

# Making Light



**Lambeth Palace**

27 September 2017



Making Light was born from John's kidnap and disappearance in Syria in November 2012. It has been a long and difficult wait and one I am at a loss to know how to describe. To have the life of someone you love very much, used as a pawn in a chess game, is both a terrible power to use and a terrible thing to know. It is something that almost all Syrians have experienced.

Making Light is conceived of as a safe place for a tiny number of Syria's stories. We hope it can give opportunities to understand the country through new eyes. If, by nurturing the detail of a few precious lives, we can help foster a sense of Syria past and present, lessen the sense of 'otherness' and see some of the threads that connect us, then Making Light will have succeeded.

'It is painful to recall a past intensity, to estimate your distance from the Belsen heap, to make your peace with numbers. Just to get up each morning is to make a kind of peace'

Leonard Cohen

We are grateful to Cara, Factum Foundation and Atassi Foundation, each run with a profound belief in the importance of knowledge and culture, for working with us.

I am indebted to many wonderful people for helping me put one foot in front of the other to enable Making Light come about.

My greatest thanks must go to the patrons and the trustees, who have shown great faith and trust in me.

JESSICA POCOCK  
FOUNDER, MAKING LIGHT

I am delighted to become patron of Making Light because I believe that God is not simply a word for what is already happening; God is hope and light, possibility and transformation. This is inspired through God-given gifts of creativity and beauty, expressions of lament and anticipation. The practice of this imagination enables us to sense that God is with us, in the midst of life, in all its sorrow and joy. Making Light is reminding us all that amongst war, amongst trauma, the human spirit continues to express itself in creativity and community; making light in darkness.

JUSTIN WELBY  
THE MOST REVD AND RT HON THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY  
PATRON OF MAKING LIGHT  
SEPTEMBER 2017

It is often said that, only in the darkness, can you truly see the light. Making Light is about finding where hope and humanity still shine in the black abyss so many Syrians now find themselves in: moments of extraordinary courage and resilience; mementos of a devastating war of our time. It's about shining our own light on a conflict which concerns us all.

LYSE DOUCET  
CHIEF INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT FOR THE BBC  
PATRON OF MAKING LIGHT

## Making Light

You sometimes come across a rather lovely little seventeenth century scientific instrument, or curiosity, called a scioptic ball. It is a movable lens, set into the wood of a window-frame, that allowed its user to capture the light of the sun and direct it into a darkened room to form a clear projected image. That's rather how I see Making Light. We know so little about Syria, and we are so puzzled by the vastness of the human tragedy unfolding, that we often fail to see, or feel, or understand what is happening there. That's human nature — baffled by the sheer superfluity of often random information, the hard-to-understand maelstrom of hundreds of thousands of individual lives and collective disasters, we can't focus easily. We need a scioptic ball to catch the blaze of blinding light and distil it into something small enough, sharply enough focused, to be comprehensible. We need, above all, people in small numbers, often one at a time, who we can begin to understand as human beings. This is why Making Light focuses on the stories of individual Syrian refugees, and the portrayed faces of Syrians. It is why the symbol of the project is a single 'Syrian' king of three-and-a-half thousand years ago, who was driven into exile, but returned to rule in Syria. These individual stories — the tales of exile of Syrian academics or ancient kings, told into a microphone or carved in cuneiform — are individually comprehensible and at the same time universal. So are the faces of people who lived and breathed, or live and breathe, portrayed on wood, or canvas. Making Light has the role of catching and distilling the confusions of blindingly bright sunlight through a little lens set in a window-frame, and showing to the people in the darkened room a human microcosm of the heroism, pain and artistry that illuminate the whole.

MARTIN ROSE  
TRUSTEE, MAKING LIGHT  
SEPTEMBER 2017

## **The military hotel and the prison**

Over the last five years, I found myself moving between two quite different places in Syria. The only connection between them is that they represent the real centres of power. The contrast and interrelation between them throw light on the use of symbols to construct a mythology and to command obedience.

A few months before the revolution broke out, I had the opportunity, for the first time, to spend a night in a hotel owned by the army. Such hotels and clubs are spread across Syria, offering leisure services for army officers and their families. The experience of staying in the empty, opulent hotel resembled that of Jack Nicholson's character in the film 'The Shining', where fear mixes with astonishment and culminates in madness.

The interior of the hotel looks like a military unit. Too many tasteless portraits fill the corridors and facilities. These pictures depict, in various combinations, the current leader, his father, his martyred brother, his brother the colonel and his smiling wife and children.

Hotel management prevents guests from wearing swimming costumes in the hallways on their way to the pool. Perhaps this rule is an attempt to preserve the modesty of the president and to respect the stature of his leadership. In the restaurant, waiters move between tables in military uniforms like a raiding unit or patrol guarding more than simply hotel services.

What is unbearable is the presence of the photo of the Eternal Leader above the bed in all the rooms. It is not even possible to dream without the regime's surveillance. This exceptional place is not the Ministry of Love in George Orwell's *Nineteen*

*Eighty-Four.* It is pure Syrian reality, which explains the nature of rule in my country.

The second place I was dragged to against my will, shortly after the beginning of the revolution, in March 2011, was the detention centre of the Air Force Security Services in Damascus. There all the authorities' touristic features, which are on ample display in the army hotels and in other government establishments, disappear. What remains is an inhumane world filled with constant humiliation and pain as its only language.

In this place, power reaches its zenith. Here there are no Presidential photographs to be found, except in the office belonging to the head of branch security. All the furniture and the room fittings focus on the chair beneath that image of the President. Everywhere else — the walls, corridors, interrogation rooms and cells — is free from such pictures, because the detainees do not deserve the 'angelic look' that emanates from the photograph and the President's blue eyes.

There is no need for pictures in prison. Everything attests to the State's absolute dominance; this stark, undeniable reality no longer requires symbols behind which to hide. On the outside, the ubiquitous photograph is there to make you think of one place, always: prison.

ZAHER OMAREEN

FROM SYRIA SPEAKS: ART AND CULTURE FROM THE FRONTLINE

## Musée des beaux arts

About suffering they were never wrong,  
The old Masters: how well they understood  
Its human position: how it takes place  
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully  
along;  
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting  
For the miraculous birth, there always must be  
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating  
On a pond at the edge of the wood:  
They never forgot  
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course  
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot  
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse  
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away  
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may  
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone  
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green  
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen  
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,  
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

WH AUDEN

Right now in Aleppo, the everyday question is how not to die [...]

When a place gets wrecked it does not become ruined alone, it ruins its people also [...]

It's a sad, soulless city at the moment, and its people have lost all of their dreams. One of the major crimes of the Arab regimes is robbing and destroying this deep memory. You know the city I told about in my dreams is another city, a city that does not exist, but it's defending itself and its memory.

KHALED KHALIFA  
*FINANCIAL TIMES*, AUGUST 2014

## **Factum Foundation and Idrimi**

The primary objective of the Factum Foundation is to ensure that future generations can inherit the past in a condition in which it can be studied in depth and emotionally engaged with. We endeavour to create a living archive, an ever-growing collection of some of the wonders that we have inherited so that future generations will have a resource of raw, clean and un-manipulated data to work with.

When Making Light contacted Factum Foundation to propose the recording of the statue of Idrimi at the British Museum as the starting point for an exhibition about Syria, migration and shared and intertwining histories, we had no hesitation in accepting the request: like so many, I have felt profoundly uncomfortable about the narratives of the war and ashamed about our response to those millions of human beings forced to seek sanctuary in Europe. Ideas and people have always moved from one place to another and for many reasons — it is how human knowledge and cultures have evolved. Academics still head from Europe to America for the promise of more time and money, while people from Syria and Iraq flee for life and peace. One form of migration is accepted while the other leads to persecution. Aleppo, Idrimi's home, has a history that curls back through time, the city a focal point for the movement of ideas, people, religions and culture flowing over millenia from east to west.

At the same time as the idea came from Jessica, Factum Foundation was also in discussion with Syrian Archaeologist Cheikhmous Ali (APSA2011) about training, equipping and supporting people on the ground in Syria to record cultural artifacts in 3D, from the scale of complete buildings to the smallest detail on the surface of an object like the statue of Idrimi.

Taken together this seemed an ideal opportunity to demonstrate what is possible with high-resolution photogrammetry.

Factum Foundation was established in Madrid in 2009 to demonstrate the importance of documenting, monitoring, studying, recreating and disseminating the world's cultural heritage through the rigorous development and application of high-resolution recording and re-materialization techniques. Iconoclastic destruction, mass tourism, war, natural disasters, imperfect restoration and commercial exploitation all pose serious threat to the preservation of many great works of art and culture. The conservation and preservation communities have realized the

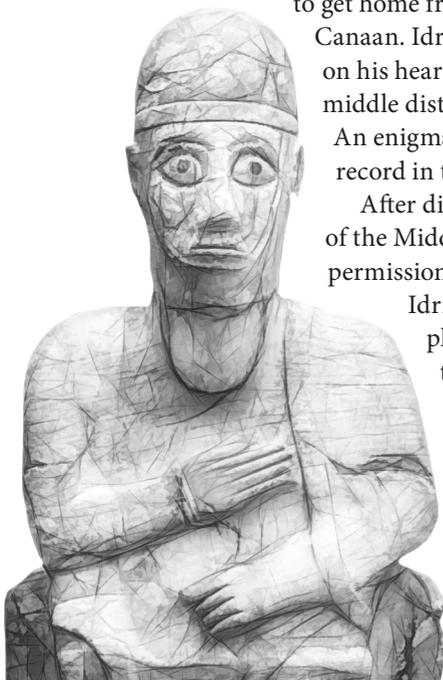
importance of high-resolution digital recording and this data is starting to be integrated into professional protocols and the discourse surrounding preservation. Central to this shift of attitude is a fundamental reappraisal of the cardinal role facsimiles can acquire when installed in their original location, or even when displaced and presented afresh in touring exhibitions. Facsimiles evidence the quality of the data retrievable through high-resolution recording. They are useful tools both to monitor the changes the original objects undergo throughout its existence and to raise awareness amongst the growing number of visitors that the preservation of the past is a delicate and difficult act. It is necessary to investigate an object's historical and physical composition in order to develop better ways to protect it.

The Foundation promotes access to the public while developing new methods of display that lead to a deeper and more intimate understanding of our relationship to the materiality of things and the dynamic nature of their 'originality'. The Foundation is committed to a policy of open access for study and conservation purposes while helping the custodians of our heritage generate revenues to preserve and protect the works in their care.

The statue of Idrimi is perhaps the first auto-biography. The life of this extraordinary man is literally written on his chest in tiny cuneiform letters.

He was fortunate to have been discovered in 1939 by Leonard Woolley in the remains of Tell Atchana, in modern Turkey about 80 km from his hometown of Aleppo. He formed an army of other refugees determined to get home from their temporary exile in the land of Canaan. Idrimi sits on his basalt throne with his hand on his heart carved in magnesite looking out into the middle distance through what is left of his glass eyes. An enigmatic figure to study and a real challenge to record in three dimensions.

After discussions with the British Museum's Keeper of the Middle East Jonathan Tubb, it was agreed that permission would be granted to remove the fragile Idrimi from his glass enclosure. He was placed in the middle of Gallery 57 and for two days in late January we recorded him: first with a Breuckmann Smartscan 3D white light scanning system, then using composite photography with a Canon



EOS5D, a variety of lenses, a tripod and two LED lights. This photographic data was converted into a 3D model using Capturing Reality software — a beautifully elegant set of algorithms that are changing the field of photogrammetry. The results of each technique are directly comparable. Except for one small area where there was a high level of reflection, the photogrammetry was better.

As we scanned the statue of Idrimi in the British Museum we were surrounded by groups of excited children, visitors and academics. Idrimi and his story of flight and exile entirely contemporary 3,500 years later. The ancient Egyptians believe we had two souls, a Ba and a Ka. The Ka contained the personal vitality and stayed with the remains of its owner. The Ba was winged and could leave the body, travelling freely between the world of the living and the dead spreading the influence of the deceased.

The challenge for Factum Foundation is to let this excitement and interest grow, to transfer these skills and recording technologies to local people with the support required to archive and store the data. The ownership of this data is a very important issue. The agreement with the British Museum was simple: that the copyright would belong to the museum for all current and future applications that could generate revenue. In return, the data would be made available to further Idrimi's reputation, used to ensure his preservation and used to make a single facsimile.

The facsimile of Idrimi will be an authentic recreation of the original when finished and made in a material that looks and feels like magnesite. We hope it will bring the words written on Idrimi's chest to a new audience and Idrimi to the attention of some who have fled from Aleppo and Syria and like him, are searching for a fruitful life.

ADAM LOWE, DIRECTOR OF FACTUM ARTE  
AND FOUNDER OF FACTUM FOUNDATION  
MADRID, SEPTEMBER 2017



FACTUM  
FOUNDATION  
FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY  
IN CONSERVATION

For the inhabitants of it, and the  
councourse of people, it is an epithome of  
the whole world

CHARLES ROBSON, *NEWES FROM ALEPPO*  
18 MAY 1628

## Letter to Idrimi

To the exalted prince Idrimi, son of Ili-ilimma, servant of the gods Teshub and Hebat, and the lady Ishtar:

Greetings.

Aleppo has not forgotten its son even 3,500 years after your glorious reign. Your statue, inscribed with the story of your life, was found in the sacred ruins of a temple, beneath the dirt and debris of millennia. It was placed on a ship and sent to a distant, green-grey land of rain and fog. It sits upon its basalt throne again, surrounded by some of the greatest treasures of the world.

Your world exists in ours as echoes. If you were to walk the lands between the Upper and Lower Seas, which we call the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf, then you would hear your Akkadian language curve and twist around the Arabic words spoken by its peoples today. Indeed, Arabic is spoken far beyond these horizons by millions of people across the four quarters of the world.

Alas Alalakh, your capital, was destroyed by sea peoples migrating from the west 300 years after your reign. The city walls you built were razed. Yet Aleppo, your birthplace, lives on, one of the oldest and most prized cities in the world.

Aleppo and its lands are now torn apart by war once more. Just as you fled to the lands of Ammiya and Canaan in the south, so 4 million people have fled to the southern lands of Lebanon and Jordan today. Over 3 million more have escaped north to Turkey, which you know as the prosperous lands of Hatti.

Like you, many people have boarded boats. But while you created a powerful fleet to take back your

ancestral rights, these people only seek safety for their families across the Upper Sea. The boats they use are perilous and sailed by corrupt men. Many of your people have drowned.

Each year thousands of people from the four quarters of the world look upon your statue and read of your labours, and so call blessings upon you forever. Aleppo has not forgotten its son.

Do not forsake its people at this time of need. Reach to the heavens and call blessings upon the people of Aleppo and its lands.

JAMES FRASER, CURATOR OF ANCIENT LEVANT  
BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON (2015–2017)

I sit on the balcony. Aleppo spread before me black and deserted  
[...] No sound save sporadic gunfire from somewhere, then a  
single shell preceded by a peculiar whistle. Someone is leaving  
this planet with a dry throat. Aleppo before me black and still  
[...] No oud plucked. No 'Swaying Silhouette'. No drinks in The  
Nightingale. No drinkers. No song.  
One by one they awaken the beasts of darkness

FOUAD MOHAMMAD FOUAD, POET OF ALEPPO.  
FROM 'ALEPPO'S DIARY'

Every time gardens welcomed us, we said to them,  
Aleppo is our aim and you are merely the route.

ABU AT-TAYYIB AHMAD BIN AL-HUSAYN AL-MUTANABBI AL-KINDI (915-965CE)  
RESIDENT OF ALEPPO FOR NINE YEARS

## Karam

Notions of hospitality, generosity, and the worthiness of the guest in augmenting individual and family honor are fundamental to many societies and cultures. But they are particularly redolent in the Arab world, where notions of modernity are mixed with those of custom and customary principles of behavior and action. Contrary to the dominant discourse in the West—where a typical response to forced migration is to place asylum seekers in centers that represent a middle ground between mere biological life and full social existence—notions of hospitality and generosity are so important in Arab culture as to make it nearly impossible for the state to adopt bureaucratic indifference to human needs and suffering.

Countries of the region tend to avoid enactment of asylum laws largely because asylum is deeply rooted in notions of individual, family, and group reputation. In societies where providing hospitality enhances reputations for generosity, humanitarian internment camps are unnecessary if not repugnant. The refusal of most Arab states to sign the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is not a reflection of a lack of concern regarding forced migration. Rather, it is an unwillingness to move against the norms and customs of hospitality that grant the stranger, exile, and refugee nearly the same rights of the citizen. The nation is regarded as the home and the head of the family is sovereign of the state. National legislation is not required in order to treat the stranger as a guest. This is underscored by the wide acceptance of the Protocol for the Treatment

of Palestinians in Arab States, the Casablanca Protocol, adopted in 1965.

The Arab ideal is that the state is the host, and hospitality is a matter for the local community and the private individual. The refugee camp is not part of the mindset. The forced migrant is welcomed or tolerated as a guest, generally temporarily but sometimes for a long duration. The ideal of an Arab nation persists in the rhetoric and the practices of some states. Syria, for example, has practiced near unconditional hospitality in allowing all Arabs into the country without visas. In other Arab states, it is easier for Arabs to enter than other foreign nationals. In any case, the host is thus someone that has the power to give something (*karam*) to the stranger, but ultimately remains in control. *Karam* not only enhances the reputation of the host, the act of hosting also creates greater security by enlarging the network (*wasta*) of the host. One day the host may become a stranger himself. The cycle of hospitality and refuge among members of different millets is the antecedent to the modern Arab state.

EXTRACT FROM THE ESSAY 'GUESTS AND HOSTS' BY DAWN CHATTY  
PUBLISHED SPRING 2013 IN THE *CAIRO REVIEW OF GLOBAL AFFAIRS*

If we want to resist the powers which threaten to suppress intellectual and individual freedom we must keep clearly before us what is at stake, and what we owe to that freedom which our ancestors have won for us after hard struggles. Without such freedom, there would have been no Shakespeare, no Goethe, no Newton, no Pasteur and no Lister...

ALBERT EINSTEIN SPEAKING IN LONDON'S ALBERT HALL AT THE LAUNCH OF  
CARA'S FOREBEAR, THE ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE COUNCIL  
OCTOBER 1933

## Cara

Cara is happy to be working with ‘Making Light’ helping Cara Fellows from Syria to create their oral histories, so ensuring that the voices of exiled Syrian academics will also be heard.

Cara (the Council for At-Risk Academics) has been working for over 80 years to rescue some of the best-educated people from some of the world’s most dangerous places. We help them to find refuge with their families and to work, until they can return home to help rebuild better, safer, societies.

Cara also runs regional programmes, to provide innovative and effective support to academics who are working on in their country despite the risks, or who have been forced into exile nearby.

Our work began in 1933, when academics and scientists in the UK came together to rescue their colleagues in Germany from Nazi persecution. Some 2000 were saved.

But it wasn’t just about rescuing the people. Our founders’ mission had two parts — *‘the relief of suffering’* and *‘the defence of learning and science’* — saving the people, but also, for the common good, saving the knowledge in their heads. In the years that followed, many of those rescued then, when still relatively young, went on to achieve great distinction, including sixteen Nobel Prize winners.

Over eighty years on, that work continues. Now, the men and women we help through our **Fellowship Programme** come mainly from the Middle East, although altogether we have some 27 ‘source’ countries. All of them started their academic careers, hoping to help build better, more successful societies; but those dreams turned into nightmares. Some spoke up for academic freedom, and were targeted by repressive governments or extremist groups. Some saw their countries collapse into conflict, and faced the daily threat of violence from regime forces and militias, or forced conscription into the regime army. Some faced individual threats — because of their religion, their ethnicity, or their sexual orientation. Almost all want to return home

“I really do not know what to do! For the opposition, I work with the regime and for the regime I belong to the opposition. In fact, I don’t belong to any of them. I just happen to love my work as a researcher and lecturer.”

— Cara Fellow from Syria

when they can, and will be needed; but, for now, they urgently need to escape.

Cara is the leading organisation of its type based in Europe. We help by working with applicants to find institutions that will take them in, by helping to arrange visas, and by agreeing financial support. We have the backing of a strong Network of 117 UK universities, and a growing number of partner universities elsewhere in Europe and beyond. Currently (September 2017), with their support, we have found placements in safety for some 280 ‘Cara Fellows’, with around 350 family members. But many more still desperately need help.

Recognising that not everyone can travel, and that we need to deliver help in the region too, we have also developed ground-breaking locally-based support programmes. Our **Iraq Programme** (2006–2012), run through an office in Amman, Jordan, delivered collaborative projects which helped Iraqi academics to maintain and develop their research and teaching skills, so they could contribute directly to the post-conflict reconstruction of Iraqi society. Our **Zimbabwe Programme** (2009–2013) provided vital equipment and supplies, as well as a ‘Virtual Lecture Hall’ which made it possible for Zimbabwean academics in exile to deliver lectures in real time to the colleges and faculties of health and veterinary sciences in Harare, to prevent the collapse of those departments, to plug knowledge gaps and improve teaching.

Drawing on this experience, in 2016 we launched a regionally-based **Syria Programme**, to provide support to academics affected by the Syria crisis. Most Syrian academics in exile, in Turkey, Lebanon or elsewhere, intend to return to Syria when they can, but for now they urgently need opportunities to work and to grow professionally, so they will be able to help re-build a better system of higher education when they go back. Cara has recently organised workshops in Turkey, and Syria Programme Fellows are being hosted in UK universities on short ‘research incubation’ visits. Cara is also working with others to establish the true state of Higher Education in Syria, before and since 2011, to get a better sense of how exiled Syrian academics can be helped to prepare to return when it is safe to do so; and a second phase of our Programme in late 2017 will also include two

“For promoting the values of enlightenment and freedom through my lectures, I was faced with the possibility of being killed as these values were perceived as a threat by the authority. Cara saved my life.”

—Cara Fellow from Iraq

‘open calls’ for research proposals of relevance to Syria or to Syrian refugee communities, to allow the Programme to reach beyond Turkey to Syrian academics in exile in other countries in the region.

STEPHEN WORDSWORTH CMG LVO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
CARA  
SEPTEMBER 2017

**cara**  
a lifeline to academics at risk

O Marvel! A garden amidst the flames,  
My heart has become capable of all forms:  
A pasture for gazelles, a monastery for Christian monks,  
A temple for idols, the Ka'abah for Muslim pilgrims,  
The Tablets of the Torah, the Book of the Quran,  
I profess the religion of Love.  
Whatever direction Love's camels take,  
That is my religion and my faith.

IBN ARABI (1165–1240CE)



### **Lampedusa and the carpenter**

On the morning of October 2013, a fishing boat leaves Tripoli. It is a small wooden boat, like a child's drawing, with a high wheelhouse. It is old, worn out, no one can remember its name. Fish are scarce, and its owner would have been happy to get rid of it for a handful of sticky notes. On board are 520 passengers; they pack every inch of the hold, a biblical human fish, and they stand crammed on deck. Each has paid about \$1,600 for the one-way trip. It is a calm, warm day, the tideless Mediterranean is blue, the rickety engine warbles and chokes, slowly pushing north. Its destination is Lampedusa.

This is the last journey, whatever the outcome. The boat is a disposable bark with a disposable cargo: Eritreans, mostly, some Somalis and Syrians, with a couple of Tunisians, men and women and children. There are 41 unaccompanied minors — the youngest is 11. They look back at their last view of Africa. The distinction between an economic migrant and a refugee is simple: are you running from or to? All these souls are escaping.

Lampedusa is a crumb of an island that has fallen off the end of Sicily. It is closer to Africa than it is to mainland Europe. It is our Ellis

Island, where the huddled masses — the tired, the poor, the wretched, refugees, hopeless and tempest-tossed — come to be free. Lampedusa is the year-round home of about 5,000 people. Once it lived off fishing, but the fish are all eaten, the coral dead. Now it catches tourists. A baking hot summer getaway, 1½ hours from Rome, set in the most iridescently clear sea. Someone with nothing better to do has designated one of its beaches as one of the most beautiful in the world. You reach it down a long, rocky path surrounded by wild thyme, marjoram and fennel. A kestrel darts overhead. It's a short curl of soft white sand, where the turtles lay their eggs and the dolphins and whales come up for air. Next to the beach is another bay. This one is surrounded by a steep wall of cliffs and it was here, on the night of October 3, that the old fishing boat, with its exhausted passengers, ran out of steam and fuel...

Mohammed comes up to tell me what happened that night in the bay. He speaks halting but good English, softly. He would like to be a translator. "When everyone moved to the side of the boat, it went over quite fast," he says. "They said on the news we set fire to the boat on purpose, but that's not true. People fell and slipped into the water. They were holding onto each other, grabbing your legs, standing on top of each other. I had to push people away. It was terrible. The noise, the sound of screaming and crying." He pauses. In the silence, he is hearing it again. "It went on and on, the shouting, the screaming, for five hours. Five hours. We swam and swam. Parents held up their children till they couldn't hold them any more. We could see the lights in the distance but no one came. It was cold, so cold we were numb. People beside me in the dark said, 'I can't swim any more, tell my family.' We didn't know them, so they said

the name of their villages. ‘They’ll know me,’ they said. And they would stop swimming and weren’t beside me any more. Do you know how hard it is to swim for five hours? You’re thinking you can’t go on, there is no end. You can’t go on so you drown. And then there was a boat. Two boats came and they saw us and went away. One sailed right round us and went away. How could someone do that?”

He pauses and looks at me for an answer, as if it might be a European habit. I don’t tell him that it is. The identity of these boats is a mystery. There will be an inquiry, but sailors in the Mediterranean are instructed not to stop for refugee boats. There was no call, no message to the coastguard. Mohammed was finally pulled from the sea by a local fisherman. He needs to find the man to thank him.

We are joined by Costantino, 56, a local construction worker, originally from Puglia. He has a pleasure boat, and he went fishing with friends at 7.30am and he sailed into the bay at about the same time as the coastguard got there and there were bodies everywhere. He picked up 11 survivors and thought there was no one else alive. “And then I saw this girl in the water, dead, but her hand seemed to move. She was covered in diesel oil. Almost too slippery to pull into the boat... I cleaned her face with fresh water. She was alive. She was the last person to be saved.

Mohammed and Costantino make an unlikely couple, sitting side by side, tensely distracted by the unresolved horror and sadness of that night, the bodies floating beside one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. “I can’t help thinking about it,” says Costantino. “You know, we were meant to go out fishing at 6.30am, but I was late, so we went at 7.30. I can’t help thinking how many more could have lived if I’d been on time.”

The reason the Lampedusans are kind and good to these desperate visitors is because they can be. They've met them and they see them; the reason we can talk about "them" as a problem, a plague on our borders, is because we don't see them. If any of these refugees knocked on any of our front doors and asked for help, we would give it. We would insist they be protected and offered a chance to be doctors and civil engineers, nurses and journalists. We would do it because we are also good and kind. It is only by not looking, by turning our backs, that we can sail away and think this is sad, but it is not our sadness.'

EXTRACT FROM THE LATE AA GILL'S 'WELCOME TO DEATH ISLAND'  
*SUNDAY TIMES*  
8 DECEMBER 2013

### **The Lampedusa Cross**

Francesco Tuccio, at Mass in his local church on the island a few days later, saw the many newly arrived Eritreans in the congregation, weeping for those who had drowned in the Mediterranean crossing, and his heart went out to them. After the service, Lampedusa's carpenter went to the beach and began collecting the blistered, painted driftwood from the wreckage of boats on the shore. In his workshop he carved small crosses from the wood and offered every refugee he met a small cross as a symbol of their rescue and hope for a new life. Within a few weeks, the carpenter had commissions for these crosses from every parish in Sicily. When Pope Francis came to Lampedusa, Francesco Tuccio was asked to make a chalice and a cross.

Jill Cook, Deputy Keeper, Dept of Britain & Europe at the British Museum, heard the story of the carpenter on BBC Radio 4. 'I was deeply moved by the story.' She recalls. 'This is a tragedy unfolding, an extraordinary

moment in European history. It is changing Europe politically and will gradually change us socially and culturally. And yet the people themselves come with absolutely nothing. Here was an object that would enable us to tell the stories

about how people escaped persecution, migrated, became refugees, and how a local community responded to them. These are large stories, but it's also the documentation of a small act of kindness.' Jill Cook searched for Mr Tuccio's phone number. Conversations followed. The museum offered payment, but the carpenter refused. The cross arrived on Jill Cook's desk one morning through the post, wrapped in bubble wrap. The piece was immediately placed on public display, opposite the Holy Thorn Reliquary,

a 14th-century piece made of gold and jewels. 'The contrast couldn't be greater,' Cook says, 'but the symbolism and the love expressed in the one made by an ordinary carpenter is much more powerful than the great wealth and opulence of the other.'

For Cook, the object's power is as material witness to a tragedy and subsequent kindness, but also as a representative for the diaspora.

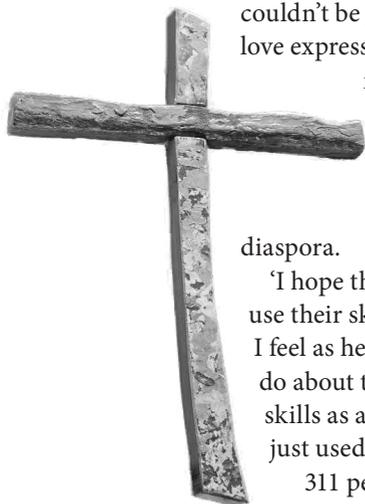
'I hope that if one person sees the Cross and is moved to use their skills to do something about it, that will be great. I feel as helpless as they do in Lampedusa — what can I do about the situation? Well, like Mr Tuccio, I've used my skills as a curator to put this in the public eye. If all of us just used our skills, that would be a magnificent thing.'

311 people died in the boat that sank that day, but the inhabitants of Lampedusa helped to save the lives of 155 others.

The Lampedusa Cross was chosen by Neil MacGregor, the outgoing Director of the British Museum, as his final acquisition. The cross is currently on loan from the British Museum.

“If all of us just used our skills, that would be a magnificent thing.”

—Jill Cook, British Museum



Abandoning one's identity is like ripping a heart out of a body. I think of the families of friends who have migrated en masse. For example, I received a phone call from the father of a friend, a man over 70 years old, who spoke to me in tears. He just wanted to speak to someone who understood his language, who understood the secrets of the language, who would listen to a joke in his version of colloquial Syrian and who would have a hearty laugh with him. A hearty laugh — that's a metaphor for the way people like to live, and refugees in general do not find many reasons to laugh, especially in their first years in exile. But not long after that conversation, the phones stopped ringing. Everyone had dropped into the black hole of exile.

EXCERPT FROM KHALED KHALIFA  
*THE GUARDIAN'S 'LONG READ'*  
AUGUST 2017

## **Lead, Kindly Light**

Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom,  
lead thou me on;  
the night is dark, and I am far from home;  
lead thou me on.  
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
the distant scene; one step enough for me.

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

The French word 'oubliette' means a place underground where prisoners are kept until they are forgotten. Those who resided in our *oubliette* will not easily forget it, even in time if the world shall forget. Here in this netherworld were living men. Each suffered his own torments and his own personal hell. But we learned to talk confessionally to each other about our feelings and of our desire and of our experiences, without hiding or turning away. As we suffered with a friend his deep moments of loneliness and grief, that awful renunciation of life itself, we each of us acquired, almost instinctually, a deeper and richer capacity for joy, for humour, for laughter. When you have so little you find joy in insignificant things."



BRIAN KEENAN  
*AN EVIL CRADLING*

God be in my head  
and in my understanding;  
God be in my eyes  
and in my looking;  
God be in my mouth  
and in my speaking;  
God be in my heart  
and in my thinking;  
God be at my end  
and in my departing

Amen

## Damascus What Are You Doing To Me

1

My voice rings out, this time, from Damascus  
It rings out from the house of my mother and father  
In Sham. The geography of my body changes.  
The cells of my blood become green.  
My alphabet is green.  
In Sham. A new mouth emerges for my mouth  
A new voice emerges for my voice  
And my fingers  
Become a tribe

5

I enter the courtyard of the Umayyad Mosque  
And greet everyone in it  
Corner to...corner  
Tile to...tile  
Dove to...dove  
I wander in the gardens of Kufi script  
And pluck beautiful flowers of God's words  
And hear with my eye the voice of the mosaics  
And the music of agate prayer beads  
A state of revelation and rapture overtakes me,  
So I climb the steps of the first minaret that encounters me  
Calling:  
"Come to the jasmine"  
"Come to the jasmine"

9

I have come to you...  
From the history of the Damascene rose  
That condenses the history of perfume...  
From the memory of al-Mutanabbi  
That condenses the history of poetry...  
I have come to you...  
From the blossoms of bitter orange...

And the dahlia...  
And the narcissus...  
And the “nice boy”...  
That first taught me drawing...  
I have come to you...  
From the laughter of Shami women  
That first taught me music...  
And the beginning of adolescence  
From the spouts of our alley  
That first taught me crying  
And from my mother’s prayer rug  
That first taught me  
The path to God...

10

I open the drawers of memory  
One...then another  
I remember my father...  
Coming out of his workshop on Mu’awiya Alley  
I remember the horse-drawn carts...  
And the sellers of prickly pears...  
And the cafés of al-Rubwa  
That nearly—after five flasks of ‘araq—  
Fall into the river  
I remember the coloured towels  
As they dance on the door of Hammam al-Khayyatin  
As if they were celebrating their national holiday.  
I remember the Damascene houses  
With their copper doorknobs  
And their ceilings decorated with glazed tiles  
And their interior courtyards  
That remind you of descriptions of heaven...

14

I put on the jubbah of Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-Arabi  
I descend from the peak of Mt. Qassiun  
Carrying for the children of the city...  
Peaches

Pomegranates  
And sesame halawa...  
And for its women...  
Necklaces of turquoise...  
And poems of love...  
I enter...  
A long tunnel of sparrows  
Gillyflowers...  
Hibiscus...  
Clustered jasmine...  
And I enter the questions of perfume...  
And my schoolbag is lost from me  
And the copper lunch case...  
In which I used to carry my food...  
And the blue beads  
That my mother used to hang on my chest

So People of Sham  
He among you who finds me...  
let him return me to Umm Mu'ataz  
And God's reward will be his  
I am your green sparrow...People of Sham  
So he among you who finds me...  
let him feed me a grain of wheat...  
I am your Damascene rose...People of Sham  
So he among you who finds me...  
let him place me in the first vase...  
I am your mad poet...People of Sham  
So he among you who sees me...  
let him take a souvenir photograph of me  
Before I recover from my enchanting insanity...  
I am your fugitive moon...People of Sham  
So he among you who sees me...  
Let him donate to me a bed...and a wool blanket...  
Because I haven't slept for centuries

NIZAR QABBANI  
TRANSLATED FROM THE ARABIC BY SHAREAH TALEGHANI

## The Atassi Foundation

Atassi Foundation was founded in 2015, in direct response to the strife that has been affecting Syria in recent years. The Foundation is grounded in our core belief that art and culture play an essential and vital role in society, subduing the ravages of violence, repairing the damages of war and in preserving the history and culture of Syria for generations to come.

Our aim is to exhibit globally, enabling the art, which has taken a lifetime to collect to be seen and better, understood worldwide, while we simultaneously continue to support the creative production of young Syrian talent. Our ambition is to create a sustainable and informative platform for Syrian artistic expression and knowledge.

Our story started in 1986, when the Atassi Gallery was founded as the first private art gallery in the city of Homs. Established by sisters Mouna and Mayla Atassi in the attic of their bookstore, it quickly expanded into new premises. The gallery went on to host exhibitions of some of Syria's most prominent artists including Fateh Moudarres, Abdullah Mourad, and Ahmad Durak-Sibai and became a nexus for Homs's local art scene.

The Atassi Gallery moved to Damascus's Rawda neighborhood in 1993. There it embarked upon an ambitious programme of international and regional collaborations, exhibitions, symposia, performances and publications, evolving to become one of Damascus's eminent vibrant spaces for encounter, discussion and experimentation, for intellectuals, writers, filmmakers and artists.

Since the launch of Atassi Foundation in March 2016, we have been lucky to befriend many individuals and organisations who share our passion for seeing the true Syria: a multi cultural, multi ethnic and multi religious society. We would love to work with Making Light and others to bring to Britain an exhibition, perhaps of portraiture, from our collection, showing Syria in a radically different way from that portrayed in the news. We very much hope something can come of this. I would like to thank Jessica, the patrons and board of trustees of Making Light for believing in Syria's people and seeing the light beyond the darkness of my country.

SHIREEN ATASSI  
DUBAI, SEPTEMBER 2017

ATASSI  
Foundation  
For arts and culture

## Damascus — Sham — Dimashq

Every name means something here, but some names are so old they've forgotten their meanings. In Aramaic, Dimashq may mean 'red earth'. For the Greeks and Romans, it might have meant 'wineskin.' One derivation given locally is from *dum ash-shaqeeq*, the blood of the brother, because Cain murdered Abel somewhere nearby. Abel's shrine is in the hills to the west, and the tomb inside is giant-sized, because the men of those days were giants indeed. And ashq means love of the overpowering kind, so there's another potential etymology — 'the blood of love'.

The city is cupped in a bowl at the foot of the mountains, and it's stretching over the plain, and creeping up the slopes, a great mass of habitation, brown and grey and white towers, low rise and high rise. Marble fronting and domes and red roof tiles. Pigeons flocking and skirting and swooping to their lofts.

Shuttered alleyways, labyrinths, high walls of car noise. Hover above these walls and look down.

Coloured lights arrowing the way to turning meat; TV screens blinking through open windows, in the office, in the shop, or out on the pavement when the weather's warm; the screens of a million mobile phones (all owned by the same man), moving at head height, at lap height, in bed; and satellite dishes; and internet cafés.

Ice cream parlours, public parks, decent fat families grazing on seeds. Banks, bureaux de change, import export offices. Taxis and minibuses. Men in uniform. Men smoking cigarettes.

Lovers, married couples, a stern knot of nuns in a flower shop which serves surreal-size bouquets,

a *bastirma* merchant's hole-in-the-wall, a coffee bean merchant in proper establishment, plus grinder, plus coffee dust, and a row of clothes shops, all girly, all neon, blue, pink and sequined, American RnB pumping outside on the pavement *Do Me You Do Me You Can Do Me*, child-hassled women in hijabs and raincoats passing underneath the speakers, past a slick-back hair proprietor in his CD shop behind smoked glass, then the shoe shop men with teapots and smiles, a row of them door after door, walls of shoe boxes towered up, and between the walls: labyrinths.

The central square. Brothel-hostels, Gypsy dancers, the last of the Iraqi trade. Beduins nursing glasses of tea, still some wearing plaited hair, crevasses wind-gouged into their cheeks. Walls of cages in the bird market, and between the walls: labyrinths.

Pay attention too to what isn't, or not yet. Holes unfilled, structures unbuilt, half-forgotten pipeways, gaps. Unconsidered demolitions, unplanned constructions, breezeblock homes which do not exist, and others absent which exist on paper. Bullet holes uncollected by the French. A river become a concrete walkway, a tunnel and a stinking pool. Orchards chopped up, smothered, enwalled.

A thousand million plastic bags.

Boys with tattoos, hairy-armed men, orange feet wagging up beside each other in the prayer line at a corner mosque.

The new boutique hotels in the Old City, the palaces and caravanserais, the restaurants: some of the finest dining in the Middle East, in the world.

The crowd. Merging and parting, swarming and dispersing. On a wheel.

Young people starting their lives, suffering, carrying books, falling in love, feeling trapped,

screwing their eyes to see a way to make some money. The middle-aged harried by ambition and failure, and those crushed by shame, also screwing their eyes to see a way to make some money. The old in mourning, or despairing, or accepting, or hoping, still screwing their eyes to see a way for their sons or grandsons to make some money. The old who are satisfied to be old. The praying old.

In the crowd a woman is biting her lip even till it bleeds to keep herself from screaming.

The odour of sex. The odour of jasmine and diesel and dust.

The odour of baking bread. Hot circles of bread piled up outside the bakeries, or gathered in transparent plastic and built into walls, and between the walls: labyrinths.

The Sham Palace and the Four Seasons. The cinemas and the cultural centres. The sports stadiums and the swimming pools. The towers which are prisons. The minarets and spires.

The Shia quarter and the Christian quarter. The Palestinian camps. The Druze neighbourhood. The Kurds piled on the hill of their name since Salahudeen al-Ayyubi.

The Alawi enclaves, or outclaves, on the approaches to the city.

A tourist, oblivious to present tensions, marching purposefully through the Alley of the Jews.

Mountains bleached by the sun, faded by the harsh winds, crumbled by pelting rains, embittered by repeated snows, most recently calcified by four decades of inertia.

The colours on the mountain subject to cloud and contour, the time of day, the position of the sun. Pink, orange, red, white, black. Polluted brown overhanging, but only visible at a distance. Then rarefied air in every direction, over the mountains and the plateau and the desert plain, air thin and

dry, the element of angels.

Something unsettled in the atmosphere pronounces a moment arriving. A moment which will stick.

Beneath the sky, above Damascus: the Fourth Division, partially hidden. Artillery in revetments. Big guns dug into the mountain. Israeli forces are on top of Jebel esh-Shaikh, whose snow-capped peak is in seeing distance. And four million Syrians are in the city below.

(UNPUBLISHED)  
ROBIN YASSIN-KASSAB

## The Chess Set

In April 2014 four French men were released from captivity in Syria into southern Turkey. They had been kidnapped by ISIS at different times since late 2012. As the men stepped off the plane to be met by President Hollande and their families, tucked away in Didier's jacket pocket, was a carefully wrapped piece of striped cloth, in which was a set of hand drawn paper chess pieces, made during their time as hostages.

After being moved to Raqqa from Aleppo in January 2014, the men's treatment improved, with less physical punishment, food and blankets more consistently provided, and for the first time they didn't have to wear handcuffs within the confines of their cell. The men had always told stories to pass the time, but after many months together with little else to do, stories needed to be supplemented. Now they were able to play games and take exercise too. Chess, chequers, a memory version of Risk and the role-play game Werewolf, each made an appearance in their cell. Yet none was as consistently played as the game of chess: pieces could be easily hidden when guards were near, and shared so that every individual could get involved.

Everyone played. Some were experienced players: Sergei, a Russian man who was shot dead by his captors months before the world knew of the men's existence, could force his less experienced opponents to capitulate in only a few moves; David, a former Scottish Schools chess champion, was the master of fast paced, 10-minute chess, while Didier, the ultimate strategist, could build indomitable defences from which he launched his attacks. Their individual styles were replicated by their protégées: David taught Federico, Didier taught Edouard, the only complete novices in the room. In little time, everybody was playing.

Several chess sets were made: initially tiny, crude and functional, they could be left behind or hidden at a cell inspection or move, these proved hard to see for those that had had their glasses taken away. Better to make them bolder and shape them so that the pieces could be more readily identified.

The best set was made using the packaging from 'Laughing Cow' cheese, the pen, left mistakenly by a guard, kept hidden under the bucket they used as a toilet. The pieces were cut out using nail clippers, which the men convinced their guards to lend them for a few hours to trim their



moustaches, as per the rules. The chessboard, which had to be left behind, was made using empty date boxes, at times their only source of food. Creating them was one of the few opportunities for creative expression, a task which for Edouard, the maker of these particular pieces, became something of a labour of love. These pieces were played by every one of the 19 men.

Perhaps what remains most vivid about the chess games in the memories of those who survived is that it brought out the raw personalities of those playing unlike anything else. Every man had his strengths and weaknesses and nowhere were these more obvious than in play. Given the amount of time available, and spent playing, there was a constant slew of players challenging each other as confidence — and sometimes arrogance — grew. In some, chess rivalries developed that led to epic battles on the board, for others it was simply a pastime to distract from the daily monotony of captivity. Not infrequent were the philosophical musings of John or Peter, who would see parallels in those unravelling games with the multitude steps that had led them to be sitting there, playing that game.

After the French men were released, Federico, Toni and finally Daniel Rye were also freed, leaving just the British and American men behind: David Haines, Alan Henning, John Cantlie, James Foley, Steven Sotloff and Peter Kassig.

FROM MAKING LIGHT'S 'BEING HUMAN' EXHIBITION AT EXETER UNIVERSITY  
EXHIBITED WITH THE CHESS PIECES  
NOVEMBER 2016

## Evening Prayer

Each day in the Lambeth Palace chapel we pray for John Cantlie and for all who are held as hostages.

God of mercy and grace, we come before your face with heavy hearts at the suffering of your world. Particularly we ask you to look with compassion on your people who face the horror of civil war in Syria.

In his life Jesus your son faced life as a refugee, taken in fear of his life; we pray this day for those who flee for fear of the lives of those they hold dear; leaving home, community and history. Grant them safety and relief.

In his life Jesus your son faced the cruelty of regimes intent on self-preservation over justice, power over compassion. We pray this day that you would turn the hearts of those in authority to the plight of the people they are called to serve. Grant them humility and righteousness.

In his life Jesus your son faced agony and pain, isolation and abandonment; we pray this day you would be with those whose suffering and pain is unbearable. Grant success to those who seek peace and justice for them and frustrate those who seek violence and hatred.

In his life Jesus you son faced the agony of forsakenness; we pray this day for those who have to abide in the spaces of aloneness and hopelessness. Grant your presence to all who are held hostage, particularly John, praying that we might see him face to face.

Because your son faced death and was raised to new life, we trust your promise is true that all things will be made new. We pray that your renewing work would enable us to face all we do with hope, faith and love.

As once you first led your son's followers in this land to be called Christians, make this bleeding nation again one where your glory is revealed as the One who raises the dead. Amen.

SEPTEMBER 2017

## **Article 1**

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
PARIS, 10 DECEMBER 1948



[www.makinglight.org.uk](http://www.makinglight.org.uk)  
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