle a thing from its meaning, the thing becomes even more entangled, and humans themselves become entrapped when they attempt to fix entrapments. He calls the process of trying to disentangle things from their associated meanings "fittingness."[53] Fittingness is a concept that expresses just how complex things and their histories are and how entangled humans become in those histories when they engage these things. The controversies over the appropriateness of wearing the *keffiyeh* are a clear example of this attempt at "fittingness" getting humans even more entangled in a thing. In the case of the *keffiyeh*, the attempts to make it into a taboo object for appreciation by cultures other than the Arab one may not be logistically possible now since the *keffiyeh* is a worldwide-used object. As Ghazanfar Ali Khan explains, "[t]he simplicity of the keffiyeh has made it an international trend even in cities such as Tokyo and Paris. It has become a popular global headgear."[54] The *keffiyeh* has also begun to cross lines of gender. In the past two decades, women have begun to wear the *keffiyeh* in the style of a *hijab* in some countries like Malaysia.[55] Teenage girls in Israel have begun to wear it as well, despite its political

52 Jian Deleon and Matthew Henson, "Check Your Privilege: Clothes White People Shouldn't Wear," *Complex*, August 27, 2013, https://www.complex.com/style/2013/08/clothes-white-people-shouldnt-wear/.

53 Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 114. Hodder's example of an object that humans become even more entangled by when they try to untangle from is sugar. Sugar consumption globally was fueled by human slavery, and it was the reason for a high rate of diabetes among Native Americans. Contemporary sugar industry cannot be divorced from these entanglements, and whenever it tries to do so, it becomes even more entangled in that history.

54 Khan, "Not Just a Checkered Scarf."

55 Thomas Fuller, "In Malaysia, Women Cover Up but in Colorful and Trendy Way: Headscarf Chic," *The New York Times*, October 7, 1999, https://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/07/news/in-malaysia-women-cover-up-but-in-colorful-and-trendy-way-headscarf.html.

associations, because of its stylish look.[56] Even Walmart currently offers an array of "*shemagh* scarves," or varieties of *keffiyeh*, marketed for women.[57] The sheer variety that the *keffiyeh* comes in and the diversity of its styles show that, while this article is associated with the everyday lives of Arabs, it has proven an extremely versatile piece of clothing in terms of function and fashion value all around the world.

This new moment for the *keffiyeh*, one in which it not only signals Arab identity and associations with a particular region of the world but also the class dynamics of fashion, shows just how far an object can be entangled with the human drive to politicize it. According to Mohammed Alshoaiby, the popularity of the *keffiyeh* as a fashion item is also bound up with more recent, post-oil boom connotations of Arab luxuriance and wealth:

"The keffiyeh went from a symbol of solidarity to a trend that took off across the globe. Sold everywhere from H&M to Armani, a Keffiyeh draped around the shoulders was the dominant Autumn and Winter look for both sexes worldwide. And with the Middle East becoming increasingly more globalized, particularly in bustling Gulf metropolises like Jeddah, Dubai, Doha, and Riyadh, the world is turning its attention to another kind of Arabia, one the Shemagh represents in its princely elegance."[58]

Indeed, it is important to note that T.E. Lawrence himself had made a point not to dress up "as any old Bedouin. He was dressing up as a *sharif*: in other words, as Royalty."[59] As he advised other British officers who embedded themselves in Arab ranks, "if you wear Arab things at all, go the whole way."[60] The recent fascination with the *keffiyeh* in the West is thus another chapter in the object's long and entangled history with Western fashion and prestige items. Thinking about the *keffiyeh* as a commodity entangled with the conspicuous wealth of oil revenue has afforded many entanglement moves that are at the very heart of what subaltern protest attempts to resist—the commodification of all that is material, including the human body. Disentanglement might be an attractive goal, but what would disentanglement even look like? This is not only a theoretical and social question but also a historical one.

Benedict notes that humans have not always thought of things the way they did after the empiricist revolution of the Enlightenment. In fact, after this moment, "things no longer carry significance in their capacity to represent or embody general truth, but rather through their irreducible singularity."[61] In other words, asserting the value of the *keffiyeh* as a thing-in-itself involves a process of cultural reassessment whereby the agency of the thing takes precedence over the agency of the subject. What critiques of the use of the *keffiyeh* focus on is not the thing itself but the structures of meaning thrust upon it. In thinking about the Marxist concept of "commodity," John Frow asserts that it refers "not to things but to the form taken by things when they are produced for exchange rather than for immediate use."[62] The commodification of the *keffiyeh* demonstrates that it is not the thing itself that has caused such controversy but the forms or meanings which the thing signals. Any process of disentanglement begins by addressing the actual basis of such controversies and not the thing itself.

56 Rachel Shabi, "On Trend? Check," *The Guardian*, November 1, 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/nov/01/middleeast-fashion.

57 "Shemagh Scarves," *Walmart*, October 14, 2018, https://www.walmart.com/c/kp/shemagh-scarves.

58 Mohammed Alshoaiby, "The Shemagh: The Heart of Saudi Men's Fashion," *Saudi Gazette*, December 13, 2013, http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/68622.

59 Hammad, "Dressing for Others."

60 Qtd. in Hammad, "Dressing for Others."

61 Benedict, "Finding Room for Things," 252.

62 John Frow, "Commodity," in *New Keywords: Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, ed. Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris (London: Blackwell, 2005), 46.

5 Conclusion: Why Things Matter in Forming Identity

As Jennifer Cotter reminds us, new materialism is part of the larger posthuman turn in critical theory. She boils it down to "a 'new' ontology of the relationship of life and matter that displaces the centrality of the human and contends that all matter is endowed with 'vibrancy,' 'aliveness,' 'affect,' and 'agency.'"[63] What does this "new" vibrancy of the object mean for its "old" politics, though? According to Cotter, "new materialism expands the notion of the individual in classic bourgeois political economy to now include objects with their own 'thing-power.'"[64] The *keffiyeh*, or any other thing related to Arabness, should not have its identifying power taken from it because this power is important for those who rely on the everyday association of this object with cultural identity. Therefore, the goal of new materialism is to clarify that cultural objects, such as the *keffiyeh*, are things-in-transition and that their full meanings are yet to be known. Further, these meanings will last long after those who imposed their own meanings on them are gone. In other words, the thing has a politics of its own.

From its use-value as an object protecting against a harsh climate, to its cultural associations with Arab pride and self-determination, to its contentious association with Palestinian politics, to its reemergence as an object of fashion and a symbol of Arab wealth and elegance in a global context, the *keffiyeh*'s long and difficult relationship to imposed meanings will not abate anytime soon. Ted Swedenburg asks if "purple designer kufiyas spell the end of Palestine solidarity."[65] When asking this question, Swedenburg, who is an anthropologist, addresses the growing fashionability of the *keffiyeh* in the U.S.: he notes the rising popularity of this fashion item amongst performers such as Lupe Fiaasco and Kanye West. The point he makes is that the *keffiyeh* as a fashion symbol and the *keffiyeh* as "a sign of political solidarity" are not mutually exclusive: both can be motivations for wearing the scarf without being, as Swedenburg argues, an "Orientalist."[66]

My argument here is less about whether broader society should or should not use the *keffiyeh* and more about whether one should influence such decisions with theoretical positions. An object can serve multiple purposes, but when confronting the politics of an object one must take into account not only its everyday uses but also the various associated meanings the object has for those who rely on it. The arguments surrounding the reinstatement of the *keffiyeh* as a fashion item did not lead to more open conversations about issues of political relevance. What these conversations did was to limit the *keffiyeh*'s meaning to just one of the many meanings it has taken on over the years. Acknowledging the *keffiyeh*'s complex symbolism could provide, instead, some relief from the anxiety over the question whether wearing another culture's object is an act of appropriation or cultural appreciation.

63 Jennifer Cotter, "New Materialism and the Labor Theory of Value," *Minnesota Review* 87 (2016): 171.

64 Ibid., 172.

65 Ted Swedenburg, "Bad Rap for a Neck Scarf?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2009): 184.

66 Ibid., 184–85.

PART 4

Post-Oil Arabia: Things, Memory, and Local Identity

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CHAPTER 10

Written in Silver: Protective Medallions from Inner Oman

James Redman

The *souq*s and tourist markets of Oman are today filled with remnants from the days not long past when the country used to be home to a highly skilled and thriving silversmithing industry. Now, the domestic market is gone and the artifacts that have been left behind—the jewelry, daggers, and other assorted accouterments—are all hawked in shops sold by weight as souvenirs and collectibles. It is among this hodgepodge of metallic curios that silver discs about the size of an adult's hand with texts etched into them are to be found. These inscribed medallions are known locally as *kirsh kitab* and they were made in the Omani towns of Nizwa, Bahla, and Rustaq until the closing decades of the twentieth century.[1] Originally crafted to be worn around a woman's neck or placed near a bed, these pieces were thought to provide their owners with protective benefits[2] by bearing words from the hallowed scriptural authority of the Qur'ān (fig. 10.1).[3]

However, the *kirsh kitab* must be separated from the kinds of generic charms meant to defend against a wide array of metaphysical onslaughts because they were explicitly created to combat the ravages of a specific *jinniya*, Umm al Subyan, the "Mother of Boys," so named for "her capacity of causing the death of infants."[4] For parents and children, Umm al Subyan has a frightening reputation that reaches beyond Oman and stretches across the Arabian Peninsula[5] to North Africa[6] and through the Indian Ocean to Zanzibar.[7] To give some impression of this "child-witch,"[8] a portion of "The Seven Covenants of Solomon" taken from a Cairene amulet provides a harrowing portrait of the *jinniya* in all her dreadful glory:

"[I]t is related of the prophet of God, Solomon, son of David, (peace upon both) that he saw an old woman with hoary hair, blue eyes, joined eyebrows, with scrawny limbs, disheveled hair, a gaping mouth from which flames issued. She cleaved the air with her claws and broke trees with her loud voice. The prophet Solomon said to her, "Art thou of the *jinn* or human? I have never seen worse than you." She said, "O prophet of God, I am the mother of children (*Um-es-Subyan*). I have dominion upon the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, and upon their possessions. I enter houses and gobble like turkeys and bark like dogs, and low like cows, and make a noise like camels, and neigh like horses, and bray like donkeys, and hiss like serpents, and represent everything. I make wombs barren and destroy children. I come to women and close their wombs and leave them, and they will not conceive, and then people say they are barren.

1 A silver dealer interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, December 1, 2016.

2 Ibrahim, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, September 2, 2017.

3 James Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 153–55.

4 Edward Alexander Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1968), 1: 400.

5 C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century: Daily Life, Customs and Learning. The Moslems of the East-Indian-Archipelago*, trans. J.H. Monahan (London: Luzac, 1931), 99–100.

6 Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief,* 1: 400.

7 Lorenzo Declich, "Zanzibar: Some Nineteenth-Century Arabic Writings on Healing," in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, ed. Scott S. Reese (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 269.

8 Samuel M. Zwemer, *Arabia: The Cradle of Islam* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1900), 283.

FIGURE 10.1 Several *kirsh kitab* hang on a wall among other bits and pieces of silverwork in a shop owned by a former *sa'ig* in Nizwa, Oman.

I come to a woman in pregnancy and destroy her offspring. It is I, O prophet of God, who come to the woman engaged and tie the tails of her garments, and announce woes and disasters. It is I, O prophet of God, who come to men and make them impotent… It is I, O prophet of God, who come to men and oppose their selling and buying. If they trade, they do not gain, and if they plow they will not reap. It is I, O prophet of God, who cause all these."[9]

This is the titanic incarnation of calamities that women in inner Oman had to safeguard themselves against: a wicked presence whose cruelty could only be checked by a *kirsh kitab* silver medallion (fig. 10.2).

Flat, circular metal, though, was not the remedy for deflecting the havocs brought on by Umm al Subyan, even if it was the vessel. To work and to become a *kirsh kitab*, it needed the divine language of the Qur'ān, oftentimes accompanied by a scrawled image of a tied and bound Umm al Subyan herself, to actually incapacitate the *jinniya* and prevent her from filling her ghastly desires. This reliance on words recognizably makes the texts on the *kirsh kitab* a focal point and a vehicle for grasping how these pieces were "enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society"[10] when the

9 Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Influence of Animism on Islam: An Account of Popular Superstitions* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 193–94. It is important to approach Zwemer's firsthand accounts about popular Islamic practices from a century ago with caution. Though a voracious collector of data, he also approached Islam and its adherents through the lens of a Christian missionary. For further discussion, see Eleanor Abdella Doumato, *Getting God's Ear: Women, Islam, and Healing in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 43–58.

10 Edward W. Said, "The Text, the World, the Critic," *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 8, no. 2 (1975): 4.

FIGURE 10.2
The horrid likeness of Umm al Subyan etched into the surface of a *kirsh kitab*. In this image, the desired effect of the *kirsh kitab* upon the *jinniya* is clear: her legs are depicted as being bound to signify that she is powerless against the owner of the *kirsh kitab*. This *kirsh kitab* variation also represents a double indemnity against Umm al Subyan's torments since she is visibly surrounded, or trapped, by the words of "Aya al Kursi."

writings were surrogates for their makers' textual knowledge. This chapter examines what these texts say about the utility of that knowledge, especially for protection, when it is conveyed in a very imperfect form through incomplete and inexact scripts. Still, these texts are inseparable from the legacy of Oman's silver trade, and understanding this market is indispensable for building a framework for the words that were scored within its quarters.

1 A Brief Overview of the Silver Craft Industry in Oman

The story of Oman's silver craft industry is vital for any appraisal of the *kirsh kitab* for several reasons, but foremost because these protective medallions had to first be fabricated from silver before anything else could be done with them. In the Omani interior towns where these pieces come from, the silver discs, hangers, and chains, not to mention any trimmings like gold leaf or red beads, would each have to be crafted and then assembled by a *sa'ig* (pl. *suwwag*), a silversmith, who would give every *kirsh kitab* its form. Thereafter, the amulets would be sold in a silversmith's workshop alongside necklaces, bracelets, rings, and other silver wares.[11] Plainly, from manufacture to market, the *kirsh kitab* have for some time been a regular part of the Omani silver trade.

While shrouded in speculation, the appearance of silversmithing in Oman is variously dated to the late eighteenth[12] and the mid-nineteenth[13] centuries, although the conclusion that it "has been going on for as long as anyone can remember"[14] is likely just as accurate. Certainly, there is some data that might allow for guesswork, like the arrival in Muscat of Jewish silversmiths from Iraq in the 1830s, or a Western visitor to Oman in 1845 noting

11 Daud, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, December 1, 2016.

12 Jehan S. Rajab, *Silver Jewellery of Oman* (Kuwait City: Tareq Rajab Museum, 1997), 31.

13 Aude Mongiatti, Fahmida Suleman, and Nigel Meeks, "Beauty and Belief: The Endangered Tradition of Omani Silver Jewellery," *The British Museum Technical Research Bulletin* 5 (2011): 1.

14 Ruth Hawley, "Omani Silver," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 6 (1976): 8.

the "dollars pendant" worn by the women.[15] The surviving silver jewelry and accessories of Sayyida Salme bint Sa'id, the daughter of Sayyid Sa'id bin Sultan, Imam of Muscat and Sultan of Zanzibar (r. 1804–1856),[16] also provide a solitary glimpse into what royal regalia looked like on Oman's distant East African shores in the 1860s.[17] But, as these samples show, the information is simply too erratic and anecdotal to allow for a satisfying chronological sketch of Oman's silver heritage to be formulated.

With this degree of uncertainty about when Omani silverwork started being produced, a similar lack of clarity can be expected for its stylistic and design roots. Given coastal Oman's extensive history of long distance trade that stretches back over a thousand years, spanning from China and India through the Arabian Gulf and all the way to Africa,[18] it is difficult to imagine that the craftsmanship of Omani silver artisans would remain immune to the influences of such a regional emporium.[19] Indicative of one direction of this flow is Jehan Rajab's observation that, when Oman ruled Zanzibar, "Zanzibari jewellery was almost indistinguishable from that found in Oman and no doubt many silversmiths must have gone with their families to East Africa and remained there."[20] Unfortunately, what is missing from this statement is an acknowledgement of the interactions between Omani and African aesthetics in Zanzibar, or the very real possibility that inspirations from East Africa streamed back to Oman. When the island's Indian silver merchants[21] are added to this mix, even the labels of Omani or Zanzibari jewelry are probably too restrictive. Turning to Oman proper, the land served not only as a point for cargoes along the trade routes but also as a stopover for populations on the move, with this traffic amplified on the coasts and reduced considerably in the interior.[22] So, in addition to the aforementioned Iraqi Jewish silversmiths in Muscat by the 1830s,[23] it is also presumed that Yemeni Jewish silversmiths helped shape Omani jewellery patterns[24] along with Pakistani Baluchis.[25] Of course, this international milieu of circulating goods and peoples is a woefully incomplete portrayal of Omani silver design; local choices, tastes, and sensibilities about what is desirable and fashionable must also be taken into account.[26] The key is to recognize that these local preferences have long coexisted with the same cycles of geographic mobility and mercantile networks that have defined the Omani experience over the past centuries.

In sharp contrast to the knowledge void that clouds our current understanding about the origins of Oman's silver heritage, there are better insights into what this jewelry has meant for its owners. As Richardson and Dorr summarize, "[s]ilver jewellery is traditionally given to a woman in the form of a dowry at the time of her marriage, and is deemed her personal property, to be exchanged at her discretion for goods and currency in times of

15 Luitgard Mols, "Art in Silver. Traditional Jewellery from Oman," in *Oman*, ed. Luitgard Mols and Birgit Boelens (Amsterdam: Production Foundation De Nieuwe Kerk and Hermitage Amsterdam, 2009), 131 and 134, respectively.

16 Percy Cox, foreword to *Said bin Sultan (1791–1856). Ruler of Oman and Zanzibar*, by Rudolph Said-Ruete (London: Alexander-Ouseley, 1929), ix-xi.

17 Mongiatti, Suleman, and Meeks, "Beauty and Belief," 2.

18 Uzi Rabi, "The Ibadhi Imamate of Muhammad Bin 'Abdallah al-Khalili (1920–54): The Last Chapter of a Lost and Forgotten Legacy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 2 (2008): 170.

19 Mols, "Art in Silver," 133.

20 Rajab, *Silver Jewellery*, 55–57.

21 Mols, "Art in Silver," 135.

22 Uzi Rabi, *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society: Oman Under Sa'id bin Taymur, 1932–1970* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 5.

23 Mols, "Art in Silver," 134.

24 Ruth Hawley, *Omani Silver* (London: Longman, 1984).

25 The Lancasters also recorded the presence of traveling Iranian Baluchi silversmiths in neighboring Ras al-Khaimah prior to oil and it is hard to think that their circuits never touched Omani soil. For details, see William Lancaster and Felicity Lancaster, *Honour Is in Contentment: Life Before Oil in Ras al-Khaimah* (U.A.E.) *and Some Neighboring Regions* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 259–61.

26 Mols, "Art in Silver," 132–33.

need. Jewellery represents security and portable wealth and as such … is ultimately viewed as a liquid asset."[27] But silver jewelry was not just a liquid asset; it was literally a plastic asset that could easily be transformed into capital by shaving away its pieces, melting it down partially or entirely, or fabricating it into a different thing altogether.[28] On the other hand, the benefits of liquidity and plasticity may have been slightly offset by the fact that silver jewelry was not an economically productive asset; it was a form of insurance reserved for tough times.[29]

Then again, the economic value of silver objects should not overshadow their significance as personal adornments and their ability to act as visual indicators of their wearers' social and marital standing, or as markers of their regional and tribal identities.[30] Another part of the metal's allure, which could be aided by being worked into something wearable, was its supposed curative and protective merits that were thought to be capable of both healing physical ailments and providing amuletic safety against unseen malevolence. Some authors have assigned this penchant for silver to the Prophet Muhammad's dislike of gold jewelry.[31] However, Sayyida Salme bint Sa'id's memoirs of Omani life in nineteenth-century Zanzibar make this assertion debatable, since she witnessed that, for their own protection, "the higher classes take sayings from the Koran engraved on gold or silver medals, suspended from the neck by a chain."[32] For most Omanis, gold was prohibitively expensive and local custom held that it was only silver, and not gold, that had the inherent ability to defend its wearers against bad luck and unearthly tribulations.[33]

By the last quarter of the twentieth century, the heydays of Omani silverwork had passed and Omani silversmithing was on the verge of extinction due to a confluence of pressures, some of which were symptomatic of the challenges faced by all Omani craft industries during this period and others that were particular to the silver industry itself. Primarily, the bulk of this marketplace collapse should be viewed as part of the broader changes that were already shaking Oman: the 1970 *coup d'état* and the new government's policies of "awakening" the country with massive infrastructural, economic, and bureaucratic developments.[34] For handicraft producers, this had many consequences. For instance, the state's investments in the private and public sectors created salaried jobs that siphoned off the potential next generation of craftsmen,[35] and the advent of a national education system[36] undoubtedly weakened the father-to-son informal apprenticeships of many crafts. The burgeoning economy also increased the import of products that could compete with and replace locally manufactured items,[37] meaning that outside competition was growing at precisely the same moment that domestic artisans were being steered to new higher paying occupations.[38] Not surprisingly, almost overnight many handicraft industries were suddenly obsolete.[39]

Oman's silversmithing trade was battered by these trends and confronted with its own challenges as local tastes, funded by the growth in spending power, gradually replaced silver with

27 Neil Richardson and Marcia Dorr, *The Craft Heritage of Oman* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2003), 1:166.

28 Ibid.

29 William C. Young, *The Rashaayda Bedouin: Arab Pastoralists of Eastern Sudan* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2002), 62–63.

30 Mongiatti, Suleman, and Meeks, "Beauty and Belief," 2–3.

31 Mols, "Art in Silver," 135–37.

32 Qtd. in Emily Ruete, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess*, trans. Lionel Strachey (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1907), 68.

33 Rajab, *Silver Jewellery*, 34.

34 Mandana E. Limbert, *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory, and Social Life in an Omani Town* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 5–6.

35 Richardson and Dorr, *The Craft Heritage of Oman*, 2:518.

36 Limbert, *In the Time of Oil*, 86.

37 Richardson and Dorr, *The Craft Heritage of Oman*, 2:519.

38 Avelyn Forster, *Disappearing Treasures of Oman* (Somerset: Archway Books, 1998), 25.

39 Richardson and Dorr, *The Craft Heritage of Oman*, 2:512–13.

gold. According to Mongiatti, Suleman, and Meeks, what began merely as a way to enhance silver by adding gold to it eventually turned into a full-blown desire for gold jewelry once it could be afforded:

"[T]he demand for the silversmith's craft has declined in recent years … The addition of small elements of gilded decoration on Omani silver jewellery gained popularity from the 1960s onwards, during a time when earnings increased and vast quantities of gold were readily available from Saudi Arabia and Dubai … Over time, however, Omani's [sic] women's fondness for small gilded embellishments developed into a demand for pieces made entirely of gold. Indian goldsmiths have largely met this demand, having established a thriving trade in Oman and neighboring Dubai and, interestingly, traditional designs of Omani silver are sometimes reworked as entire gold pieces or smaller, lighter versions in gold."[40]

The effect of this swing in precious metal choices was already noticeable by 1975, only five years into the regime's rapid modernization plans, when Ruth Hawley found that, in the southern Dhofar region, "[w]ith the exception of the *atngeel* (a hair ornament) silver does not seem to be made up into jewellery any more, as gold has almost entirely replaced it."[41] Thus, it comes as little wonder that silversmithing "all but died"[42] after several decades of its workforce shrinking and demand for its products dwindling. Today, many Omani silver dealers contract expatriate craftsmen, such as Pakistanis, to fill any orders they get for brand new "traditional" silver jewelry.[43]

To some extent, it can be anticipated that the fates of Oman's *kirsh kitab* rose and fell with its silver fortunes given that the former was, literally, part of the stock and trade of the latter. Like with silver craft industry overall, the circumstances surrounding the appearance of these amulets in inner Oman are probably lost to posterity, aside from vague notions that they are "ancient," which in the parlance of the *souq*s can mean from roughly one hundred years ago.[44] Also, it seems that the production of *kirsh kitab* trailed off almost in conjunction with the loss of Oman's silver markets, with manufacturing ending in the 1980s[45] or 1990s.[46] Some Omanis say that the *kirsh kitab* stopped being made because, as with silver goods in general, Omani leanings shifted to gold[47] and away from the heavy, bulky silver medallions that could weigh over a quarter of a kilogram.[48] Other Omanis, departing from this materialistic and market-centered approach and thinking in terms of religiosity, insist that the *kirsh kitab* fell from favor because they date from the days of the "old beliefs that were not right" and that sales dried up after "people learned how to believe correctly."[49] The more probable scenario is that all of these explanations contain some validity depending on the circumstances. Now, it is rumored that there are workshops in Oman where Pakistanis are using electric engravers to churn out any *kirsh kitab* that might be needed by retailers.[50]

2 The Texts in the Silver

Without question, there are multiple layers of meaning wrapped around the *kirsh kitab*

40 Mongiatti, Suleman, and Meeks, "Beauty and Belief," 1.

41 Hawley, "Omani Silver," 88.

42 Forster, *Disappearing Treasures of Oman*, 25.

43 Daud, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, December 1, 2016.

44 Muhammad, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, May 10, 2018.

45 Khaled, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, May 10, 2018.

46 Said, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, December 2, 2016.

47 A silver dealer interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, December 1, 2016.

48 Khaled, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, May 10, 2018.

49 Muhammad, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, December 1, 2016.

50 Daud, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, December 1, 2016.

individually and collectively. At any given moment, these medallions can variously be seen as commodities, personal adornments, transportable wealth, family mementoes, tourist souvenirs, and so forth. This incomplete list can also serve as a basis for studying most other pieces of old Omani silver jewelry, but the *kirsh kitab* have additional features that set them apart. Namely, they were believed to be endowed with the capacity to shield their owners from the misfortunes wrought by an otherworldly force, a capacity that largely depended on the application of Qur'ānic texts. For this reason, the *kirsh kitab* probably communicate as much or more as documents, as textual products, than they do as anything else and it is this probability that is underpinning the present discussion.

Quite literally, a *kirsh kitab* does not exist without texts. Even the name *kirsh kitab*, or "coin writing," designates that it is the appliance of written text that makes a *kirsh kitab* what it is. Without text, it is not a *kirsh kitab*; it is either unfinished raw material or, if embellished on one side with gold leaf shaped in a sunburst design, a necklace known as a *sumpt*. Conversely, though, when a *sumpt* has texts engraved into its plain side, i.e., the side of the silver disc without gold decoration, it ceases to be called a *sumpt* and, instead, it is a *kirsh kitab* or *kirsh kitab* with gold (*ma dhihab*).[51]

Yet, a *kirsh kitab* is more than a silver slate used for the recording of texts and writing; as already mentioned, for it to have any protective potential, a *kirsh kitab* must have had words from the Qur'ān engraved into its surface. Almost exclusively, these words came from the "Aya al Kursi" ("The Throne Verse") of *Surat al Baqarah* (*The Chapter of the Cow*).[52] This attribute, in and of itself, does not make the *kirsh kitab* unique as there are many little silver "Aya al Kursi" pendants and lockets that are widely available nearly everywhere today. As textual products and as texts, the *kirsh kitab* bear little resemblance to the contemporary "Aya al Kursi" medals, but the distinctions between the two are useful for illustrative purposes. So, whereas the new stocks might fall into a category of products that are viewed as "the growing mass commoditization of the Islamic tradition,"[53] the *kirsh kitab* were very much a local handicraft tradition, and this difference likely accounts for the disparities found in each of their texts. With the mass-marketed necklaces, the perfection and tiny text of the mechanized engraving of the "Aya al Kursi" is something akin to Walter Ong's commentary about printing books: "Printed texts look machine-made, as they are.... Typographic control typically impresses more by its tidiness and inevitability: the lines perfectly regular, all justified on the right side, everything coming out even visually, and without the aid of guidelines or ruled borders that often occur in manuscripts.... By and large, printed texts are far easier to read than manuscript texts."[54] If today's "Aya al Kursi" pendant is analogous to the printed words described by Ong, then the *kirsh kitab* must surely embody his thoughts about manuscripts.

In fact, the manufacture of *kirsh kitab* can be aligned quite neatly with manuscript culture. To begin with, every piece is the antithesis of print-capitalism with its faculty for "infinite reproduction" stripped of "individualizing ... habits."[55] Rather, what is seen with each *kirsh kitab* through its handwritten content is the epitome of

51 Khalid, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, May 10, 2018.

52 The author documented 116 *kirsh kitab* samples in Oman. Of this number, 106 (91%) used words from the "Aya al Kursi" exclusively, and three combined words from the "Aya al Kursi" with those from another verse. In total, 109 (94%) examples contained words from "Aya al Kursi." One *kirsh kitab* was engraved with words from *Surat Ya Sin* (*Chapter Ya Sin*) and two others with words from *Surat al Fatihah* (*The Opening Chapter*). The four remaining *kirsh kitab* were each made up of a different patchwork of *ayat* from the Qur'ān and one of these also included a *du'a* (prayer).

53 Gregory Starrett, "The Political Economy of Religious Commodities in Cairo," *American Anthropologist* 97, no. 1 (1995): 65.

54 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 120.

55 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 44.

personalized predilections, as extra phrases, numbers, and symbols are blended with *ayat* (Qur'ān verses; sing. *aya*) that might also have missing, misspelled, or broken words.[56] Granted, while this may appear to be an unpardonable level of ineptitude or an exhibit of charm writing by way of the occult scriptural sciences,[57] and it is within the realm of possibilities that both or either of these prospects might be the case, it is also in line with the errors that typify manuscripts.[58] Moreover, even in the medieval Arabic manuscript industry, with its highly trained copyists and rigorous proofing protocols, authors sometimes concluded their original tomes with apologies in anticipation of the inevitable mistakes that they expected to be introduced by others in later renditions.[59] This begs the question that, if these inaccuracies were the norm for scribes and copyists who used conventional writing materials, should there be any expectation that the use of silversmithing tools on a resistant surface will yield higher levels of textual accuracy? Probably not, although it does make the irregular and inconsistent texts on the *kirsh kitab* even more understandable and emblematic of manuscript traditions.

Obviously, texts cannot create themselves and the *kirsh kitab* are no exception. Here, again, the manuscript model provides a guide to follow, this time for gathering insights into what it meant to produce the *kirsh kitab* as texts. Like with manuscripts, the *kirsh kitab* are "producer-oriented" texts in the sense that every single copy corresponds directly to an individual maker's time and effort, unlike the automated reproduction of innumerable copies from a single prototype.[60] However, the producers of the *kirsh kitab* texts were not from the same mold as the manuscript copyists, scribes, notaries, or other document writers,[61] who were known for their competencies with texts and writing, nor were they drawn from the ranks of the *shuyukh* or any other learned "carriers of the Quran,"[62] who were commonly tasked with duplicating the scriptures for the laities. Instead, the *kirsh kitab* authors were silversmiths; the very same *suwwag* who crafted the silver discs and affixed them to chains also wrote the Qur'ānic words by scratching them into being.[63]

To write a *kirsh kitab*, it is presumed that a *sa'ig* had to have a skill somewhat related to what Dale Eickelman identified as "mnemonic domination" or "mnemonic possession,"[64] but in a more diluted guise, since neither the Qur'ān nor any other religious treatises were to be memorized in their entirety.[65] What an adept craftsman who could make a *kirsh kitab* was thought to mnemonically hold, it turns out, was flawless, pristine memorization of the "Aya al Kursi,"[66] coupled with the ability to write it. The use of patterns, templates, or even the Qur'ān as a guide to copy from was expressly ruled out; for the sacred texts on a *kirsh kitab* to have any effectiveness, they had to come straight from the

56 There are 1,258 total irregularities in the 116 *kirsh kitab* recorded by the author. These irregularities include words missing from the *ayat*, misspelled words, broken words, as well as added words, numbers, and symbols.

57 Emilio Spadola, "Writing Cures: Religious and Communicative Authority in Late Modern Morocco," *The Journal of North African Studies* 14, no. 2 (2009): 155–60.

58 Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 2: 444.

59 Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, trans. Geoffrey French (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 47–49.

60 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 120.

61 Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 224–26.

62 Dale F. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 66–67, and 77, respectively.

63 Salim, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, November 4, 2017.

64 Dale F. Eickelman, "The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and Its Social Reproduction," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 (1978): 489 and 495, respectively.

65 Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power*, 50–59.

66 Ahmed, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, May 10, 2018.

memory of the *sa'ig* who wrote it.[67] It is not immediately clear why the memorization of the words was necessary. The Qur'ān, it must be remembered, is a "recitation-text"[68] which, at its foundation, "denies its writtenness while foregrounding its recitational quality,"[69] and this might have fostered a popular, idealized conviction that its revered words were formerly produced solely from memorization and not by any other method. Furthermore, studies in other Muslim communities have found creeds that maintain that Qur'ānic words have to be "internalized … in the head"[70] before their strength and force can be fully realized, and it is plausible that this doctrine or something like it may have applied to inner Oman whenever the protective powers of texts were needed. But whether or not these are the reasons behind the importance of memorized texts for making the *kirsh kitab* is not as crucial as seeing that it was a *sa'ig*'s encapsulation of the words he wanted to write that gave those words their intended efficacy.

The following *kirsh kitab* examples draw these themes together. Each text was produced by a different *sa'ig*, but each text was etched with the aim of replicating the "Aya al Kursi" to fend off Umm al Subyan, thereby making textual conformity a probable outcome. This is not the case here. The imprecisions of the manuscript art, any faults of mnemonic control, and the limitations of pre-1970s education in inner Oman,[71] when the available *maktab* or *kuttab* (Qur'ān-based primary school) literacy could denote some Qur'ānic reading and memorization[72] without the ability to write,[73] are all liable for the textual variations that appear across *kirsh kitab* samples. Before looking at the words written by the *suwwag*, the complete "Aya al Kursi" is given for comparison since it is the archetypical text:

"Aya al Kursi"

الله لا إله إلا هو	Allah, there is no god but He
الحي القيوم لا تأخذه سنة ولا نوم	The Living, the Eternal, He cannot be taken by slumber nor sleep,
له ما في السماوات وما في الأرض	His are all things in the heavens and on earth.
من ذا الذي يشفع عنده إلا بإذنه	Who is there that can intercede in His presence except as He permits?
يعلم ما بين	He knows what is
أيديهم وما خلفهم	Before or behind them,
ولا يحيطون بشيء من علمه إلا بما شاء	Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He wills it.
وسع كرسيه السماوات والأرض	His Throne extends over the heavens and the earth,
ولا يؤده حفظهم	And He feels no fatigue in preserving them
وهو العلي العظيم	And He is the Most High, the Supreme.[74]

67 Salim, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, May 11, 2018.

68 Brinkley Messick, "Just Writing: Paradox and Political Economy in Yemeni Legal Documents," *Cultural Anthropology* 4, no. 1 (1989): 27.

69 Ibid., 28.

70 A. Osman El-Tom, "Berti Qur'anic Amulets," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 17, no. 3 (1987): 243.

71 Limbert, *In the Time of Oil*, 5 and 86, respectively.

72 Said, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, March 16, 2018.

73 Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 16.

74 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2001), 105–06. This translation by 'Ali has been amended and adapted by the author.

The next three texts are from *kirsh kitab* and are offered, line by line, exactly as they have been carved into the silver. With the original Arabic text, misspelled words are provided in green but spelled as they were written, words missing from a line are marked with an ellipsis in parenthesis, broken words are indicated with a hyphen where the split occurs, and added words are written in red. The English translations are notated the same except for misspelled words. If a word from "Aya al Kursi" is misspelled, but it is still an actual word, the resulting translation is green; if the misspelled word is not a word, but it is identifiable as part of "Aya al Kursi," then what is assumed to be the intended translation is green and placed in brackets.

Text 1[75]

الله لا الله الا هو	Allah, there is no Allah but He
الحي القيوم لا تخذهو	The Living, the Eternal, [He cannot be taken by]
سنة ولا نوم له ما في	Slumber nor sleep, His are all things in
السماوات وما في الار ض	The heavens and on earth.
من ذا ل (…) فعو عند –	Who is (…) [intercede in] Hi –
– ه (…) ه	– s

Text 2[76]

الله لا اله الا هو	Allah, there is no god but He
حي القيوم لا تاخذه سنة	Living, the Eternal, He cannot be taken by slumber
ولا نوم له ما في سماوات وما في ار –	Nor sleep, His are all things in heavens and on ear –
– ض من ذا الذي يشفع عنده الا با–	– th. Who is there that can intercede in His presence except as He per –
– ذنه يعلم ما بين ايديهم وما خل –	– mits? He knows what is before or [be –
– فم ولا يحيطون بشى من علم –	– hind them], nor shall they compass aught of His know –
– ه الا بما شاء وسع كرسيه	– ledge except as He wills it. Extends His Throne

Text 3[77]

الله لا اله الا (…) الحي	Allah, there is no god but (…) the Living,
القيوم لا تاخذه سنت	The Eternal, He cannot be taken by [slumber]
ولا نوم له ما في السموات وما	Nor sleep, His are all things in [the heavens] and
في الارض من ذ لذي يشفع عنده	On earth. Who [is there that can] intercede in His presence
الا باذنه يعلم ما بين ايديهم وما	Except as He permits? He knows what is before or
خلفهم ولا يحيطون بشيء	Behind them, nor shall they compass aught
من علمه الا بما شاء وسع كرسيه	Of His knowledge except as He wills it. His Throne extends over
السموات والارض ولا يوده	[The heavens] and the earth, and He does not like
حفظهما وهو العلي	Preserving them and He is the Most High,
العظيم لا اكراه في الدين	The Supreme. There is no compulsion in religion
قد تبين الرشد	The truth stands out[78]

The omissions and lapses shown in the *kirsh kitab* texts above are not outliers; of the more than one hundred *kirsh kitab* texts that were examined, there was hardly a single one that could pass as an impeccable reproduction of "Aya al Kursi." The factors that are likely at the root of these errors have already been presented. What remains to discover is why such flagrant textual flaws were passable.

3 Mnemonic Alchemy and the Logic of Textual Imperfection

At first, it might seem barely conceivable that any of the hallowed words from the Qur'ān could become as mangled as they were, as texts one through three show, and yet still be sought as a deterrent against a *jinniya* as horrific and devastating as Umm al Subyan.[79] Naturally, the thought occurs that it cannot be too out of the ordinary that, when unlettered men engraved texts for unlettered women,[80] some inaccuracies were bound to happen. Besides, there is also plenty of data compiled from other settings that demonstrate the weight that written words carry, especially holy words, among those who cannot read well. This is apparent in the research of Mercedes García-Arenal about written Arabic for Moriscos in Spain: "The women in this case, as in many others, were illiterate. The function of the written word was not dependent on its being read and understood but was related to the power which the believer assigned to that writing. In other words, the word did not necessarily form part of an act of communication but took on a magical or talismanic character, and was used as such."[81] García-Arenal's portrayal of a relationship with texts by those who could not read them is close to that which the *kirsh kitab* shared with their owners, that is, the faith that the unknown characters were protective no matter how they might have been arranged or fractured because they were believed by the unlettered to represent the words of the scriptures (fig. 10.3).

Where did that trust in the efficacy of the sometimes jumbled *kirsh kitab* texts stem from? It did not come from ignorance of the printed word even though that was an unavoidable component. What seems to have been filling in for literacy when purchasing these texts was a buyer's confidence in a maker's intentions. Abdellah Hammoudi calls discrepancies in ritual practice "the gap … between effort and achievement" and reminds us that there are always divides "between what is said and what could possibly be meant."[82] Likewise, the faults on the *kirsh kitab* can be said to reflect a split between mnemonic control and textual expression, though intent (*niyah*) could reconcile those breaches. If a *sa'ig* memorized the "Aya al Kursi" or whatever other *aya* was required and applied it to a silver medallion with the intent of making it for the

75 Catalog number 13 M—02.17.2018, author's database.

76 Catalog number 4 N—04.20.2018, author's database.

77 Catalog number 17 N—03.16.2018, author's database.

78 These additional words are from the first line of the *aya* that follows "Aya al Kursi."

79 Even now, many Omanis insist that the *kirsh kitab* are faithful renderings of the "Aya al Kursi" and that any mistakes with the words were due to the inexperience of novice craftsmen. Unless every piece currently available for purchase was made by a trainee, then what this position really suggests is that Omanis today find it implausible that these silver texts with their divine contents could be so contorted.

80 There is no shortage of data about the dearth of literacy and educational facilities in premodern inner Oman. For a good description, see Rabi, *The Emergence of States*, 49–52, 155–58, and 208.

81 Mercedes García-Arenal, "The Converted Muslims of Spain: Morisco Cultural Resistance and Engagement with Islamic Knowledge (1502–1610)," in *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West*, ed. Roberto Tottoli (New York: Routledge, 2015), 51.

82 Abdellah Hammoudi, "Textualism and Anthropology: On the Ethnographic Encounter, or an Experience in the Hajj," in *Being There: The Fieldwork Encounter and the Making of Truth*, ed. John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 28.

FIGURE 10.3 The eclectic blending of writing on this *kirsh kitab* shows both the variability and the partial texts that can be found on different samples. It features no words from "Aya al Kursi"; instead, *Surat al Ikhlas* (*The Sincerity Chapter*) 112:1–4 and *Surat al Buruj* (*The Constellations Chapter*) 85:2 are complete, but only fragments of *Surat Yusuf* (*Yusuf Chapter*) 12:64 and *Surat al Imran* (*The Family of Imran Chapter*) 5:173 are present.

select purpose of protecting its wearer, without other thoughts of money or profit or anything else, the resulting *kirsh kitab* could be expected to perform as planned. All that was left for customers was to know how to gauge a silversmith's intent, and this relied heavily on a *sa'ig*'s reputation for religious piety and practice, with elements like prayer and alms-giving being part of this equation.[83]

83 Salim, interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, November 4, 2017.

Finally, nearly all *kirsh kitab* display a tied-up likeness of Umm al Subyan, the feared *jinniya* whose wrath should be disabled by the presence of the partial holy texts, engraved into their surfaces.[84] As an "iconographic symbol"[85] that made the target and desired effect of the scriptures unmistakable, even to the completely unlettered for whom a written *aya* was no more than a collection of lines with curves and dots,[86] the graphic depiction of Umm al Subyan was a recognizable affirmation of a *sa'ig*'s talents and a literal representation of the words on the *kirsh kitab* that would render the *jinniya* harmless. In the recollections of one elderly *sa'ig* renowned for his silver writing who used to write on occasion for less gifted *suwwag*, the image of the *jinniya* as it appeared on a disc had to come from within the maker; it had to come from his heart.[87] Only then, by drawing into silver what he saw inside himself, could the *sa'ig* display Umm al Subyan as being neutralized by the words around her.

4 Conclusion: The Good Judge's Memory

It is difficult to contemplate the roles of mnemonic authority in the fabrication of imperfect texts and their reinforcing graphics without recalling some of the age-old questions about the very nature of memory and writing. Jacques Derrida explored Plato's arguments about the association between the two when he wrote of writing as having "no essence or value of its own … It is in its type the mime of memory, of knowledge, of truth, etc."[88] This distillation of the ancient orator's take on texts that "the best of them really serve only to remind us of what we know"[89] actually might encompass some of the logic of coin writing in that the silver texts were ultimately mnemonic products whose effectiveness seems to have rested more on a *sa'ig*'s memory than on exact textual reproduction.

Taking Derrida's inquiry into Plato's contentions further is even more revealing because it goes past the postulation that memory and texts are somehow inimical to each other. Turning to *Laws*, XII: 957–58, Derrida brings attention to Plato's insistence that texts and their memorization are the cornerstones of the "good judge."[90] In Plato's phrasing, "of all such speeches, the writings of the lawgiver will serve as a test; and inasmuch as he possesses these within himself, as a talisman against other speeches, the good judge will guide both himself and the State aright."[91] Here, little licence is required to make the transference from the good judge to the *sa'ig*, from the texts of the lawgiver to the divine Scripture by Allah, or to see that the talismanic shelter created by internalizing these writings can equally apply to magistrate and silversmith so that each might better tend his State or clientele.

The texts on the silver discs that were churned out of workshops in inner Oman complicate perceptions about writing, texts, and memory, and not just because Derrida and Plato can intermittently cloud things with contradictions. This confusion arises because the *suwwag*'s writings were taken from a sacred source that is at once textual and mnemonic, scriptural and recitational,[92] and thus resists placement into binary categories that are one or the other.[93] At the same time, all the

84 Only 18 of 116 documented *kirsh kitab* are without a *jinniya* image.

85 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 74.

86 Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, 153.

87 A *sa'ig* interviewed by the author, Nizwa, Oman, May 11, 2018.

88 Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 105.

89 Harold North Fowler, *Plato with an English Translation, Volume 1, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1943), 573.

90 Derrida, *Dissemination*, 121.

91 R.G. Bury, *Plato with an English Translation: Laws* (London: William Heinemann, 1926), 2: 527.

92 William A. Graham, "The Earliest Meaning of 'Qur'ān,'" *Die Welt des Islam* 23/24 (1984): 372.

93 Derrida, *Dissemination*, 109–10.

protective inscriptions made by craftsmen to keep Umm al Subyan at bay were ancillary to the ups and downs of the Omani silver market. A *sa'ig* was a writer of memorized texts that gave people safety, but his scribal services were needed only as long as local silver prices remained buoyant; when people stopped buying silver, they also stopped buying his texts and, by extension, the amuletic properties of his memory. The lot of the wretched *jinniya*, now that Oman's silver era and its *kirsh kitab* has ended, curiously remains unsure.

CHAPTER 11

From Cradle to Grave: A Life Story in Jewelry

Marie-Claire Bakker and Kara McKeown

Jewelry has played a significant social role in the life of the people of the Arabian Gulf for millennia.[1] This is well-evidenced by the 24,000 pieces of Neolithic shell and stone beads found at the al-Buhais 18 site in Sharjah.[2] Burial jewelry comprising of head decorations, earings, necklaces, pendants, bracelets, anklets, hip and elbow decorations, and upper lip beads found at this site suggest that adornment from head to toe was an important ritual element in death, if not in life. As Roland de Beauclair, Sabah A. Jasim, and Hans-Peter Uerpmann summise, "[t]he full range of jewellery may have been reserved for special ceremonies, including burial and possibly others such as marriage or coming of age."[3] In addition to the jewelry found at al-Buhais 18, carnelian beads have been discovered in archaeological sites all over the Arabian Peninsula,[4] such as Umm Al Nar in Abu Dhabi,[5] Saruq Al-Hadid in Dubai,[6] the Dilmun Burial Mounds in Bahrain,[7] and Failaka Island in Kuwait.[8] Early samples are often complemented by gold or silver elements while later ones display exquisite Sasanian and Hellenistic craftsmanship (fig. 11.1). Surviving examples of jewelry include ornaments from the great Islamic Empires, more notably the Fatimids, and portraits from the Mughal and Safavid era. Besides these discoveries, travelers' and diplomats' accounts describe almost unimaginably lavish jewelry and jewel-encrusted thrones, fabrics, tents, parasols, and clothing.[9]

This archeological and historic evidence indicates that jewelry played an important role in the past, just as it continues to be a significant element in the daily lives of women of this region in the present era. The authors of this chapter have drawn on oral history case studies and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the early 1990s in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, and more recent research from 2016–2019 in the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman, to provide insights into the way of life and the importance of jewelry for the people of the region. Bahrain was chosen as the original focus for this research due to its reputation as the centre of the gold and pearl jewelry trade throughout the last century.[10] It was

1 For details, see Daniel Potts, Hassan Al Naboodah, and Peter Hellyer, eds., *Archaeology of the United Arab Emirates: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Archaeology of the U.A.E.* (Abu Dhabi: Trident Press, 2003), 38.

2 Roland de Beauclair, Sabah A. Jasim, and Hans-Peter Uerpmann, "New Results on the Neolithic Jewellery from Al-Buhais 18, U.A.E," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 36 (2006): 176.

3 Ibid., 183.

4 An De Waele and Ernie Haerinck, "Etched (Carnelian) Beads from Northeast and Southeast Arabia," *Arabian Archeology and Epigraphy* 17, no. 1 (2006): 31–40.

5 Some of these findings are displayed in the Al Ain Museum, U.A.E.

6 Saruq al-Hadid Archaeology Museum in Dubai contains thousands of beads, as well as fine samples of gold jewelry from the area. For details, see Lloyd Weeks et al., "Recent Archaeological Research at Saruq Al-Hadid, Dubai, U.A.E.," *Arabian Archeology and Epigraphy* 28, no. 1 (2017): 31–60.

7 Well-preserved samples were found in the royal burial mounds in the village of Aali. They are currently displayed in Bahrain National Museum.

8 Marley Brown, "Bronze Age Bling," *Archaelogy: A Publication of the Archeological Institute of America,* May/June 2017, https://www.archaeology.org/issues/257-1705/from-the-trenches/5451-trenches-kuwait-failaka-bronze-age-jewelry-workshop.

9 Cf. Rachel Hasson, *Early Islamic Jewellery* (Jerusalem: L.A. Mayer Memorial Institute for Islamic Art, 1987), 9.

10 Throughout both cycles of research and in all Gulf countries, Bahrain was consistently identified by those interviewed as the source of the best quality gold

FIGURE 11.1 Jewelry from the Tylos (Hellenistic) Period of Bahrain's history (330 B.C.–622 A.D.).

also the first Gulf country to implement guaranteed quality standards with the establishment of the Precious Metals Assay Office in 1979.[11] This earlier fieldwork in Bahrain primarily focused on the extensive jewelry collections of the elite, pearl merchants, and important local jewelry businesses; however, interviews and data were also collected from the larger population. A number of original informants, particularly from the jewelry industry, were again interviewed in recent fieldwork, which provided a longitudinal perspective on consumption patterns. The material researched in Saudi Arabia included the large jewelry collection documented by Heather Colyer-Ross in her book, *The Art of Bedouin Jewellery: A Saudi Arabian Profile*,[12] as well as interviews, predominantly amongst the elite. The multigeneration oral history interviews included here come from more recent fieldwork conducted by students at a federal higher education institution in the U.A.E. These students represent a cross-section of contemporary Emirati society, often with wider regional family connections, and provide a comprehensive overview that has enabled cross-referencing of certain genralized observations. Drawing together over thirty years of ethnographic participant observation, interviews, and research, this chapter provides a descriptive narrative focused on the role of jewelry in articulating every major event in the life of the women from the eastern coastal regions of the Arabian Peninsula in the latter part of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. As we argue here, jewelry in the Arabian Peninsula is a coded expression of both public and private identity and a status statement layered with subtexts fully accessible only to those within a specific community.[13]

1 Social Significance of Jewelry in the Gulf

A passage in Shirley Guthrie's *Arab Social Life in the Middle Ages: An Illustrated Study* depicts an illustration titled "A Complicated Delivery in the Palace" from Al-Hariri's masterpiece, *Al Maqamat*, currently held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.[14] Guthrie observes that "[t]he mother

jewelry. It is a matter of prestige if one's gold jewelry is "Bahraini gold."

11 *Kunūz al-Baḥrayn/Treasures of Bahrain* (London: Bahrain Promotions and Marketing Board, 1998), 123.

12 Heather Colyer-Ross, *The Art of Bedouin Jewellery: A Saudi Arabian Profile* (Fribourg: Arabesque, 1985). Also known in the past as the Haifa Faisal Collection of Saudi Arabian Traditional Arts, this is now known as the Art of Heritage Collection and is stored in Riyadh. Marie-Claire Bakker researched and collected additional jewelry for this collection in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s.

13 Ibid., 11.

14 Qāsim ibn ʿAli ibn Mohammad ibn ʿAli al-Hariri al-Basri, *Les Makamat de Hariri* [Assemblies of Hariri] (1236–1237). Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Arabe 5847. Al-Hariri was an eleventh-century poet and scholar from Basra.

wears a heavy gold necklace, gold bracelets, and gold anklets and her immediate attendant also wears gold anklets."[15] This medieval illustration provides evidence of the form that jewelry took at that time and demonstrates how it was worn, with the invariable pairing of bracelets and anklets. This symmetrical aesthetic has continued to this day, although the costs involved in providing matching pairs not only of earrings but also bracelets, rings, hand ornaments, and anklets is beginning to challenge this norm.[16] It is also important to note that jewelry was not restricted to particular occasions, but it was worn every day, including during childbirth. For this elite woman, jewelry was, of course, a status indicator, differentiating her visually from her attendant, but it was also an everyday adornment which was almost never removed.

For local communities in the Arabian Peninsula, the type and style of jewelry worn by a woman indicates not only her economic and social position but also her age, education, and marital status.[17] A complex matrix of reciprocal exchanges is expressed through jewelry during the major events of a woman's life. In addition, the exchange of jewelry as gifts, both within the family and among families through marriage, creates and reinforces bonds of community and identity in society. As student Shamma Jassem mentioned during her conversations with the authors, jewelry exchange is "a sign of trust and caring which makes the relationships unbreakable."[18] While tastes have evolved with each generation, the social role of jewelry has remained relatively stable, both as an adornment and an investment:[19] jewelry is wealth that is controlled directly by a woman. Although bank accounts and careers have become the norm nowadays, reliance on these multivalent objects has remained culturally significant for the *Khalīji* women. The relationship of an Arab woman with her jewelry is both public and private and it is an intrinsic part of her identity.[20] For the wearer, her jewelry may embody a treasured relationship with a parent, spouse, sibling, or friend. This contrasts with an equally important practical approach, which is the strategic acquisition and gifting of jewelry. This latter practice is particularly evident in the older generations, for whom the value of a piece lies in the intrinsic worth of the precious metal of which it is composed. While the beauty and workmanship of a piece are highly appreciated, what is most important for the owner is its underlying value. This attitude has a historical motivation. In the past, many women experienced periods of hardship and frequently needed to exchange their gold for necessities.[21] This functional approach means that updating pieces and trading old jewelry for contemporary designs never depletes them of value as they are made of gold. This is why heirloom pieces can only be found in the wealthiest families, who have been able to follow changes in taste without needing to exchange older jewelry pieces to do so.

The women in the Arabian Gulf are high profile and sophisticated consumers of jewelry.[22] What

15 Shirley Guthrie, *Arab Social Life in the Middle Ages: An Illustrated Study* (London: Saqi Books, 1995), 160.

16 See, also, Kuwaiti women wearing matching paired silver bracelets in a 1933 photograph by Dame Violet Dickson in Jehan S. Rajab, *Costumes from the Arab World* (Kuwait: Tareq Rajab Museum, 2002), 25.

17 Sigrid Van Roode, *Desert Silver: Nomadic and Traditional Silver Jewellery from the Middle East and North Africa* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2010), 47.

18 Shamma Jassem, interviewed by the authors, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., December 15, 2018.

19 Soraya Altorki and Donald P. Cole, *Arabian Oasis City: The Transformation of 'Unayzah* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 205.

20 Authors' interviews and fieldnotes: Bahrain, 1994–1995 and 2016–2019; Saudi Arabia, 1997; U.A.E., 2016–2019; Kuwait and Oman, 2018–2019.

21 Ibid.

22 World Gold Council statistics for the Middle East in the second quarter of 2019 totaled 1,123 tons of gold, as reported by www.nationaljeweler.com. For details, see "Gold Jewellery Demand Was Up Slightly in the Second Quarter, Aided by the United States and the Middle East," VOD Dubai, August 7, 2019, https://www.jewelleryshow.com/component/zoo/top-news-homepage/

may appear as excessive and conspicuous consumption of luxury goods by the wealthy actually conceals an underlying network of social forces which act to promote and perpetuate the significant role that jewelry plays in the lives of these women. Having an extensive jewelry collection is by no means the prerogative of the upper echelons of society.[23] Women of every social level buy jewelry on a regular basis;[24] today, such pieces tend to be almost exclusively made of gold and are designer gem-set pieces. Perhaps the most enduring reason for this practice is that gold acts as an insurance policy. Gold is relatively safe from depreciation and, in the form of jewelry, it is both accessible and transportable by the woman herself. In times of financial hardship, a woman will sell her jewelry just as she will methodically add to it in times of prosperity.[25] Despite modern forms of financial investment, such as shares and real estate, gold jewelry remains a convenient and relatively safe way to save for women, a form of wealth that they have direct access to and can easily control. Jewelry is also a cushion against potential divorce or abandonment. While elaborate designer gem-set jewelry is popular, and the intrinsic value of the stones is more widely recognized and accepted today than thirty years ago,[26] gold remains the default currency. Every mother will make sure that her daughter is well provisioned with sufficient gold jewelry to ensure her financial security. As Reem Saeed's grandmother mentioned during a conversation with her granddaughter, "[g]old is your best friend: keep it with you even if you don't wear it. A piece of gold can save you one day."[27]

Prior to the discovery of oil, life was extremely uncertain for women in the Arabian Peninsula. During the pearling season men were absent, fishing or trading, for months at a time, and women had no certainty that they would return. Divers, especially, were engaged in high-risk activities during which death or serious injury could occur.[28] Jewelry, therefore, assumed an important role as an investment for the women left behind, in the event of their husbands' death or permanent disablement. It was also both transportable and easy to wear in a society that was mostly nomadic or migrating seasonally between coast and oasis. While more modern forms of savings and insurance policies have augmented the practice of keeping wealth in jewelry, there is still a strong psychological need for a woman to maintain a reserve of gold. An often repeated saying throughout the Arabian Peninsula is, "with gold, a girl has a future."[29] Although rapid changes have occured in all areas of society, it is still the case in much of

gold-jewelry-demand-was-up-slightly-in-the-second-quarter-aided-by-the-united-states-and-middle-east?Itemid=416.

23 Marjorie Ransom notes that one of the Yemeni women she interviewed in 2005 in Hadhramout had received over 10 kilograms of silver at her wedding, around fifty years earlier. Silver has largely been replaced by gold throughout the entire Gulf region since that time. For details, see Marjorie Ransom, *Silver Treasures from the Land of Sheba: Regional Yemeni Jewelry* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2014), 12.

24 In 2018, the three top products traded in the U.A.E. were gold ($40 billion), jewellery ($29 billion), and diamonds ($26 billion), according to Juma Al Kait, Assistant under Secretary at the U.A.E. Ministry of Economy. For details, see Michael Fahy, "Head of Dubai's Gold Trade Body Calls for More Support from Government, Industry," April 24, 2019, Zawya, https://www.zawya.com/uae/en/markets/story/Head_of_Dubais_gold_trade_body_calls_for_more_support_from_government_industry-ZAWYA20190424032104/.

25 Numerous oral histories collected in both research cycles have recounted the need to dispose of jewelry collections to rescue families facing financial hardship, as well as the drive to replace and rebuild those collections as soon as it was financially possible.

26 Authors' interviews and fieldnotes: Bahrain, 1994–1995 and 2016–2019; Saudi Arabia, 1997; U.A.E., 2016–2019; Kuwait and Oman, 2018–2019.

27 Reem Saeed, interviewed by the authors, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., December 15, 2018.

28 Frauke Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2004), 233–37.

29 Zayed University students in conversation with the authors, Abu Dahbi, U.A.E., 2016–2019. The students frequently reported that their mothers and grandmothers

the region that mostly men control the financial affairs of their families. Therefore, a woman's jewelry remains an investment that is directly within her control: it is hers to trade, exchange, alter, or cash in.

In addition to its role as an important form of investment and life insurance, jewelry is a much loved indulgence. Part of being a woman in this region (and, indeed, many others) is a deep appreciation for jewelry. As Shamma Jassem mentioned during her conversation with the authors, "I've come to the conclusion that the traditional jewelry of the U.A.E. has its own social effect on our culture and Emirati women. Gold jewelry is the identity of the Emirati woman that she will never stop passing down through generations."[30] Women spend a long time in jewelry shops, trying on rings and necklaces and discussing merits and faults in design and workmanship with their female friends and relatives. Jewelry shopping is as much a cultural pastime as it is a shopping expedition. The quoted price, possible discount, and real value are all debated with the seller and all those present. And, despite all this social and commercial interaction, women may leave without a purchase and move on to repeat the process in the next showroom.

The pressure to be seen wearing a new piece of jewelry at every important social occasion and the desire to keep pace with the latest trends has led to a relatively high turnover of pieces within a woman's collection.[31] If she cannot afford to buy a piece outright, she will bring an old piece and trade it in based on the value of the gold. When any piece of jewelry is bought, it is the price of the gold that is paid for, in addition to the value of the stones and the workmanship. When jewelry is sold, however, only the weight of the gold is taken into account. Today, gemstones are also accorded a value, but unless this value is extremely high and the gems' authenticity is documented, gold continues to be the most significant factor. A majority of the multigenerational oral histories recorded to date suggest that women who can afford to do so will buy a piece of jewelry about once a month, even if this is just a small item, such as a ring or a pair of earrings. Other women limit themselves to acquiring new jewelry only on special occasions, such as weddings, birthdays, and Eids. A woman also receives jewelry from her husband on the birth of a child, especially if she delivers a boy. Nowadays, however, the mother will also receive jewelry if she delivers a girl.[32]

How, when, and where a woman wears her jewelry, as well as the type, quantity, and quality of these items, is used by those around her to infer her social and economic status. Obvious differences may be noticed by the larger society while more subtle nuances may only be apparent to those within a particular social group. The jewelry a woman wears every day is mainly restricted to earrings, rings, and, more recently, watches and smaller necklaces or pendants, often with Qur'ānic inscriptions, such as the protective "Throne Verse," or "Aya Al Kursi" (fig. 11.2). Rings have perhaps been the most popular items for daily wear. Many women who wear head coverings have had little use for earrings and necklaces, except at weddings and social occasions, where head scarves can be removed. Although today this seems to be a matter of personal preference, some women will always wear earrings in, while others will not.[33] Prior to the contemporary era, when a majority of women in the Arabian Gulf adopted the *abaya* (a loose over-garment) and *shayla* (a long head scarf)[34]

reminded them of the importance of a substantial jewelry collection.

30 Shamma Jassem, interviewed by the authors, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., December 15, 2018.

31 Authors' interviews and fieldnotes: Bahrain, 1994–1995 and 2016–2019; Saudi Arabia, 1997; U.A.E., 2016–2019; Kuwait and Oman, 2018–2019.

32 Zayed University students in conversation with the authors, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., April 14, 2019.

33 Ibid.

34 In the Gulf area, a *shayla* is worn either loosely draped and covering most but not all hair, or tightly wrapped and covering all hair, like a *hijab*. A *hijab* is more widely

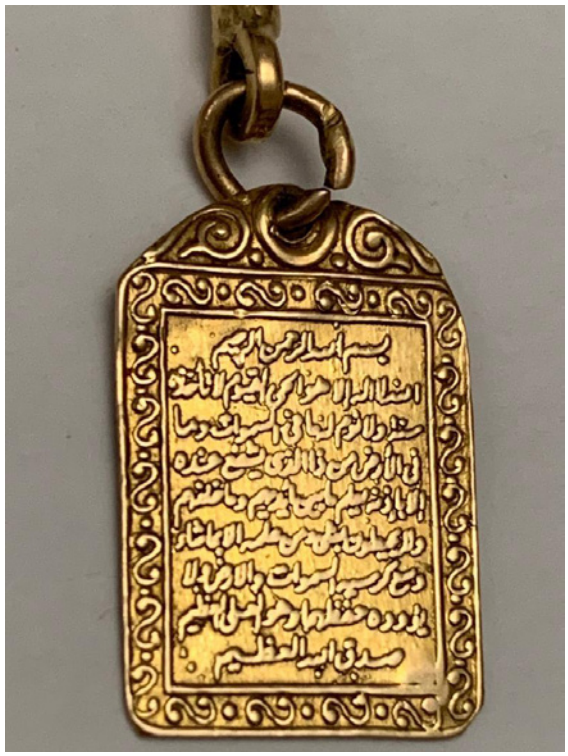

FIGURE 11.2 Protective verse on a tiny plaque hanging from a key chain dating from 1976.

FIGURE 11.3 Woman wearing traditional clothing at Qasr Al Hosn Festival, Abu Dhabi, 2016.

as everyday wear, women along the eastern shore of the Arabian Gulf wore the burnished indigo *burqa* or *batoola* (face mask)[35] to cover their face, a brightly patterned dress with *sirwal* trousers, and a transparent gauzy veil embroidered with silver threads (fig. 11.3). Examining historical photographs,[36] one can notice that women were veiled in such a way that their earrings were visible and that they also used to wear a small amulet case in leather around their neck,[37] along with gold necklaces (such as *murtaʿasha* or *mareya*). The spiky *huyul bu showq* or *banjeri* bangle is the most common item of jewelry seen in archival images, along with rings, which are often worn on all fingers. Rings remain very popular gifts today as they are relatively small and, therefore, comparatively inexpensive. For all these reasons, rings are often offered at birthdays, dinners, and parties to the female hosts. During the 1980s and 1990s, fewer women wore the *abaya* and *shayla*, especially in Bahrain and Kuwait;[38] however, today they are more commonly covered, and in the U.A.E. such modes of dress are ubiquitous. Covering trends, whether culturally or religiously motivated, do have an impact on how and when jewelry is worn.

understood as a head scarf covering the hair for religious reasons.

35 Today it is mainly the older generation who are seen in the traditional mask-like *burqa*. Younger women who cover their face use the *niqab* (a black fabric face-veil).

36 See, for instance, the photographs published by Ronald Codrai in *Abu Dhabi: A Collection of Mid-Twentieth Century Photographs. An Arabian Album* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 1992) and *Dubai: A Collection of Mid-Twentieth Century Photographs. An Arabian Album* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 1993); and Gertrude Dyck, *The Oasis: Al Ain Memoirs of "Doctor Latifa"* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2010).

37 These amulets would most commonly have contained Qur'ānic verses.

38 Marie-Claire Bakker, fieldnotes, Bahrain, 1994–1995.

FIGURE 11.4A–B
Van Cleef and Arpels
Sweet Alhambra Set.

Whether or not a woman wears a pendant or a necklace depends on how she wears her *hijab* and the extent to which she is covered. Some women will wear jewelry that is visible over their clothes, while others will wear jewelry even if it is not visible.

The type and style of jewelry that a woman wears are governed not only by her economic and social status but also by her age and education. For example, nose piercing has almost died out.[39] The *zmam* floral nose stud[40] and especially the much larger nose ring *khazama* are rarely worn, even by the older generation. Women of this older generation are more likely to wear traditional style gold jewelry for both everyday and special occasions, and they are also more likely to wear pearls. Younger women tend to wear more elaborate jewelry only on special occasions and simpler, more subtle pieces for everyday use.[41] The latter ones often come from fashionable designer brands, such as bracelets from the currently popular Van Cleef and Arpels "Alhambra" collections (figs. 11.4a–b). This is also most likely due to their wearing Western-style clothes under their *abaya*, for which a different style of jewelry is deemed appropriate. When choosing to wear a *kandoura* (a traditional long dress), more old-style pieces of jewelry can be worn.

While the style of jewelry may be changing, the underlying social compulsion to wear jewelry and its symbolic significance in the lives of women persists.[42] Given the historical and cultural importance of jewelry and the large quantities owned by the Gulf women, it is not surprising that the ownership of jewelry is also governed by religious duty. The guidelines about how much *zakat*, or charity, must be given for gold and silver that is owned vary depending on different schools of interpretation.[43] Platinum, palladium, gems, and pearls are not subject to *zakat*. In her notes, Rachel Hasson mentions "the interesting *hadith* of Malik ibn Anas" (b. 716 CE), founder of one of the four schools of Islam, which clarifies when *zakat* is owed: "*zakat* is not paid on jewellery being worn and used, and thus they are considered household effects and utilitarian articles; but if they are not being worn or if they are broken—that is,

39 Interestingly, some young women today have nose studs, but this is largely an adoption of what they perceive as a facet of the Western youth culture rather than an extension of their own cultural traditions.

40 An example can be seen in Rajab, *Costumes from the Arab World*, 22. The photograph shows a woman in the mountains around Wadi Bani Khalid, Oman.

41 Authors' interviews and fieldnotes, Bahrain and U.A.E., 2016–2019.

42 Ibid.

43 "Zakat on Gold, Silver & Jewellery," The National Zakat Foundation, April 12, 2018, https://help.nzf.org.uk/en/article/zakat-on-gold-silver-and-jewelry-1hkm5v4/.

unusable—then *zakat* must be paid."[44] The fact that this condition exists is significant since it indicates the propensity of the women in the Arabian Peninsula to acquire large collections of gold and silver.

2 A Life Cycle through Jewelry

Jewelry plays a significant role in every major event in a woman's life and is an important marker for all rites of passage[45] as she matures from daughter to wife and mother.[46] From birth to childhood birthdays and religious celebrations, such as Eid, to engagement, marriage and motherhood, every occasion is marked by an exchange of jewellery. The display of jewellery during these events clarifies and reinforces a girl's or a woman's status in society. This is how Ayesha AlMarrar describes the role of jewelry in celebrating a birth:

"When a boy is born and named after a person with a [good] moral reputation, this person is known as their *smei*. The *smei* will prepare a feast of camel meat known as *hwar*. However, if a girl is born, two or three goats are enough for the feast, in addition to gifting a piece of jewelry to the newborn girl. Thus, the person after whom the child is named is called *smei* or *smiyah* and the gifts given by them to the child are called *smowh*. Indeed, my grandmother and mother were named after their grandmother, while I was named after my grandmother's best friend. Each one of us has received a piece of jewelry from our *smiyah* and mine is the first piece of jewelry that I was given."[47]

As with jewelry throughout the world, in every age, there are some items that have amuletic significance. Through the use of a symbol, material, or a religious verse, amulets are meant to ensure protection from unseen misfortune. Of particular concern in the Middle East is the covetous or admiring glance, "the evil eye," which is of particular danger to infants, young children, and women, who are viewed as vulnerable due to their desirability. A newborn baby, for instance, would have had an alum crystal covered in gold pinned to its clothes, together with a lion's claw in a gold case and a wolf's tooth pinned on its cap.[48] A pregnant woman and children would also wear amulets to ward off evil, such as a small piece of iron wrapped with strips of gold,[49] or small containers of silver, gold, or leather, known as *yam'a*, *hirz*, or *tabla*,[50] which are worn as pendants.[51] These may have originally contained protective Qur'ānic verses such as the "Aya al Kursi"; however, the form of the piece is often enough to denote its purpose and intended effect. Today, at traditional heritage festivals, such as Qasr al Hosn in Abu Dhabi, children dressed in their best traditional clothes are seen wearing small amuletic necklaces (fig. 11.5).

Young children will often wear a protective amulet pendant. Baby girls have their ears pierced and, when dressed up to go out, they will usually be adorned with small gold bangles and a *hirz* pendant. Nowadays, gold or gold-plated necklaces with the child's name in calligraphic script are very popular (fig 11.6). On birthdays and Eids, girls will also receive small pieces of gold jewelry, such as bangles, to add to their collection. During Eid, gold jewelry and *kandouras* are usually worn, which

44 Hasson, *Early Islamic Jewellery*, 11. Note 16 mentions the work of Ibn al Salam 'Abd al-Qasim, *Kitab al-Amwal* [Book of revenue], where he discusses the various rulings in different *hadiths* regarding jewelry.

45 See Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

46 Marie-Claire Bakker, "The Arabian Woman Adorned," *Linacre Journal* 1 (1997): 56.

47 Ayesha AlMarrar interviewed by the authors, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., December 15, 2018.

48 Marie-Claire Bakker, "Amuletic Jewellery in the Middle East" (Master of Philosophy thesis, Oxford University, 1996).

49 Bakker, "The Arabian Woman Adorned," 57.

50 Rafia Obaid Ghubash and Maryam Sultan Lootah, eds., *Traditional Emirati Jewels* (Dubai: Women's Museum, Hamdan Bin Mohammed Heritage Center, 2015), 76.

51 See images in Dyck, *The Oasis*, 28, 33, and 35, respectively.

FIGURE 11.5 Children in traditional clothing at Qasr Al Hosn Festival, Abu Dhabi, 2016.

FIGURE 11.6 As Maha AlHosani explains, "my grandfather had a sister called Maryam, and he loved her so much. He gave her this gift the day before she died. Just days later, God blessed him with a child and he named her Maryam. He gave this necklace to his daughter, Maryam. This was a gift from Maryam to Maryam."

FIGURE 11.7 Young girl dressed up for Eid Al Adha wearing *murta'asha* choker and a large necklace with a central *hilal* (crescent) element, known in the U.A.E. as *almajlis*.

suggests that for religious celebrations, when more traditional attire is the norm, more traditional styles of jewelry are also preferred to match the occasion (fig. 11.7).

In the course of collecting oral histories over the past thirty years, it has become clear to the authors that there is a generational divide regarding when these pieces of jewelry are first received. We believe this is due to the change in economic circumstances for large parts of the population of the eastern Gulf after the discovery of oil. In the past, a girl's first jewelry, other than a protective amulet, may not have been received until her engagement or wedding.[52] According to Noora Bint Nasser Al Thani, "[i]f a young woman uses beauty accessories during ordinary days, her mother would

52 In conversations between Zayed University students and the authors from 2016 to 2019, many students who had interviewed their grandmothers, now aged between 65 and 80, reported that they had received their first gold jewelry at the time of their marriage.

admonish her: 'It is a shame to use *kohl* and perfumes, you are not married and these are for married women.'" Girls and unmarried young women would be allowed to use henna and perfumes and wear some of their mother's gold only on special occasions, such as Eid.[53]

Today, it is more common for female children to receive bangles and other small pieces of jewelry at a young age. As Fatima AlShehhi explains, "My mother got her first piece of jewelry when she was four years old from her father. One day he came back home from his trip to Oman and he bought for all of his ten daughters the same bracelet, which was named *huyul* or *mada'ad*.[54] But she does not have it anymore because one day my mom's father had a financial crisis, so she and all her sisters helped him and they gave him all of their gold."[55] Another occasion when young girls wear traditional gold jewelry over an embroidered *kandoura* and *serwal* is Hag al Layla, or the middle of the Islamic month of Sha'ban. During this holiday, children wear new clothes and walk through the neighborhood receiving sweets. Girls wear traditional jewelry, such as *shnaaf* (a triangular forehead ornament),[56] *murta'asha* (a gold choker with long rows of dangling elements), *mareya* (a gold necklace, often with a large central crescent shaped element), *huyul bu shook* (a spikey bangle), and gold earrings.

On religious and national holidays, dress, ornament, and event combine to reinforce a sense of community and national identity. In the rapidly modernizing societies around the Gulf, anxiety about loss of their traditional culture is pervasive. Therefore, the performative nature of religious and national holidays, when dress and jewelry are used as core signifiers binding the community together and providing tangible proof of a common identity, should not be underestimated. The ultimate expression of national pride culminates in the production of jewelry pieces that depict the founder of the U.A.E., the late Sheikh Zayed (fig. 11.8) and jewel-encrusted falcon pendants.[57] National Day in all countries around the Gulf sees girls in dresses reflecting the colours of the national flag and adorned with traditional jewelry (figs. 11.9 and 11.10). As Maather AlSaaidi explains:

"I remember wearing traditional jewelry like *taasa* (circular head ornament), *murta'asha* and *kaf* (bracelet connecting to rings with chains across the back of the hand) on U.A.E. National Day with a flag dress in elementary school, from first grade until fifth grade. I remember loving them and

FIGURE 11.8
'Irq Zayed Perfume draped with a pearl necklace featuring the image of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan, set with pearls and rubies.

53 Noora Bint Nasser Al Thani, *Marriage in Qatar: Its Regulations, Customs and Traditions in Qatari Society* (Doha: State of Qatar Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2016), 51.

54 These are golden or silver bracelets, used as a group of six to twelve similar pieces on one hand.

55 Fatima AlShehhi, interviewed by the authors, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., December 15, 2018.

56 Asma Saeed Obaid Ghubash tells the story of a 1992 photograph of her husband's sister, who was wearing a large gold triangular *shnaaf* for National Day: "Her mother took this photo just before Aisha went to school for her fouth grade National celebration. At the time, children wore their mother's and grandmother's real gold to school on National Day. I really love this photo and I wish we still had the gold in our family. But my mother-in-law sold it when wearing traditional gold jewelry went out of fashion." Michele Bambling, ed., *Emirati Adornment: Tangible/Intangible* (Abu Dhabi: Lest We Forget, 2017), 27.

57 Bambling, *Emirati Adornment*, 59.

FIGURE 11.9 Sisters dressed up in their flag dresses for the U.A.E. National Day, 2 December 2018.

getting excited the night before National Day, although they were annoying and not easy to manage, especially the *taasa*, because as you play and run it starts to fall down. Ever since I cannot think of any other time I had to wear *taasa* or any of the traditional jewelry except for henna nights."[58]

Another event during which pieces of jewelry are gifted is Tomina, the celebration held when a child has memorized sections of the Holy Qur'ān. Depending on the economic status of the family, during this ceremony the child receives a small gift. For wealthier families, this may be a piece of jewelry like the large forehead ornament *shnaaf*[59] shown in

58 Maather AlSaaidi, interviewed by the authors, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., December 15, 2018.

59 "Occasionally known as *hayar* or *al dinar* … it is usually worn by brides in their weddings, or young girls during

FIGURE 11.10 Shamma Ahmad Al Ketbi wearing a short *murtaʿasha* (sometimes known as a *manthura*), dressed up for the U.A.E. National Day, 2 December 2018.

FIGURE 11.11 As Mariam Al Qubaisi explains: "Al Tomina is a small celebration during which young children dress up and walk through the neighborhood chanting, so everyone would know that these children were proud and were being acknowledged that they memorized our Holy Book, the Qur'ān. My grandmother was one of those children once upon a time, and in the foreground of this photo is the Qur'ān and *tafrooga* (*mareya*) she gifted to my mother, Laila Al Qubaisi, for her wedding. Here she is wearing the triangular gold *shnaaf* on her forehead, a *habat al shaʿeer* (*murtaʿasha* choker), *seytemi* coin necklaces, and a gold belt set (*hugub*) with a central turquoise element."

figure 11.11. Soraya Altorki and Donald P. Cole describe the celebration in Saudi Arabia in the following terms: "When she had memorized a certain part of the Holy Qur'ān, a *zaffah*, or a 'procession,' was held. The girl was dressed up for the occasion in gold and fancy clothes and passed in the *zaffah* from the house of her teacher through the nearby streets accompanied by singing. The procession led to her parents' home where a reception was held in the women's quarters of the house."[60]

These days, during her childhood, a young girl continues to be gifted jewelry by parents, grandparents, relatives, and friends for her birthdays and at Eids. However, it is at her engagement that her jewelry collection increases

Tomina ceremony." Gubash and Lootah, *Traditional Emirati Jewels*, 26.

60 Soraya Altorki and Donald P. Cole, *Arabian Oasis City: The Transformation of ʿUnayzah* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 95.

significantly.[61] Her husband-to-be will present her with a wedding set, or *shabka*. This consists of a necklace with a matching bracelet, ring, and earrings. More recently, it has become usual for the bride to also be given a matching jewel-encrusted watch. There are sets designed for every taste and income level. At the lower end, there are small, plain, gold sets in a variety of styles which may be studded with pearls or semi-precious stones or gems. Further up the scale, there are wedding sets made of gold or platinium with precious stones and diamonds. In the early 1990s in Bahrain, the *shabka* was a relatively new addition to the list of essential jewelry. Traditionally made of gold, these days the *shabka* can also incorporate diamonds or other precious gems and may be designed by leading international jewelry houses. With the advent of oil and increased income, watches have become an essential part of the jewelry gift sets offered by the groom to his bride. In a conversation with the authors, student Shereena AlHameli explained the custom as follows:

"My mother was married to my father at the age of twenty-four. She was given seven jewelry sets; some were gifts from guests and were all diamonds, pearls, and stones. She requested no gold due to 'being young and not knowing the worth of gold.' She said she's regretting it now because gold is more durable, valuable, and beautiful. The idea of collecting gold jewelry was like an investment for women back then. They would sell it when the value of gold rises and buy new pieces when it lowers. Although diamonds are luxurious and mesmerizing, it was not the same as gold, it would not sell with the same price."[62]

The groom is still expected to either gift both a diamond necklace or earrings and a set of traditional gold jewelry. If he does not gift both sets to the bride, then he is obligated to provide sufficient money so that she can purchase both sets. Today, brides can expect to receive up to ten complete sets of jewelry. As Shereena pointed out, "while interviewing my grandfather to ask about his opinion on getting my grandmother jewelry for their wedding, he said, 'It was important to me to make sure your grandmother never felt that I could not provide her with whatever she needed.' 'Jewelry,' he said, 'might have cost a lot; however, money is not as important to me as her happiness.'"[63]

Before the wedding, the bride's trousseau, or *zihba*, is displayed at the *miksar*, the viewing of the wedding jewelry, together with other trousseau gifts such as perfume, *kandouras*, and fabric. In the past, the contents of the *zihba* were paraded through the streets, from the bride's house to the groom's, by young girls wearing the bride's wedding jewelry.[64] The groom or his family may also buy the bride more traditional gold jewelry to wear on her henna night, or she may wear her own family heirloom pieces or borrowed pieces from wealthier members of the extended family. Marriage brokers or match-makers around the Gulf often have a significant jewelry collection that they can rent out on the occasion of a henna night,[65] as do some jewelry shops. It is common to borrow or rent jewelry on these occasions since a good outward show is mandatory: the bride must be adorned in gold from head to toe. Guests may know that a particular piece is borrowed, but this is not acknowledged.

Despite the rapid social changes in the Arabian Peninsula, the transitional periods when a girl becomes a woman, then a wife and a mother, are still culturally and socially the most significant times

61 Authors' interviews and fieldnotes: Bahrain, 2016–2019; U.A.E., 2016–2019; Kuwait and Oman, 2018–2019.

62 Shereena AlHameli, interviewed by the authors, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., December 15, 2018.

63 Ibid.

64 Zayed University student who had interviewed her 90-year-old grandmother in conversation with the authors, Abu Dhabi, 2016.

65 Ziad Rajab, son of collectors Tareq and Jehan S. Rajab, in conversation with the authors, Kuwait, November 8, 2018.

in her life. It is not surprising, therefore, that jewelry has an important role as a central secular component during these rites of passage. The exchange and display of jewelry indicates the transactional nature of this reciprocal exchange system: it simultaneously forges and reinforces community relationships, signifies social status, and extends this reciprocal network of exchange to a new generation. Mothers of the bride record carefully what gifts are received and from whom and are extremely careful to ensure that they gift a piece of jewelry of approximately the same value when their friend's daughter marries. Personal loyalties and friendships are continuously articulated through the exchange of small jewelry gifts, and the value of these friendships is further reinforced during the exchange of higher value gifts at weddings.

Jewelry, whether borrowed or owned, plays a central role on a bride's henna night. During this occasion, the beauty of the bride is assessed based on how much gold jewelry she is wearing. In recent years, it has become usual for the bride and her close relatives to have their hands and feet hennaed at a salon on the previous day.[66] Only twenty or thirty years ago, the henna party was a more private affair.[67] Henna artists would decorate the guests during the event.[68] If one looks at earlier times, the majority of the wedding celebrations, including the decoration of the bride, occurred after the marriage had been formalized. The henna night party is usually held between a few days to a week before the wedding celebration. In the U.A.E. today, it is usual to hold it at a different venue than the wedding party. Guests are mostly family, close relatives, and personal friends, but it can still be a fairly large affair, with several hundred guests. The format of the henna night varies depending on the social and cultural background of the family (i.e., if they are from coastal or Bedouin origins, from Ajam or Huwla, or from Yemen).[69] Important variations are seen along the length of the Peninsula, from Kuwait to the Northern Emirates. While the type of dress that the bride will wear may differ quite considerably, it is most often green or (less commonly) red. Originally, these celebrations would have lasted more than one night and the bride would have had to wear a different color on each night.[70] However, the one aspect that unites these varying ceremonial occasions is jewelry. All the jewelry worn by the bride on the henna night are traditional gold pieces, sometimes set with pearls and sometimes with gem stones. The bride will wear one of the various head pieces from the region. In the U.A.E., most often this is a circular *hama* or *taasa* with dangling strands of *talaat.* In Bahrain, the bride would often wear the lozenge-shaped *gubgub,* so named because it resembles the back of a crab (fig. 11.12).

Today, the bride's hair is often worn loose, but in the past it would have been plaited into strands with bunches of sweet basil (*mishmum*) and jasmine. Gold hair elements, such as *sararih*, or gold versions of the basil bunches (also called *mishmum*) are woven into her plaits. Gold hair clips finish the hair decoration. Several layers of necklaces adorn her throat and chest, particularly the spectacular, multi-stranded *murtahish,* which may extend almost to her knees. Almost every bride, particularly in the U.A.E., wears the choker known as *murtaʿasha*[71] (fig. 11.13) with articulated square elements, often set with a small central gem from which stream rows of small, flat, stamped elements, forming an almost chain-mail effect. The length of the dangling elements depends on the value of the piece.

Another important necklace will be a version of the *mareya*, most commonly with a large crescent

66 Authors' interviews and fieldnotes: Bahrain, 2016–2019; U.A.E., 2016–2019; Kuwait and Oman, 2018–2019.

67 Bakker, fieldnotes, Bahrain, 1994–1995.

68 Ebrahim Sanad, *Bahraini Customs and Traditions* (Bahrain: Ministry of Culture, 2011), 11.

69 Jehan S. Rajab, *Silver Jewellery of Oman* (Kuwait: Tareq Rajab Museum, 1997), 61.

70 Bakker, fieldnotes, Bahrain, 1994–1995.

71 Zayed University students in conversation with the authors, Abu Dhabi, 2016–2019.

FIGURE 11.12 A Bahraini bride in traditional green *thobe*. She wears a circular gold plate (*hama* or *taasa*) on her head, with the chains of discs *talaat* suspended from the rim. Sweet basil (*mishmun*), jasmine, and rosebuds adorn her hair. Around her wrists she wears gold bangles, including the *shmelat,* studded with turquoise and pink glass. She wears a *murtaʿasha* choker and a long *murtahish* necklace ending in a crescent element.

central element. As seen in figure 11.11, a *seytemi* may be added to this; it can be identified by the row of gold coins running up the chain and "it is among the most sought after pieces of jewellery by women in the U.A.E."[72] All these pieces may vary in size and weight. At her waist, the bride will wear a gold belt (*hizam*), which is usually composed of articulated square or round elements with smaller dangling bells or tassels. On her hands, she will often have rings on each finger, especially the *shahida* ring, worn on both forefingers, and the *marami* on the middle finger. The back of her hand may be covered in the *kaf* or *chef* ornament, which runs from rings and is anchored to a bracelet. She also

72 Gubash and Lootah, *Traditional Emirati Jewels*, 62.

FIGURE 11.13 Wedding *murta'asha.*

wears matching bangles, the popular spikey *huyul bu showq* in a single or double row of spikes (fig. 11.14), or an arm band covering half of her forearm known as *glass*. What the bride chooses to wear on her feet and ankles nowadays depends on the type of dress and shoes she wears for her henna night, but in the past matching anklets (*khulkhal*), along with toe rings (*fitakh*), would have completed her henna night jewelry collection. The guests to the henna night party also wear their finest traditional jewelry for the occasion, although it is often combined with more contemporary gem set pieces.[73] The night is recalled in great detail by those who attend and the events are carefully transmitted to

FIGURE 11.14 *Huyul bu showq* (also known as *banjeri*), in a single and double row of spikes.

the younger generation. Here is how Mahra Alkhajha recalls her grandmother's story of the two nights of her wedding:

"The first night was called 'the green night,' where she had henna on her hands and legs besides wearing a green dress. On the green night, my grandmother had a head piece called *tasa*, a necklace covering the whole chest called *murta'asha*, and a wrist jewelry that was given to her by her loved ones called *huyul*. In addition, she wore an anklet called *khulkhal* and a toe jewelry called *fitakh*. On her second night, the red night, she wore a red *badla* (decoration around the cuff of her *serwal* trousers) and a red top. She had her hair braided with gold clips hanging on the end. She had a *mareya* hanging from her neck and a *shahida* on her second finger and different types of rings on each finger. Her most precious gifts were two hair clips, *reesh*, given to her by my grandfather, and a *mareya* necklace she received from my uncle, God bless his soul."[74]

The full wedding celebration used to take place over two or three nights. During the first and most significant night, only relatives and important guests would be invited. Today, it is more common for celebrations to concentrate on the henna night and one larger wedding night party for women. The groom has a separate reception for male guests usually earlier in the afternoon, on the same night as the female wedding party or the night before. Each woman wears her most exquisite jewelry and most elaborate evening gown. At large weddings, a spectacular array of gold, diamonds,

73 Authors' interviews and fieldnotes: Bahrain, 1994–1995 and 2016–2019; Saudi Arabia, 1997; U.A.E., 2016–2019; Kuwait and Oman, 2018–2019.

74 Mahra Alkhajha interviewed by the authors, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., December 15, 2018.

rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and pearls competes with a sea of silk, chiffon, brocade, and velvet designer dresses. The bride wears a white wedding dress with a veil and jewelry that has been carefully chosen to complement the dress.[75] This is not necessarily her *shabka*; while relatively simple in comparison with the display of gold at the henna night, it often consists of a high-quality diamond and a white gold set. She will also have received a wedding ring called *dblah*, which is not part of her *shabka* sets. The form that these wedding parties take, while definitely a post-oil wealth phenomenon, has remained stable over the last thirty or forty years. They are held at wedding halls or large hotel ballrooms decorated in a theme that complements the bride's taste and vision. Today, wedding planners organize a spectacular and well-coordinated event and the groom may or may not attend the women's wedding party. The jewelry worn by the bride reflects the current changes in fashion and style, as explained by Shereena Al-Hameli in her conversation with the authors":

"When my sister got married two years ago, she was given three diamond sets, four gold sets, and some pieces of jewelry from brands that were gifts from her friends. I have noticed the change in customs when I saw that people got her jewelry from well-known brands. If it was my grandmother who received such gifts, she would be offended and see it as a useless piece of jewelry that she would not wear."[76]

On the morning after her wedding night, it was traditional for the bride to receive a further gift from her husband, a *sbaha* or *sabahiya.*[77] This piece of jewelry had a great sentimental value in the past: it was usually gold or pearls, and a woman would try never to part with it, no matter how dire her circumstances.[78] However, by the early 1990s, this gift was no longer necessarily gold; it might have been, instead, a new car. The current younger generation does not identify with this particular practice anymore.[79]

In the 1970s and 1980s, on her return from honeymoon, the bride would let it be known that she was ready to receive well-wishers. Her friends and relatives would visit, usually bringing gifts of gold jewelry. The most extravagant gift was expected to come from the groom's parents; the bride's parents would only give a gift if they could afford it. In more recent times, this part of the wedding ceremony has mostly disappeared. Many young people nowadays prefer to have an extended honeymoon and gifts before the wedding.[80]

The bride also receives *mahar*, or bride price, from her husband.[81] On occasion, in the past, the bride's father would keep some or all of the *mahar* as recompense for raising his daughter. This, however, was generally frowned upon. In some parts of the Gulf, the *mahar* is nominal; in others, it is substantial. It may be set by the bride's family or by the groom himself; however, in each instance, this is the bride's money and she can do with it as she wishes. Generally, it is a significant sum that a woman invests in protecting her future. Traditionally, most brides put it toward gold jewelry for their collection, using it as a practical and pleasing way to keep their wealth. Given the huge costs of today's weddings, the *mahar* may be used to help prepare for such events.[82]

75 Both authors have attended numerous henna nights and weddings in Bahrain and the U.A.E. in the past thirty years.

76 Shereena AlHameli interviewed by the authors, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., December 15, 2018.

77 For more details, see Bakker, "The Arabian Woman Adorned," 57.

78 It is this piece that would be sold to buy a woman's burial shroud.

79 Zayed University students in conversation with the authors, Abu Dhabi, 2016–2019.

80 Ibid.

81 Roode, *Desert Silver,* 42–44.

82 For details, see Jane Bristol-Rhys, "Weddings, Marriage and Money in the United Arab Emirates," *Anthropology of the Middle East* 2, no. 1 (2007): 20–36, and Thani, *Marriage in Qatar*, 142–46.

FIGURE 11.15 Tefla Al Mazrouie's family acquired this pearl in its oyster shell from Qatar in the 1980s. As she tells the story, the family had four beautiful pearls hidden in a safe place covered with silk cloth for more than forty years. She claims that they got the pearls as a gift from her cousin, Hassan Bin Otaiba Al Mazrouie, who was a wealthy pearl diver. He had collected more than fourteen large pearls from the deep sea of Qatar; four of them were gifted to her grandparents and the rest were given as a gift to his Highness Sheikh Zayed Al Nahayan. This is part of the tradition of Khswa, whereby wealthy people gift each other things of value without a specific reason. The gift is meant as a symbol and not as a material to exchange.

And so, the cycle begins again: the bride becomes a mother and receives jewelry as a gift upon the birth of her baby who, in turn, receives her first jewelry at the same time. Adult children with an independent income continue to gift their mother with jewelry or watches on special occasions. A mother loans her jewelry to her daughters on important occasions or gifts some of her jewelry to her daughters or granddaughters. However, she is just as likely to buy them new pieces or to trade in her older pieces in order to buy them new ones. In many cases, the older generation seems to have

the least sentimental attachment to jewelry. In the past, jewelry was equivalent to financial security, so many of the collected oral histories mention particular pieces and on occasion whole jewelry collections having to be sold when the family experienced a financial crisis.[83]

It would seem that women from the older generation who consider jewelry as both financial security and personal property are more likely to alter or update their pieces.[84] Their gold is something that is truly their own to do with as they please. For them, the weight and quantity of the gold is paramount. This is one of the reasons why finding very old heirloom jewelry pieces is so difficult.[85] The middle generation appears to value the cultural heritage of traditional jewelry but does not like to wear it, preferring jewelry from high-end jewelry houses. However, they will wear it when attending henna night celebrations. In the youngest generation, one can observe a genuine appreciation of traditional jewelry pieces and an increasing desire to ensure that this cultural legacy does not disappear (fig. 11.15).[86] The establishment of museums in the region, in addition to the recent revival of interest in traditional jewelry forms, will hopefully ensure their survival.

3 Conclusion

From cradle to grave, jewelry is an intrinsic part of the life and identity of the women in the Arabian Peninsula. Jewelry is embedded in *Khalīji* women's culture to such an extent that it becomes the catalyst at the heart of the most significant events in their lives. It is an agent that embodies the network of reciprocal exchanges between families and the larger community in which they live and reinforces bonds of friendship and obligation amongst individuals.[87]

Jewelry first acts to protect them as infants from "the evil eye" in the form of amulets. As they move though their childhood, every birthday or festival is an occasion for a gift of jewelry to be bestowed upon them. However, it is during the ceremonies of betrothal and marriage that women receive the most significant additions to their jewelry collection. A woman's jewelry is rarely handed down and reused by the next generation. In the past, just one piece, the bride's wedding morning gift, the *sabahiya*, would be sold to buy her burial shroud.[88] The rest of her gold or silver would be taken to the jeweler and reworked in the new designs preferred by the younger generation. A funeral is the only occasion when no jewelry may be worn by the mourners or those visiting to offer condolences. The absence of jewelry in this context is made more powerful by its necessity on every other occasion.

This chapter has focused primarily on gold jewelry from the late 1800s to the present day, whose forms are identified throughout the eastern Gulf as *Bahraini*.[89] The reality is, of course, a complex web of trade routes stretching back millennia and connecting the Arabian Peninsula with other centers of jewelry production, especially India, but also Oman and Yemen to the South, Iran to the East, and Iraq and Syria to the North.[90] Jewelry is a conveniently mobile commodity so, while shapes, patterns, and tastes may vary over time and geography, the intrinsic value of the gold or silver

83 Zayed University students in conversation with the authors, Abu Dhabi, 2016–2019.

84 Authors' interviews and fieldnotes: Bahrain, 1994–1995 and 2016–2019; Saudi Arabia, 1997; U.A.E., 2016–2019.

85 Ransom, *Silver Treasures from the Land of Sheba,* 12.

86 Zayed University students in conversation with the authors, Abu Dhabi, 2016–2019.

87 Authors' interviews and fieldnotes: Bahrain, 1994–1995 and 2016–2019; Saudi Arabia, 1997; U.A.E., 2016–2019.

88 On occasion, a woman may sell the *sabahiya* herself and put aside the proceeds for that purpose. For details, see Bakker, "The Arabian Woman Adorned," 57.

89 A recurrent theme in many conversations and interviews around the Gulf during the course of this research (1994–2019) was that gold came from Bahrain.

90 Colyer-Ross, *The Art of Bedouin Jewellery*, 17–23.

allows it to be traded and exchanged across continents. Although silver jewelry was extensively used in this region in the past, it was almost entirely displaced over the course of the twentieth century by gold, primarily due to the economic success of the Gulf states.[91] Today, old silver jewelry is disappearing fast, as are the stories and names associated with it. However, although the rapid economic development and resultant social transformations in the Gulf region have led to significant changes in tastes and styles, jewelry continues to be an integral part of women's identity in the Arabian Gulf.

91 Ransom, *Silver Treasures from the Land of Sheba,* 12.

CHAPTER 12

Cine-Things: The Revival of the Emirati Past in Nojoom Alghanem's Cinemascape

Chrysavgi Papagianni

1 Introduction[1]

One of the first Emiratis to become a successful filmmaker and to boast an international reputation, Nojoom Alghanem[2] is interested in stories that are on the verge of disappearance. From her very first film, *Between Two Banks* (1999), which tells the story of the last local man sailing between Dubai and Deira, the director has been intent on recovering the past: in her own words, the film was "almost like the last evidence of an era," especially if we take into consideration that the main character died soon after the making of the film.[3] Indeed, a close look at films like *Hamama* (2010), *Sounds of the Sea* (2014), *Nearby Sky* (2014), and *Honey, Rain, and Dust* (2016) clearly shows her nostalgia for an almost forgotten pre-oil past.

Among these films, *Hamama*[4] stands out for its focus on objects from the Emirati past which become animated and enlivened due to their projection on the cinematic screen. As a matter of fact, the film can be seen as a repository of old stories where memory-infused objects claim center stage as Alghanem attempts to reestablish a lost connection with the Bedouin past. These objects, or the film's cine-things, are granted a life of their own as they are positioned within Alghanem's cinematic landscape. As these cine-things are isolated from their usual context and placed on a visual terrain, their relationship with human actors is radically revised: the essential proximity of the two invests the objects with a voice of their own, while simultaneously enabling viewers to see them anew.

The focus of the film is on an elderly protagonist, the 93-year-old Hamama, who resides in the city of Sharjah and who continues to practice the ancestral art of healing despite her age. As the film

1 I would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Office of Research at Zayed University, U.A.E., which awarded me a Research Incentive Fund Grant for a project on Emirati women filmmakers. Special thanks are also due to my colleague, Dr. Hülya Yağcıoğlu, for the illuminating discussions on thing theory that we had.

2 Starting as a poetess in the 1990s, Alghanem is also a filmmaker who has directed more than twenty films, shorts, and feature documentaries. Given that the first Emirati film only dates back to 1998, Alghanem's *oevre* is indeed pioneering.

3 Nojoom Alghanem, interviewed by the author, October 2016.

4 *Hamama* won the Special Jury Award at the Dubai International Film Festival in 2010, Best Documentary Award at the Arab Film Festival in Sweden in 2011, and was screened in prestigious regional and international festivals. It has also been publicly screened at the New York University and Sorbonne University in Abu Dhabi, garnering wide academic attention. Nevertheless, the film has not had a theatrical release not only because feature documentaries do not constitute the usual commercial theater fare for "shopping-mall theatres" but also because Emirati films in general have had limited theatrical visibility given that the country's filmmaking history is only two decades old. For a more detailed discussion of the reasons surrounding the reduced theatrical visibility of Emirati films, see Dale Hudson "Locating Emirati Filmmaking within Globalizing Media Ecologies," in *Media in the Middle East : Activism, Politics and Culture*, ed. Nele Lenze, Charlotte Schriwer, and Zubaidah Abdul Jalil (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 165–202; and Chrysavgi Papagianni "Re-Orienting the Gaze: Emirati Women Behind the Camera," in *Reorienting with the Gulf: Film and Digital Media between the Middle East and South Asia* ed. Alia Yunis and Dale Hudson (forthcoming from Indiana University Press).

unfolds, it becomes obvious that the director presents Hamama as an emblem of the past or, to use Astrid Erll's term, a "carrier of memory,"[5] which is preserved through the medium of film so that the future of the past can be ensured. All in all, the film makes a strong statement that the pre-oil past can come to life by bringing together human and non-human actors, objects and people. Undoubtedly, when projected or reconstituted in such a way, the past can have a healing effect on the present.

Regarding the cultural significance of the film's staging of memory-infused objects, one needs to consider that *Hamama* does not only question popular perceptions about Emirati people but also unsettles discourses that foreground the marketability of the past and the formation of a national identity. By looking at the relationship between materiality, representation, and signification in film, I will propose that local Emirati films, through a focus on memory-objects, can actually counteract the annihilating forces of globalization and commodification that have transformed the cultural identity of the area into a marketable commodity, making the pre-oil past almost obsolete. From this point of view, it can be safely argued that Alghanem's film invests things with cultural significance in order to illustrate how the material world of the past can still have an important effect on the identity formation of the Emirati people.

Grounded on thing theory and memory studies, this chapter highlights the need for a remediation of the Emirati memory, which is made possible through a collection of memory-infused objects. In particular, I am taking my lead from Bill Brown's groundbreaking work,[6] which questions the status of objects as silent counterparts of human actors and argues, instead, that there is a mutually informing relationship between the two. Brown further draws a distinction between objects and things, suggesting that the thingness of objects emerges when the latter "stop working for us," that is, when "the drills breaks, when the car stalls … when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution is arrested, however momentarily."[7]

When we look closely at the context of the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E), it becomes clear that objects signifying the pre-oil past, or what I called earlier memory-infused objects, have "stopped working" for the local people, or, rather, they have been *halted* due to the dramatic changes that occurred in the past fifty years and radical transformation of the material geography of the area since the discovery of oil.[8] More specifically, oil has become a temporal signifier designating the pre- and post-oil era and has spearheaded radical changes in the lives of local populations. It has, in fact, become the driving force behind the union of the seven Emirates in 1971 and the economic power of the region as a whole. Thus, oil emerges as an *all-encompassing object* defining and representing the newly-formed Gulf states and their citizens. However, due to the almost limitless possibilities for growth that oil created, objects from the past have either disappeared or, at best, have lost their original significance.

As a result of this sweeping transformation, the pre-oil past bears no similarities to the mushrooming, industrialized cityscape-*cum*-marketplace reality of the present. As Brown argues, once objects stop working, their thingness, or their interiority, becomes evident and thus they are transformed into values and fetishes. Nevertheless, in the case of the U.A.E., it appears that the thingness of past objects is hard to emerge as the past itself has been banished from popular imagination, which is now dominated by the limitless possibilities for growth predicated on oil. To put it differently, there is no space for these objects to exist except, perhaps, when they are positioned as marketable

5 Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory," *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011): 12.

6 Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," in *Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.

7 Ibid.

8 Oil was discovered in the 1950s and oil exports started in 1962. The modern state as we know it today was formed in 1971, when the seven Emirates came together and formed a federation.

commodities in *souqs* or as historical exhibits in museum windows, where they are nevertheless "muted." The things' displacement from traditional sites of identity formation parallels the displacement experienced by contemporary Emiratis and, at the same time, prevents these objects from triggering an emotional response from the Emirati people.

To make matters worse, objects of a global commodity culture circulate widely in a country that is characterized by rampant consumerism, to the extent that commodities often pose as supplements *for* rather than *of* people. Yet, these objects fail to turn into things because they are devoid of any cultural significance for modern Emiratis. The obvious aftermath of this cultural process is a sense of alienation that calls for an immediate redefinition of modern Emirati identity, which seems to rely more on the global reality of the present than on the memory of the past. Such a redefinition is achieved through *Hamama* as the film becomes a medium of localization[9] that opens up a new space for memory-objects to meaningfully exist.[10] Indeed, what Alghanem's cinematic landscape presents is the "before" of objects.[11] As these objects become animated, their "after" also becomes possible since the memories that these objects evoke become mobile as they are rememediated through film. To remember Erll, "contents of cultural memory must be kept in motion, because they … do not exist outside individual minds, which have to actualize and re-actualize those contents continually to keep them alive."[12] This is what Alghanem's film achieves: it actualizes and re-actualizes the memory of the pre-oil past, keeping the past itself in motion, and thus ensures the preservation of this memory beyond the span of a mere viewing of the film.

2 Discourses of Emirati Nationhood and Identity

Overall, *Hamama*'s nostalgic turn to the material culture of the past redefines contemporary Emirati identity that is nowadays presented, rather ineffectively I would say, through specific discourses of nation branding and popular stereotypes borrowing heavily from Orientalist attitudes and propagated by the overwhelming force of globalization. Before discussing how the film enacts such a turn, we need to look briefly at these discourses to better understand the significance of Alghanem's film. The obvious starting point would be the dominant stereotypes and the exoticism discourse that are intimately linked to an Orientalist rhetoric. In short, Orientalism posits the Orient as the "other" and thus sets the ground for the political and cultural hegemony of the West even after the presumed end of colonialism.[13] Within this context, stereotypes, both positive and negative, support hegemonic power structures by describing East-West relationships through simplifying binaries.

With regards to stereotypes, one needs only to look at Jack Shaheen's work,[14] which poignantly illustrates how perceptions about Arabs have crystallized in popular representations in films, magazines, and the news. Shaheen successfully reveals how the Western hegemonic discourses described Arabs either as absent or different by promoting stereotypical images of dangerous, incomprehensible

9 For a further discussion of locality versus globality in the Emirates see Chrysavgi Papagianni, "The Salvation of Emirati Memory in Nujoom Alghanem's *Hamama*," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 35, no. 4 (2018): 321–32.

10 That films can offer this space is an argument also put forth by memory studies, which emphasize the need for memory to become more mobile. See, for example, Erll, "Travelling Memory," 4–18.

11 Brown, "Thing Theory," 5.

12 Erll, "Travelling Memory," 13.

13 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

14 See, for example, Jack Shaheen, "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588, no. 1 (2003): 171–93.

males or extremely conservative, exotic, or eroticized females. That these stereotypes still exert a strong hold on popular imagination becomes obvious if one looks, for example, at the 2010 film, *Sex and the City 2* (*SATC2*), which supposedly takes place in modern-day Abu Dhabi, the capital of the U.A.E.[15] The film crystalizes dominant perceptions of the area that are highly stereotypical and is but another example of a foreign film that is widely screened in the country,[16] threatening to normalize the outsider's view and influence Emiratis' self-perceptions. In the words of Dale Hudson, the visibility and predominance of foreign productions allow "foreign suspicions to frame perceptions about the U.A.E."[17] that are limiting and do not do justice to their people or the country.

As Elizabeth Ezra argues in her book, *Cinema of Things*, in *SATC2* the Middle East and, in this case, Abu Dhabi "appears stuck in an exoticism infused past."[18] She goes on to explain that Abu Dhabi is shrouded in what Johannes Fabian has termed "allochronism," "a primitivist trope in which cultures located at a geographical remove from one's 'own' are deemed to inhabit a different temporal space."[19] Thus, *SATC2* is an eloquent example of a Western view of the East that is clearly tinted by past stereotypes and popular Orientalism. As such, it underlines the need for an internal point of view and highlights the importance of films like *Hamama* that resist such depictions.

Another popular discourse that dominates the film's narrative is that of extreme affluence whose apex is overconsumption. Images of extreme luxury and wealth feature prominently in *SATC2*, which capitalizes on a view of the country as a posh tourist destination. Hudson warns against such foreign media production that "obscures populations of middle-class Emiratis who do not keep 'exotic' animals as pets or drive gold-plated cars with special-number plates."[20] Such representations build on popular Orientalist representations of petro dollars and oil-rich *sheikhs* and offer a narrow view of the forty-seven year-old nation-state based on models of transformation and modernization according to which the desert, and the Emirati past for that matter, have gradually disappeared under the push for ever-expanding cities.

The defining object signifying this dramatic transformation and ensuing modernization of the U.A.E. has been the oil. More specifically, discourses about change in the Middle East refer to the pre-oil and post-oil era, with oil posing as the quintessential object-*cum*-thing defining the modern state. From this point of view, oil lies at the heart of many popular representational discourses, having acquired a thingness that has become synonymous with the Arabs and the Arabian Peninsula itself. Interestingly enough, the discourse of affluence which is closely linked to oil and the notorious petrodollars seems to be promoted not only by the West but also by the countries of the area themselves. In the U.A.E.'s case, its two leading cities, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, invest heavily in nation branding in an attempt to package and sell an identity that can be easily marketed and consumed. In this context, identity is represented by an array of objects and practices that are intended for popular consumption and are, more often than not, linked to economic progress and a posh lifestyle.

To exemplify, Burj Khalifa has emerged as a fetish, an emblem encapsulating the quintessence of the country. Indeed, the tallest building in the world is among the most popular sites of tourist consumption, having acquired a life of its own in the popular imagination, both local and foreign. It has, in fact, come to represent all that the

15 The film was not actually filmed in Abu Dhabi but in Morocco due to cultural restrictions.

16 U.A.E. has the biggest box office of Hollywood films in the area. At the same time, Bollywood and, lately, Lolywwod productions screen widely in the U.A.E. theaters.

17 Hudson, "Locating Emirati Filmmaking," 173.

18 Elizabeth Ezra, *Cinema of Things: Globalization and the Posthuman Object* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 42.

19 Ibid.

20 Hudson, "Locating Emirati Filmmaking," 174.

country has achieved in less than fifty years from its formation: it is an icon of progress, money-power, and prestige. Moreover, adjectives in the superlative describing the place seem to be part of a national campaign to advertise the country as the ultimate travel destination. Thus, "the tallest," "the fastest," "the most," "the only" are qualifiers that promote the country's exceptionalism. According to Robert A. Beauregard, Dubai poses on the global map as a "city of superlatives."[21] Following the dictates of a global and local culture that are highly depended on things, nation branding has turned these landmarks into the epitome of Emirati nationhood and essential parts of its identity.

Apart from the two discourses mentioned above, nation branding in the Emirates promotes, among other things, the discourse of traditionalism,[22] which explains the recent boom in heritage projects all around the country. Significantly, the seven Emirates, with Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah in the lead, show a keen interest in promoting the local culture through conscious efforts to connect it to the local heritage. Hence the wealth of heritage clubs, villages, festivals, museums, and various other initiatives that aim at preserving the past. To mention only a few examples, the Emirates Film Competition and the National Center for Documentation and Research actively promote the Emirati heritage through projects such as the Sheikh Zayed National Museum or the annual Quasr Al Hosn Festival.[23] At the same time, the pre-oil, Bedouin past comes to life through safaris that are, nevertheless, linked to a culture of consumerism, as luscious buffets, belly dancers, and luxurious comfort conceal the poverty of the past and the harshness of the desert life. During these safaris, even national identity can be "tried on" in the form of an *abaya* or a *kandoura* for the sake of photographs. This "touristification," although not within the scope of the present chapter, is definitely worth studying more as it obviously problematizes notions of Emirati identity that have become commodified. Some would argue that the past and its memory are repackaged and sold for profit. Nevertheless, this could also represent an attempt to link identity to concrete objects and artifacts not just for the sake of nation branding but also for the sake of cultural preservation and survival. Given that the U.A.E. is a newly-formed state in the process of solidifying its defining principles, such a narrative could, indeed, be linked to the need to forge a common identity for the seven Emirates that form the union.

Needless to say, this commodification of nostalgia is in sync with a commodity culture and globalized modernity that have swept over the Emirates. Unfortunately, even when it is not kindled for touristic ends and purposes, such nostalgia does not seem to suffice when it comes to the preservation of memories of the pre-oil past, especially given that the carriers of this memory, those above the age of sixty who have experienced this past past, are almost extinct.[24] The transmission of stories from the past is further complicated by the oral tradition of the area and the ensuing absence

21 Robert A. Beauregard, "City of Superlatives," *City and Community* 2, no. 3 (2003): 183–99. Apart from Burj Khalifa, other identity features associated with the Emiratis are Atlantis The Palm Jumeirah (the seven-star hotel with underwater suites in Dubai), the Burj Khalifa dancing fountains, and the impressive Emirati malls.

22 For a more detailed discussion on nation branding see, for example, Simon Anholt, "Why Brand? Some Practical Considerations for Nation Branding," *Place Branding* 2, no. 2, (2006): 97–107.

23 For more details on attempts at preservation by the U.A.E., see Fred Lawson and Hasan Al Naboodah, "Heritage and Cultural Nationalism in the United Arab Emirates," in *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States*, ed. Alanood Alsharekh and Robert Springborg (London: Saqi Books, 2008), 15–30.

24 According to the 2005 census data, adults older than 65 represented less than 3% of the total local population. More than ten years later, the number is bound to be even smaller. Cf. *Statistics by Subject: Population by Age Group 1975–2005*, Dubai, United Arab Emirates: Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority, 2016, http://fcsa.gov.ae/en-us/Pages/Statistics/Statistics-by-Subject.aspx.

of written records. At the same time, the younger generations are sated by overconsumption as they compete for the acquisition of more and more goods and opt for different narratives that are linked to the present, as Suleyman Khalaf aptly observes.[25] Unfortunately, despite sincere attempts to salvage the past from the ruins of modernity and foster memory, these state-led efforts do not seem to suffice. This is undoubtedly the aftermath of the local conditions of memory rupture and discontinuity with the past, but, at the same time, it could also be linked to the death that objects suffer in museums due to their removal from their socio-historical context.[26] From this point of view, their display in museum windows or during festivals falls short of triggering an emotional response in modern Emiratis. To put it differently, the lack of affect when it comes to the representation of these objects obscures their interiority and does not allow for their "magic" to emerge.

Things become even more complicated if we consider how the discourse of traditionalism often gets entangled with the other discourses mentioned above. For instance, the trade in mementoes and knick-knacks which, according to Ezra, also characterizes Western discourses of exoticism, is very prominent.[27] This trade takes place both in the more traditional *souqs* and in the super-luxurious five-star hotels spread widely in the country. Take, for instance, the *gawah*, or Arabic coffee pot, which can be found everywhere, from museum windows to travel brochures to *souqs* to ostentatious hotel lobbies. It would not be far-fetched to argue, then, that the pre-oil past is de-territorialized and placed in sites that are incongruous with what it represents, that is, a previous Spartan way of life. To put it differently, the humble, banal *gawah* does not seem to belong in a setting of extravagance and affluence. When this happens, the object loses its original meaning and "stops working for us." Even if its presence in this setting indicates an attempt to fit the *gawah* in the new reality of the country, it is this very reality that banishes it from the present due to its disconnection with the past. From this perspective, the reconnection and re-territorialization of these memory-objects becomes a necessity in a country that is left "stranded in a present without a past," as many commentators point out.[28]

3 The Magic of Objects in *Hamama*

The above discussion has focused on problems and limitations inherent in popular representations of the Emirati culture and has underlined the failure of current preservation efforts to create a meaningful bridge with the past. Vis-à-vis these shortcomings, the remediation of Emirati memory from oral accounts in Alghanem's cinemascape establishes an essential interconnectedness between the past and the present that challenges dominant representational paradigms. Indeed, a close look at the film shows that the staging of neglected memory-objects from the Emirati past reveals their true meaning and thus enables their subsequent preservation for future generations. To put it differently, memory-infused objects are transformed into living things that complement the characters living in the present in a harmonious and necessary way. Along this axis of complementarity, an essential proximity between people and objects is established, and a dialectical relationship between human and non-human actors is foregrounded. All in all, this new visual relationship can lead to a redefinition of Emirati identity

25 Suleyman Khalaf, "Globalization and Heritage Revival in the Gulf: An Anthropological Look at Dubai Heritage Village," *Journal of Social Affairs* 19, no. 75 (2002): 13–42. For a similar argument see also Jane Bristol-Rhys, "Emirati Historical Narratives," *History and Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2009): 125.

26 See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 67.

27 Ezra, *Cinema of Things*, 42.

28 See, for example, Papagianni, "The Salvation of Emirati Memory," and Bristol-Rhys, "Emirati Historical Narratives."

as the "pre-oil" and "post-oil" eras are brought together in ways that can fight against the epistemic closure of the Emirati past.

My discussion of the film is partly informed by Arjun Appadurai's view in *The Social Life of Things*, where he posits that, methodologically, "it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context," despite the human actors' need to "encode things with significance."[29] Starting from this premise, I will "follow" the objects in Alghanem's films in an attempt to show that these objects surpass, to use Brown's words, "their mere materialization as objects, or their mere utilization as objects,"[30] turning into values and memories laden with possibilities as far as the salvation of Emirati memory is concerned. The focus on the "magic" of objects in *Hamama* also relates to discussions about early cinema's obsession with the power imparted in objects.[31] For instance, in 1924, the French film theorist and filmmaker Jean Epstein addressed the ability of the cinema to convey a "semblance of life to the objects it defines" that essentially invests those objects with "personality."[32] Interestingly enough, a century or so later the need to refocus on objects and their "magic" seems to resurface as the redrawing of boundaries between people and objects has become a central concern in a globalized and highly commodified world.[33]

As far as the film is concerned, the choice of an elderly protagonist is in sync with Alghanem's nostalgic turn to the Emirati past in an attempt to recuperate it. Indeed, the almost blind protagonist embodies the pre-oil past since she is a genuine "carrier of memory" who, in line with Erll's definition, "share[s] in collective images and stories of the past, who practice[s] mnemonic rituals, display[s] an inherited habitus," and can rely on a gamut "of explicit and implicit knowledge."[34] As a respected healer, Hamama exhibits throughout the film profound implicit and explicit knowledge of how to concoct medicine and heal people, both of which come from an ancestral past.

As the camera follows her around, we can see Hamama performing her daily chores in the house and on the farm. These chores depend upon her use of specific objects that are evocative of past routines and rituals, which Alghanem brings to life through the medium of film. An apt example is the vessel used to make cheese, which plays an essential role in Hamama's life. Without it, she cannot function, she cannot even survive. It seems that the object has become an integral part of her existence, an extension of the self. The vessel is invested with a significance that one cannot miss as the camera closes in on it. It is as if it has a life of its own, a symbolic depth, as it is connects to a different temporal dimension. The object stands for the self-sustained way of life of the pre-oil era, which has been replaced by mechanized food production after the discovery of oil.

Hamama is by no means a detached observer as a museum visitor might be. Instead, she is involved in meaning-making as she carries the vessel with an inherited habitus that allows her to reveal its hidden meaning, the "magic" of the object. Presented in a dialectical relationship with the main character, the object emerges in its full potentiality, becoming a supplement of the human actor. It is this close proximity of human and non-human actors that informs what I call Alghanem's "thing rhetoric," which usually occurs through close-ups on everyday objects, such as the cheese vessel and the sleeping rug, and on fetishized objects, such as Hamama's water dripping hands. This thing rhetoric is reiterated in Alghanem's film through scenes

29 Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.

30 Brown, "Thing Theory," 6.

31 Rachel O'Moore, *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

32 Jean Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie," in *French Film Theory and Criticism, Vol. 1: 1907–1929*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 116.

33 See, for example, Ezra, *Cinema of Things,* 1.

34 Erll, "Travelling Memory," 12.

illustrating the possession and raise of animals, the making of cheese, or the ancient healing practices mentioned above.

Similar to the cheese vessel, the rug becomes a signifier of an older mode of existence characterized by poverty, simplicity, and self-sustenance. Hamama's preference for the rug is, once again, indicative of the intimate relationship between the object and its owner. The rug is her object of choice and a companion that allows her to be in close proximity to the earth and the sand, both of which are quintessential to her identity. The rug becomes an extension of Hamama as it encapsulates the simple lifestyle of the Bedouin past. As we see her opting for this past against the comfort of the present (i.e., the rug vs. the bed), we are reassured that the past is not to be dismissed: it is still a valid lifestyle choice. Imagine now the rug displayed in a museum or in a *souq*. It would pose as an exotic object or as a collectible commodity. An Emirati youngster could pass by and ignore it because it would be devoid of reference and lack affect. In contrast, the memory-objects in Alghanem's films are rendered in "quotidian moment[s] of banality"[35] and are invested with affect, having the ability to elicit both sensory and gestural attention not only from the camera and Hamama herself but also from the viewer. Looking at the image of the Maltese falcon, Lesley Stern argues, for instance, that "the affect of the moment is the ability of the image to elicit from us a sensory response. This quotidian moment is also a moment when the gestural and the object are brought into relationship, when the thing elicits gestural attention. Or perhaps it is the other way around: gestural attention elicits a certain quality of thingness."[36] Obviously, the cheese vessel and the rug elicit a sensory response from Hamama. The gestural attention she pays to these objects is indicative of the intimate relationship she shares with them, which, in turn, calls for a similar attention from the viewer. In accordance with Stern's view, the image of the object or the ritual associated with it elicits from the spectator a sensory response that is similar to Hamama's. The "affect of the moment"—be it a gesture or a feeling—can thus escape the screen and survive into the future as a concrete memory of things past.

To bring this point home, an intense feeling of nostalgia emerges as the camera casts an affectionate glance at the humble vessel or the trivial rug which, nevertheless, represent the cornerstone of Hamama's world. In line with Stern, both these objects participate in "different temporalities: narrative time and emotional duration (the temporality of touching)."[37] This double participation surfaces as they occupy a central place in narrating Hamama's story: both the film's *mis-en-scène* and the things themselves simultaneously evoke nostalgic feelings for a previous mode of existence in the audience. To put it differently, the staging of the cine-things encapsulating the past contains gestural tropes like preparing food, eating, sleeping, farming, or healing that are reminiscent of older times.

As Stern posits, the transformation of objects into actions is what really attracts the viewers' attention. Starting from a similar premise, Robert Bresson argues that the gestures that objects initiate can represent the real substance of films.[38] This is true as far as *Hamama* is concerned if we consider, for example, that the materiality of the film re-creates rather than merely re-present the Emirati self. The cultural significance of Algahanem's films is in sync with what John Plotz calls "culturalist object theory," a notion which underlines the symbolic dimension of evocative objects

35 Lesley Stern, "Paths That Wind through the Thicket of Things," in Brown, *Things*, 397. Stern looks at how cinema invests things with affect and discusses "the quotidian nature of things as a mode of cinematic instantiation" (399).

36 Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 397.

37 Ibid.

38 Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (London: Quartet Books, 1986), 59.

through which cultures represent themselves.[39] Although culturalist object theory has been questioned on the grounds that such an approach attaches a pre-determined meaning to objects and precludes the possibility of their speaking for themselves,[40] from an Emirati perspective, the memory-objects' capacity to speak is inhibited not because of their silencing but because of their belonging to an almost-forgotten past. Thus, when it comes to salvaging the past within specific sociocultural conditions, the culturalist object theory is still a fertile methodological approach.

The "magic" of objects in *Hamama* draws attention not only to concrete objects but also to processes and actions involving the material world, such as animal farming and cheese making, which illuminate the objects' social context. If one takes into consideration the radical transformation of the material geography of the U.A.E. in recent times, the scenes where Hamama visits her farm and interacts with the animals vividly bring to life memories of the past. More specifically, "as modernity banished the desert from the social imaginary and substituted the camel with the Ferrari,"[41] people's connection to space and locality has been compromised. Admittedly, many modern Emiratis own farms and regularly visit them for family gatherings. However, they rely on hired help for farming and maintenance, so their relationship with a locale that used to be the cornerstone of their life in the past is no longer interactive. Emiratis are simply visitors to these sites of identity formation. Alghanem reconstitutes this lost connection through scenes where the elderly protagonist, despite her age, participates actively in animal farming. Even more, Hamama talks affectionately to animals, which she knows by name. Clearly reminiscent of the intimate relationships that people used to share with their locale in the past, these scenes also reveal the affectionate relationship between animals and Hamama. The animals elicit gestural attention and, thus, they are also invested with affect.

In these scenes, Alghanem opts for long shots, thus creating a sense of communal space in which the human actor does not dominate the setting. In fact, through these long takes, the focus is on the material environment, the locale, and the state of things, which complement Hamama in a harmonious way as the elderly protagonist obviously "belongs" to this environment. The setting and the things are central to the narrative, to Hamama's life, and to reconstructing the past. It could be argued at this point that Alghanem's cinematic language supports the thing rhetoric of the film. Indeed, through the use of long shots, slow motion, close ups, and crosscutting, the material world of the past is re-appropriated in a more intimate and personal way that makes the cine-things resonate with life. As a result, "things seem slightly human and humans seem slightly thing-like"[42] as they mutually shape and even occupy each other. To exemplify, the elderly protagonist is reified through the use of extreme close up on her hands in the scene where she touches the water falling onto the plants, a gesture which turns her hands into a fetish. At the same time, the slow-motion technique fetishizes the water itself, which turns into drops on Hamama's hands. In these scenes, the material object and the fetishized body are brought together harmoniously, appearing as almost inseparable. Alghanem's choices are obviously a result of her poetic sensibilities. At the same time, they are also part of her agenda of salvaging the memory of pre-oil era through a focus on the things that made up

39 John Plotz, "Can the Sofa Speak? A Look at Thing Theory," *Criticism* 47, no. 1 (2005): 110. Plotz discusses how anthropological discourses consider evocative objects to examine the ways in which a culture describes itself to itself. According to Plotz, such a culturalist object approach is limited because it does not allow objects to speak for themselves. Plotz's approach to thing theory as an investigation of the margins of meaning rather than symbolic objects, or "marked up signifiers" (112) is interesting, yet it might not be applicable to cases where salvaging of memory is needed.

40 Ibid.

41 Papagianni, "The Salvation of Emirati Memory," 327.

42 Brown, *A Sense of Things*, 9.

that world. As I have argued elsewhere,[43] if one takes into consideration that water in the dry, desolate landscape of the desert symbolizes life, then Hamama's hands acquire a similar significance not only due to their healing potential but also as emblems of a past that relied exclusively on manual labor for survival.

Overall, the film abounds in moments when the camera closes in on Hamama's hands. This is the case, for example, in the scenes where she makes plant-based ointments, cooks, or touches the bodies of the people she heals. The fetishization of the elderly woman's hands, which become emblems of the past with the marks of time on them clearly captured by the camera, elicits once again a sensory response from the audience. At the same time, apart from the affective dimension highlighted here, the film also insists on the physical dimension of Hamama's hands as they "transmit" the wisdom of the past and heal the bodies they touch. This past, the film seems to say, needs to be acknowledged and respected."[44] And indeed, not only is the past acknowledged thoughout the film but also reconstituted as a living presence as the magic of objects is constantly foregrounded.

It is interesting to observe that the recuperation of memory-objects in *Hamama* is often realized through a juxtaposition of the material world of the past and the present. If we see this recuperation through the lens of thing theory, what Alghanem does is a disavowal of the objects and practices related to modern commodity culture in favor of memory-infused objects that have no exchange value in terms of currency; instead, as the filmmaker seems to suggest, they can be traded for the past. To be more specific, the film shows a consistent preference for objects and practices of the past, which could be seen as a rejection of global capitalism and the discourse of affluence itself. As we have seen, the bed is shunned for the rug, and a self-sustained existence is preferred despite the presence of maids and hired help. This juxtaposition of the past and the present is also obvious in the sequences where the bulldozer is working to make a new road behind Hamama's house. While the rug and the cheese vessel occupy a central place in the narrative, eliciting Hamama's affect, the bulldozer associated with global capitalism seems to occupy an awkward space of nonbelonging. The image of the bulldozer is incongruous with the affectionate reality established in the scenes described above, where a sense of reciprocity and complementarity between the human and the social context surface beautifully. For example, in the scenes where Hamama stares blankly at the bulldozer, the human and the social context are inharmonious. Instead of affect, the bulldozer elicits from Hamama feelings of fear and disdain. A symbol of a new order of things brought about by oil, the bulldozer threatens to irreversibly change Hamama's way of life and obliterate the past.

Moreover, although the film does not focus on oil *per se*, the changes and tensions that its discovery have generated are visualized clearly in such moments. It is this new order of things that illuminates the thingness of oil as a perennial presence in the film. Even when Hamama is inside her house, shielded from the outside world, oil materializes in the form of foreign maids and helpers, modern furniture, and knick-knacks. While Hamama does not seem to be aware of or influenced by their presence as she remains loyal to the old ways, outside the house she feels the threat that oil carries as an agent of modernity and change. Yet another materialization of oil, the bulldozer threatens to transform the outside world as she knows it and this, as she tells her grandson, endangers the children. Hamama here expresses a clear concern about the threat that modernity poses to the younger generation.

It is interesting to note that Hamama uses the sleeping rug over and over again to sleep outside at night in scenes where she attempts, one could argue, to safeguard her place from the encroachment of modernity represented by the bulldozer. It is as if the rug becomes her shield against

43 Papagianni, "The Salvation of Emirati Memory," 328.

44 Ibid.

erasure, an inherited habitus that bespeaks of her determination to carry on. Thus, Hamama is by no means compliant. Her sleeping outside the house can be regarded as an act of resistance against displacement and obliteration. As she practices her routine, the rug loses its value as an object and becomes one with her, defining her "Emiratiness" and, thus, her belonging to a specific locale. The fact that the rug allows her to sleep on the sand ensures a strong connection both with her Bedouin past and the setting, given that the sand is an integral part of local identity. Conversely, the bulldozer is responsible for the burial of the sand under cement, that is, for the transformation of the material geography of the area, which also implies an obliteration of the past by the present. Thus, the rug becomes an extension of a past that lays a bold claim on the present. The crosscutting between the blissful scenes of everyday life inside the house and on the farm and the unnerving scenes of the bulldozer brings this point home as it highlights the discrepancy between the two. Hamama's silence as she stares at the bulldozer is indicative of the incompatibility between the old and the new world. Simultaneously, "silence emerges as a powerful trope of resistance,"[45] as an act of defiance and disregard. In this sense, Hamama the protagonist and *Hamama* the film turn into guardians of these memory-objects that are in danger to be lost as progress intrudes upon daily life.

Despite the juxtaposition and occasional polarization between the material world of the past and that of the present discussed above, it should be noted that the film also highlights an essential intersection between the two. This is clearly illustrated in the scenes where Hamama uses plants and ointments from the past to treat people. The ancient practice of healing is acknowledged and given its due respect in the film, as we see people from near and far coming to Hamama for help. The fact that many of these people are young and, thus, accustomed to the latest, state-of-the-art hospitals and modern methods of treatment enhances the aura of reverence surrounding this ancestral healing practice. At the same time, the presence of a doctor that acknowledges the importance of these practices validates them and opens up space for their inclusion in the present. It is in these scenes that Alghanem establishes very clearly the interconnection between the past and the present as the two are shown to mutually inform each other. Both the doctor, a representative of modern practices, and the young people, who inhabit a post-oil space of affluence, embrace the old ways and in so doing bring them into the present. Their affective response to the past during these scenes extends beyond the screen, to the audience.

Once again, the bowl used to mix plants and other ingredients for the medicine is invested with an affect that brings to mind Brown's description of objects that are no longer used merely as objects. Instead, they gain a "force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence";[46] this is where their magic comes from. The magic of the bowl in the film is not just linked to the healing effect of the medicine it is used to produce. It is further and most importantly linked to it belonging to an old time, to a past that is almost forgotten. In this respect, the bowl is not just a bowl: it is a memory-object that has a metaphysical presence as it carries within itself the values of a different temporal dimension. Once again, the reciprocity and proximity of the bowl and the human actor brings out the magic of the object and ensures the transference of the values it embodies to the present.

Overall, the staging of everyday objects from the past within the film-scape places Alghanem into the role of a collector. From this point of view, "the film can be compared to a 'museum' of localized memories, full of images, sounds, and colors that can awaken the Emirati spectator to a new sense of selfhood."[47] In his introductory chapter to *Things*, Brown asks a crucial question: "How does the effort to rethink things become an effort to

45 Ibid., 329.

46 Brown, "Thing Theory," 5.

47 Papagianni, "The Salvation of Emirati Memory," 328.

*re*institute society?"[48] The answer can be simpler than we imagine, especially if we take into account Baudrillard's assertion that, through the collection of objects, "it is invariably oneself that one collects."[49] Collecting and recollecting the "Emirati self" in order to salvage the past and thus reinstitute the Emirati society seems to be exactly what Alghanem does in *Hamama*.

The question that obviously arises at this point is whether Alghanem urges for a return to the past or not. The answer is not simple, especially considering that a return to the past would not help the country survive into the future. It could be argued, then, that Alghanem attempts to salvage the past from obsolescence. In doing so, she further underlines the incongruity of the various discourses that represent the Emirati people and the Emirates and offers a new representational paradigm, perhaps a fourth type of discourse, one that brings the past into the present. As she has invariably stated, her interest lies with the past, as well as with the present and the future.[50] A look at her *oeuvre* from the perspective of thing theory shows that the nostalgic turn to the past does not preclude the present. Her focus on materiality brings forth the past not just as a temporal dimension but also as a lived experience, thus reconstituting its spatiality. All in all, the dialectic relationship between the memory-objects of the past and the human actors of the present is indicative of her attempt to create bonds between different temporal landmarks and thus make the future of the past possible.

Therefore, a close look at the cine-things "collected" in *Hamama* reveals that they are by no means "mute counterparts" in the story. In fact, it is through these things that the story of Hamama and of the Emirati pre-oil past is told.[51] At the same time, these objects are stories in the making: they are symbols of times past that have been denied a narrative space due to the complete transformation of the material geography of the country. Obviously, the stories these objects tell are considerably different from the stories that official discourses promote. As a result, they have the ability to create a new basis for thinking of an Emirati identity. Needless to say, this comes at a very appropriate time for Emiratis. Indeed, at a time when the country is investing heavily in the future through the building of a city on Mars in 2117, salvaging the past from the assault of late modernity is more important than ever.

48 Brown, "Thing Theory," 9.

49 Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 12.

50 Nojoom Alghanem, interviewed by the author, October 2016.

51 The ability of objects to tell stories is discussed by Mieke Bal in "Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting," in Elsner and Cardinal, *The Cultures of Collecting*, 99.

AFTERWORD

All Things Collected

Hülya Yağcıoğlu

My co-editor, Ileana Baird, and I started thinking about this book in the summer of 2017, right after the conclusion of our seminar, "Things and Their Global Networks: Thing Theory, 15 Years Later," organized at the Annual Meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in Utrecht, the Netherlands. The goal of this three-day seminar was to investigate the relationship between human and nonhuman subjects in different historical and cultural contexts. The engaging discussions we had with the panelists during the conference inspired us to dwell more on material culture, specifically the material culture of the Arabian Peninsula, and to examine how local objects have helped define what we call "Arabia" and "Arabian" throughout the ages. This decision stemmed not only from our love for the local culture—both my co-editor and I live and work in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.—but also from our interest in investigating the cultural significance of Arabia, a place strategically situated at the junction of three continents, at the crossroads of human civilizations.

As Bill Brown posits, we may find in things "not just the physical determinants of our imaginative life but also the congealed facts and fantasies of a culture."[1] Therefore, the main focus of this book is to examine the role played by objects in creating regional and local identities. Not only do local objects, such as pearls, frankincense, and *al-Sadu* weaving, create a distinctive "Arabian" identity throughout history; the Western world's fictional encounters with the things of Arabia have also led to often stereotyped and inaccurate representations of the place. Archeological, historical, ethnographical, anthropological, literary, and art-related readings offered by our contributors demonstrate how objects are at the center of a community's representation of its own cultural place and of the way this image is assembled globally, in the collective imaginary. The multidisciplinary nature of this collection allows, thus, for an exploration of Arabia's things from a variety of perspectives that can provide, we hope, a better understanding of its unique contribution to the world heritage.

A recent archeological exhibition from the region, *Roads of Arabia: The Archeological Treasures of Saudi Arabia*, has been another pivotal moment that triggered our interest in the material culture of the region. First inaugurated at the Louvre Museum in Paris in 2010, it has since travelled across the world and has been exhibited in fifteen museums, attracting more than five million visitors so far. Covering a wide historical period, the exhibition starts from prehistoric Arabia and demonstrates the presence of ancient human settlements in the region dating as far back as 7,000 B.C. The maritime and caravan routes of the Arabian Peninsula, as well as its pilgrimage roads and modern highways are the other focal points of this exhibition. The hundreds of artifacts displayed include Neolithic steles and statues, wall paintings, vases, jewelry, tombstones, keys to Ka'ba, maps, and Qur'ānic inscriptions. Thus, this exhibition has helped change common perceptions about the area, revealing its rich historical and cultural heritage. As Jean-Luc Martinez, the President-Director of Musée du Louvre, explains, *Roads of Arabia* has demonstrated that the Peninsula "has always been a fertile ground for human encounters and artistic expressions."[2] The unexplored past of this region is

1 Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4.

2 Qtd. in Souraya Noujaim, "From Past to Future, Now and Always, an Eternal Dream," in *Roads of Arabia: Archeological Treasures of Saudi Arabia,* ed. Souraya Noujaim and

laid bare in the displayed objects, which encapsulate the cultural, economic, and religious significance of "Arabia" for the travelers, pilgrims, and merchants who crossed it since ancient times. After being showcased in many prominent museums in Europe, North America, and Asia, the exhibition finally arrived at Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2018, where it was enriched by many archeological findings from the U.A.E. According to Manuel Rabaté, the director of Louvre Abu Dhabi, the exhibition "allow[ed] the international public to cultivate a better-informed view of the present-day realities of a region of crucial global importance."[3] Moreover, as Islamic scholar Jacques Berque points out, it revealed the "symbolic quality of the Arab East, which is related to the close involvement of facts and values, the upsurge of the new from the old, and the compromise between the one and the other."[4]

The discovery of oil in many Arab countries in the second part of the twentieth century has given way to drastic economic and social transformations, determining the current position of the region in the international arena. Immersed in the rich Emirati culture, my co-editor and I became interested in examining the relationship between various local objects and Emirati national identity, in delving into "the role of material culture in creating and shaping a shared consciousness and collective identity"[5] after the oil boom. One of the largest oil-producing countries worldwide, with three million barrels of oil per day,[6] the United Arab Emirates has enjoyed a robust economy, high standard of living, and unprecedented prosperity since the discovery of oil in 1958. However, the wealth coming from the oil revenue has also changed the nation's relationship with its material objects, so cherished in its pre-oil times. As opposed to older generations who depended on fishing and pearl diving, the new generations of Emiratis live in a culture of conspicuous consumption. The country boasts a rapid pace of transformation from a desert to a top-class nation of superlatives due to its unparalleled entrepreneurial spirit: it houses today the world's tallest building, the largest man-made island, the biggest shopping mall, and the only seven-star hotel in the world. The profusion of consumer products and the desire to acquire them has led to a sort of commodity fetishism whereby things are no longer valued for what they represent but for the symbolic power they invest their owner with. As Georg Lukács explains, the inclusion of the capital in the social life engenders an objectification of social relations which often obscures the relations between the subject and the object.[7] This is also in line with Guy Debord's vision of modern society as a society of the spectacle, based on a monopoly of appearances, as commodification dominates the entire human experience.[8] In such a view, social relations describe an existence in which "having" resonates with "being," ultimately giving way to a new relation with material objects.

This vested interest in objects as commodities has been accompanied in the region by a growing interest in collecting culturally significant objects both in museums and private collections. In *Collecting in a Consumer Society,* Russell W. Belk states that "collecting things and displaying things should flourish among individuals and museums

Noëmi Daucé (Beirut: Louvre Abu Dhabi/Art Book Magazine Éditions, 2019), 15.

3 Ibid., 17.

4 Jacques Berque, *The Arabs: Their History and Future*, trans. Jean Stewart (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), qtd. in Noujaim, "From Past to Future," 21.

5 Geneviève Zubrzycki, "Introduction. Matter and Meaning: A Cultural Sociology of Nationalism," in *National Matters: Materiality, Culture, and Nationalism*, ed. Geneviève Zubrzycki (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 5.

6 "Our History," Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, accessed April 5, 2019, https://www.adnoc.ae/en/about-us/our-history.

7 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 92.

8 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 36.

in a consumer culture."[9] Indeed, as Karen Exell posits, the more exposed the region is to the outside world, the more private collections have proliferated due to the need to safeguard traditions through a preservation of their material expressions.[10] Discussing the recent collecting practices in the U.A.E., Emily Doherty interrogates, however, whether the younger Emiratis, who are not formally educated in the arts, could appreciate art objects when they compete with commodities such as "Gucci handbags, Porsches, Apple IPods," and whether they could be motivated to invest in art galleries rather than malls.[11] She suggests that "the joy of ownership," that is, the delight brought by material possessions, might be the answer.[12] This indicates the displacement of an object from its use value to its symbolic value, as it is transformed from an object that is consumed to an object that is collected. For Walter Benjamin, a collected object is "divested of its function and relocated from its commodity scene" to be re-appropriated in a more intimate, subjective realm by the collector.[13] In other words, collecting objects can be a way for individuals to relate "to their society and its past in order to construct their own personalities."[14]

Among the many events in the region, *Lest We Forget* exhibitions in the U.A.E. have had a special place as they showcased for the first time personal objects belonging to local Emiratis. The first exhibition, *Lest We Forget: Structures of Memory* (2014), focused on the history of architectural and urban developments of the seven Emirates. The second edition of the exhibition, *Lest We Forget: Emirati Family Photographs 1950–1999* (2015), displayed private family photographs provided by Emiratis, while the third edition, *Lest We Forget: Emirati Adornment: Tangible & Intangible* (2017), presented items of clothing, jewelry, and weapons, as well as perfume and cosmetics—all contributed by the public. For Michele Bambling, the creative director of the exhibition, the purpose of this initiative was "to really develop a history of vernacular Emirati memory, not just of Emiratis, but of people who have lived and contributed to the Emirates."[15] The privately-owned everyday objects displayed in the exhibition are part of the tangible and intangible heritage of the nation. As opposed to the structured museums owned by the government, these exhibitions focus on aspects of individuals' private lives, displaying objects that were once integral parts of their daily routines. As such, these objects represent a more personal way of recording the past as they lie at the center of the local people's spiritual world, highlighting how a people's identity and culture is embedded within objects of everyday life.

Material objects have also come to represent and preserve the past in their capacity of bearers of a people's cultural identity over time. Besides this burgeoning interest in collecting in the region, Pamela Erskine-Loftus calls attention to the "heritage revivalism" apparent in the many heritage museums that display ethnographic objects in restored buildings of local architecture.[16] A tendency

9 Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London: Routledge, 1995), 139.

10 Karen Exell, "Introduction: Questions of Globalization, Modernity and the Museum in the Arabian Peninsula," in *Modernity and the Museum in the Arabian Peninsula*, ed. Karen Exell (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 12.

11 Emily Doherty, "The Ecstasy of Property: Collecting in the United Arab Emirates," in *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World,* ed. Sonja Mejcher-Atassi and John Pedro Schwartz (Farnham: Routledge, 2012), 193.

12 Ibid.

13 Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Press, 1969), 60.

14 Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), 159.

15 Qtd. in Nick Leech, "New Lest We Forget Exhibit Tells U.A.E.'s History with Tales and Heirlooms," *The National*, February 2, 2017, https://www.thenational.ae/uae/new-lest-we-forget-exhibit-tells-uae-s-history-with-tales-and-heirlooms-1.47002?videoId=5598744747001.

16 Pamela Erskine-Loftus, "Introduction: Common Purpose and Uncommon Outcomes: The Cultural

toward building national heritage museums rather than world heritage museums coincides with an increasing political and national awareness of the need to assert the new state's distinctive identity.[17] In the U.A.E., state authorities have invested heavily in museums such as the Al Ain National Museum, the National Museum of Ras al Khaimah, and the Zayed National Museum in Abu Dhabi (currently in progress), as well as in heritage villages, such as the ones in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Fujairah, and Ras al Khaimah. The Zayed National Museum, in particular, is an ambitious project designed by the starchitect Norman Foster in the form of a falcon's feathers, the falcon being an iconic symbol of the U.A.E. It aims at bringing together "contemporary form with elements of traditional Arabic design and hospitality to create a museum that is sustainable, welcoming and culturally of its place."[18] As Geneviève Zubrzycki points out, the built environment and the landscape are as important as the material artifacts in a museum in creating "historical narratives and national myths" as they render "otherwise distant and abstract discourses close" to the social actors who inhabit or witness them.[19] Such museums, as well as important annual heritage festivals, such as Qasr Al Hosn Festival and Sheikh Zayed Heritage Festival, aim at preserving the local values of the pre-oil past and serve to counterbalance the impact of globalization on the country. The objects displayed are both symbols of a collective history and of nation-building, as "tribal affiliation and solidarity is slowly being replaced by national solidarity."[20] This "national sensorium," as Zubrzycki describes it, helps generate "sentiments of national belonging and resonant emotional attachments to what is otherwise merely a distant imagined community."[21]

As Erskine-Loftus indicates, the Gulf states are currently experiencing the most explosive *per capita* museum building boom in history.[22] Besides the recent development of several important museums in the region,[23] Abu Dhabi, the capital city and the wealthiest state of the U.A.E., has built a museum district dedicated to arts and culture in Saadiyat Island (The Isle of Happiness) that hosts important international museums, such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. In museums, however, history is represented as a transmission of the "spoils" of ages to the present, divorced from the environment in which these artifacts were produced. The museum is a space symbolizing modernity and reflects the Western culture of the nineteenth century, with its organizing impulse to accumulate time in an immobile space.[24] Therefore, the regional proliferation of international museums based on Western models might seem, at first blush, controversial since the museum is a truly Western invention. The Abu Dhabi versions of the Louvre and Guggenheim, however, are not attempts at duplicating the Western museums; instead, as explained by the French Culture Minister Gilles de Robien, they are "part of a wish to find a dialogue between East and West."[25]

Transferability of Museums," in *Reimagining Museums: Practice in the Arabian Peninsula*, ed. Pamela Erskine-Loftus (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc., 2014), 20.

17 Pamela Erskine-Loftus, "Introduction: Ultra-Modern Traditional Collecting," in *Museums and the Material World: Collecting the Arabian Peninsula*, ed. Pamela Erskine-Loftus (Edinburgh and Boston: Museums Etc., 2014), 42–43.

18 Exell, "Introduction: Questions of Globalization," 15.

19 Zubrzycki, "Introduction. Matter and Meaning," 5.

20 Erskine-Loftus, "Introduction: Ultra-Modern Traditional Collecting," 38.

21 Zubrzycki, "Introduction. Matter and Meaning," 5.

22 Erskine-Loftus, *Museums and the Material World,* back cover.

23 The increasing interest in the acquisition and display of local artifacts is evidenced by the recent development of several important museums in the region, such as the Museum of the Islamic Art and the National Museum of Qatar, Mathaf: The Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, King Abdul Aziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia and The National Museum of the Sultanate of Oman.

24 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 26.

25 Qtd. in Sarina Wakefield, "Heritage, Cosmopolitanism and Identity in Abu Dhabi," in *Cultural Heritage in the*

The Louvre Abu Dhabi's claim of universality and cross-cultural dialogue is also evident in the statement posted on the museum website, which mentions a focus "on what unites us: the stories of human creativity that transcend individual cultures and civilizations, times or places."[26] One reason underlying such an investment is, perhaps, to place Abu Dhabi on the cultural and touristic world map as a cosmopolitan center in order to attract tourism revenues and diversify its oil-dependent economy. Another reason could be the emirate's aspiration to educate its young generation in the value of understanding other cultures and developing a global mindset. The main reason, however, is probably maintaining cultural legitimacy through cultural capital. Sarina Wakefield argues that, with these franchise museums, Abu Dhabi will "place itself on the map of globally significant cities by promoting itself as a cosmopolitan center within the Arabian Gulf."[27] For Exell, these museums signify "an attempt at shifting global cultural centers, not just within the Arab world but in relation to the West, and demonstrating a fluent understanding of Western cultural values."[28] Providing an interesting slant to this local vs. global dichotomy, the franchise museums in Abu Dhabi help the country assert its global influence, as well as laying the foundation for a dynamic cultural life in the region.

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Just like a museum, this volume brings together different objects which have historically and imaginatively represented Arabia. While the countries of the Arabian Peninsula have started to assert their own cultural identities after the emergence of the modern nation states, we can still recuperate an "Arabian" identity that is the product of common experiences, traditions, fictions, and material culture. In her chapter, Victoria Penziner Hightower considers the pearl as an iconic signifier of Arabia and its most important object of regional and global trade in the past. Other important historical symbols associated to an Arabian identity, the frankincense and the date palm, are studied by William Gerard Zimmerle and Eran Segal in their respective chapters in light of their economic, symbolic, and political power in the life of the peoples of the peninsula. On the other hand, Yannis Hadjinicolaou demonstrates how objects can act as substitutes for ideas, examining the visual renderings of the falcon as a symbol of political strength and sovereignty in the Gulf countries.

Other objects—used, traded, or displayed—are embedded in personal stories, as well as in social and cultural practices in the region. Joseph Donica examines *keffiyeh*, the traditional head covering worn by Arab men, as an important cultural symbol and identifier of Arabness. Rana Al-Ogayyal and Ceyda Oskay discuss how *al Sadu*, a type of traditional nomadic weaving popular in the Arabian Peninsula, evokes the idea of portable home and contains symbols that act as identity markers for the Bedouin tribes. Similarly, Marie-Claire Bakker and Kara McKeown explore the importance of ornaments and jewelry for *Khalīji* women and their role in creating a sense of personal and communal identity. The power of objects to evoke the past and preserve it in the memory of local people is examined by two other contributors: James Redman, who interrogates the value of *kirsh kitab,* protective medallions inscribed with Qur'ānic texts, as mnemonic objects, and Chrysavgi Papagianni, who explores the impact of oil on local processes of identity formation and preservation through the medium of film.

Finally, equally important in constructing a distinct "Arabian" identity throughout the ages, the things of the imagination, that is, things that conjure up Arabia in the Western imaginary through fictional narratives, are given due attention for their essential role in processes of identity

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Arabian Peninsula: Debates, Discourses and Practices, ed. Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 108.

26 "Our Story," Louvre Abu Dhabi, accessed April 10, 2019, https://www.louvreabudhabi.ae/.

27 Wakefield, "Heritage, Cosmopolitanism and Identity in Abu Dhabi," 100.

28 Exell, "Introduction: Questions of Globalization," 2.

formation and self-definition in the region. The chapters by Ileana Baird, Jennie MacDonald, and Holly Edwards look at how things representing "Arabia" in Orientalist literature, travel narratives, paintings, theater, and film have led to stereotypes and myths pervasive in our culture to this day, which have solidified Arabia's exoticism.

By placing the things of imagination side by side with the real things of Arabia, this volume acts as a museum of the mind: the objects it displays aim to illustrate, complicate, and dispel stereotypes about the region and reveal how the material culture of the area has been embedded in the construction of a local and global Arabian identity over time. This interplay of national, regional, and global identities blurs the subject-object binary, calling attention to their mutually informing relationship. As we have tried to suggest in this volume, the objects studied here are not only silent partners in Arab people's lives but also active participants in the histories of the communities, nations, and cultures of the region at large.

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