

## Egyptologist finds name of early king in desert

Monarch dates back to 3000 BC

CAIRO: An Egyptologist said Tuesday she had found the first evidence that the earliest rulers of Egypt had influence deep into the Western Desert, over 200 kilometers from their power-base in the Nile Valley.

Salima Ikram of the American University in Cairo said her team had discovered a royal name dating from before 3,000 BC inscribed on a rock outcrop near the oasis of Kharga.

She said she read the name of the previously unknown king as Aa and thought he lived about the time of the dynasty now known as Dynasty Zero because they ruled in the south before Egypt was united under the 1st Dynasty.

"We don't have other attestations for any early royal names in that area. The earliest previously was from the 4th Dynasty (about 500 years later)," Ikram said.

German Egyptologist Guenter Dreyer, one of the world's leading experts on the period, said the inscription would indicate some early activ-

ity in the Western Desert. "That is somewhat surprising," he said.

Egypt's Supreme Council for Antiquities said in a statement that the presence of the royal name far out in the desert could indicate early trade with Africa or the exploitation of raw materials in the desert at an early date.

The king's name follows the standard pattern for the period - a falcon on top of a picture of a niched palace facade and one hieroglyph indicating his name, in this case a forearm.

Ikram said the name did not appear in any of the existing lists of kings which Egyptologists have compiled for the period.

Egyptologists have been piecing together the political history of Dynasty Zero only for the past few decades and do not claim to have identified all the rulers of the period.

Their work has shed new light on Egypt's political history, which traditionally began when the first king of the 1st Dynasty united the north and the south. - Reuters

## Iraqi intellectuals breathe more easily but fear rise of Islamism

Artists, writers hope new-found freedom won't be curtailed

Assaad Abboud  
Agence France Presse

BAGHDAD: Iraqi intellectuals are basking in new-found freedom almost a year after the dictator Saddam Hussein was ousted, but some are concerned that a rise of Islamists may quickly curtail that liberty.

Artists, writers and journalists say they are breathing more easily than ever before after 30 years of censorship and pressure, despite the enormous security problems that still plague Iraq.

"The veil over us has been lifted and we can express ourselves and write in complete freedom," said Rabah Nuri, 48, a poet who grew up during the reign of perhaps Iraq's harshest ruler.

"It is too early to say what orientation the country will take but we can already feel the weight of Islamization and confessionalism upon us," said Nuri, sipping tea in a Rachid Avenue cafe frequented by Baghdad's elite.

Like many of his peers, this poet does not hide his apprehension at the rise in power of the Shiite majority, long repressed under the former regime, and fears that it in turn may soon be responsible for oppression of its own.

Nevertheless, "a new literature will emerge" said the poet, who has lived in a country that has produced some of Arab literature's greatest names.

In the middle of last century,

Badr Shaker al-Sayyab revolutionized Arab poetry with a freedom of tone and style that was unprecedented.

On his heels, Iraqi Palestinian writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra modernized the novel, a literary form still handled with difficulty by many Arab writers.

Under the reign of the onetime Baath Party, and in particular under Saddam Hussein, Iraqi culture was largely instrumentalized. The Culture Ministry was an essential part of the propaganda machine.

The theme was clear: one in-

**'The cages that imprisoned birds in all my previous works are gone'**

fallible leader (Saddam Hussein), one great country (Iraq) and one eternal nation (Arab). Dissidents were hunted, thrown into jails and exiled when they weren't physically eliminated. Their loved ones and supporters were banished or harassed.

"I for one know what that's like," said Fethi Zine al-Abidin, a man of the theater who said that he had 26 of his works looked over with a finetoothed comb and "rectified" by the regime's censors.

The issue that is now facing Iraq's intellectual and artistic community is what to do with

all of their new-found freedom.

"I have no idea yet," said Zine al-Abidin, somewhat at a loss since the disappearance of the "patriarch" that Saddam Hussein became for him and nearly 30 million other Iraqis.

Apart from the appearance of a flurry of newspapers, some of which feed a readership hungry for information or nostalgic for the old regime with false scoops, no real new intellectual works have surfaced.

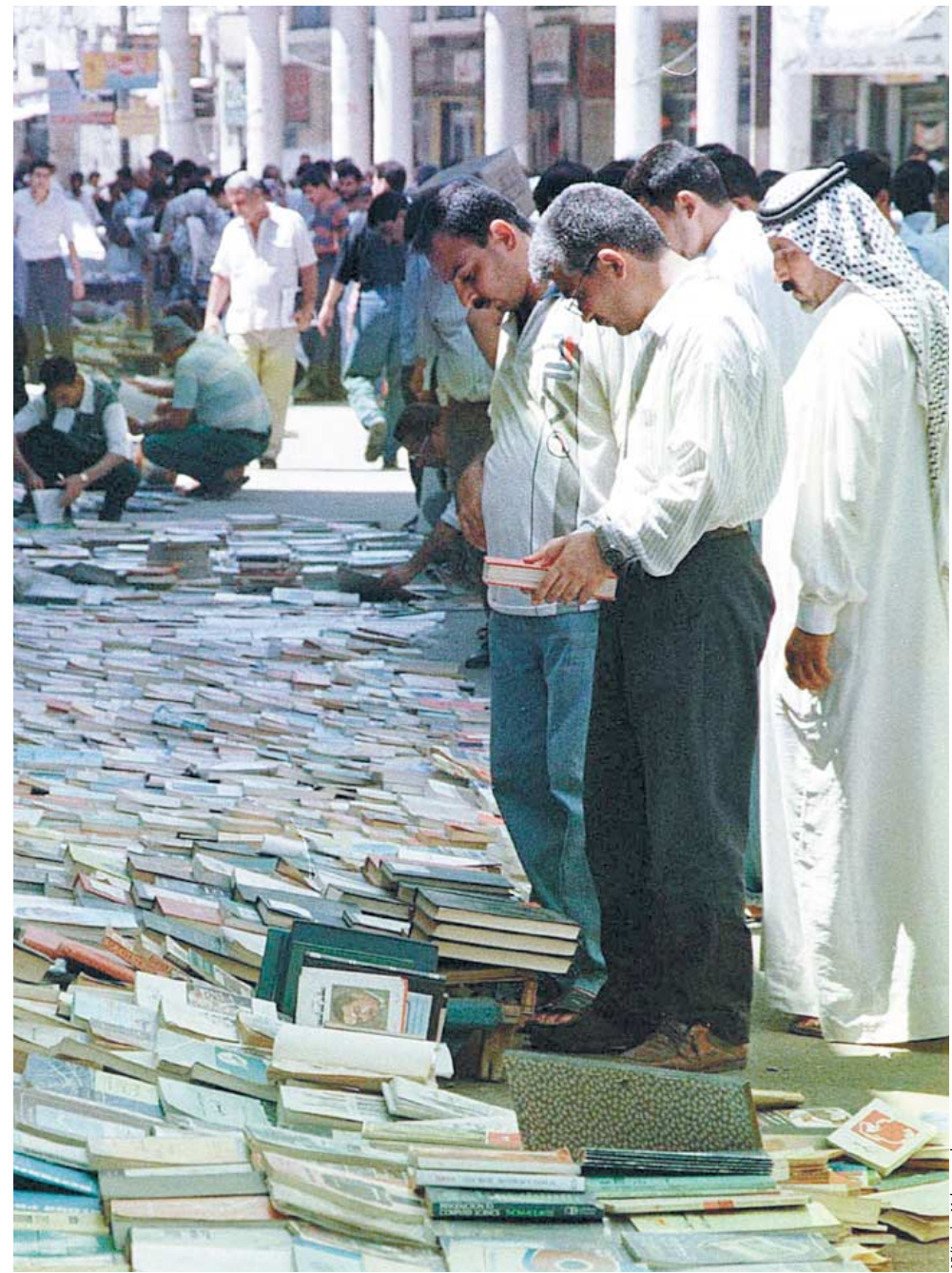
Playwrights, novelists and poets seem to be going through a period of gestation even though some, in particular painters, have begun to renew themselves and their work.

"The cages that imprisoned birds in all my previous works are gone," said Jaafar Mohammad Khodar, 45, a painter, talking about a recurrent theme in his art.

"But the new freedom is still not really palpable to me," he said, highlighting the sense of waiting in expectation that currently characterizes Iraq's artistic community.

Even now, though, some nostalgic voices can still be heard claiming the regime was not as bad as it is made out to be.

"Iraqi culture now is too self-satisfied under the occupation and the freedom people speak of is only superficial," said Majed al-Samarrai, former editor of the Aklam literary magazine, which disappeared with the regime.



Browsers look at used volumes laid along the sidewalk at the weekly book market in Baghdad

### WEB WATCH

#### Jawaahir Dance Company:

The Jawaahir Dance Company's website contains informative articles on Middle Eastern dance and music. It also offers links to other Middle Eastern music and belly-dancing sites.

[www.jawaahir.org](http://www.jawaahir.org)

## Tunisian producer to bring Gibson's Passion to France

PARIS: French film buffs worried that anti-Semitism charges could bar them from seeing Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* will get to see the movie thanks to a Tunisian Muslim producer ready to distribute it.

This movie-mad country was rife with rumors last week that distributors would boycott the film because it could spark anti-Semitic violence.

The daily Le Figaro reported on Tuesday that *The Passion* would open in France on April 4, two days after it hits cinemas in Spain and shortly before it reaches Italy and Germany.

Tarak ben Ammar, a major film broker with business ties to media tycoon Rupert Murdoch and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, told interviewers the film stressed forgiveness and blamed the Romans rather than the Jews for Christ's death.

"I thought it was my duty as a Muslim who believes in Jesus, who respects and was brought up in the three (monotheist) religions, to have this film shown to the French and let them judge it for themselves," he told TF1 television late on Monday.

"When I saw the film two weeks ago, I was deeply touched

because it shows what Christ really went through in his final hours," he told Le Figaro in remarks published Tuesday.

"It's a powerful film and not at all anti-Semitic, as viewers who go to watch it will see," he said, explaining that the criticism that preceded the film's US premiere last week was based on an early script, not its final version.

Ben Ammar told TF1 he had discussed producing the film in his native Tunisia with Gibson three years ago, but the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States stymied that project and the film was made in Italy.

"It is a film against fundamentalism," he said. Defending the graphic violence Gibson portrays, he added: "He wanted to show the barbarity of the Romans, because it was the Romans who killed Christ."

Ben Ammar, who produced Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* and Roberto Rossellini's *The Messiah* in the 1970s, has also been involved in the production of the *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* series.

Born in Tunisia, he studied at Georgetown, a leading US Catholic university, and now lives in Paris. - Reuters

### PROFILE

## Writer puts focus on Iraq's many women authors

Inaam Kachachi's book is compilation of 20 years of female voices

Olivia Snajje  
Special to The Daily Star

PARIS: "Iraq was like an overripe fruit, rotting and ready to fall off the tree."

Inaam Kachachi perches on a sofa in her high-rise apartment in Paris overlooking the elevated metro, the dome of the Pantheon and the top of the Eiffel Tower.

The Iraqi journalist and writer has lived in Paris for 25 years but she feels she lives in Iraq in spirit, following events closely and acting of late as a bridge between her country and the West to show what life is like for the ordinary civilian in Iraq.

Her recent book, *Paroles d'Irakiennes: Le Drame Irakien écrit par des Femmes* (Iraqis Speak: The Iraqi Drama in Women's Writing) is a compilation of Iraqi women's writing spanning the last 20 years. Translated from Arabic into French and published in France shortly before the US invasion of Iraq, the book has also been translated into Italian and Greek, generating much attention in Europe.

It may soon appear in English; an American publisher is interested in an enlarged version of the book containing more texts.

"Maybe it's because I live far away from my country that it's important for me to examine the history of modern Iraq," says Kachachi. Her plant-filled apartment is crammed with ceramic and porcelain bibelots of birds all shapes and sizes. Kachachi explains that she used to collect them but things got out of hand when friends began to give her additional birds as gifts. Sometimes, she sighs, she wishes they would all fly out the window.

The dry, chronological accounts of Iraq's recent history - coup d'etats, revolutions, and wars - saddened her.

"As a journalist I wanted to show the other side of Iraq, a society rich in culture and art, a place where the soul of resistance to war is alive, where the love of civilization is passed on," she says, adding that she chose texts by women because the subjects they treat and their use of vocabulary is drastically different from men's.

"Men talk about their time as soldiers. They use military vocabulary - regiment, machine gun, cadaver, battle. Women talk about immigration, loneliness, fear, anguish, death. They talk about their dreams in a tomorrow much better than the present. Men's writings are about the reality of war, while women's writings are about daily life, an interior life common to every human being."

Kachachi was born in Baghdad in 1952. Her family was originally from the northern city of Mosul and her father, the



Kachachi: examining history

eldest son, moved to Baghdad to study law.

"At the time it was unthinkable to let my father go alone. So the whole family - brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, grandmothers - all moved to Baghdad with him," Kachachi says. "You can imagine how terrible it was for him to let me go to Paris to study for four years."

Kachachi had already graduated from university in Baghdad with a journalism degree. She had worked for a newspaper for seven years when she decided to study abroad.

"I really liked being a journalist, and diplomats didn't mean much to me, but I wanted to experience new horizons."

The political climate in Iraq was heavy; Saddam Hussein was just coming to power and media self-censorship was strong.

"Official censorship was easy. We knew what they wanted and what to avoid. But the internal censorship was very hard, day after day, year after year; you had to weigh each word, and eventually it felt like you had handcuffs on."

Kachachi settled in Paris with her husband and young son. She worked for a variety of Lebanese newspapers based in Paris during the civil war (she is now the cultural correspondent for the London-based *Asharq al-Awsat*) while getting her doctorate in journalism at the Sorbonne. She and her family remained in Paris when the Iran-Iraq war broke out, afraid if they returned that her husband would be drafted.

"Then there was the (1991) Gulf War and my son could have been drafted. So we stayed on," she says.

From Paris, Kachachi kept up with Iraqi literature, often published in dire conditions and distributed by friends. The idea for a book came from reading women's writings.

"These texts were their answer to war, their refusal. It is a literature of resistance, a way to hang on to life," she says.

As in Lebanon, the wars in

Iraq brought women into the mainstream world of men as they took on a double workload filling positions that men had vacated as well as taking care of their children. Writing in itself, says Kachachi in the introduction, is difficult enough. But a total lack of basic necessities left writers without paper or pencils. She describes writers using their children's old schoolbooks, or paper bags. But "when you're able to write about suffering, it is easier to get up in the morning, get dressed, put on some lipstick and go out to work."

There are many parallels between women's war literature in Lebanon and the texts in Kachachi's anthology. Miriam Cooke, in her 1987 landmark study on women writers during the Lebanese Civil War, War's other voices: Women writers on the Lebanese civil war, writes: "Only feminine literature documents details that seem too trivial and personal to note. Yet these same details suggest transformations of feeling that finally weave, for each individual, the fabric of war experience."

Women write of waiting for men to return, as in Maysaloun Hadi's short story, which begins: "Is that why in kitchens the sink is always under the window? So that while the woman's hands, lost in a swirl of dishes, can watch for someone's arrival,

### 'Feminine literature documents details that seem too trivial and personal to note'

with impatience or dread?"

In *The Return of the Captive*, Buthaina al-Nassiri describes a POW's homecoming. He is taken away by how well his wife has managed without him for 10 years. His youngest child tells him that he preferred to imagine his father as a martyr.

An extract from Hayat Sharara's novel *When Days become Dusk* describes corruption and humiliation in a university professor's life. A university professor herself, Sharara tragically took her own life. Her novel was published posthumously in Beirut in 2000.

Always intent on researching and bringing to light contemporary Iraqi history, Kachachi was recently in Germany where she recorded on film the history of an exceptional woman's life. Nazha al-Dulaimi was the first Arab woman to become a minister in Iraq 1959. The only Communist Party member in the government after the monarchy's overthrow, she tried, unsuccessfully, to pass a law stipulating equal inheritance for boys and girls. Her attempted reform cost Duleimi

This article is part of a series of profiles of Arab women, which The Daily Star is publishing throughout the week, leading up to International Women's Day on March 8.



her job, and she was exiled.

Kachachi wants to ensure that Duleimi, now in her 80s, leaves a record of her history before she dies.

Another of Kachachi's current projects is a study of five Jewish Iraqi writers who left the country in the 1950s. Prior to the exodus of Iraqi Jews in the 1940s and 50s, the Jewish community in Baghdad, with a 2,500-year heritage, flourished. (The country's first post-independence finance minister was Jewish.) What intrigues Kachachi is that, 50 years later, these writers, now living in Canada, Britain, France and Israel, still recount Baghdad in their novels.

"What is the strength of this city that continues to be present in their work?" she asks. "Talking about Iraqi Jews is a taboo, but it's part of history. Theirs are destinies that were broken off and diverted."

Sami Michael, whose best-selling novel, *Victoria* - a family saga in Baghdad - is an author on whom Kachachi is focusing.

"His is one of the strongest and most emotional novels in Iraqi literature. Even if it's written in Hebrew, I consider it to be an Iraqi novel," she says.

Kachachi exudes passion and tenderness when she speaks about Iraq.

"Since Gilgamesh, since Scheherazade, this ancient civilization has kept a flame burning that refuses to be blown out. I love putting my hands around this flame with millions of other Iraqi women to keep it alight."

She can see herself returning to Iraq one day to open a research center, which would document and rediscover the country's modern history.

"People have been frightened of talking for years. They would rather be forgotten than create problems. But these people have stories to tell."

### Q & A 2.6

## Wealthy Families Need A Global Trusted Advisor



Deepak Sharma  
President  
Asia Pacific and Middle East Private Banking

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